

# Latino electorate largest ever; expect influence from those not voting, expert claims

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(Phys.org)—The large Latino electorate is expected to play a key role in this year's presidential election, but so will the influence of Latinos who don't have U.S. voting rights, says a Purdue University political science expert.

"Voting is just one way actors in a democratic society can make a difference, and interest in politics and party politics comes well before naturalization," says James McCann, a professor of political science who is leading a large study to follow Latino interest and civic engagement in recent [presidential elections](#). "We see a lot of civic interest before someone acquires voting rights, and it's important to track this too. Just like economists track aspects of the undocumented workforce, we need to gauge and model similar effects in politics."

His research focuses on Latinos who don't have citizens' rights. About 40 percent of Latino adults in the United States are noncitizens, and the Pew Hispanic Center recently reported that a record 24 million Latinos are eligible to vote.

McCann's studies in 2008 and preliminary data for this year's election show that many Latinos who aren't voting are still politically active by discussing issues with family members and encouraging those who can vote to do so.

"The Latino culture is highly community-focused, and there is a high incidence of engagement that is powerful," McCann says. "Many of these people we survey intend to pursue naturalization, so what they think about politics and how they support candidates in 2012 provides a glimpse of what is to come in the future. Many of these people are also parents, and how they believe will influence their United States-born children who may be voting in the next election."

McCann is leading a class focused on surveying [Latinos](#) in north-central Indiana about American politics and society during this year's campaign season. The 15 students in "[Mexican Immigrants](#) in the Crossroads of America" also use their Spanish language skills when surveying Mexican expatriates at community stores, laundromats, restaurants and festivals.

Questions this year not only focus on the presidential election, but also on perceptions of the American economy, immigration issues, plans to pursue U.S. citizenship and interest in Mexican politics. Mexican expatriates can register to vote in Mexico with their dual-citizenship.

McCann is the co-author of "Democratizing Mexico: Public Opinion and Electoral Choices" and is working on a book about how Latino immigrants respond to American party [politics](#).

Provided by Purdue University

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