



Stepping Up

The Impact of the Newest Immigrant,
Asian, and Latino Voters

by Rob Paral

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LATINO, AND ASIAN VOTERS

SEPTEMBER 2013

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rob Paral is a writer, analyst and communicator with many years of experience working in community development, human services, and immigrant integration. Rob is a Senior Fellow at the Immigration Policy Center and [principal of Rob Paral and Associates](#), a consulting firm that helps philanthropic foundations, service organizations and government agencies understand the communities they serve through applied research methods.

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Summary

Amid the current debate on immigration reform, much attention is on House members and how their vote for or against reform will play in their home districts. But many congressional districts have a huge number of naturalized immigrants and young Asians and Latinos who are entering the electorate, and who deeply support immigration reform.

Political analysts frequently discuss the changing demographics of voters but no analysis to date has quantified a key aspect of this change for each congressional district. Thus, we have no way of knowing what portion of newly eligible voters in the 2014 elections come from either Asian and Latino citizen teenagers who will vote for the first time in 2014, or from legal immigrants who will naturalize by 2014.

Young Asians and Latinos will have a major impact on the composition of newly eligible voters in upcoming elections. These groups are highly represented among the population of teenage citizens that become able to vote for the first time with each election. About 1.8 million U.S. citizen Asians and Latinos become eligible to vote in each two-year election cycle.

Immigrants who become U.S. citizens through naturalization will also be a significant contributor to the evolving electorate. Each election cycle, about 1.4 million of these new citizens become eligible to vote nationally.

Together, these groups will constitute 34 percent of all newly eligible voters in the 2014 elections.

In certain states and congressional districts, the impact of these newly eligible voters will be even greater. For example, in Texas, these groups will be about 53 percent of all newly eligible voters in 2014. In Florida they will be 45 percent. However, California tops the list with young Asians, young Latinos, and recently naturalized U.S. citizens composing 68 percent of the newly eligible voters in 2014.

Historically, young adults have relatively low registration and voting rates¹, and this may slow their impact on election outcomes. But they will steadily enter the electorate and move into older age cohorts that indeed vote more frequently. Young Asians and Latinos have unique motivations to vote because immigration reform often directly affects their parents and families. These young persons are also the target of competing efforts of the major parties to win their support.

¹ See Census Bureau reports of voting rates at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p20-568.pdf>

Introduction

Since the Senate passed a comprehensive immigration reform bill on June 27, 2013, speculation over its fate in the House of Representatives has been a constant fixture among political pundits and the media. By all accounts, public support for immigration reform, including a path to citizenship, continues to grow, as does the list of House members who have come out in support of it. Many analysts have attributed the changing demographics of the country as the catalyst for change. In fact, supporters of immigration reform tend to represent highly diverse, multi-racial communities. However, demographics alone don't necessarily move politicians, and many would resist attributing their change of heart to demographics, pointing instead to economic, social, and moral reasons for supporting reform. But these reasons are linked, particularly among the crop of younger Latino and Asian voters who will come of age, and among new immigrants who will naturalize in the next few election cycles. In some districts where the demographic shift is not yet apparent, it is nonetheless on the horizon. Keeping in mind the concerns that these new voters bring to the table should become an important factor in taking a stand today in favor of reform.

Our analysis of immigration trends and the demographic composition of U.S. House districts shows that numerous congressional districts have emerging electorates who have many reasons to care deeply about immigration reform. It is not surprising that many of these districts are represented by Democrats, whose districts tend to be less white and more racially diverse. But large numbers of Republican Members of Congress represent districts where there are sizable numbers of the new voters who are either immigrants themselves (i.e., newly naturalized citizens) or who come from families and communities in which the legacy of immigration is strong (i.e., young, U.S. citizen Asians and Latinos).

New York's 11th district, currently held by Republican Congressman Michael Grimm, provides an example of how these new voters may shift the agenda over time. Congressman Grimm serves an area whose overall population is currently 64 percent white, non-Latino. But by the 2014 elections, a majority (55 percent) of all newly eligible voters in the 11th district will be persons who are newly naturalized citizens, or U.S. citizen Asian or Latino youth newly eligible to vote.

This story is repeated in Democratic and Republican districts across the country and reflects a larger narrative of American racial and ethnic change. Forty years ago, our country was 83 percent white and 95 percent native-born. Today it is only 64 percent white and 87 percent native-born. The demographic transformation is well-documented at national and state levels. However, less attention has been paid to how these changes are affecting congressional districts, particularly within the context of immigration reform.

Nationally, One-Third of Newly Eligible Voters in 2014 Will Be Young Latinos, Young Asians or Recently Naturalized Immigrants

With each upcoming two-year election cycle, the composition of congressional districts and their eligible voters changes as younger adults – and the racial/ethnic groups they represent – enter the voting booth. This transformation of the electorate is happening because younger Americans are much more diverse than older Americans. For example, our analysis of Census Bureau data (described later) finds that only about 9 percent of U.S. citizens aged 55 years and older are either Asian or Latino. But looking at citizens turning 18 between the 2012 and 2014 congressional elections, we see the Asian and Latino portion rise to 23 percent.

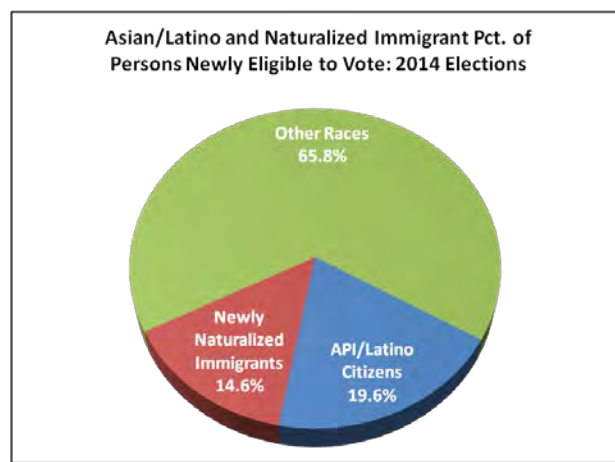
During each two-year election cycle over the last decade, almost 1.4 million legal immigrants acquired citizenship and the right to vote. These new citizens also represent diverse demographics. About 36 percent come from Asia and more than 30 percent come from Latin America.

In the 2014 elections, there will be approximately 9.3 million newly eligible voters. These include both people who were 16 or 17 years old at the time of the 2012 elections, as well as immigrants who become naturalized U.S. citizens between 2012 and 2014.

Of these 9.3 million newly eligible voters, 1.8 million will be Asian or Latino. Another 1.4 million will be new U.S. citizens through naturalization. Together, these 3.2 million people will comprise 34 percent of the new electorate.

Asian/Latino Youth and Newly Naturalized Immigrant Pct. of All Potential New Voters in 2014 Elections

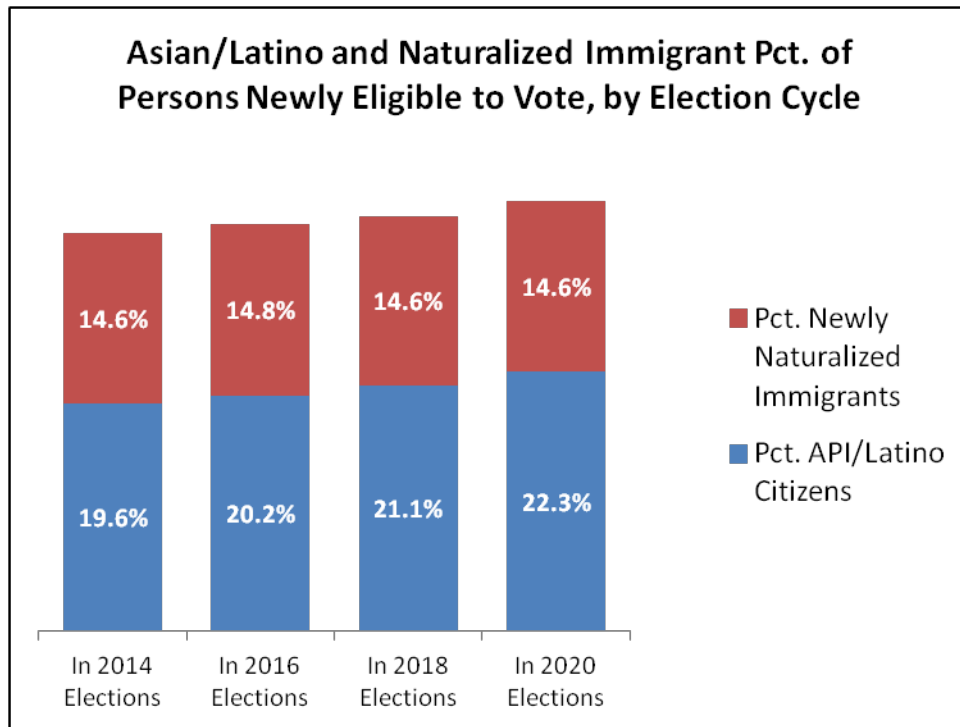
	#	% of Total
New Potential Voters	9,376,173	100.0%
API/Latino Citizens	1,838,318	19.6%
Newly Naturalized Immigrants	1,365,745	14.6%
Other Races	6,172,110	65.8%



The impact of newly eligible Asian, Latino, and immigrant voters is not a one-time event. It stretches across future election cycles and its influence grows over time. Of younger Americans, such as those who will not turn 18 until the 2020 elections, there are even more Asians and Latinos than those who are slightly older and who will turn 18 in time for the 2014 elections. Together, Asian and Latino youth and naturalized immigrants will be 34 percent of newly eligible voters in 2014, 35 percent in 2016, 36 percent in 2018, and 37 percent in 2020.

Asian/Latino Youth and Newly Naturalized Immigrant Pct. of All Potential New Voters

	In 2014 Elections	In 2016 Elections	In 2018 Elections	In 2020 Elections
New Potential Voters	9,376,173	9,239,157	9,355,234	9,327,464
API/Latino Citizens	1,838,318	1,869,913	1,972,251	2,078,274
Newly Naturalized Immigrants	1,365,745	1,365,745	1,365,745	1,365,745
Other Races	6,172,110	6,003,499	6,017,238	5,883,445
Pct. of Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Pct. API/Latino Citizens	19.6%	20.2%	21.1%	22.3%
Pct. Newly Naturalized Immigrants	14.6%	14.8%	14.6%	14.6%
Pct. Other Races	65.8%	65.0%	64.3%	63.1%

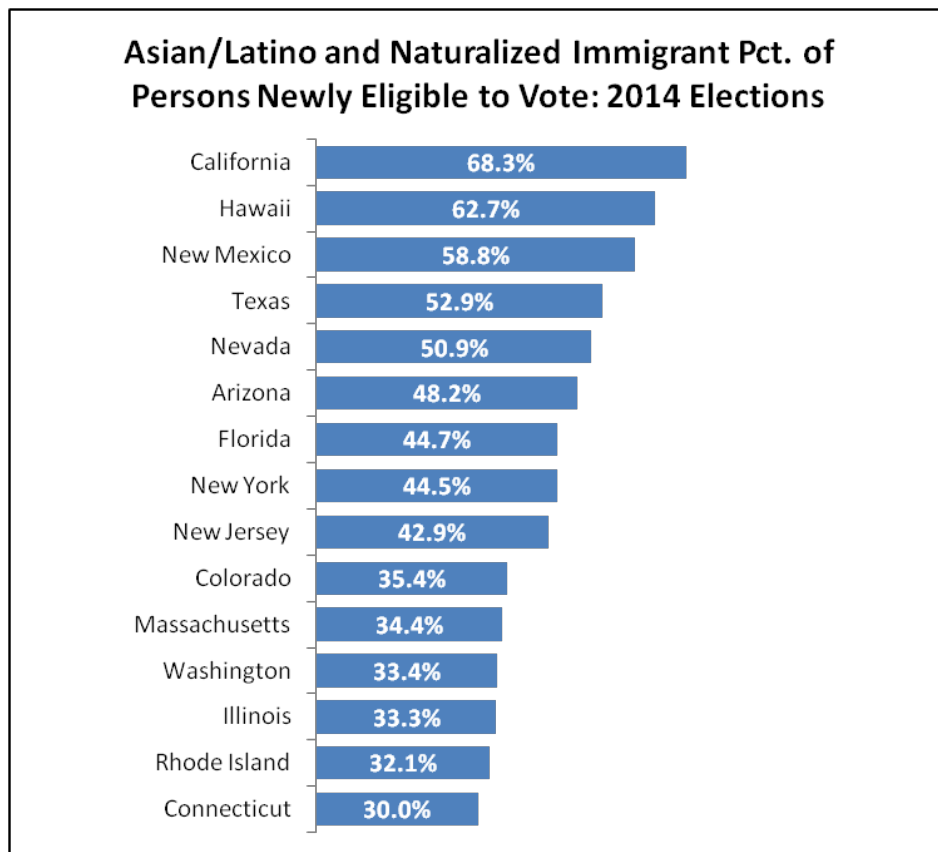


The immediate effect of the newly eligible voters is small, representing only about 1.4 percent of voting age citizens by 2014. However, the cumulative impact is such that by the 2020 elections, young Asians, Latinos and naturalized immigrants will account for approximately 5 percent of all eligible voters. In particular districts this impact will be more concentrated; in many districts, it may be enough to decide a close race.

The Impact of New Voters Will Be Felt in Numerous States, Including Politically Competitive Ones

The majority of foreign-born Asians and Latinos in the US reside in so-called “gateway states” like California and New York that have been immigrant destinations for decades. Other states like Washington or Nevada have attracted immigrants in recent decades, but their relatively small populations mean that immigrants and their children can quickly become a large portion of eligible voters. Still other states have long-established, non-white populations, such as Hawaii (Asians) and New Mexico (Latinos).

At the time of the 2014 elections, there will be 15 states where Asian/Latino youth and naturalized voters will constitute more than 30 percent of all citizens newly eligible to vote. Unsurprisingly, California will experience the greatest impact, with nearly two-thirds of newly eligible voters belonging to one of these three groups. Combined, Latino/Asian youth and naturalized citizens will also be more than half of new potential voters in Hawaii, New Mexico, Texas, and Nevada.



Districts in Both Parties Will Be Impacted by the Demographic Change

There are 171 congressional districts where naturalized citizens and young Asians and Latinos will comprise at least a third of newly eligible voters in 2014. This represents 39 percent of all districts. Fifty-five of the 171 districts are currently represented by a Republican. Districts where naturalized citizens and young Asian and Latino new voters are more than half of the new voters are overwhelmingly Democratic (79 Democrats to 21 Republicans). However, the amount of districts where these groups represent between 33 percent and 50 percent of new potential voters are roughly split between the two parties, with 37 districts represented by Democrats and 34 represented by Republicans.²

		Dem	Rep
Pct of Newly Eligible Voters Who are Naturalized Immigrants or Asian/Latino	50.1% and higher	79	21
	33.1-50%	37	34
	20.1-33%	34	43
	10.1-20%	32	62
	0-10%	19	74
	Total	201	234

The tables below display, by party, the 25 districts that will experience the largest impact of newly eligible Asian/Latino and naturalized voters.

[Click here for a sortable file of all congressional districts.](#)

[Click here for a national, interactive map of the districts.](#)

² In the table, the currently vacant district of former Rep. Markey (MA-05) is included in Democrat column. Note also that Rep. Bonner (AL-01) resigns on 8/2/2013.

Democratic Districts with Largest Impact of Naturalized Immigrant Voters and Young Asians/Latinos in 2014

Cong Dist	Representative 113th Congress	Party	Newly Eligible Voters	API/Latino Citizens	Newly Naturalized Immigrants	Other Races	Latino/API and Newly Naturalized Immigrant Pct. of All Potential New Voters: 2014 Elections
CA-34	Becerra	D	25,394	15,697	8,501	1,196	95.3%
CA-40	Roybal-Allard	D	30,082	21,318	6,634	2,130	92.9%
TX-34	Vela	D	24,640	19,065	3,360	2,215	91.0%
CA-46	Sanchez	D	28,110	17,483	7,920	2,707	90.4%
TX-16	O'Rourke	D	26,379	18,291	5,292	2,795	89.4%
CA-29	Cárdenas	D	28,169	16,729	8,374	3,065	89.1%
CA-32	Napolitano	D	29,854	17,059	9,317	3,478	88.4%
CA-51	Vargas	D	27,959	17,769	6,903	3,287	88.2%
TX-15	Hinojosa	D	25,715	19,206	3,376	3,133	87.8%
IL-04	Gutierrez	D	25,306	15,877	6,276	3,152	87.5%
CA-38	Sánchez	D	28,893	16,557	8,473	3,863	86.6%
CA-35	Negrete McLeod	D	29,336	18,824	6,331	4,181	85.7%
TX-29	Green	D	24,550	16,859	4,118	3,573	85.4%
TX-28	Cuellar	D	25,762	18,469	3,262	4,031	84.4%
FL-26	Garcia	D	31,688	10,734	15,809	5,145	83.8%
CA-12	Pelosi	D	18,391	5,047	10,309	3,035	83.5%
NY-14	Crowley	D	24,913	10,129	10,643	4,141	83.4%
CA-44	Hahn	D	29,666	17,991	6,636	5,039	83.0%
CA-17	Honda	D	27,260	10,325	12,189	4,746	82.6%
CA-19	Lofgren	D	26,391	12,309	9,334	4,748	82.0%
CA-27	Chu	D	28,723	11,019	12,337	5,367	81.3%
NY-06	Meng	D	28,257	7,628	15,186	5,442	80.7%
TX-20	Castro	D	20,698	14,106	2,516	4,076	80.3%
AZ-07	Pastor	D	24,836	16,575	3,282	4,979	80.0%
NJ-08	Sires	D	23,580	9,426	9,390	4,764	79.8%
TX-23	Gallego	D	25,026	16,424	3,484	5,119	79.5%
TX-33	Veasey	D	23,290	15,175	3,107	5,007	78.5%
CA-16	Costa	D	26,459	16,441	4,171	5,847	77.9%
NY-07	Velázquez	D	24,429	10,679	8,217	5,533	77.4%
NY-13	Rangel	D	25,103	11,320	8,077	5,707	77.3%
CA-14	Speier	D	26,111	8,702	11,346	6,063	76.8%
AZ-03	Grijalva	D	25,371	15,749	3,685	5,938	76.6%
NY-15	Serrano	D	28,679	15,306	6,424	6,949	75.8%
CA-41	Takano	D	28,426	15,749	5,377	7,301	74.3%
TX-35	Doggett	D	19,688	12,669	1,943	5,076	74.2%
CA-47	Lowenthal	D	25,907	11,635	7,483	6,789	73.8%
CA-28	Schiff	D	26,143	6,704	12,540	6,898	73.6%
CA-20	Farr	D	22,174	12,064	4,147	5,963	73.1%
CA-43	Waters	D	25,777	12,200	6,459	7,118	72.4%
CA-36	Ruiz	D	23,117	12,398	4,292	6,428	72.2%
HI-01	Hanabusa	D	19,710	9,050	4,877	5,783	70.7%
NV-01	Titus	D	20,811	9,873	4,802	6,136	70.5%
CA-53	Davis	D	23,161	9,301	6,756	7,104	69.3%
CA-37	Bass	D	22,329	8,675	6,545	7,109	68.2%
NJ-09	Pascrell	D	27,696	8,305	10,513	8,879	67.9%
CA-30	Sherman	D	25,404	7,414	9,817	8,173	67.8%
CA-15	Swalwell	D	26,874	9,133	8,692	9,048	66.3%
NY-12	Maloney	D	13,286	2,498	6,111	4,677	64.8%
FL-23	Wasserman Schultz	D	26,071	6,326	10,497	9,248	64.5%
CA-26	Brownley	D	25,033	10,947	5,063	9,024	64.0%

Republican Districts with Largest Impact of Naturalized Immigrant Voters and Young Asians/Latinos in 2014

Cong Dist	Representative 113th Congress	Party	Newly Eligible Voters	API/Latino Citizens	Newly Naturalized Immigrants	Other Races	Latino/API and Newly Naturalized Immigrant Pct. of All Potential New Voters: 2014 Elections
CA-21	Valadao	R	25,601	17,916	3,595	4,090	84.0%
FL-27	Ros-Lehtinen	R	28,722	9,440	14,687	4,595	84.0%
FL-25	Diaz-Balart	R	31,535	11,058	15,003	5,474	82.6%
CA-39	Royce	R	29,078	12,496	9,638	6,945	76.1%
CA-31	Miller	R	26,787	13,650	5,026	8,110	69.7%
NM-02	Pearce	R	19,765	11,683	1,463	6,619	66.5%
CA-22	Nunes	R	25,023	12,521	3,827	8,676	65.3%
TX-27	Farenthold	R	20,243	10,671	1,586	7,986	60.5%
CA-10	Denham	R	26,404	11,628	4,358	10,418	60.5%
CA-48	Rohrabacher	R	23,934	7,031	7,402	9,501	60.3%
CA-42	Calvert	R	28,432	11,515	5,276	11,641	59.1%
CA-45	Campbell	R	27,175	7,479	8,233	11,462	57.8%
CA-25	McKeon	R	29,412	10,958	5,745	12,710	56.8%
NY-11	Grimm	R	26,664	5,165	9,415	12,084	54.7%
TX-22	Olson	R	26,804	8,370	6,008	12,427	53.6%
TX-07	Culberson	R	22,945	7,097	5,131	10,717	53.3%
CA-23	McCarthy	R	24,524	9,798	3,099	11,627	52.6%
CA-08	Cook	R	25,108	10,379	2,696	12,034	52.1%
WA-04	Hastings	R	21,662	9,000	2,175	10,487	51.6%
TX-02	Poe	R	22,196	7,374	3,882	10,940	50.7%
CA-50	Hunter	R	24,010	8,348	3,784	11,877	50.5%
CA-49	Issa	R	20,848	6,696	3,640	10,511	49.6%
NV-03	Heck	R	20,550	5,186	4,541	10,823	47.3%
TX-32	Sessions	R	21,386	6,554	3,500	11,332	47.0%
TX-24	Marchant	R	20,895	6,232	3,561	11,102	46.9%
TX-19	Neugebauer	R	18,524	7,352	1,315	9,856	46.8%
TX-11	Conaway	R	18,895	7,342	1,287	10,265	45.7%
TX-21	Smith	R	17,473	5,708	1,796	9,969	42.9%
TX-10	McCaul	R	21,485	6,413	2,422	12,649	41.1%
FL-19	Radel	R	16,433	3,465	3,233	9,735	40.8%
GA-07	Woodall	R	26,004	4,838	5,710	15,456	40.6%
NV-02	Amodei	R	19,777	5,262	2,593	11,921	39.7%
NJ-05	Garrett	R	27,586	4,010	6,831	16,745	39.3%
VA-10	Wolf	R	28,540	4,462	6,481	17,598	38.3%
AZ-08	Franks	R	21,795	5,528	2,821	13,447	38.3%
TX-03	Johnson	R	24,804	5,202	4,137	15,465	37.7%
TX-17	Flores	R	18,292	5,288	1,576	11,428	37.5%
TX-05	Hensarling	R	20,604	5,985	1,709	12,910	37.3%
TX-31	Carter	R	21,300	5,644	2,240	13,416	37.0%
TX-06	Barton	R	24,287	5,844	3,092	15,352	36.8%
FL-10	Webster	R	19,875	3,652	3,652	12,572	36.7%
NY-02	King	R	24,816	4,865	4,253	15,698	36.7%
NJ-11	Frelinghuysen	R	25,354	3,063	6,210	16,081	36.6%
FL-07	Mica	R	21,028	4,180	3,463	13,385	36.3%
CO-06	Coffman	R	23,379	5,508	2,949	14,922	36.2%
TX-13	Thornberry	R	19,507	5,888	1,137	12,482	36.0%
GA-06	Price	R	22,909	3,108	4,940	14,861	35.1%
AZ-04	Gosar	R	18,082	4,596	1,725	11,761	35.0%
TX-12	Granger	R	20,108	5,172	1,835	13,101	34.8%
TX-14	Weber	R	20,132	5,383	1,632	13,117	34.8%

Conclusion

Immediately after the 2012 presidential election, many Republican leaders and pundits concluded that Mitt Romney's position on immigration hurt him with a range of voters, particularly Latinos and Asians. They consequently argued that immigration reform was not only inevitable but vital to the survival of the Republican Party. While this philosophy has been embraced by many national leaders, others have argued that this message is less compelling in districts where those voters are not in the majority. Even if that is the case, the luxury of ignoring immigration reform will not last much longer. The next generation of voters, even in many districts that are currently homogenous, will be more diverse and more inclined towards supporting a redesign of immigration policy.

This report addresses only one part of the coming wave of electoral change, the role of newly eligible voters in the next election. It does not address the variety of reasons that other voters—such as conservative business leaders or white, evangelical Christians—are also pushing for immigration reform. Nor does it address the diversity of opinion among the very groups of immigrants and Asian and Latino youth that we have analyzed. But it does reflect a cold, hard reality: the country is changing demographically. How we deal with the implications of that change, including the immigration policy we adopt, will be evaluated by voters. Representatives contemplating a vote on immigration reform need to weigh the numerous policy arguments in favor of reform and make an informed decision, but they must also understand the demographic dimensions of their district. Despite the composition of their current voters, U.S. Representatives need to see their electorate not only for what it is, but for what it will be.

Methodology

Age Cohorts by Congressional Districts. These were tabulated from decennial census files for single years of age by sex for the 113th Congress. The table below shows how age groups in 2010 are used to estimate the number of persons becoming voting age in 2014 and later years.

Age in 2010	Year When Eligible to Vote
14-15	2014
12-13	2016
10-11	2018
8-9	2020

Estimating Asian and Latino Citizens. Citizenship estimates for young Asians and Latinos at the state level were calculated by applying citizenship rates from the 2009-2011 American Community Survey to 2010 populations by age cohort. For congressional districts, statewide age and race-adjusted rates were applied to 2010 age cohorts.

Defining “Asian.” Asians are defined to include persons categorized as either Asian or Pacific Islander.

Naturalization Data Are for Adults. Naturalization data used to estimate citizens newly eligible to vote include adults only.

Estimating Naturalized Citizens. For states, we estimate naturalizations likely to occur in two-year cycles by using average two-year naturalization numbers for the period 2003-2012, by state, obtained from the Department of Homeland Security. For congressional districts, we estimate this number by distributing the statewide estimate across districts using naturalized populations by district as reported by the 2011 American Community Survey.