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Growing Latino population puts Republican Party in jeopardy

Mario T. García | Jul. 8, 2013 NCR Today

Last week, The Associated Press reported [1] that in California, Latinos have reached population parity with whites. Both groups represent 39 percent of the population of the nation's largest state.

This demographic landmark was followed by the prediction that the parity would be short-lived. The state Department of Finance that released these figures further noted that by early next year, Latinos would be the largest ethnic population, exceeding whites. The increase in the Latino population, moreover, will continue to rise so that in 2030, it will account for 44 percent and in 2060, for close to 50 percent.

The report did not explain the reasons for the Latino increase, but most demographers say it is a combination of higher birth rates among Latinos -- since they represent a younger population than whites, blacks and Asians -- and immigration, though scholars also note that even if immigration were to be cut off, this increase would still occur because of high birth rates.

Latinos in California are already the largest so-called minority group, but now they are the largest group, period. Many of the same Latino demographics are also occurring in other states, such as Texas. But in the case of California, the future is already here. Demographically, Latinos will be dominant in California, which sets the trend in many ways for the rest of the country.

One trend is political. Latinos are now the backbone of the Democratic Party. No candidate for statewide office, whether Democrat or Republican, can win without the Latino vote. While Latinos have voted Democratic since the New Deal days of the 1930s, the surge in Latino support for the Democrats came in the wake of Proposition 187 in 1994, in which voters passed a resolution that would deny all state benefits to undocumented immigrants and to their undocumented children, excluding them from public schools.

Latinos, whether immigrants or not, were outraged, particularly at Republicans for leading the charge that implied that all Latinos were undocumented and welfare cheaters. Proposition 187 was not just about immigrants; it was perceived by most Latinos as an anti-Latino movement. Not only did even more Latino citizens vote for the Democrats in a backlash against the Republicans, but many unnaturalized Latino residents moved to become U.S. citizens to vote overwhelmingly Democrat. This Latino voter surge has made California into a secure blue state and impressed politicians, though not all Republicans, with Latino political power. The demographic increase of Latinos has only furthered this process. Demography has political implications.

This is the reality now spreading throughout the country as Latinos grow in numbers in many key electoral states. This is the reality that the national Republican Party has to face and that increases the political stakes on the passage of comprehensive immigration reform. Some Republicans are finally waking up to what has happened in California and what is happening and will happen in many other states over the next decades. The Latino vote already was perhaps the most determining factor in the 2012 presidential elections, pushing swing states such as Florida, Virginia, Colorado and Nevada into President Barack Obama's column. Unfortunately, many other Republicans still don't get it, especially the House Republicans who appear to be prepared to vote against comprehensive immigration reform that in particular provides legalization to the millions of

undocumented in the country. But they do so at the political peril of the future of their party in national elections. What has happened in California will happen nationally, and the Republicans will be the biggest losers.

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[1] http://www.mercurynews.com/census/ci_23577444/whites-latinos-hit-population-parity-california