

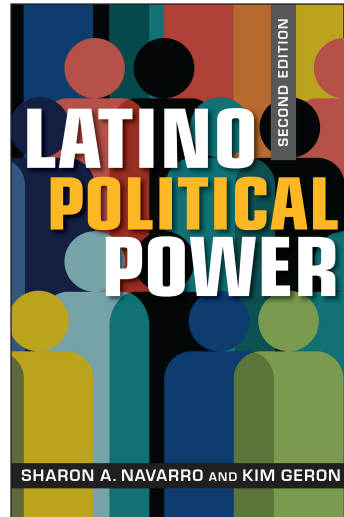
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# Latino Political Power

SECOND EDITION

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# 1

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## Latino Politics: The Evolution of Inclusion

**In 2021, in Salt Lake City, Utah, two Latinos were elected to the city council.** Now four of the seven members are from racial and ethnic minorities, and there are now also four openly LGBTQ council members. Victoria Petro-Eschler and Alejandro Puy join council member Ana Valdermoros, making three Latinos on the council in a city that is 21 percent Latino and 63 percent White, with smaller percentages of Blacks, Asians, Pacific Islanders, and people of two or more races. In a conservative state politically, this election reflects the growing diversity in many communities across the United States.<sup>1</sup>

This book introduces the reader to the efforts of countless Latinos who have sought to fully participate in the US political system at its most basic level, as voters, political participants, candidates, and officeholders, among other forms of political inclusion at different levels of government. A largely untold story in American politics is the ascension of Latinos to elected office nationwide. In the early years of the twenty-first century, there are Latino elected officials (LEOs) at the local, state, and federal levels; many have achieved elected office fairly recently due to changing political structures and demographics, as well as Latinos' growing awareness of the importance of holding political power. Although there is uneven progress in the extent of officeholding from state to state and community to community, Latinos have established considerable influence statewide in several key Electoral College states, including Florida, Arizona, Nevada, and Texas. There are also enough Latino voters in other crucial states, like Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and Michigan, to make a difference in closely contested elections.<sup>2</sup> Latinos are also the dominant influence in numerous large cities, such as Miami and San Antonio, and have growing influence in other cities, such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and San Jose.

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Yet Latinos in political office are not a new phenomenon in the United States. Spanish and Mexican settlers arrived in the late 1500s and established settlements and governed themselves in the northern New Mexico area beginning in the early 1600s under the sovereignty of Spain and Mexico.<sup>3</sup> After the United States annexed the northern half of Mexico in 1848, following the war between the United States and Mexico, the New Mexico region became a US territory. The Hispano descendants continued to govern themselves until New Mexico became a state in 1912. Mexicans who remained in the Southwest region of the United States following the annexation of northern Mexico became US citizens; over the next 100 years some of them were elected to political office, including city council member, mayor, US senator, US representatives, and governor. Outside New Mexico, however, only a handful of Latinos were elected to office; by and large Latinos remained marginalized in the US electoral arena. This began to change in the 1960s.

This book is a comparative analysis of the diversity of Latino politics in the United States. It explores the political struggles of Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Dominicans, Salvadorans, Colombians, and other Latinos in rural, suburban, and urban areas of the United States to transition from marginalized descendants of the Spanish conquest and indigenous peoples, to immigrants and political refugees, and to officeholders and decisionmakers. While the media have begun to focus on the growing significance of the Latino vote for presidential elections, the development of Latino political efforts at the state and local levels has not received much coverage. This book aims to explain one facet of a larger story of the Latino political experience: the efforts of Latinos to obtain political power, particularly at the local level, where the forces of opposition to their achievement of political equality have been most virulent.

The purpose of this book is twofold: (1) to describe the transition of Latinos from disenfranchised outsiders to political leaders and policymakers at the local level and, increasingly, at the statewide level, and (2) to observe their relationships with their ethnic communities as candidates and as elected officials. We examine to what degree Latino elected officials are sensitive to ethnic community concerns and whether they deliver policy benefits to their communities. This book highlights how Latinos have achieved political empowerment and how they have provided leadership in office. After obtaining elected office, not all Latinos act the same. Some are more responsive to ethnic community needs; others are more attentive to concerns of the larger communities they serve; still others straddle ethnic community needs and universal needs in their policymaking priorities. This chapter begins with a discussion of key terms used in the text, including the racialization process of Latinos; it then briefly reviews the underrepresentation of Latinos in politics. Next, an exploration of the growing impact of

Latinos on electoral power in the twenty-first century provides a look at contemporary Latino politics. A discussion of the concepts explored in the text, including representation and political incorporation, follows.

## Labels

What is Latino politics? A discussion of the terms used in this text must by necessity begin with a definition of *politics*. Politics is the study of who gets what, when, and how. The *who* are the participants in politics, including voters, interest groups, political parties, and elected and appointed government officials. The *what* are the public policies produced by the political system in areas such as education, health care, and national defense. *When* and *how* refer to the dynamics of the political process, including campaigns for office and elections, implementation of legislation, and decisions made by the courts.<sup>4</sup>

In this book, the term *Latino* is used to refer to all individuals originally from Spanish-speaking regions of Latin America and the Caribbean. *Latino* does not refer to a specific race of people; rather it is inclusive of indigenous, White, Black, Asian, and mixed-race people. As Marcelo Suarez-Orozco and Mariela Paez note, “The Latino population is a highly heterogeneous population that defies easy generalizations.”<sup>5</sup> The term *Latino politics* will be used to refer to the broad array of efforts by Latinos in politics, whether they are joint efforts by several national-origin groups working together in one group or political activity or the efforts simply of one national-origin group.

The term *Hispanic* is used by the US government, and by some who self-identify as such, to include anyone from a Spanish-speaking region, including Spain. This term will be used sparingly, except where it refers to a governmental designation or in those instances where it is the chosen self-designation. While *Hispanic* is controversial in some quarters, in a recent survey conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center, it was preferred over other such terms.<sup>6</sup>

*Mexican American* and *Chicano* are used to refer to people of Mexican descent raised in the United States. The term *Chicano* became popular among Mexican American political activists in the late 1960s as a means of political self-definition, and it retains popularity today. Others from a Spanish-origin population apply terms such as *Hispano*, *Spanish American*, and *Latin* to their heritage. *Tejano* and *Californio* are used to refer to Mexicans who lived in what is now the US Southwest before its annexation in 1848. Where possible, the word or term used in previous research or in a group or person’s self-identification is used. *White* and *Anglo* are used to refer to non-Latino Caucasians, and *Black* and *African American* are used to refer to residents of the United States with an African heritage. People from the Caribbean islands

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are referred to by their country of origin; similarly, persons from Central and South America are referred to by their country of origin.

*Latinx* has emerged in recent years as a new pan-ethnic term to describe the nation's diverse Hispanic population. It is increasingly being used in social media, where it is replacing earlier gender-neutral labels such as Latino/a or Latin@. The Latinx label has gained increasing use in higher education, where it is disrupting traditional notions of inclusion and shaping institutional understanding of intersectionality, particularly with people living gender-fluid and hybrid identities. When asked about their preferred pan-ethnic term to describe the Hispanic or Latino population, a majority of adults prefer other terms over Latinx. Only 3 percent preferred Latinx to describe the Hispanic or Latino population.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the diversity among Latinos, a common political legacy has been formed by their collective experiences and identity. This is not to say each distinct national-origin group does not have unique political as well as other characteristics, but the dominant US political system has racialized Spanish-speaking peoples from throughout the hemisphere into a broad category known by labels such as *Latinx*, *Latino*, *Hispanic*, and *Hispanic American*. In other circumstances, multiple national-origin groups of Latinos are racially lumped into one predominant group, such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban, by those outside the Latino community, such as government agencies, the English-speaking media, and the public. In both instances, this has the effect of diluting national distinctions, and many Latinos find such dilution problematic.

*Racialization* is “the construction of racially unequal social hierarchies characterized by dominant and subordinate social relations between groups.”<sup>8</sup> One form racialization takes is the US government's use of racial and ethnic categories for census enumeration and apportionment for political representation. After each ten-year census, federal, state, and local governments redivide political boundaries based in part on broad racial and group categories, including Hispanic. This process groups together all persons with origins in Spanish-speaking countries. The lumping of peoples from throughout the Americas into one category masks important political and social differences among Latinos, such as the influence of homeland politics, national-origin distinctions, party affiliation, citizenship status, and ideological beliefs. On the positive side, the commonality of a pan-ethnic designation has brought Latinos together to work for shared political goals, including civil rights, redistricting of electoral boundaries, support for bilingual education, and equal opportunity.

Still, despite efforts at cooperation among Latino ethnic groups and the growth of pan-ethnic organizations, at the time of this writing there is no political agenda adhered to by all Latinos. The heterogeneity of political views among the major ethnic groups, the lack of an identifiable national

leader (or leaders) who could unite all Latinos around a common program, and a high percentage of new immigrants in the Latino community with strong ties to their countries of origin make political unity difficult in the short run. While Latinos tend to agree on some social issues, such as support for bilingual education, they are not united in their views on other issues, such as immigration—particularly illegal immigration. A 2013 survey indicated that over half—53 percent—of the Latinos believe undocumented immigrants have a positive impact on Latinos living in this country. A much heavier majority—75 percent—say they are helping rather than hurting the economy.<sup>9</sup> The presence of Democratic and Republican Latinos in Congress and in several state legislatures reflects political and more fundamental ideological differences and has resulted in distinct Latino caucuses based on party affiliation at the state and federal levels.

Nonetheless, as racial minorities in the United States, the majority of Latinos find themselves in barrios where local educational institutions are poorly funded, where crime and drugs are prevalent, and where politically they have been disenfranchised until very recently. This book makes the case that the Latino community in the twenty-first century—whether in Lawrence, Massachusetts; Orlando, Florida; Brownsville, Texas; Cicero, Illinois; Pueblo, Colorado; or Oakland, California—has developed common political experiences, and these similar experiences cross state lines and regional particularities. Today, a typical group experience of Latinos, whether they are American born or immigrant, involves participating in efforts to achieve political incorporation at the local level and beyond. In some instances, Latinos join together as Latinos, not simply as an alliance of national-origin Latinos. Other times there is a go-it-alone attitude, with an emphasis on national-origin compatriots. This is both a unique and not so unique experience: like African Americans and other racial minorities, Latinos have learned they need to join together to increase their opportunities for advancement; yet, at times there is only limited cooperation among Latino national-origin groups. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that a distinct brand of politics known as Latino politics has emerged in the United States. Time will tell whether it becomes established as a distinctive form of politics or becomes more similar to the political activities of other groups.

### **The Underrepresentation of Latinos**

Historically, the domination of politics and economics by Anglos was almost universal in the United States. There were virtually no non-White elected officials until the 1950s, except in New Mexico and a few local areas. The emergence of the modern Latino civil rights and nationalist movements in the 1960s and 1970s forced the political process open for a

previously disenfranchised ethnic group.<sup>10</sup> Latinos used a variety of methods to gain entrance to institutions that had previously excluded them, “but underrepresentation remained the rule.”<sup>11</sup> Inequalities in employment, unequal access to education, limited opportunities for social advancement, and a cultural bias that privileged the language, customs, and values of Whites were difficult to overcome. According to pluralist theory, an important theory in the study of US politics, power is dispersed in society somewhat equally among various groups and institutions; thus no one group dominates the full policy agenda in American politics. However, the experiences of racial minorities, including Latinos, reveal continuing major disparities between Whites and nonwhites in the political sphere and other aspects of society. Conventional pluralism is unable to explain why racial minorities have little power in our society despite the growth of interest groups focused on equality. The theory of two-tiered pluralism more accurately describes the system’s formal political inclusion of minorities with Whites, while minorities remain marginalized with few avenues for full participation and equality.<sup>12</sup>

The political legacy of discrimination and marginalization of minority groups is manifested in underrepresentation in elected offices. According to one author, “When marginalized groups are chronically underrepresented in legislative bodies, citizens who are members of those groups are not fairly represented.”<sup>13</sup> The extent of electoral empowerment of racial minorities can be viewed as a measure of whether the US political system can be categorized as just: “Equal access to decision making is therefore defined as an equal opportunity to influence the policy-making process. Such a situation has two elements: a realistic opportunity to participate on the basis of self-defined interests and a continuous opportunity to hold representatives accountable to community-based interests.”<sup>14</sup>

To gain access to the electoral process, Latinos have used grassroots activism, legal challenges, and group protest.<sup>15</sup> The passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, the extension of voting rights legislation to linguistic minorities in 1975, the elimination of structural barriers to participation, and the creation of single-member districts eliminated many formal barriers to inclusion.

These legal and structural changes, combined with group mobilization efforts, have enabled Latinos to hold elected office in locations and in numbers not previously possible. In 1973, a few years after the passage of the Voting Rights Act, there were only 1,280 Spanish-surnamed officials in the six largest Latino-population states.<sup>16</sup> The growth of Latino political efforts in the post-civil rights era of the 1980s and 1990s is evident in the numbers of Latinos who hold elective office at all levels of government. As of 2020, there were 6,882 Latino elected officials, 39.1 percent of them Latinas (see Table 1.1).



**Table 1.1 Total Number of Latino Elected Officials, 2020**

Level of Office	Number of Males	Number of Females	Total
US senators	3	1	4
US representatives	27	12	39
State officials	11	6	17
State senators	43	45	88
State representatives	137	99	236
County officials	301	225	526
Municipal officials	1,493	749	2,242
Judicial law enforcement	565	338	903
Education school boards	1,436	1,156	2,592
Special districts	174	61	235
Total	4,190	2,692	6,882

*Source: National Directory of Latino Elected Officials 2020.*

Yet the total number of Latino elected officials is still woefully discrepant with Latinos’ percentage of population. The 6,882 LEOs listed in Table 1.1 represented about 1.3 percent of the nation’s 519,682 elected officials,<sup>17</sup> while the Latino population reached a record 62.1 million in 2020, up 930,000 over the previous year and up from 50.5 million in 2010.<sup>18</sup> By comparison, in 2019 the US Census Bureau estimated 48,221,139 African Americans (or 13.4 percent) in the United States, compared to 13 percent identifying as African American only in 2010.<sup>19</sup> The number of African American elected officials is on par (13 percent) with the share of the overall US population that is African American.<sup>20</sup> In addition, the number of African American elected officials is nearly double the number of LEOs for a comparable minority population. While the number of African American elected officials still falls short of their percentage of the population, their larger number relative to LEOs reflects several factors, including the long struggle to obtain the right to vote in the South and a high rate of US citizenship, which has enabled more African Americans to participate in the voting process and vote for an African American candidate.<sup>21</sup>

The imbalance in the number of LEOs relative to the Latino percentage of the population reflects a combination of factors, including the legacy of exclusion and structural barriers faced by Latino candidates for office, low participation rates in politics among Latino groups, and a high percentage of immigrants who are not yet engaged in politics. Latino elected officials are

concentrated in nine states, including three of the four largest-population states in the country (see Table 1.2). These nine states had 91.75 percent of the Latino elected and appointed officials in the United States and accounted for more than 20.10 percent of the total Latino population in 2019.<sup>22</sup> In California, New Mexico, and Texas, LEOs represented 74.3 percent of all Latinos elected in the United States.<sup>23</sup>

### The Impact of Latinos in Recent Electoral Campaigns

Since the initial publication of this book, the power of the Latino vote during presidential seasons has found its footing. In the presidential election of 2008, Latinos voted for Democrats Barack H. Obama and Joseph R. Biden over Republicans John McCain and Sarah Palin by a margin of more than two to one, or 67 percent versus 31 percent,<sup>24</sup> with Latinos consisting of 9 percent of the electorate.<sup>25</sup> This was higher, by one percentage point, than the share in the 2004 national exit poll.<sup>26</sup>

Then again, in 2012, Latinos flexed their muscle at the polls and voted for President Barack Obama over Republican Mitt Romney by 71 to 27 percent, according to the Pew Hispanic Center.<sup>27</sup> Latinos made up 10 percent of the electorate, up from 9 percent in 2008 and 8 percent in 2004.<sup>28</sup> In 2016, the national exit poll showed that Hillary Clinton drew 65 percent of the Latino vote compared with 29 percent for Donald Trump.<sup>29</sup> Latinos made up 11 percent of the electorate in the 2016 presidential election.<sup>30</sup>

**Table 1.2 States with the Highest Number of LEOs**

State	Total
Texas	2,784
California	1,660
New Mexico	664
Arizona	383
Florida	202
New York	168
New Jersey	166
Colorado	157
Illinois	129
Total	6,313

*Source:* National Association of Latino Elected Officials (NALEO) Education Fund 2020.

According to the Pew Research Center, 16.6 million Latino voters cast a ballot in the 2020 presidential election nationally, comprising 13.3 percent of the electorate.<sup>31</sup> This represented a 30.9 percent increase, nearly double the nationwide 15.9 percent growth in ballots cast between the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections.<sup>32</sup> This was the single largest four-year increase in the Latino vote ever. Latino voters supported the Democratic candidate, Joe Biden, by very wide margins across the country.

Latino voters supported Biden over Trump by a nearly three-to-one margin in the counties that were analyzed in Arizona, California, Colorado, Illinois, New Mexico, Nevada, New York, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.<sup>33</sup> In Arizona, the size of the Latino electorate and its overwhelming support for Joe Biden flipped the state from Republican to Democratic for the first time since Bill Clinton ran in 1996.<sup>34</sup> Arizona showed just what Latinos acting as a concentrated voting bloc could achieve. In Wisconsin and Georgia, where Latinos make up less than 5 percent of registered voters combined, the Latino electorate helped tipped the results in favor of Biden, whose margin of victory was less than a single percentage point in each state.<sup>35</sup> Latino voters' strong support for Biden and growth in votes cast helped tip the state in favor of the Democratic candidate. In states like Georgia, a small but growing Latino electorate was part of a large, Black-led multiracial coalition that added to Democrats' winning. For years both Latino and Black voters felt as though they were left out of the conversation when it came to shaping policy and were seen as an afterthought when it came to elections. The 2020 presidential election changed that.

Latinos chose Biden over Trump by a margin of two or more to one in the counties analyzed in a study of Texas, Georgia, and Washington and in Florida outside Miami-Dade County.<sup>36</sup> In Florida, the Latino vote is diverse and unique from the rest of the nation. Latinos in Miami-Dade supported Trump by a two-to-one margin, but Latinos in the rest of the state preferred Biden two to one.<sup>37</sup>

Many observers said voting results in Miami-Dade County—where Trump got support from the majority of Latino voters—was evidence of a wider Latino swing toward Trump. Although the Miami-Dade result did help Trump win Florida, the Pew Research Center found in all Florida counties outside Miami-Dade, Latino voters favored Biden by a margin of two to one. And in every other state analyzed by Pew Research, Latinos voted for Biden by wide margins.

The power of the Latino electorate has also been measured by the many “firsts” in elected office. For example, in 2011, Susana Martinez became the first female governor of New Mexico and the first Latina female governor in the United States. In Nevada, Brian Sandoval became the first Latino governor of the state in 2011. In 2015, Evelyn Sanguinetti became the first Latina lieutenant governor in the United States. In 2017,

Nevada elected its first Latina Democratic US senator, Catherine Marie Cortez Masto. Prior to her rise to the US Senate, she served as the state's attorney general from 2007 to 2014. In 2019, Veronica Escobar and Sylvia Garcia became the first two Latinas ever elected to represent Texas in Congress. Escobar previously served as an El Paso County judge prior to her run for Beto O'Rourke's seat. Garcia previously served as a state representative prior to running for Congress. In 2019, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) became the first Latina Democratic Socialist of America elected to serve in Congress. In 2020, Alex Padilla, a Los Angeles Democrat who once developed software for satellites but later rose through local and state political office to become California's secretary of state,<sup>38</sup> was chosen to take Vice President Kamala Harris's place in the US Senate. This appointment tears down barriers for Latinos that have stood for as long as California has been a state. Latinos can be a powerful political ally. They are youthful and diverse and projected to make up 27.5 percent of the American population by 2060.<sup>39</sup> This translates into immense political power as more of that population grows into the electorate.

### **Latinos and Representation in Government**

Political representation has been the focus of the struggle for political equality by people of color, women, and others who are historically disadvantaged. *Political representation* refers to a prescribed relationship between elected officials and constituents. There are different dimensions of representation: formal, descriptive, symbolic, and substantive.<sup>40</sup> Formal representation refers to the institutional rules and regulations that precede and initiate representation. In *descriptive representation*, the race, ethnicity, or national origin of the representative matches that of his or her constituents.<sup>41</sup> As one author states, "Voters want to see someone who looks like them in office. Black voters tend to support black candidates and Hispanic voters tend to support Hispanic candidates."<sup>42</sup> The highest form of representation is *substantive representation*, where a representative acts in the interests of the represented, in a manner responsive to them.<sup>43</sup> The main component of substantive representation is policy responsiveness: "There should be meaningful connection between the representative and the represented."<sup>44</sup>

Descriptive representation, in which the representative reflects the social composition of the people he or she represents, is still an important goal for many Latino communities. Once elected, Latino officeholders need to bring both symbolic and material benefits to the Latino community.<sup>45</sup> *Symbolic representation* refers to the extent that representatives "stand for" the represented. This is important because Latino elected officials become role models for a community that has had few visible political leaders. Yet

symbolism is not enough; the majority of Latinos remain impoverished, with many social problems that need to be addressed.

Economic resources are needed to provide affordable housing, expand youth services, improve the quality of education, and build recreational facilities. The structural inequalities in America severely limit what politicians can do to erase fundamental problems of inequality and poverty. Nevertheless, under certain circumstances some Latino officials have taken action to direct resources to address long-standing problems in the Latino community. Such actions need to be analyzed. Of course, Latino politicians do not exist in a vacuum; LEOs have also prioritized universal issues such as economic development, fiscal accountability, crime reduction, environmental cleanup, and traffic-congestion reduction. While these types of issues are concerns within Latino communities, the benefits of new policies are not specifically directed at the elected official's own community, although they may disproportionately impact the Latino community, particularly in low-income areas.

In a democracy there are limits to what an individual representative can accomplish for his or her constituents, since competing interests and priorities vie for the attention of lawmakers at all levels of government. Particularly for racial-minority legislators, ascending to elected office has not always substantively benefited the constituents who helped put them there.<sup>46</sup> Some argue minority legislators and executives have only begun to achieve political power after many years of exclusion; they are still a minority of the elected officials at the federal level and in state capitols and have limited resources at the local level to resolve basic inequalities.<sup>47</sup>

### Latinos and Political Incorporation Theory

To move from disenfranchisement to political power, Latinos have used a variety of methods. To explain the process of achieving and retaining political power, we use political incorporation theory. According to researchers Rufus Browning, Dale Marshall, and David Tabb, *political incorporation* entails local "movements demanding the power of political equality and their ability to achieve it."<sup>48</sup> Political incorporation is a widely used measure of the extent to which group interests are effectively represented in policymaking in government.<sup>49</sup> At the lowest level, a group is not represented at all: there are no elected officials from the group, and the group does not participate in the governing coalition that controls political decisionmaking through its use of resources. At the next level, a group, such as a racial minority, has formal representation in a governing body, but the government body is dominated by a coalition resistant to racial minority group interests. In the highest form of incorporation, racial minorities have an

equal or a leading role in a dominant coalition that is strongly committed to racial minority group interests.

For Latinos, the achievement of political incorporation has been uneven; there is wide divergence in the levels of incorporation at the local, state, and national levels. Because the history of Latino political movements in achieving incorporation has unfolded differently in state and local contexts, patterns of mobilization have also evolved differently. In some situations, Latinos were until recently completely excluded from access to government. In other situations, they were partially included in a governing coalition as junior partners in a political party or on business-centered slates. Under certain circumstances, they achieved an equal or dominant role without the use of a biracial coalition; an example is the achievement of Cubans in Miami.<sup>50</sup>

Groups seek to obtain political objectives in several ways. They can petition or pressure government from the outside (the interest group strategy) or seek to achieve representation and a position of power or authority by electing members of the group to office (the electoral strategy). Each of these approaches is pursued depending on circumstances. The protest strategy is usually employed when a group has been excluded and seeks to use group pressure to win appointments to positions, funding for programs, and increased hiring of members of the group. The electoral strategy is used when a group is sufficiently large to win office by itself or with allies in a coalition.<sup>51</sup>

### **Pathways to Political Incorporation**

We have modified these two forms of mobilization to include other pathways to incorporation. There are at least four distinct pathways to political incorporation: (1) demand/protest, (2) nonconfrontational political evolution, (3) legal challenges to structural barriers, and (4) coalition politics.

The first pathway, demand/protest, includes violent and nonviolent protests (sit-ins, demonstrations, boycotts) and also includes more traditional tactics, such as mass mobilization at city or school board meetings and direct exchanges with city officials.<sup>52</sup> A second pathway is a more gradual political evolution without demand and protest; instead, individuals in the Latino community are groomed by political elites to run for office, usually as pro-business candidates and as alternatives to more grassroots candidates. A third pathway is the use of legal challenges, usually voting rights lawsuits that challenge redistricting and reapportionment plans and lead to restructuring of the electoral system. Latinos have used the legal approach in many communities nationally to overturn discriminatory political structures and create single-member districts.

The fourth pathway is the use of coalition politics. Browning, Marshall, and Tabb discuss the critical importance of biracial coalitions of racial or ethnic minorities and liberal Whites to achieve political incorporation for minorities that do not comprise a majority of the local population. We view the coalition pathways as including other possibilities depending on the situation, such as the 2020 African American efforts in coalition with Latinos in cities such as Minneapolis, Miami, New York City, Los Angeles, and San Antonio to protest the murder of George Floyd and join the fight for racial justice.<sup>53</sup> These pathways are not mutually exclusive; each may include aspects of other pathways to achieve political incorporation. Latino political incorporation efforts have historically used all of them in small towns, medium-sized cities, major urban centers, and state houses of government.

What can reasonably be expected in a democratic society as a result of the incorporation of previously disenfranchised groups? One school of thought holds there are limits to what local officials can accomplish, given the fiscal limitations of local government in this era of global capital mobility and decreased federal and state assistance.<sup>54</sup> Others argue that while there are limits to what public bodies can accomplish in an era of globalization and fiscal conservatism, this does not mean that local government has no ability to redirect resources.<sup>55</sup> The general fund portion of any budget can be directed to address problems including social and economic inequalities; however, the level of resources will depend on the structural limitations of available funds. Furthermore, city leaders do not simply respond to a cost-benefit analysis of the prospect of economic advancement and political empowerment of racial groups. Poor and working-class people sometimes exercise power when they mobilize in mass defiance, breaking the rules that have restricted their participation in the institutions of a densely interdependent society.<sup>56</sup> At times resources are redirected to confront systemic problems. Many of the antipoverty programs of the 1960s arose in response to the riots in urban communities by racial minorities.

In addition to the structural arguments about achieving political power, there is the historical argument that the deeply embedded character of race relations and the history of racial antagonisms on an individual and institutional level have limited full participation by people of color in the economic, political, and cultural arenas of our society. The weight of this economic, political, and cultural domination has forced Latinos to try to overcome the legacy of exclusion by or condescension from Anglo politicians. The various outcomes of those efforts are important to document and compare.

As historical barriers to political inclusion have come down, Latino electoral efforts have blossomed; however, not enough is known about the consequences of these changes. Obviously, not all electoral efforts begin in the same way, seek to achieve the same objectives, or accomplish the same goals. These distinctions in the empowerment of Latinos reflect

basic differences in political conditions and the individual philosophies of candidates regarding the role of government. Both internal dynamics within ethnic communities and forces external to the Latino community influence its political development.

In short, this book examines Latina and Latino efforts to overcome discriminatory barriers, seek political office, and establish policy priorities once in elected office. It explores how LEOs address the challenges of limited resources and conflicting interests that confront all elected officials, while maintaining ties to the Latino community. In particular, this text explores the role of Latinas, immigrants, and ethnic-specific and pan-ethnic Latino politics.

### **Research and Data Sources**

The research for this book is based on primary and secondary sources. Archival research, survey data, in-depth interviews, and ethnographic methods were used to gather materials from 2021 to 2022. We conducted semi-structured interviews with a cross section of community leaders and activists across the nation and observed firsthand how Latino politics operated in Latino-majority communities and in communities where Latinos numbered less than 2,000.

According to the 2020 National Directory of Latino Elected Officials, there are 2,692 Latina elected officeholders. We solicited a cross section of them over a period of several months. Follow-up emails and calls were made to ensure contact was made. However, the challenges of coordinating dates and times proved infeasible for many of them for the following reasons: a pressing national legislative agenda, participation in budgetary committees, states with year-round legislative sessions, primary mid-term election campaigns, campaigns for other state or local offices, and limited communication because of staff shortages (several staffers were multi-tasking and serving in more than one role, and scheduling interviews was not a priority). Interviews were conducted via Zoom and phone. We conducted archival research in public libraries, universities, and local governments in those areas. We also spoke with scholars and activists in many of the cities to draw on their insights regarding the operation of Latino politics in different contexts. Subsequently, we have continued to interview elected officials and study more recent political developments in several cities and counties.

Since we were a little over a year into the Covid-19 pandemic, it was impossible to attend national conferences and meetings of organizations involved with Latino politics, including the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials and the Southwest Voter Registration Edu-



cation Project. A detailed review of articles, books, dissertations, and studies about Latino politics was completed as part of this research. This combination of research methodologies and sources has produced a study that combines the practical experiences of electoral politics with analytical observations about Latino politics.

### **Organization of the Book**

This is an introductory text about Latinos in American politics. Its purpose is to provide an overview of historical and current efforts by Latinos to achieve political power. While many books have been written on the Latino experience, and several have been written on Latino politics, this book discusses in detail the strategies and methods Latinos have used to achieve political power. Furthermore, it tracks what happened once Latinos achieved political incorporation in various political contexts. The electoral arena is not the only, or even the main, vehicle that Latinos have used to achieve equal treatment under the law, end discrimination in schools, housing, and jobs, oppose racist stereotyping, and create positive images of themselves. Nevertheless, a study of the broad range of efforts by Latinos to influence and participate in the electoral system provides a means to explore the progress made to achieve representation. Latino politics is evolving within the larger American political system. It is our intent to study the evolving process of political inclusion, thereby creating a sense of agency and belonging.

We are now ready to explore the history and development of Latino politics and its contemporary features. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the rise of Latinos in US politics, which began slowly in the late 1940s and the 1950s, increased markedly in the 1960s and 1970s, and progressed steadily to the beginning of the twenty-first century. Chapter 4 focuses on the first two decades of the twenty-first century and on the growing political clout of Latinos in several states and the continuing challenges facing Latinos around issues such as immigration policies, voting rights, and political representation. Chapter 5 provides an overview of the 2020s and Latino political behavior. Chapter 6 focuses on three large cities where Latinos play a major role in politics: Miami (and Miami-Dade County), Florida; San Antonio, Texas; and Los Angeles, California. Chapter 7 focuses on the history and growth of Latinas in politics and includes interviews with several elected officials. Chapter 8, the concluding chapter, focuses on strategies for electing Latinos in various local contexts.

This book does not explain all facets of Latino politics. An in-depth study of Latino grassroots efforts to influence the political process by opposing anti-immigrant laws, fighting discrimination in communities and workplaces, and

obtaining quality health care and education lies beyond the scope of this book. These struggles, many of them at the local level, produce the seeds of change that create community leaders. Some of these activists run for office, oftentimes successfully, other times not. *Latino Political Power* seeks to explain the history of political activism that has led to electoral empowerment efforts by Latinos. It is our intent to add to the understanding of Latino politics as part of the broader political process unfolding in the twenty-first century.

## Notes

1. Canham 2021.
2. Narea 2020.
3. In 1680, a mass revolt by the Pueblo Indians forced the Spanish settlers to flee; it took more than a decade for Spain to reestablish its colonial outposts. See Gonzales 1999.
4. Dye 2001, 1.
5. Suárez-Orozco and Páez 2002.
6. Lopez, Krogstad, and Passel 2021.
7. Noe-Bustamante, Mora, and Lopez 2020. In a 2022 National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) survey of Latino voters in Los Angeles conducted by BSP Research, 28 percent identified with the term *Latino*, 71 percent with the term *Hispanic*, and 1 percent with the term *Latinx*.
8. Marrable 2004.
9. Lilley 2013.
10. Jennings and Rivera 1984; Estrada et al. 1988; Torres and Velázquez 1998; Munoz 1989.
11. Gomez Quiñones 1990.
12. Hero 1992.
13. M. S. Williams 1998, 3.
14. Guinier 1995, 24.
15. Jennings and Rivera 1984; Regalado and Martinez 1991; A. Navarro 2000.
16. Lemus 1973.
17. NALEO Educational Fund. *2020 National Directory of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials*.
18. Noe-Bustamante, Lopez, and Krogstad, 2020.
19. Jones et al. 2021.
20. Brown and Atske 2021.
21. The situation is changing as the African diaspora draws immigrants to the United States; African and Caribbean immigrants of African descent cannot vote until they become US citizens. See Fears 2002.
22. NALEO 2020.
23. Ibid.
24. The analysis in this report is limited to nine states with sufficiently large Hispanic samples in state exit polls: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, and Texas. Voter survey results from the national and state exit polls were obtained from CNN's Election 2008 website on Friday, November 7, 2008.

25. Suro, Fry, and Passel 2005.
26. Ibid.
27. Lopez and Taylor 2012.
28. See CNN's Election 2012 at <https://www.cnn.com/election/2012>.
29. Gomez 2016.
30. Sonneland and Fleischner 2016.
31. Noe-Bustamante, Budiman, and Lopez 2021.
32. Ibid.
33. L. Mendez 2021.
34. Taladrid 2020.
35. Ibid.
36. Narea 2020.
37. Ibid.
38. Willon and McGreevy 2020.
39. Vespa, Armstrong, and Medina 2020.
40. Pitkin 1967, 11–12.
41. Swain 1993, 5.
42. Menifield 2001b.
43. Pitkin 1967, 209.
44. Whitby 1997, 7.
45. Geron 1998.
46. Reed 1995; R. Smith 1990b; Regalado 1998.
47. Matos Rodríguez 2003; Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 2003a, 377–378.
48. Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1994.
49. Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1997, 9.
50. Moreno 1996.
51. Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1997, 10.
52. Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984, 78.
53. Murguía 2020.
54. Peterson 1981.
55. Fainstein et al. 1983; Stone and Saunders 1987; Stone 1989.
56. Piven and Cloward 1997.

