

Latino Political Participation and Prison Gerrymandering

By Gabriela Hasaj



800,000 American Latinos turn 18 each year, and the average American Latino is 27 years old, 14 years younger than the average White American. Currently, Latinos make up 30% of the U.S. population and 10% of the electorate. There is no debate that the Latino population is growing and as it gains political capital, they become targets of voter suppression tactics.

Latino's are not the only demographic that are impacted by these tactics, African Americans, Asian Americans and other minority groups are also disproportionately impacted by voting regulations. Some of these regulations include: mandatory showing of government issued ID to vote, elimination of same-day registration, not having absentee voting available. Another major tactic used to transfer political clout from urban areas to more rural areas is the practice of prison gerrymandering.

This legislative initiative counts prisoners as part of the population in which they are incarcerated. Felon disenfranchisement laws prohibit prisoners from voting and paying taxes, yet they are still counted for legislative redistricting.

Peter Wagner, the founder of the Prison Policy Initiative has written at length about the effects of “importing constituents.” In a report focusing on prisoners and political clout in New York, he writes that because of the disproportionate incarceration of minorities who typically reside in urban areas and are poor, the communities that are losing political capital “are the most negatively affected by aggressive incarceration policy, and giving that clout to rural communities that benefit from prison jobs has the potential of launching a cycle of prison growth without a democratic restraint.” In New York, he presents data that over half the prison population is black and another third is Hispanic. Protecting each voter’s right allows citizens to enjoy equal political dignity and connection to the community in which they live.

How can you make your voice heard on this issue and on other issues? Find out who your representative in Congress is by going to: <https://whoismyrepresentative.com> call their office or email them and tell them your opinion. Remember it is their JOB to listen to what you have to say because their salary comes from YOUR taxes. They work for you. Other ways you can get your voice heard is by engaging with local organizations and advocacy groups. Just by talking to friends and family about politics is a way to take part in civic engagement. Your voice is powerful, use it!