

# Hispanic voters growing influence in the West

By Paige Blankenbuehler, High Country News

In the midst of the raucous and polarized presidential election, a quieter story has been at play as well: the growing political clout of Latino voters.

Nationwide, about 12 percent of the country's eligible voting population is Hispanic – and the West is home to nearly 40 percent of those voters, far surpassing other regions. This November, Hispanic voters are projected to turn out in greater numbers than they did in 2012, with a nearly 10 percent increase forecast by the National Association of Latino Elected Officials Educational Fund.

At the same time, the Latino voting bloc is in transition. Latino populations are getting younger, larger and more politically engaged. In the process, they promise to change Western presidential politics.

Now, not only are there more Hispanic younger voters, but an increasing percentage of them are born in the United States. That naturalized population is beginning to dominate the Latino population of voters (non-citizens can't vote). Young Hispanics make up a larger proportion of the voting block than in other groups: 44 percent of Hispanic voters are between the ages of 18 and 35 this year, compared to 27 percent among white voters.

In Nevada, Hispanic groups are becoming more vocal on the immigration debate and about their opposition to Donald Trump, whose campaign has taken an anti-immigration stance. But their influence is complicated by the fact that the state has the

largest percentage of undocumented immigrants in the country (nearly 8 percent; California comes second with just more than 6 percent), according to the Pew Research Center.

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