

THE OPPORTUNITY IS NOW!



Participate. Become A Citizen. Vote.

“Today We March, Tomorrow We Vote!”

The Untapped Power of New Immigrant Voters: Up to 13 Million New Citizens and New Children of Immigrants Voters in 2008

This report finds that there are 14.25 million potential voters among legal immigrants who are currently eligible to naturalize and the 16 - 24 year old U.S. born children of immigrants. This includes 12.4 million potential new voters who can be eligible to participate in the 2008 elections.

The current Republican-led legislative attacks on immigrants and red-hot anti-immigrant demagoguery sparked the spring 2006 immigrant rights marches and are currently driving record increases in citizenship applications by legal immigrants. They are also likely to drive increases in the registration and voting rates of U.S. born children of immigrants. This could dramatically – and negatively – affect the outcome of the 2008 Presidential election for the Republican Party, as well as Republican prospects in numerous state elections.

PRESS EMBARGO To Noon E.S.T. June 29, 2006

Author Joshua Hoyt & Policy Fred Tsao, Illinois Coalition for Immigrant & Refugee Rights;
Research Rob Paral & Associates;
Released by the Center for Community Change, June 29, 2006

ILLINOIS COALITION FOR IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE RIGHTS

36 S. Wabash, suite 1425 · Chicago, IL 60603 · 312.332.7360 voice · 312.332.7044 fax · www.icirr.org



“Today We March, Tomorrow We Vote!”

Written by: Joshua Hoyt, Executive Director
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

Data Estimates by: Rob Paral and Associates, Chicago, IL

Policy Background by: Fred Tsao, Policy Director
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

Released by: Center for Community Change, June 29, 2006

Table of Contents:

Section 1

p. 3 “Today We March, Tomorrow We Vote” Executive Summary
p. 5 Why does it matter?

Section 2

p. 6 “The Awakening Giant”: Immigrants and Citizenship and the 2008 Elections
p. 7 Table 1: Potential Impact of New Citizens and U.S. Born Children of Immigrants on the 2008 Elections
p. 8 “The Awakening Giant”: Children of Immigrants and the 2008 Elections
p. 9 Chart 1: 2nd Generation as Percent of Native Born 18 – 24 year olds
p. 9 Table 2: Potential Impact of U.S. Born Children of Immigrants on 2008 Elections
p. 10 Table 3: Potential impact of Mexican New Citizens and U.S.-Born Latino Children of Immigrants on the 2008 Elections
p. 11 The Challenge of Voter Registration Among Children of Immigrants
p. 11 Table 4: National Voter Registration Rates 2004
p. 11 Table 5: Voter Registration Rates Children of Immigrants Aged 18 – 24
p. 11 Table 6: Voter Registration Rates Latino Aged 18 - 24

Section 3

p. 12 New Barriers to Citizenship – A Second “Wall”?
p. 13 Senate “English as a National Language” Ammendment: Closing the Door on Citizenship

Section 4

p. 15 Recommendations
p. 16 Resources
p. 17 Methodology
p. 18 Bios & endnotes
p. 19 Partners



Section 1: "Today We March, Tomorrow We Vote" Executive Summary

As millions of immigrants marched across the U.S. in the historic mobilizations for immigration reform this past spring, they chanted: "Today We March, Tomorrow We Vote". Skeptics dismissed the marchers, pointing out that neither the undocumented nor legal permanent residents (green card holders) can vote. **This report finds that there are 14.25 million potential voters among legal immigrants who are currently eligible to naturalize and the 16 - 24 year old U.S. born children of immigrants. This includes 12.4 million potential new voters who can be eligible to participate in the 2008 elections.**

The current Republican-led legislative attacks on immigrants and red-hot anti-immigrant demagoguery sparked the spring 2006 immigrant rights marches and are currently driving record increases in citizenship applications by legal immigrants. They are also likely to drive increases in the registration and voting rates of U.S. born children of immigrants. This could dramatically – and negatively – affect the outcome of the 2008 Presidential election for the Republican Party, as well as Republican prospects in numerous state elections.

Findings and Implications:

There are 14.25 million potential voters among immigrant legal permanent residents (green card holders) who are currently eligible for citizenship and 16 – 24 year old U.S. born children of immigrants who will be eligible to vote in the 2008 elections. (See Tables 1 and 2 below.) This number includes:

- Nearly nine and a half million immigrants who are currently eligible to naturalize, become U.S. citizens, and vote.
- Almost two million U.S.-born children of immigrants between the ages of 18 and 24 years who are not currently registered to vote.
- The almost two million U.S.-born children of immigrants between the ages of 18 – 24 who are already registered to vote.
- Another one million U.S.-born children of immigrants who are not yet voting age, but will reach 18 years of age by the time of the 2008 elections, and will be eligible to register and to vote.
- There are over 2.6 million Mexican immigrants who are currently eligible to become U.S. citizens. (Table 3, Column 1)

These numbers reveal a massive population whose entry into the electorate holds the potential to substantially and quickly alter the political status quo:

- There are 16 states where the number of immigrants eligible for citizenship and unregistered young U.S. born children of immigrants in 2008 total more than the vote differential between George Bush and John Kerry in 2004. This includes 11 states considered presidential "swing states" (Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Iowa, Michigan, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, and Wisconsin.)
- There are 27 states where the numbers of immigrants eligible to become citizens and vote and unregistered young U.S. born children of immigrants who could vote in the 2008 election cycle total more than 50,000 potential new voters.
- There are 17 states with gubernatorial races in 2006 where the voting potential of the 4.25 million children of immigrants is either large enough to be a significant voting block, or where the race is close enough (according to the Cook Political Report) for the immigrant vote to be a determinative "swing". (Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Wisconsin)
- The harsh anti-immigrant rhetoric and legislation initiated by some Republican legislators is already pushing these potential voters to march and has spurred close to a 20% increase in citizenship filings.
- It appears that the Bush administration and some Republican legislators understand and are threatened by the large numbers of immigrants who might become citizens. They are **creating numerous new walls to deny citizenship to legal immigrants, and thereby delay democracy.** New barriers that prevent legal immigrants from becoming U.S. citizens include: higher citizenship fees, more bureaucracy, electronic pre-applications, and a substantially more difficult citizenship exam.



Why does it matter?

Humane, decent immigration reform with a path to citizenship, family reunification, and civil and worker's rights matters because it directly affects the lives of millions of people living and working in the United States. It affects the lives of their family members, their congregations, and their communities.



But arguments of justice, decency, faith, and humanity engender derisive snarls from the political class. So let's talk "rocks are hard, water is wet" cold political numbers.

Exit polling showed that the Republican outreach strategy to Latinos in 2004 was successful. President George Bush won 40% of the Latino vote, up from an average of 28% in the four previous elections. Even more significantly, among *immigrant Latinos* Bush got a 40% higher vote than he did among U.S.-born Latinos. Appealed to correctly the Latino vote, especially the *immigrant Latino* vote is a true swing vote.

Similar nuances are important when examining the Asian vote, as well. The Bush percentage of the Asian vote ran from a high of 82% of the Vietnamese vote to a low of 27% of the Asian Indian vote. He won 57% of the Korean vote; 55% of the Filipino vote; 42% of the Japanese vote; and 37% of the Chinese vote. Clearly, the "Asian Vote" cannot be taken for granted by either the Republicans or the Democrats.

However the aggressive approach and harsh tone in the immigration debate taken by Republican leaders has galvanized the Latino and immigrant community. What will be the effect of a Latino electorate alienated from the Republican Party? Let us quote two renowned Republican strategists:

"We can't afford to do to the Hispanics what we did to the Catholics in the late nineteenth century: tell them we don't like them and lose their vote for a hundred years." **Grover Norquist, Americans for Tax Reform, The New Yorker, 4-10-2006**

"We can't survive as a party without getting more of the Hispanic vote." **Matthew Dowd, Bush Campaign Strategist, Chicago Tribune, January 27, 2006**

ILLINOIS COALITION FOR IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE RIGHTS

36 S. Wabash, suite 1425 · Chicago, IL 60603 · 312.332.7360 voice · 312.332.7044 fax · www.icirr.org



Section 2: "The Awakening Giant" Immigrants and Citizenship and the 2008 Elections

The immigrant population in the United States in 2005 is estimated by the U.S. Census Bureau to be just under 40 million. Of this total an estimated 11 to 12 million are undocumented immigrants and another 14 million are naturalized citizens. In addition there are some 13 million legal permanent residents living in the United States, that is, "green card holders" who are legal immigrants with the right to apply for citizenship. (Another almost 4 million legal immigrants are either temporary residents or have refugee status).

Of these legal permanent resident immigrants there are 9,400,000 who are currently eligible to apply for citizenship, including 2.6 million Mexican immigrants. (See Table 1, Column A; Table 3, Column A.) This number has increased substantially since the most recent study that showed these numbers to be 7,900,000 in 2002.ⁱ Immigrants are currently naturalizing at a rate of 600,000 per year.ⁱⁱ)

Immigrants are realizing the power of citizenship. In the wake of anti-immigrant legislation passed last December by Republican House leaders, including Speaker Dennis Hastert and Rep. James Sensenbrenner, **interest in citizenship has surged during the past few months**ⁱⁱⁱ:

- US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) website received a record 6.6 million hits in March 2006.
- Downloads of the N-400 naturalization form and other forms from the website jumped from 1.8 million in February to 2.2 million in March.
- In May immigrants downloaded 140,000 citizenship applications, almost twice as many as a year earlier.
- Citizenship applications have also surged. Between January and March The U.S. Department of Homeland Security received over 185,000 citizenship applications, a 19% increase over the same period a year ago.
- The Congressional Hispanic Caucus has named July 1, 2006 "National Citizenship Day" and the "We Are America Alliance" has launched the "New Americans Democracy Summer" of citizenship and voter registration. Over 60 events are being held nationally to encourage citizenship and voting.

Immigrants are not just marching—they are becoming citizens and gaining the right to vote.

Table 1: Potential Impact of New Citizens and the U.S.-Born Children of Immigrants on the 2008 Election

	A	B	C			
	Estimated Immigrants Eligible to Naturalize	U.S.-Born, 18-24 Year Old Children of Immigrants Registered	U.S.-Born Children of Immigrants Becoming Voting Age by 2008 Election	Total: A+B+C	Bush-Kerry Vote Differential	Winner in 2004
Alabama	14,000	5,500	2,800	22,300	482,461	Bush
Alaska	11,000	4,700	2,400	18,100	79,864	Bush
Arizona	217,000	55,300	31,300	303,600	210,770	Bush
Arkansas	36,000	3,800	1,900	41,700	102,945	Bush
California	3,202,000	639,400	346,000	4,187,400	1,235,659	Kerry
Colorado	72,000	25,500	14,700	112,200	99,523	Bush
Connecticut	75,000	18,100	11,700	104,800	163,662	Kerry
Delaware	5,000	1,900	1,000	7,900	28,492	Kerry
District of Columbia	17,000	2,800	1,400	21,200	181,714	Kerry
Florida	721,000	147,000	77,200	945,200	380,978	Bush
Georgia	82,000	29,400	14,900	126,300	548,105	Bush
Hawaii	46,000	14,400	7,400	67,800	37,517	Kerry
Idaho	30,000	5,800	3,000	38,800	228,137	Bush
Illinois	404,000	81,200	41,300	526,500	545,604	Kerry
Indiana	23,000	10,500	7,100	40,600	510,427	Bush
Iowa	33,000	3,800	2,600	39,400	10,059	Bush
Kansas	29,000	5,300	3,600	37,900	301,463	Bush
Kentucky	15,000	7,300	3,700	26,000	356,706	Bush
Louisiana	27,000	7,600	3,800	38,400	281,870	Bush
Maine	17,000	3,200	2,100	22,300	66,641	Kerry
Maryland	116,000	34,800	17,600	168,400	309,790	Kerry
Massachusetts	213,000	35,300	22,800	271,100	732,691	Kerry
Michigan	137,000	27,300	18,500	182,800	165,437	Kerry
Minnesota	56,000	13,300	9,000	78,300	98,319	Kerry
Mississippi	7,000	2,600	1,300	10,900	226,887	Bush
Missouri	31,000	9,200	6,200	46,400	196,542	Bush
Montana	4,000	2,000	1,000	7,000	92,353	Bush
Nebraska	21,000	3,700	2,500	27,200	258,486	Bush
Nevada	82,000	22,500	11,500	116,000	21,500	Bush
New Hampshire	20,000	3,300	2,100	25,400	9,274	Kerry
New Jersey	443,000	52,800	34,000	529,800	241,427	Kerry
New Mexico	48,000	16,500	8,100	72,600	5,988	Bush
New York	1,346,000	147,100	108,000	1,601,100	1,351,713	Kerry
North Carolina	82,000	26,400	13,400	121,800	435,317	Bush
North Dakota	2,000	800	500	3,300	85,599	Bush
Ohio	99,000	15,900	10,800	125,700	118,601	Bush
Oklahoma	37,000	9,500	4,800	51,300	455,826	Bush
Oregon	75,000	21,600	11,100	107,700	76,332	Kerry
Pennsylvania	137,000	23,100	14,900	175,000	144,248	Kerry
Rhode Island	42,000	6,900	4,500	53,400	90,719	Kerry
South Carolina	32,000	9,200	4,700	45,900	276,275	Bush
South Dakota	2,000	800	500	3,300	83,340	Bush
Tennessee	33,000	10,600	5,300	48,900	347,898	Bush
Texas	910,000	260,000	133,800	1,303,800	1,694,213	Bush
Utah	46,000	14,100	7,200	67,300	422,543	Bush
Vermont	6,000	1,300	900	8,200	62,887	Kerry
Virginia	100,000	35,600	18,000	153,600	262,217	Bush
Washington	135,000	32,700	16,800	184,500	205,307	Kerry
West Virginia	4,000	2,200	1,100	7,300	97,237	Bush
Wisconsin	53,000	10,200	6,900	70,100	11,384	Kerry
Wyoming	1,000	1,000	500	2,500	96,853	Bush
USA	9,400,000	1,924,800	1,077,800	12,402,600	3,012,166	Bush

Source: Estimates by Rob Paral and Associates. See Methodology Section for important information on these data.

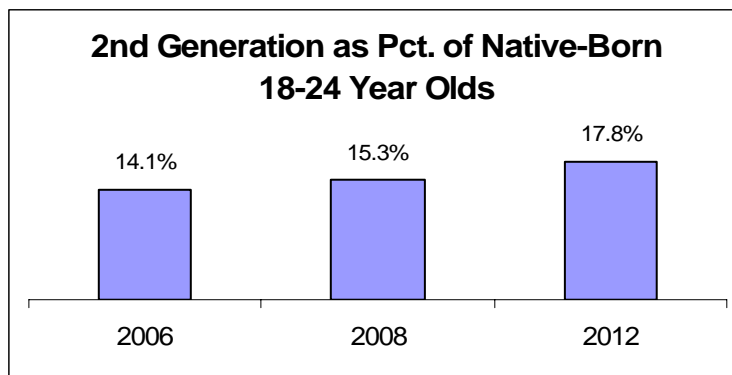


“The Awakening Giant” Children of Immigrants and the 2008 Elections

During the immigrant rights marches in the Spring of 2006 many of the marchers were youth, including large numbers of high school students. Some of the young marchers were undocumented and many of their parents certainly are, but a large and rapidly growing sector of the electorate in the U.S. are the children of immigrants, born in the U.S. and eligible to vote. (See Table 1, Columns B & C, Chart 1, and Table 3 below.) **If the energy of the marches and the high school walkouts begins to translate into voter registration and voting, the political impact will be fast and dramatic.**

- There are currently close to 2 million children of immigrants aged 18-24 who are not registered to vote.
- There are over 1 million children of immigrants who are currently aged 16 and 17 who will be eligible to vote by the 2008 elections.
- There are 1,765,000 U.S. born Latino children of immigrants who are currently unregistered but will be eligible to vote in 2008. (See Table 3 below.)
- There are 1.85 million children of immigrants currently registered to vote, including 792,000 Latino children of immigrants. (See Tables 2 and 3.)
- There are 19 states with over 30,000 16 – 24 year old children of immigrants unregistered and eligible to vote by 2008 and there are 11 states with over 50,000.
- There are 5 states with over 100,000 16 – 24 year old children of immigrants who could be new voters in 2008, including California with almost 1 million, Florida with 224,000, Illinois with 122,500, New York with 255,000, and Texas with 394,000.

The rapid growth of the children of immigrants as a percent of the young adult vote is detailed in Chart 1, below. In the six years from 2006 to 2012 the children of immigrants will grow from 14% of the native born youth to almost 18%. As the children of the immigrants who arrived in the 1990's come of age, this percent will increase even further. Chart 1:



ILLINOIS COALITION FOR IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE RIGHTS

36 S. Wabash, suite 1425 · Chicago, IL 60603 · 312.332.7360 voice · 312.332.7044 fax · www.icirr.org



Table 2: Potential Impact of U.S.-Born Children of Immigrants on the 2008 Elections

	A	B	C	
	U.S.-Born, 18-24 Year Old Children of Immigrants: Registered in 2006	U.S.-Born, 18-24 Year Old Children of Immigrants: Not Registered in 2006	U.S.-Born Children of Immigrants Becoming Voting Age by 2008 Election	Total: A+B+C
Alabama	4,244	5,500	2,800	12,544
Alaska	3,745	4,700	2,400	10,845
Arizona	54,208	55,300	31,300	140,808
Arkansas	2,924	3,800	1,900	8,624
California	571,553	639,400	346,000	1,556,953
Colorado	25,864	25,500	14,700	66,064
Connecticut	22,752	18,100	11,700	52,552
Delaware	1,492	1,900	1,000	4,392
District of Columbia	2,155	2,800	1,400	6,355
Florida	123,248	147,000	77,200	347,448
Georgia	22,627	29,400	14,900	66,927
Hawaii	11,376	14,400	7,400	33,176
Idaho	4,588	5,800	3,000	13,388
Illinois	63,274	81,200	41,300	185,774
Indiana	14,316	10,500	7,100	31,916
Iowa	5,175	3,800	2,600	11,575
Kansas	7,196	5,300	3,600	16,096
Kentucky	5,598	7,300	3,700	16,598
Louisiana	5,814	7,600	3,800	17,214
Maine	4,056	3,200	2,100	9,356
Maryland	26,773	34,800	17,600	79,173
Massachusetts	44,376	35,300	22,800	102,476
Michigan	37,416	27,300	18,500	83,216
Minnesota	18,150	13,300	9,000	40,450
Mississippi	1,994	2,600	1,300	5,894
Missouri	12,540	9,200	6,200	27,940
Montana	1,607	2,000	1,000	4,607
Nebraska	5,051	3,700	2,500	11,251
Nevada	17,826	22,500	11,500	51,826
New Hampshire	4,096	3,300	2,100	9,496
New Jersey	66,368	52,800	34,000	153,168
New Mexico	11,881	16,500	8,100	36,481
New York	230,979	147,100	108,000	486,079
North Carolina	20,334	26,400	13,400	60,134
North Dakota	1,095	800	500	2,395
Ohio	21,777	15,900	10,800	48,477
Oklahoma	7,280	9,500	4,800	21,580
Oregon	17,105	21,600	11,100	49,805
Pennsylvania	29,049	23,100	14,900	67,049
Rhode Island	8,727	6,900	4,500	20,127
South Carolina	7,088	9,200	4,700	20,988
South Dakota	1,028	800	500	2,328
Tennessee	8,141	10,600	5,300	24,041
Texas	208,443	260,000	133,800	602,243
Utah	11,180	14,100	7,200	32,480
Vermont	1,664	1,300	900	3,864
Virginia	27,418	35,600	18,000	81,018
Washington	25,918	32,700	16,800	75,418
West Virginia	1,675	2,200	1,100	4,975
Wisconsin	13,948	10,200	6,900	31,048
Wyoming	823	1,000	500	2,323
USA	1,847,953	1,924,800	1,077,800	4,850,553

Source: Estimates by Rob Paral and Associates. See Methodology Section for important information on these data.

ILLINOIS COALITION FOR IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE RIGHTS

36 S. Wabash, suite 1425 · Chicago, IL 60603 · 312.332.7360 voice · 312.332.7044 fax · www.icirr.org



Table 3: Potential Impact of Mexican New Citizens and U.S.-Born Latino Children of Immigrants on the 2008 Elections

	Estimated Mexican Immigrants Eligible to Naturalize	18-24 Year Old Latino Children of Immigrants: NOT Registered	18-24 Year Old Latino Children of Immigrants: Registered	Latino Children of Immigrants Becoming Voting Age by 2008 Election
Alabama	14,100	1,000	700	500
Alaska	2,100	600	400	300
Arizona	130,500	36,800	27,900	18,500
Arkansas	15,400	1,400	1,100	700
California	816,300	419,300	317,600	210,500
Colorado	61,100	13,600	10,300	6,800
Connecticut	5,500	4,200	4,100	2,400
Delaware	2,500	300	300	200
District of Columbia	300	1,100	800	600
Florida	68,100	68,400	53,100	34,700
Georgia	70,700	7,200	5,600	3,700
Hawaii	2,400	600	400	300
Idaho	15,200	2,900	2,200	1,500
Illinois	186,900	34,000	39,000	20,900
Indiana	28,300	1,800	2,100	1,100
Iowa	10,800	1,600	1,800	1,000
Kansas	27,900	1,500	1,700	900
Kentucky	9,100	1,200	1,000	600
Louisiana	4,700	1,900	1,500	1,000
Maine	200	200	200	100
Maryland	6,400	4,700	3,700	2,400
Massachusetts	3,600	6,300	6,100	3,500
Michigan	23,000	3,900	4,400	2,400
Minnesota	15,400	600	700	400
Mississippi	6,300	100	100	100
Missouri	11,500	2,500	2,800	1,500
Montana	300	400	300	200
Nebraska	14,700	2,200	2,500	1,300
Nevada	59,100	11,900	9,000	6,000
New Hampshire	1,000	400	400	200
New Jersey	19,900	16,200	15,900	9,200
New Mexico	34,500	13,600	10,300	6,800
New York	41,200	58,400	57,200	33,000
North Carolina	70,400	5,600	4,400	2,900
North Dakota	200	100	200	100
Ohio	11,600	2,500	2,800	1,500
Oklahoma	26,600	3,200	2,500	1,600
Oregon	33,300	8,300	6,300	4,200
Pennsylvania	15,200	5,200	5,100	2,900
Rhode Island	800	2,000	1,900	1,100
South Carolina	13,700	1,000	800	500
South Dakota	800	200	200	100
Tennessee	21,500	1,400	1,100	700
Texas	610,400	212,800	165,200	108,000
Utah	24,400	4,200	3,200	2,100
Vermont	300	100	100	100
Virginia	12,400	7,500	5,800	3,800
Washington	55,900	6,000	4,600	3,000
West Virginia	600	200	100	100
Wisconsin	23,100	2,000	2,300	1,200
Wyoming	1,500	400	300	200
USA	2,631,700	983,500	792,100	507,400

Source: Estimates by Rob Paral and Associates. See Methodology Section for important information on these data.

ILLINOIS COALITION FOR IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE RIGHTS

36 S. Wabash, suite 1425 · Chicago, IL 60603 · 312.332.7360 voice · 312.332.7044 fax · www.icirr.org



The Challenge of Voter Registration Among Children of Immigrants

A central challenge of the immigrant rights movement over the next two years will be to increase the registration rates among children of immigrants. As Tables 2, 3, and 4 below show, the current registration rates of immigrant youth as a whole, and of Latino youth in particular, are among the lowest in the nation.

Table 4: National Voter Registration Rates: 2004

	Adult Citizen Population	Percent Registered to Vote
All Citizens	197,005,361	72.1%
Whites	148,158,512	75.1%
African Americans	22,866,151	69.0%
Asians	6,269,000	51.8%
Latinos	16,088,003	57.9%
Latino Native Born	12,061,883	57.1%
Latino Children of Immigrants	4,163,448	54.8%
Latino Children of Immigrants, Aged 18-24	1,408,904	42.1%

Source: Estimates by Rob Paral and Associates. See Methodology Section for important information on these data.

**Table 5: Registration Rates of Children
of Immigrants, Aged 18-24 Years**

USA	48.9%
Northeast exc. NY	55.7%
New York	61.1%
Midwest exc. IL	57.8%
Illinois	43.8%
South exc. FL&TX	43.5%
Florida	45.6%
Texas	44.5%
West exc. AZ, CA, CO, NM	44.2%
Arizona	49.5%
California	47.2%
Colorado	50.4%
New Mexico	41.8%

**Table 6: Registration Rates of
Latinos Aged 18-24 Years**

USA	45.0%
Northeast	49.5%
Midwest	53.4%
South	43.7%
West	43.1%

Section 3: New Barriers to Citizenship – A second "Wall"?

Full citizenship of the immigrants living in the U.S. should be a goal for all in our Republic. Citizenship makes our Democracy real, ensuring that all who live, work, contribute, worship, and raise families in our land have equal rights and responsibilities. It enables all to participate fully in our civic life. **"Americans by choice, not by chance"** implies an affirmative commitment to our nation and our democracy. Growing numbers of both undocumented and legal non-citizens create the risks of a European-style alienated immigrant underclass, something America has successfully avoided to date. **Citizenship delayed is Democracy denied.**

Legal permanent residents are eligible to apply for citizenship if they have lived in the United States for 4 years and 9 months, or for 2 years and 9 months if they are married to a U.S. citizen. To apply for U.S. citizenship, a legal permanent resident must fill out the 10-page N-400 application; pay fees currently totaling \$400; and be photographed and fingerprinted for a criminal background check. After a processing wait that currently averages 5 - 6 months, the applicant is invited to a citizenship interview. There they must show their knowledge of basic English and of U.S. government and history by passing a written and oral exam. The English requirement is waived if the applicant is elderly and has lived in the U.S. for at least 15 years, and for the disabled unable to learn English.

A full list of the requirements to become a U.S. citizen can be found at www.newamericans-il.org on the website of the **New Americans Initiative**, a partnership between the **Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights** and the **State of Illinois**.

If the applicant passes the citizenship exam, the final step is the Oath Ceremony, where the applicant swears "to support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America" and becomes a U.S. citizen with the full rights and responsibilities of all Americans, including the right to vote.

Although eligible for citizenship after five years in the U.S. many legal permanent residents do not take this final step towards full civic participation in the U.S. The reasons may range from a desire to return to their native land to a lack of information about the process. But increasingly the obstacles to American citizenship are those created by the U.S. government.

Over the last several years the Bush Administration and Republican elected officials have proposed and implemented numerous barriers that make U.S. citizenship much more difficult to obtain, especially for the poorer legal immigrants with less English and less education. These measures affect Mexican immigrants disproportionately.

Increased fees: The costs to apply for citizenship have gone up dramatically over the past decade. In 1998, it cost \$95 to file an N-400 citizenship application. Now it costs \$400, including a \$70 fee for fingerprints. USCIS has set up automatic fee increases (not subject to public comment) each year based on the inflation rate, and has commissioned a study about increasing the costs still further. Citizenship will continue to get more expensive, and many Mexican and other lower-income immigrants will find it increasingly difficult to pay.

ILLINOIS COALITION FOR IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE RIGHTS

36 S. Wabash, suite 1425 · Chicago, IL 60603 · 312.332.7360 voice · 312.332.7044 fax · www.icirr.org



In a remark unbelievably insensitive to those working poor immigrants who would like to become U.S. citizens, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services Director Emilio Gonzalez told reporters, "American citizenship is priceless. I think people will pay." ^{iv}

A longer application form: In 2002, the N-400 form ballooned from four pages with two additional pages of instructions to ten pages with six pages of instructions. The form now includes ridiculous questions, such as whether the applicant has any titles of nobility, and questions about the previous spouses of the applicant's spouse.

A corrupt process to make the citizenship test harder: Since 2001, the immigration service has been working to make the citizenship test more "meaningful." During this time it has:

- hired and fired as its test design contractor Metritech, a company with no experience or competence with testing adult learners;
- then hired and fired the objective National Academy of Sciences, which it had brought in to provide objective guidance on test re-design;
- and then taken the process away from professional immigration service staff and placed it under the control of political appointees; and
- presented a draft test (prepared by Metritech) that included obscure and poorly-worded questions (such as "What social idea was important to people living in the 13 American colonies?") and difficult essays.

By January 2007, USCIS plans to unveil a new test that could put citizenship out of reach for many. Immigrants with less education already struggle with English and studying for a formal test.

Even more costs and bureaucracy: USCIS has proposed a new **electronic pre-application system** for immigration applications. This proposed new system would be effective by the end of 2006. Under this system, applicants must:

- pay an additional \$100 to set up an account with USCIS, and
- fill out a 19-page electronic pre-application form that asks detailed questions regarding criminal history, moral character, past and present marriages, and other personal information.

This system would cut off citizenship applicants who lack the additional money to set up an account. It would also worsen the consequences of the digital divide that many poorer immigrants already face. Community organizations and volunteers would need to fill out the citizenship application AND the new electronic pre-application form for each applicant. This would make it extremely difficult for these organizations to conduct citizenship workshops.

Delaying procedures that target Muslim applicants: On top of all these measures, USCIS is also checking the names of all citizenship applicants against FBI databases. USCIS will not proceed with an application unless the FBI clears the applicant's name. These name checks are disproportionately delaying the applications of applicants who emigrated from predominantly Muslim nations. As documented by the Council on American Islamic Relations-Chicago, at least 80 Muslim citizenship applicants in the Chicago area have faced extraordinarily long delays. So far USCIS and the FBI have not provided any explanation of how this problem can be rectified.

ILLINOIS COALITION FOR IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE RIGHTS

36 S. Wabash, suite 1425 · Chicago, IL 60603 · 312.332.7360 voice · 312.332.7044 fax · www.icirr.org





Senate “English as National Language” Amendment: Closing the Door on Citizenship

An amendment to the recently passed Senate comprehensive immigration bill (S 2611) offered by Sen. James Inhofe of Oklahoma would make English the “national language” of the US. Buried in the legislation are provisions that drastically raise the bar for immigrants who want to become US citizens. The Senate approved the amendment on May 18, 2006, by a vote of 63-34.

Cutting off immigrants from citizenship

The amendment would require that the immigration service develop a new citizenship test by January 1, 2008. The amendment would mandate that any such test demand that applicants “demonstrate an understanding of the history of the United States, including the key events, key persons, key ideas, and key documents that shaped the institutions and democratic heritage of the United States.” But the amendment goes even further by specifying some of the items that applicants must know about: the Federalist Papers, the Emancipation Proclamation, major court decisions and legislation, pioneers, entrepreneurs, and artists.

All of this specific content would **drastically add to the knowledge load** we expect of citizenship applicants. Indeed, one has to wonder how well native-born US citizens, even elected officials, know this information. Sen. Inhofe and his allies would demand this knowledge of would-be citizens, including many immigrants who struggle with the current citizenship test due to their limited education.

This amendment represents a **massive legislative intervention** in the naturalization test redesign. The redesign process has already been going on for five years, and is already severely flawed and politicized. Significant consultation with and input from adult educators and community leaders would be discarded if this amendment becomes law.

This amendment is yet **another brick in the wall blocking immigrants from citizenship**. The Inhofe amendment continues the trend of closing off the dream of US citizenship for hardworking, patriotic legal immigrants and preventing them from becoming full, voting members of American society.

ILLINOIS COALITION FOR IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE RIGHTS

36 S. Wabash, suite 1425 · Chicago, IL 60603 · 312.332.7360 voice · 312.332.7044 fax · www.icirr.org



Section 4:

Recommendations:

For immigrant leadership

- **Move legal immigrants toward citizenship:** If the power of the immigrant vote is to be realized, immigrants must first gain the right to vote by become citizens. We need to undertake a sustained campaign to promote citizenship and help eligible immigrants move through the naturalization process. Immigrant leaders must encourage eligible immigrants to start the process, through media, word-of-mouth, and other promotions. We should also offer assistance to those immigrants who need help with their naturalization applications, through workshops and if necessary, referrals to classes and immigration service providers.
- **Register new citizens and children of immigrants as voters and mobilize them to vote:** Citizenship alone, however, is not enough. We need to make sure that these new citizens, and children of immigrants who are citizens, are registered to vote and turn out to the polls. Immigrant leaders should identify and register prospective new voters, educate these new voters regarding issues of concern to them, and build get-out-the-vote operations to enable them to get to their polling places on election day.

For the federal government

- **Conduct a fair and impartial test redesign:** If the naturalization test is to be redesigned, the process must be conducted fairly and professionally. It must incorporate input from adult educators and immigrant community leaders, people who work with immigrants and refugees on a daily basis. The process must also be impartial and insulated from political influence. Any redesign must also pay heed to the meaningful amounts of time and energy that immigrants spend in preparing for the citizenship test, and must not result in undue burdens placed on citizenship applicants. If these objectives cannot be met, USCIS should leave the test alone.
- **Invest in English and citizenship:** The Inhofe amendment tries to force immigrants to learn English, but provides no additional resources for English classes. At the same time, the State of Illinois by itself devotes more funding to promoting citizenship than the entire budget for the federal Office of Citizenship. The federal government needs to step up its funding levels for English education and for promotion of citizenship, rather than leaving it to state and local governments to fill the gaps left by its lack of leadership.
- **Fund citizenship services.** Full citizenship of the immigrants living in the U.S. should be a goal for all in our Republic. Citizenship makes our Democracy real, ensuring that all who live, work, contribute, worship, and raise families in our land have equal rights and responsibilities. It enables all to participate fully in our civic life. **“Americans by choice, not by chance”** implies an affirmative commitment to our nation and our democracy.

Under federal law, USCIS is supposed to be self-funding, its entire operations paid for through application fees. This law has resulted in drastic increases in the cost of citizenship and other immigration benefits. Congress should show that it is serious about providing quality immigration service and maintaining immigration access to these services. It should change this law and provide regular appropriations to help underwrite immigration operations, reduce fees, and lessen the burden on applicants for citizenship and other immigration benefits.

ILLINOIS COALITION FOR IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE RIGHTS

36 S. Wabash, suite 1425 · Chicago, IL 60603 · 312.332.7360 voice · 312.332.7044 fax · www.icirr.org



Resources:

New Americans Initiative website, www.newamericans-il.org

The New Americans Initiative is a partnership between ICIRR and the State of Illinois to assist legal permanent residents become citizens. This web-site contains citizenship support info in English and Spanish, a "how-to" manual on citizenship workshops, and links to the N-400 citizenship application form.

Congressional Hispanic Caucus National Citizenship Packet,
<http://luisgutierrez.house.gov/pdf/citguide2.pdf>

US Citizenship and Immigration Services, www.uscis.gov

US Census Bureau website: www.census.gov

US Department of Homeland Security Office of Immigration Statistics:
www.uscis.gov/graphics/shared/statistics/index.htm

"Trends in Naturalization," by Michael Fix, Jeffrey Passel and Kenneth Sucher, Urban Institute, September 2003, www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/310847_trends_in_naturalization.pdf

"Denying the Dream: How the Proposed Changes to the US Naturalization Test Would Prevent Immigrants From Becoming Citizens," by Leslie da Mota, Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, September 2003, www.icirr.org/publications/denyingthedream.pdf

Immigrant Rights Organizations and Coalitions:

Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM), www.fairimmigration.org

We Are America Alliance, www.weareamericaalliance.org

New Americans Opportunity Campaign, www.cirnow.org

National Immigration Forum, www.immigrationforum.org

Methodology

Population Estimates

For this report, basic population estimates for four race/Latino categories and four citizenship categories were created for the November 2006 election day. This involved establishing control totals for the voting-age population in each state based on U.S. Census Bureau data. Data on race/Latino and citizenship categories were derived from the American Community Survey (ACS) of 2001-2004. Age, race/Latino and citizenship categories from the ACS were forwarded to November 2004, and then adjusted to conform to the control totals.

Registration Rates

Registration rates were derived from the U.S. Census Bureau Voting and Registration in 2004 file. Rates were calculated for each of four race/Latino and four citizenship categories for each state. Given small sample sizes, however, the estimated registration rate used in this report for 18-24 year old second-generation immigrants was based on both second-generation individuals at the regional level, (Northeast, Midwest, South and West) except for those states where a sufficient sample was available: New York, Illinois, Florida, Texas, Arizona, California, Colorado and New Mexico. For Latinos, sample-size considerations required that registration rates of 18-24 year old second-generation persons be based on regional rates of both second and third and later generations of Latinos.

Estimated Immigrants Eligible to Naturalize

These estimates are based on the work of Fix, Passel and Sucher. They calculated the number of immigrants eligible to naturalize by state in 2003. (The report can be found at: http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/310847_trends_in_naturalization.pdf.)

For this report, the 2003 estimate of Fix, Passel and Sucher was forwarded to November 2006 based on immigration and naturalization in the intervening period. The resulting number was then distributed across states based on their representation in the 2003 numbers. The estimate of Mexican immigrants eligible to naturalize is based on Fix et. al's estimate that 28 percent of immigrants eligible to naturalize were of Mexican origin. This rate was applied to the updated, 2006 estimate, and distributed across states based on the immigration of Mexican origin persons in the 1990s.

Bios and Endnotes

Joshua Hoyt has been the director of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights since May of 2002. During that time the Coalition has fought vigorously for citizenship for the undocumented and to protect civil liberties in the wake of the attacks of September 11, 2001. The Coalition has helped to make Illinois one of the most immigrant friendly states in the U.S.

Mr. Hoyt has worked a total of 29 years as an organizer for social justice in Chicago, Baltimore, and in the countries of Spain, Peru, and Panama. Josh was educated at the University of Illinois and the Universidad Central de Barcelona, Spain, and received his Master's from the University of Chicago. He has testified before Congress; spoken to such national media as the Lehrer News Hour, the O'Reilly Factor, and the New York Times; written numerous articles; and directed political campaigns. He speaks fluent Spanish and limited Portuguese. His e-mail is: jhoyt@icirr.org.

Rob Paral is a consultant and writer specializing in public policy, demographic and human services-related issues involving immigrants, Latinos, and other populations. He is Principal of Rob Paral and Associates, is a fellow with the Institute for Latino Studies at Notre Dame University, and is a Research Fellow with the American Immigration Law Foundation in Washington, DC.

Mr. Paral has published numerous analyses of immigration and its economic and social impacts. His recent publications include reports and book chapters on Mexican immigrant integration in Chicago, the role of Mexican immigrant workers in the national labor force, immigrant use of welfare, and poverty trends in Illinois. His e-mail is: rob@robparal.com.

Fred Tsao is the Policy Director at the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights. In this position, he provides technical support, trainings, and presentations on immigration-related topics to service providers, immigrant community organizations, and others who work with immigrants. He also provides updates and analysis of changes in immigration policies and procedures to ICIRR members and allies, and assists with the coalition's legislative advocacy efforts.

A self-described "recovering attorney," Mr. Tsao practiced law at the Rockford office of Prairie State Legal Services, where he worked after receiving his law degree from the University of Michigan. He has also worked with the American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois, the Chicago Anti-Hunger Federation, and the Missouri Public Interest Research Group. A native of Chicago, Fred is the son of immigrants from China, and has had a lifelong concern with immigration issues. His e-mail is ftsao@icirr.org.

ⁱ "Trends in Naturalization," Fix, Passel and Sucher, the Urban Institute, September 2003, www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/310847_trends_in_naturalization.pdf

ⁱⁱ "Naturalizations in the United States: 2005" U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Immigration Statistics, www.uscis.gov/graphics/shared/statistics/publications/2005NatzFlowRpt.pdf.

ⁱⁱⁱ Wall Street Journal, 4-10-06, B1; Newsweek, 5-22-06, p. 36.; Washington Post 6-9-06

^{iv} Associated Press, 6-1-06.



Today we march, tomorrow we vote!

Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR):

ICIRR was founded in 1986, and is dedicated to promoting the rights of immigrants and refugees to full and equal participation in the civic, cultural, social, and political life of our diverse society. In partnership with our member organizations, the Coalition educates and organizes immigrant and refugee communities to assert their rights; promotes citizenship and civic participation; monitors, analyzes, and advocates on immigrant-related issues; and, informs the general public about the contributions of immigrants and refugees.

The Center for Community Change:

The Center, founded in 1968, grew out of a powerful combination of ideas and events in the 1960s. Throughout our history, the Center has provided policy and organizing expertise on a range of issue areas, including: community reinvestment, affordable and public housing, transportation, income support and job creation, economic development and housing production, hunger and malnutrition, immigrant rights and legislation, and community monitoring efforts to hold government agencies accountable to residents.

The Center helps low-income people, especially people of color, build powerful, effective organizations through which they can change their communities and public policies for the better.

Center for Community Change
1536 U Street NW, Washington, DC 20009
(202) 339-9300 | toll-free: (877) 777-1536 | info@communitychange.org

ILLINOIS COALITION FOR IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE RIGHTS

36 S. Wabash, suite 1425 · Chicago, IL 60603 · 312.332.7360 voice · 312.332.7044 fax · www.icirr.org





ILLINOIS COALITION FOR IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE RIGHTS

36 S. Wabash, suite 1425 · Chicago, IL 60603 · 312.332.7360 voice · 312.332.7044 fax · www.icirr.org

