

LATINO VOTING ELIGIBILITY IN NEBRASKA

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OFFICE OF LATINO/LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES (OLLAS)
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Latino Voting Eligibility and its Potential Impact in Nebraska

DATA BRIEF--March 2011

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A “Data Note” from the National Institute for Latino Policy (NILP) used newly released estimates from the 2005-09 American Community Survey (ACS) to calculate the citizen voting age population (CVAP) by ethnic and racial groups at the national level. We thought it would be valuable to produce a similar “Data Brief” for the state of Nebraska. The “Data Note” produced by the NILP can be found at <http://www.latinopolicy.org/>

One reason data on CVAP are so important, as the author of the national report, Angelo Falcón, points out, is that these figures “represent a new element in the redistricting process because this is the first time that citizenship information has been released prior to the release of the decennial Census redistricting data. Because the use of citizenship status is an unsettled redistricting and voting rights issue with the courts, it is anticipated that the use of the ACS data for this purpose may be subject to legal challenges.”

In the coming weeks and months, Nebraska legislators will be redrawing the electoral map of the state based on the newly released population figures from the 2010 US Census. Despite the fact that Omaha grew at a surprisingly slower pace than expected, the Omaha-based 2nd Congressional District, where the largest concentration of Nebraska’s Latinos reside has “30,000 too many people to be in proper balance.” (Omaha World Herald, March 3, 2011)

Conversely, Nebraska’s 3rd District, which includes cities with significant and growing Latino populations such as Grand Island, Lexington, and Scottsbluff, has too few people when compared to the other two districts. Legislators must find ways to redraw the congressional boundaries in order to achieve balance among the three districts. These are important decisions where party politics often play a significant role and where minority populations’ impact on future elections could be diluted if their numbers are seriously split across district boundaries. Legislators must tread lightly in order to avoid charges of “gerrymandering,” or the practice of manipulating geographic boundaries for undue political advantage. We include current numbers of Latinos in each congressional district as reported by the 2010 US Census.

State legislative districts also will need to be redrawn and that work starts first. As the data below shows, it is at this level where the Latino vote stands to make its most significant impact. Moreover, the impact of the Latino vote will be increasingly felt at the local level, in City

Councils, School Boards and other local elections. We have included a table with selected school districts where the Latino population in each of those districts is at least 1,000. We also include a map of the current Legislative Districts which may serve as a base from which to compare redistricting proposals and redrawn district boundaries. District maps and other information about State senators representing each of those districts can be found on the Nebraska Legislature's website: <http://nebraskalegislature.gov/>

The 2010 US census did not ask about citizenship. However, it does provide us with the most accurate count of the total Latino voting age population in the state, those who are 18 years or older. It also tells us the total number of Latinos by congressional, state and school districts. We have added this information from the 2010 Census to our Data Brief.

Two previously published OLLAS reports, along with this Data Brief, offer an incremental, albeit incomplete, picture of the strength of Latino voters in past and future elections. The previously published OLLAS reports are "The Challenge of Enhancing Voter Mobilization and Representation," and "The Omaha Site: Migrant Civil Society under Construction." Data across reports may not be perfectly comparable given the fact that they may employ different methodologies and sources. To view these reports go to www.unomaha.edu/ollas.

Latinos are the state's largest and fastest-growing minority population. However, their young age, relatively low rates of US citizenship and lack of political capacity to transform numbers into registered and active voters may dilute their influence in future elections. On the other hand, Latinos are becoming naturalized citizens at increasingly high rates and their children are overwhelmingly US-born. As Jonathan Benjamin-Alvarado, OLLAS and Political Science professor said in the March 3, 2011 redistricting story, "this is going to be a very vibrant discussion in the Unicameral."

It is reasonable to expect that larger numbers of Latinos will become civically engaged and will be paying closer attention to these discussions, and to the factors preventing their numerical influence from being proportionately felt at the voting booth. Latinos' political impact, however, may not be confined to this population's capacity to vote. Previous OLLAS reports have documented the presence of a new generation of fledgling, but increasingly well-organized Latino community organizations, with increasingly well-trained leadership, which are paying close attention to the composition and agendas of local and state institutions. Latino representation, in the overwhelming majority of these institutions, is not simply disproportionate to their population size, but it is practically zero. Importantly, some of these newer organizations are poised to forge strategic and egalitarian alliances within and across social, ethnic and racial groups. Some of their work is structurally-transformative in at least two important ways. One is the fact that it is serving to underscore the need for collective and participatory, as opposed to personalistic and top-down, community leadership development models. Second, some of this nascent leadership is keen in forging their programmatic agendas based on an informed understanding of the diversity and heterogeneity of the Latino and non-Latino communities in the state.

Acknowledgements

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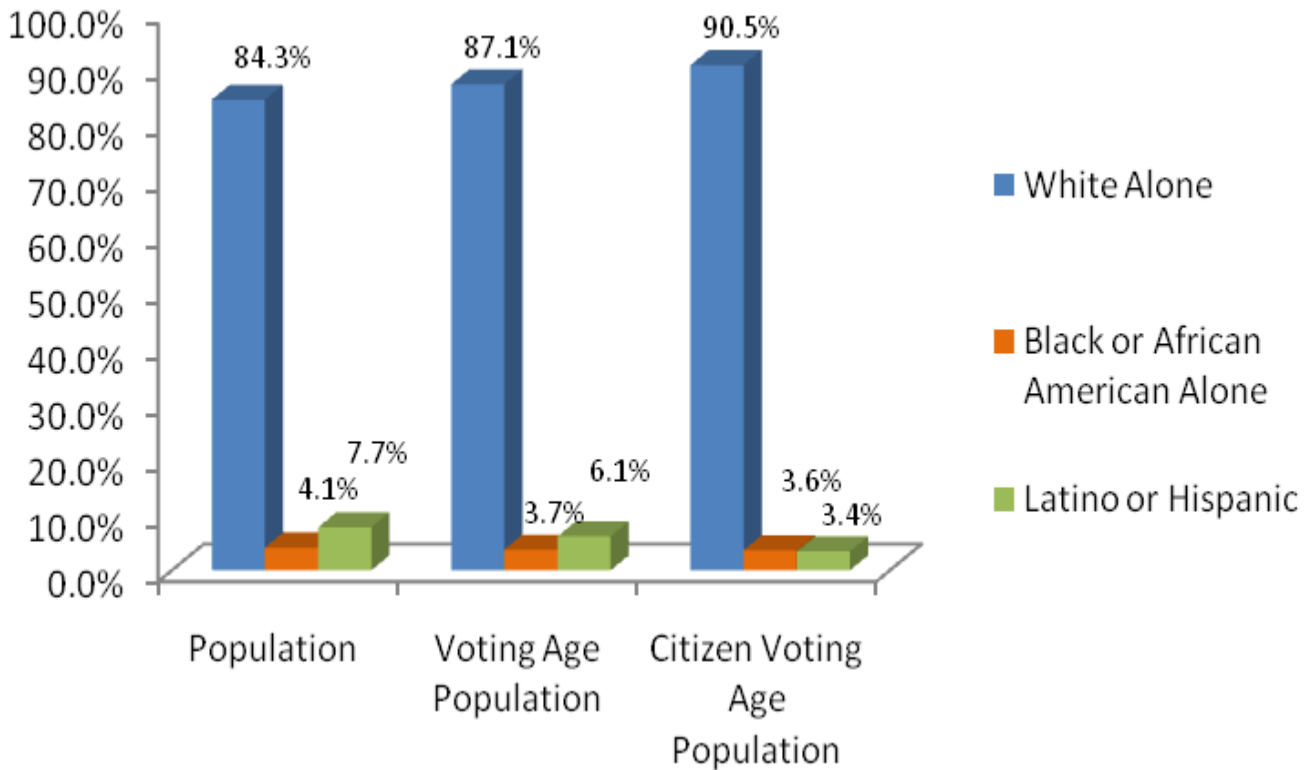
About the Data

This Data Brief is based on three major sources of data: 1) The US Census Bureau's Citizen Voting Age Population (CVAP) Special Tabulation from the 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates; 2) 2009 ACS and 3) 2010 Census. The American Community Survey (ACS) is an ongoing survey that provides data every year - giving communities the current information they need to plan investments and services. Information from the survey generates data that help determine how more than \$400 billion in federal and state funds are distributed each year. To help communities, state governments, and federal programs, the ACS asks about a variety of topics, including age, race, ethnicity, and citizenship. For the ACS' methodology and explanations about margins of error, please visit:

http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/survey_methodology/acs_design_methodology_ch07.pdf. 3) To review 2010 US Census data reported here go to:

<http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/searchresults.xhtml?refresh=t>

Figure 1. White Alone, Black or African American and Latino Share of Total, Voting Age Population (VAP)¹ and Citizen Voting Age Population (CVAP)² in Nebraska, 2005-2009



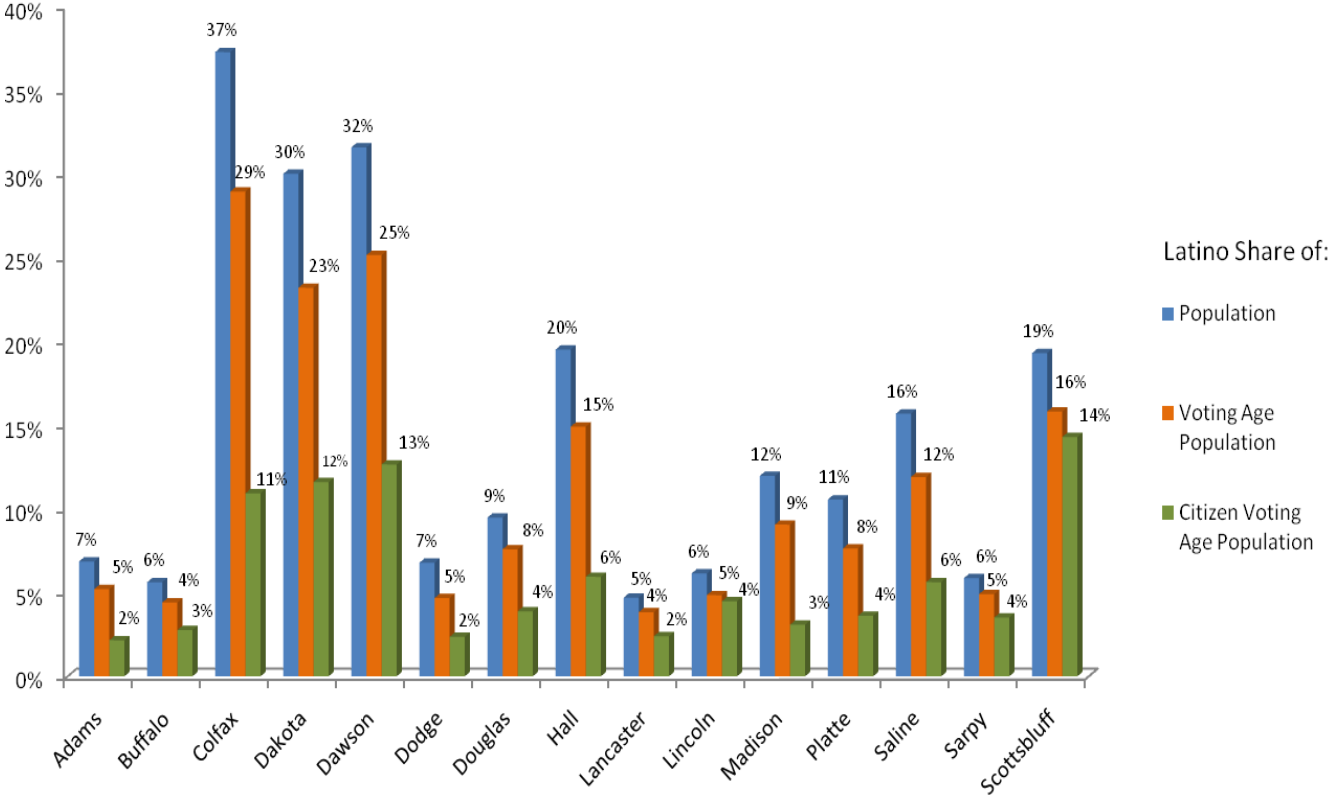
Source: OLLAS calculations based on the Citizen Voting Age Population (CVAP) Special Tabulation from the 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

¹ Total number of people 18 years of age or older.

² Total number of United States citizens 18 years of age or older.

Nebraska continues to be an overwhelmingly White state and this is reflected in the voting age population (VAP) and citizen voting age population (CVAP) by race and Hispanic/Latino origin. Latinos are 7.7% of the state’s population, a distant second to Whites who account for 84.3% of the population. Of the state’s CVAP population (citizens of age 18 and over), 90% are White and 3.4% were Latinos.

Figure 2. Latino Share of Total, Voting Age Population (VAP)¹ and Citizen Voting Age Population (CVAP)² in Selected Nebraska Counties, 2005-2009



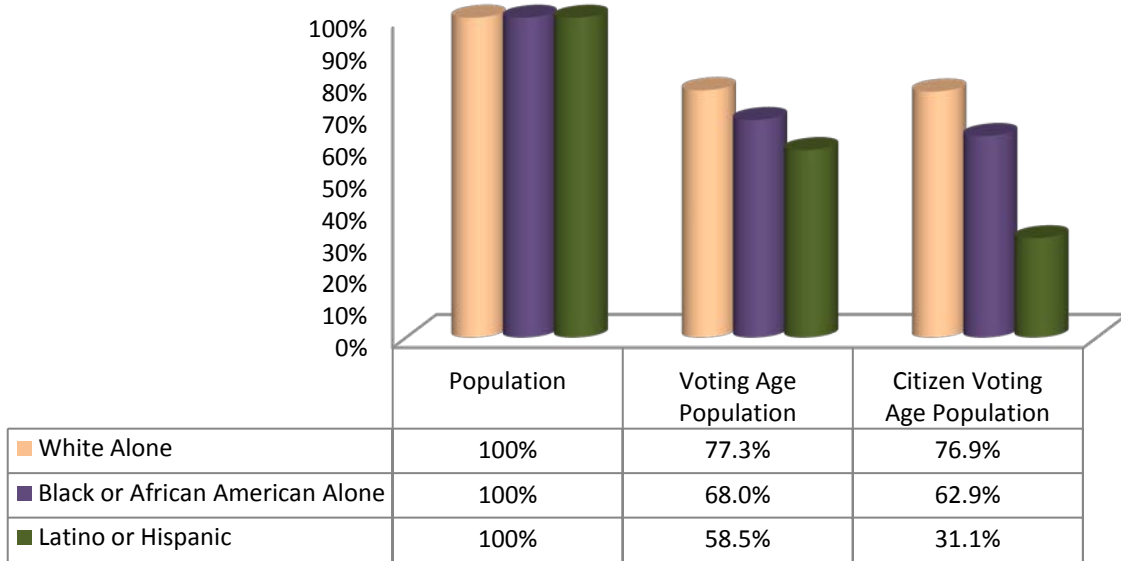
Source: OLLAS calculations based on the Citizen Voting Age Population (CVAP) Special Tabulation from the 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

¹ Total number of people 18 years of age or older.

² Total number of United States citizens 18 years of age or older.

The potential influence of the Latino vote changes somewhat when we look at selected Nebraska counties. For one thing, the Latino voting age population (VAP) in many of these counties is quite high. In time, increasing numbers will achieve citizenship and become new voters. More importantly, in the state and in these counties, according to the 2009 ACS, about 90% of the under-18 population is US-born. US-born Latinos, not immigrants, accounted for the largest share of Latino population growth in 2009. Should they register to vote in proportionate numbers, Latinos will become a decisive voting segment in the districts and counties where they reside. The influence of the Latino vote is inevitably felt with particular force in counties with the oldest Latino, mainly Mexican, populations. In Scottsbluff, for example, the gap between the Latino share of the county’s total population and those who remain eligible to vote, after accounting for age and citizenship (CVAP), is rather small, 19% and 14% respectively. On the other hand, in counties such as Colfax, Dakota or Dawson, where the growth of the Latino population has been influenced by intense labor recruitment since the early 1990s, the gap between total Latino population and Latinos eligible to vote after accounting for age and citizenship (the CVAP population) is much wider. While a third or more of the residents in those counties are Latinos, the Latino CVAP does not go above 13% of the counties’ total CVAP.

Figure 3. Effect of Age and Citizenship on White Alone, Black or African American Alone and Latino Voter Eligibility in Nebraska



Source: OLLAS calculations based on the Citizen Voting Age Population (CVAP) Special Tabulation from the 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Figure 3 shows the varied impact of citizenship and age on the eligibility of White, African American and Latino voters. If one examines the two columns on the right (“Voting Age Population” and “Citizen Voting Age Population”), it becomes readily apparent that nearly all of the 77.3% White, and about 95% of the 68% Black VAP, remained eligible to vote after citizenship is factored in (76.9% and 62.9% respectively). On the other hand, as the steep drop in the green-color column shows, only about a third of the 58.5% of the Latino VAP (31.1%) remained eligible voters.

Table 1. Nebraska Latino Voting Age Population 2009, 2010, 2012

Estimated Latino VAP 2009 (ACS 2009)	Actual Latino VAP (2010 Census)	Estimated Additional Latino VAP in 2012 (ACS 2009)	Total Estimated Latino VAP 2012
46,904	98,221	15%	112,954

Source: OLLAS calculations based on the U.S. Census Bureau. Census 2010 and 2009 American Community Survey.

¹Total number of people 18 years of age or older.

To construct Table 1 we used a combination of sources to estimate what the Latino voting age population (VAP) may look like in 2012. The figure is likely to be revised upwards, after the release of the 2010 American Community Survey. This is because the additional, estimated, 15% of Latino voters is based on the number of Latinos under 18 years of age that will be of voting age by 2012, as calculated by the 2009 ACS. The total number of Latino VAP in 2012, 112,954, was derived by calculating 15% of the actual Latino VAP as calculated by 2010 Census. As one can observe, however, the 2009 ACS appears to have seriously underestimated the number of Latinos of voting age when compared to the actual count produced by the 2010 Census (46,904 versus 98,221). We surmise that a similar underestimate has occurred with the under-18 population which will be voting age by 2012.

Table 2. Total Number of Latinos in each of Nebraska’s Congressional Districts

Congressional District 1	Congressional District 2	Congressional District 3
44,015	68,300	55,090

Source: 2010 Census Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File.

Reflecting what is happening in the state as a whole, the number of Latinos is unequally distributed across congressional districts. The majority of Latinos in the state are registered as Democrats and they are thought to have played a significant role in the 2nd Congressional District electoral win for President Obama. Redistricting and demographic shifts may stand to alter Latinos’ electoral influence in the years to come and far beyond the 2nd Congressional District.

Table 3. Selected State Legislative Districts with Significant Latino Minorities 2010

Legislative District	Total Population	Total Latino Population	% of Latino Population	Total District VAP	Total Latino VAP	% of Latino VAP	Latinos under 18 ¹	% Latino under 18
05- Omaha	37,686	13,367	35.5%	26,416	7,629	28.9%	5,738	42.9%
07- Omaha	37,866	18,176	48.0%	27,500	10,879	39.6%	7,297	40.1%
22 - Columbus	35,193	4,515	12.8%	26,023	2,580	9.9%	1,935	42.9%
23- Schuyler	40, 859	5,086	12.4%	29,453	2,930	9.9%	2,156	42.4%
35 - Grand Island	39, 561	11,894	30.0%	28,483	6,903	24.2%	4,991	42.0%
36 - Lexington	37, 224	8,742	23.4%	26,615	5,104	19.2%	3,638	41.6%
48 - Scottsbluff	33, 594	7,415	22.0%	25,221	4,507	17.9%	2,908	39.2%

Source: 2010 Census Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File.

¹Universe=Total Latino Population

Based upon a survey of selected Nebraska State Legislative Districts the demographic trend of increasing Latino population is dramatically illustrated in the table above. In fact, Legislative District 7 (South Omaha) is poised to become the first minority district in the state should the district boundaries remain relatively intact after the re-districting process. The districts with more than 20 percent Latino populations may be those where Hispanic voter participation is likely to increase. In fact, there are four districts (LD-5, LD-7, LD-35, LD-36) where the total Latino VAP is nearly 20 percent or above, and in all of these districts the population of Latinos under the age of 18 is over 40 percent. This means that these districts with significant Latinos of voting age populations will continue to see an increased number by virtue of the large proportion of Latinos under the age of 18, and the fact that many (as much as 90 percent) of this population are already U.S. citizens.

All told, this has the potential significantly of altering the electoral equation in all of these districts, meaning that the Latino vote, if coordinated and participating, has the potential to turn close legislative electoral races, and increasingly so in the 2 South Omaha districts, Grand Island and Lexington. This is only prospective at this time because much depends on the extent to which Hispanics self-organize (register and turn-out to vote) and the extent to which they will vote as a bloc. But given the often contentious nature on anti-immigrant legislation introduced in Nebraska over the past five years, more and more Latinos are disregarding partisan allegiances and are coming together in pan-Latino identity coalitions to push back against these legislative efforts. As of yet, this incipient Latino coalition (multi-generational, immigrant/non-immigrant, Spanish and non-Spanish speaking) against the anti-immigrant movement has not translated to the ballot box but recent efforts of direct lobbying and rallies against LB 48 - The Nebraska "Arizona" bill were impressive and perhaps portends broader and more sustained political action and participation on the part of Hispanics across the state.

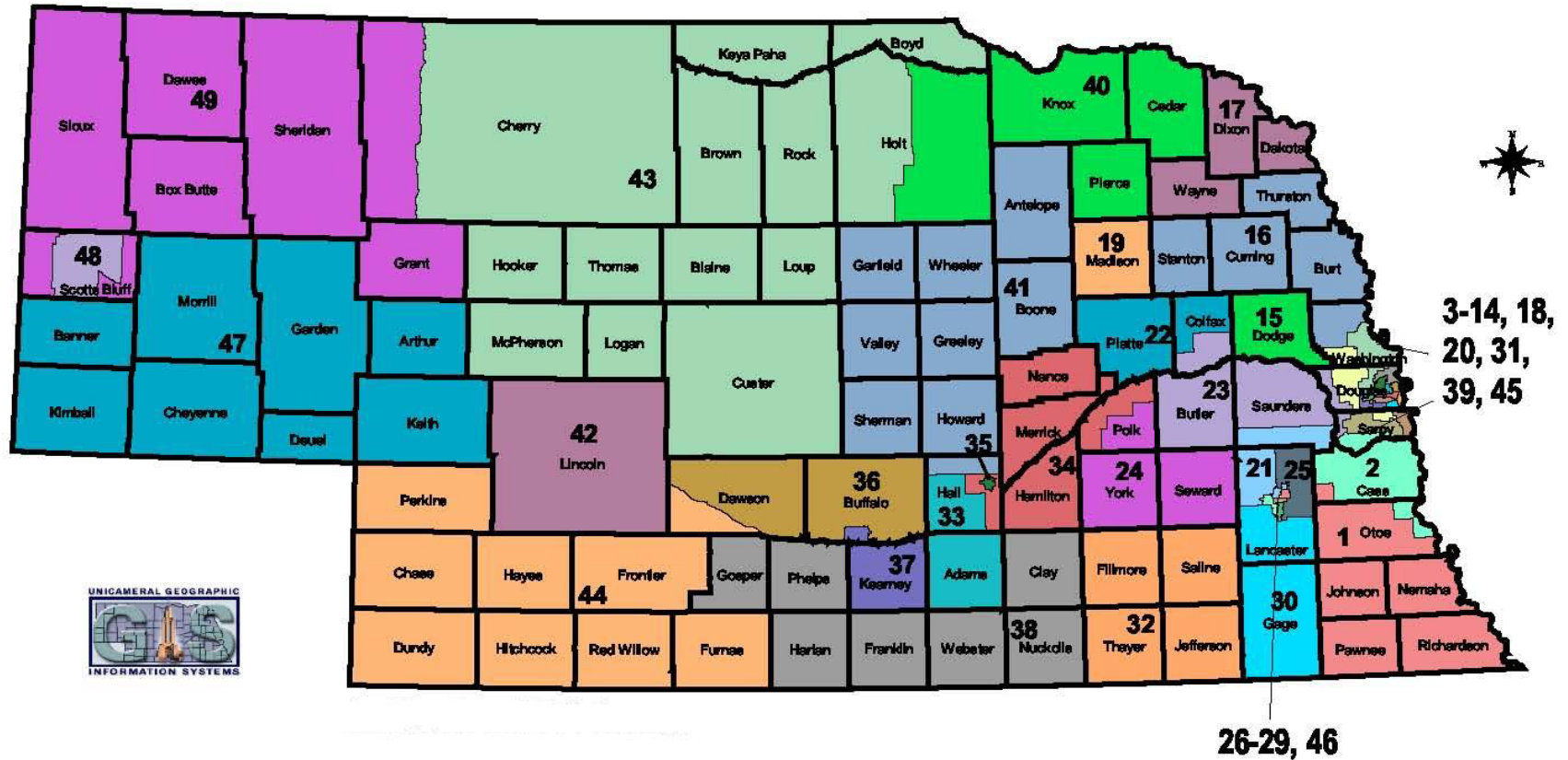
As the final table below shows, and contingent the impact of the Latino vote could, and should, be increasingly felt at the local level in school boards across the state.

Table 4. Nebraska School Districts with 1,000 or more Latinos

School District	Total Population	Total Latino Population	% of Latino Population
Alliance Public Schools	9,549	1,114	11.7%
Bellevue Public Schools	42,326	3,578	8.5%
Columbus Public Schools	22,865	3,620	15.8%
Crete Public Schools	9,941	2,535	25.5%
Fremont Public Schools	29,431	3,464	11.8%
Gering Public Schools	11,060	2,085	18.9%
Grand Island Public Schools	47,142	12,833	27.2%
Hastings Public Schools	23,372	2,417	10.3%
Kearney Public Schools	35,719	2,482	6.9%
Lexington Public Schools	11,952	6,816	57.0%
Lincoln Public Schools	253,111	16,268	6.4%
Madison Public Schools	3,485	1,241	35.6%
Millard Public Schools	111,506	4,648	4.2%
Norfolk Public Schools	29,232	3,283	11.2%
North Platte Public Schools	28,337	2,284	8.1%
Omaha Public Schools	334,714	52,448	15.7%
Papillion-La Vista Public Schools	52,656	3,137	6.0%
Ralston Public Schools	19,351	2,704	14.0%
Schuyler Community Schools	8,113	4,260	52.5%
Scottsbluff Public Schools	18,664	4,691	25.1%
South Sioux City Community Schools	17,248	7,284	42.2%
Westside Community Schools	29,358	1,064	3.6%

Source: OLLAS Calculation based on the 2010 Census Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File, Tables Pi and P2.

Nebraska Legislative Districts



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000 TIGER/Line Files
 LB 852, 2001

The TIGER/Line Files have been edited to reflect passage of LB 349 (2000), which changed the boundary between Butler and Platte Counties.

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