

**The Changing Face of Charlotte:**  
**Political Participation in the Developing Latino Community**

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## I. Introduction

The Latino vote has quickly become one of the most important issues in contemporary domestic politics in the United States. This attention is greatly a result of Latinos surpassing African Americans as the largest minority group in the nation in 2001 and the recent geographic dispersion of many Latinos to new settlement areas outside of the traditional locations in the Southwest. These non-traditional settlement areas include many destinations in the Southeast region, an area previously devoid of notable Latino presence and dominated by binary race relations. The Latino population in one of these new destinations, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, increased by 570% from 1990 to 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000). The rate of this population change combined with the novelty of Latinos in the area demands further study to address how the region's political climate is adjusting to the dramatic shift. Furthermore, since the population is young and rapidly reproducing, the future will hold a continuous growth in eligible electorate as the young population comes of voting age. However, currently, Latino political involvement severely lags behind its caucasian and African American counterparts and does not reflect its growth in numbers. This pattern of political exclusion needs to be deconstructed in order for the full power of the growing Latino electorate to be harnessed. This study seeks to explain the obstacles facing the political integration of the Mecklenburg County Latino population. This research expects to find that the Mecklenburg County situation differs greatly from the underrepresentation of the general Latino population nationwide and thus demands a custom approach to achieve greater inclusion and more accurate representation.

The goal of this study is to demonstrate how and why this difference exists through an analysis of the unique context and consequences of the population's unsustainable rate of hypergrowth. This research identifies obstacles to political integration, unique to this population,

in its predominantly young, non-citizen population, in the spatial mismatch between the location of Latino suburban enclaves and the public, community resources of urban centers, and most importantly in the population's cycle of low socioeconomic status and poor socialization perpetuated by the aforementioned characteristics. This study explains how these specific challenges relate to the political incorporation of Mecklenburg Latinos in the distinctive context of the surge in feminization of immigration, Charlotte's lucrative economy, Mecklenburg County's democratic tendencies, North Carolina's potential as a swing state, the region's conservative political culture, and also the recent increase in party attention to courting the Latino vote. In order to fully comprehend this dynamic nature of Mecklenburg County Latino politics, the subject is first presented within the frame of reference of prior theory regarding Latino political participation levels, then made relevant to trends in contemporary national Latino politics, and ultimately comprehensively analyzed on the local level through personal interviews and comparative quantitative analysis of population data.

## I. Literature Review

Research regarding the political participation of Latinos in the United States has until very recently been largely focused on the role of Hispanics in politics in the southwest region of the nation, in the traditional settlement areas. "The geography of Latino America is changing rapidly. Latinos once confined largely to the Southwest, South Florida, Chicago, and New York, are suddenly to be found in large numbers in the South and Midwest." (DeSipio and Leal, 2010). However, with this rapid population growth of Latinos in the southeast over the past twenty years, the field of study has begun to expand to include the new demographic. This rise of Hispanics in non-traditional locations, as well as the emergence of Hispanics as the largest

minority in the country, has spurred much political discussion regarding how the population growth can be translated into political influence. “Population increase is the foundation of the developing scholarly and popular interest in Latino politics. This began when the release of the 1980 U.S. census documented the first wave of what would become a continuous, massive influx of Latino immigrants.” (De La Garza, 2012).

Researchers face many obstacles in studying this relationship between population size and political representation, due in part to the variability of Hispanic-Americans in terms of location, citizenship, and access to politics. This population is not a homogenous entity which can be studied through one lens, nor through basic comparisons to the political activity of other minority groups, yet since current research is still very limited in its analysis of the political climate for Hispanics specifically in these non-traditional regions, the framework for this developing area of study is based in general theories of nationwide Hispanic political activity and identity, and comparisons to politics of select traditional settlement areas. Overall, the incorporation of Latinos into the political sphere is currently primarily addressed through the role of socialization or time in the United States, English proficiency, socioeconomic status (SES), and party mobilization efforts (Slocum, 2013). These established factors can be appropriately applied to an analysis of the Charlotte region’s political climate as a new Hispanic immigrant destination because they are equally applicable, but alone they will ultimately fail to accurately encompass the entirety of the complex factors at play because, as previously noted, the Latino population is incredibly diverse and must be studied in accordance to each community’s personal characteristics, and as a hypergrowth new settlement destination, this region is particularly prone to noteworthy variance from the overall national Latino population.

As mentioned, one of the key accepted factors which impacts electoral and non-electoral participation is socioeconomic status. Studies analyzing the role of this variable within Latino political activity have consistently shown that low SES is associated with low levels of participation across all ethnicities. "...describes Hispanic non-electoral involvement as slightly lower than that of African Americans and considerably lower than Anglos', but the study emphasizes that this pattern reflects differences in human capital such as education and income and is not intrinsically a function of ethnicity." (De la Garza, 2012). This is not just a reality for Hispanic-Americans, but for all ethnic groups, as a low SES generally limits a person's access to politics and civic engagement as they lack the finances and time to donate to supporting campaigns or joining party organizations and are thus isolated from a large segment of the political process, and more importantly, those who control it. "Although there is no doubt that low SES is a major factor in low Latino turnout, even studies that control for SES find that Latinos vote less than Anglos." (De la Garza, 2012). This suggests that there is another, larger variable preventing Latinos from realizing their full political potential outside of their collectively lower SES. Rodolfo De la Garza is a leading Hispanic American scholar and he espouses the idea that although low SES does function to facilitate the cycle of Latino political exclusion, it is not the true underlying cause. "It is a truism of American politics that individuals participate either because they have the resources to 'go to politics' or because 'politics comes to them' through mobilization efforts." (DeSipio and Leal, 2010). Low SES combined with a lack of English proficiency makes many disadvantaged Latinos less likely to vote or enter politics unsolicited and therefore also less likely to be targeted in the future by parties and campaigns which do not see them as significant forces of support or opposition due to the absence of a

tradition of civic participation. Working class and recently arrived Latinos are thus left without the resources to involve themselves in political activity as well as lacking the ability to attract political organizations. This theory of exclusion is particularly relevant to Latino populations in new settlement areas like Mecklenburg where there is a constant influx of recently arrived Latinos in the area, most already subject to exceptionally low SES due to their educational attainment and restrictive nature of employment, but who are then also concurrently confronted by widespread language and cultural barriers which serve to further ostracize them from opportunities for community engagement and social mobility, and in turn foster the previously mentioned cycle of economic inferiority and political isolation.

The nature of this exclusion has been analyzed further in terms of what factions of the Latino population suffer the most from political exclusion due to low SES and its consequences. Specifically, the relationship between political activity of naturalized versus native-born Hispanic citizens is an important area of focus due to the notable lower levels of political participation in naturalized Latino-American citizens than native-born citizens. Part of this discrepancy is believed to be attributed to the general lower SES of naturalized citizens and more particularly, in how this trait is manifested within their social networks. The role of social networks in the cultivation of civic participation is not to be underestimated and is paramount in understanding how, particularly amongst more recent arrivals, Latinos overcome language and cultural barriers and branch out beyond their ethnic enclaves, to become engaged in mainstream politics. “There is a broad agreement that naturalized Hispanics vote at lower rates than the native-born. This is predictable given that they have the demographics associated with low turnout, they reside in communities candidates tend to ignore, and are not well socialized in

American politics.” (De la Garza, 2012). The assertion that naturalized citizens are members of a less politically attractive sector of the community suggests that it is not only a lack of financial resources which inhibits their political engagement, but also a lack of familiarization with the U.S. political system due to a certain level of social isolation. This factor influencing political participation is especially relevant in the non-traditional settlement areas like Charlotte due to the high volume of non-native born Latino adults in the area resulting from the high rate of population growth. “Data for Mecklenburg County for 2005 from the American Community Survey show that 85 percent of Latinos under the age of 18 were born in the United States, whereas only 16 percent of the adult population was U.S. born...” (Weeks et. al. 2006). Although it appears that since the majority of underage Latinos in Mecklenburg County are native-born and thus not directly implicated by this trend, since most of these youths are coming of age in relatively secluded environments guided by foreign-born parents and neighbors since there are minimal older generations of native born Latinos in the area, it seems only natural that they would tend to inherit the characteristics associated with the political exclusion of their social group and continue the accepted order of political invisibility by becoming more internally focused within the confines of their exclusive Latino community, rather than reject what they have been conditioned to understand and embrace an unknown course of civic engagement. Hyper-growth areas such as Mecklenburg County seem to be particularly vulnerable to this type of secluded Hispanic hubs which collectively resist assimilation and societal engagement not as a matter of decided principle, but rather a product of circumstance as a result of their rate of growth not allowing for natural progression away from native ties towards integration into American society. “Specifically (1) native-born Latinos are residentially more dispersed than

immigrant ones, (2) the recent immigrants are more likely to live in concentrated Latino areas than are those who arrived earlier, and (3) immigrants residing in concentrated Latino areas evidence a lower rate of naturalization than immigrants elsewhere in the community.” (Morrison, 1998). Currently, hypergrowth regions do not have this presence of generations of native-born Latinos spread out into the greater community and inciting the dispersion of dense Hispanic *barrios*, so therefore the communities continue to grow and expand, but currently as predominantly separate entities excluded from mainstream society and thus popular avenues of civic participation.

Studies addressing the political activity of naturalized versus native-born citizens also expand to include the role of non-citizen activity in the realm of Latino politics. Once again, this topic is also particularly relevant to the study of non-traditional settlement areas because of the newness of their populations and consequently their large constituencies of non-citizen Hispanics. This does not refer specifically to illegal or undocumented immigrants, but rather encompasses all Latinos lacking the right to vote in the United States. This group follows the similar pattern of naturalized citizens in their political and social isolation as a result of limited resources and a tendency to reside within the community confines of other recent immigrants, removed from the community center. These challenges are intensified amongst non-citizens in their possible mistrust or apprehension towards American government, due to their questionable legal status or unfamiliarity with their rights in the political process, even in regards to non-electoral participation. This group not only has limited resources to initiate political involvement and serious personal reservations regarding civic participation, it is also even less attractive to mobilization efforts by political organizations than its naturalized counterparts because these



Latinos do not hold even the concrete possibility of providing electoral support. "...two key spurs to activism are (1) membership in an organization that develops politically relevant civic skills, and (2) others asking for your participation. Non-citizens may have fewer friends and acquaintances who are involved in politics as well as fewer group memberships." (Leal, 2002). Once again, the research indicates that another sector of this population is less inclined to participate in even a non-electoral manner due to the extent of their isolation from community organizations. Naturally, undocumented immigrants harbor a greater reluctance towards visible civic involvement, but since this characteristic does not apply to the entire demographic of non-citizens it should not hold such substantial weight. This form of apprehension brings up the intriguing question of how non-citizen apathy or distrust towards the American political system can negatively influence the political habits and identities of eligible Latinos citizens in the same social network. Although very difficult to concretely examine, this relationship is pertinent to the study of new settlement regions like Mecklenburg County where there is a great deal of close interaction between the incredibly high volume of poorly-socialized, non-citizen Latinos and the steadily growing number of young native-born Latino citizens. Understanding the possible influence this kind of negative group attitude could have on electoral and non-electoral activity levels is an aspect of this subject that necessitates more attention, especially given the remarkable affect non-electoral involvement can have when realized in densely concentrated Hispanic locales. "Because 39% of Hispanics [nationwide] are noncitizen adults and therefore ineligible to vote, non electoral activities are much more significant to Hispanics than to other segments of the nation's population. Such activities not only provide the only mechanisms available to non citizens for making their preferences known, but also can stimulate the

development of local civic institutions that produce social capital, which strengthens neighborhoods and empowers ethnic groups.” (De la Garza, 2012). This dormant potential lying in non-electoral participation suggests that the path to accurate political representation can begin long before citizenship and therefore non-citizens should get an early start at cultivating a practice of civic engagement. This is also of importance for candidates and parties as well since many non-citizens will eventually gain voting rights through naturalization and if ignored in the mean time could continue to have minimal impact on elections, but if targeted beforehand, could become an entirely new support base with significant growth potential.

Aside from the unique obstacles facing each subgroup of the Latino population, there are also established overarching factors which contribute to the group’s low participation levels as a whole and even more noticeably in hypergrowth and or new settlement areas. Due to the nature of immigration being most accessible and desirable to younger generations, along with the propensity of Latinos to have larger families than their Anglo and African American counterparts, the Latino population as a whole is very young. “...Hispanics are by far the nation’s youngest ethnic group. Their median age is 27 years—and just 18 years among native-born Hispanics—compared with 42 years for that of white non-Hispanics.” (Taylor, Gonzalez-Barrera, Passel, and Lopez, 2012). Thus not only is there a significant amount of the population that is not eligible to vote due to citizenship, there is also a great portion that is still too young and another which is far more politically apathetic than the notably absent middle-elder populations would tend to be and this demographic trend is even more present within new settlement areas. “Adult Latinos are disproportionately in their late teens and twenties, politically the least active ages.” (Morrison, 1998). However, although the absence of a large older population means the

Latino electorate is currently lacking what it would be a very active voting base, the promise that the booming young population holds is remarkable. “We can await the impact of the disproportionate number of Hispanics who are young—currently under or barely over the age of eligibility—when they mature politically. Their future voting patterns and the likely fluidity of Hispanics’ partisan choices only increases the relevance of the Hispanic vote in future elections.” (DeSipio and Leal, 2010). Conversely, although slowing in recent years, new immigrants continue to bolster the Latino population’s numbers but mostly contribute to the young demographic of politically inactive Latinos who perpetuate the absence of political engagement in most of these new-settlement communities. “...further imply that Latino voting suffers because immigration continuously adds to the number of Hispanic citizens who are not well socialized into the electoral system.” (De la Garza, 2012). How Latino political empowerment is influenced by these increases in politically inactive demographics requires further study in order to explore whether community growth in whatever capacity is positive in that it creates more attention and resources, thus more opportunities, or if since the increase is primarily in poorly socialized and politically inactive Latinos perhaps it only serves to hinder the group’s overall development.

Until very recently with the Hispanic population boom and dispersion of the late 80’s throughout the 21st century, it seemed as though the minimal political clout wielded by the largely underage and politically averse population resulted in the widespread ignoring of the group’s needs by national campaigns as well as local party efforts. Both major parties were capable of paying little attention to the interests of Latino voters as their support rarely played a decisive role in elections. “Leighley (2002) reports that 45% of Anglos, compared to 15% of

Latinos, are asked to engage in campaign activity, and whereas ~18% of Anglos and blacks engage in campaign work, only 8% of Hispanics do.” (De la Garza, 2012). Experts demonstrate how Latinos are continuously ostracized from the political process, not just in the historical lack of attention paid to their vote, but also in the form of parties and organizations not seeking their campaign participation. This creates speculation regarding whether greater attempts to include Hispanics in campaign and other non-electoral activities could generate an increase in voter turnout, or if more electoral participation is needed first in order to create followup interest in future non-electoral participation. The effectiveness of these two approaches is difficult to compare due to the variability of the political climates in which Latino voters reside, and the differences within the voting population itself.

Researchers agree that one of the greatest contributing factors to this exclusion on behalf of parties is the geographic distribution of the Latino population. 48% of eligible Latino voters lie in just two states, California and Texas (Kochhar, et. al. 2005). Even with the long history of Latino presence in these areas, since both are densely populated and heavily partisan states the impact of the Latino voice is still fairly muted. In terms of national elections, the uneven geographic distribution allows for the Latino vote to be ignored even more so due to its lack of influence in the electoral college. “We recognize that, for Latinos to be an important force, several conditions must be in place, including close contests, generally unified Latino voting, sufficient registration and turnout numbers to sway the outcome, and an interest by candidates and parties in seeking Latino votes.” (DeSipio and Leal, 2010). Much discussion has occurred regarding how much competitive national elections enhance Latino participation and attempts by major candidates to court them. Previously politically inactive Latinos could be inspired to vote

in these elections when they feel their vote and opinion matter, possibly leading to the development of habitual voters for future elections. Conversely, candidates fighting for small victory margins could come to see the Latino vote as pivotal to winning the election and therefore engage in greater mobilization efforts that would be engrained in future campaign practices. This is something that will become more evident with upcoming elections in new settlement areas in the southeast where there is no historical presence of a significant Latino electorate, and many of which are potential swing states, such as North Carolina. Depending on how it is approached, this untapped support base could serve to give Democrats a chance at overtaking some traditionally red states or to solidify Republican control of the region. However, up until recent dispersion trends, in national elections parties were able to succeed without legitimately representing the Latino population at all, even when campaigning in states where they had a significant presence. “In addition to neither party treating Latinos as an important constituency, Democrats and Republicans also used the same tactics to feign genuine interest. Both engaged in what analysts label ‘taco politics,’ so called because such outreach emphasized highly publicized brief visits highlighted by public fiestas and ample Mexican food and beer while ignoring specific Hispanic policy concerns during and after the election.” (DeSipio and Leal, 2010). The Obama presidency and its promotion of an era of post-racial politics suggests that these days of ‘taco politics’ have largely come to a close, and although admirable, his progressive message must be visible throughout all levels of the party infrastructure in order to become a permanent practice. This necessity to reform and enhance legitimate party relations with Latino voters is even more evident in the GOP, whose declining prowess reflects a potential disconnect between the party and the changing demographics of the modern American electorate.

“In particular, the Republicans will need to reach out to them because, realistically, no other demographically identifiable group is available for them to court. The Democrats will need to take their votes more seriously because, as 2004 shows, sizable portions of Latinos share fundamental interests with Republicans.” (DeSipio and Leal, 2010). Unlike other minority groups who vote as a heavily partisan unit, such as African Americans with the Democratic party, the dynamic Latino electorate shares core values with both ideologies and thus has the potential to be swayed either way.

Given the great stake this young community will have in the future make up of the nation’s population, it will no longer suffice to pander to Hispanic stereotypes and efforts to rectify party stances with Latino voter interests must be made. Uncertainty surrounds how attempts to include these interests will coexist with traditional party positions on critical issues such as education, healthcare, and most importantly, immigration. Above all, however the transition to inclusion is manifested, it is agreed upon that the current lack of direct and indirect representation of Latino interests in government can no longer be ignored so proactive approaches should be taken before it is too late. “Regardless of the forecasts one chooses to make regarding Latino naturalization, registration, and turnout, some degree of political influence will eventually come to this population. Political candidates and parties, we contend, therefore have a clear interest in shaping the political attitudes and identities of these Latinos.” (DeSipio and Leal, 2010). In order to shape these attitudes and identities do Latinos need models of empowered Latino politicians in office, or are favorable policy stances and heightened mobilization efforts sufficient? How Latino elected officials (LEOs) promote electoral participation amongst different factions of the Latino population is another variable

which commands further study. This idea of racial identity in Latino politics is shown to be incredibly important in understanding the role of Latinos in the overall political process, especially in the new settlement areas of the southeast characterized by a tradition of racially binary politics and a culture of historically conservative values.

### **The Context of Mecklenburg County**

As noted, all of these broad themes of immigrant and minority political habits apply to the study of Charlotte's Latino population, but must be applied cautiously due to the unique nature of these new settlement areas in contrast to the traditional settlements of the southwest. Unlike the traditional settlement areas which have accrued a large Latino presence over decades, sometimes centuries, through continuous steady growth with rogue times of heightened influx, Mecklenburg County's population drastically expanded in roughly two decades. "Between 1990 and 2000, Hispanic population growth in North Carolina was dramatic (393.9%). This growth is phenomenal in relation to the total population growth in North Carolina (21.4%) and in comparison to the U.S. as a whole (13.2%) during the same period." (Johnson, 2003). This rate of growth means that the political landscape of the county did not have time to naturally evolve and adapt to the steady change of its population, but rather, was forced to react suddenly to the diverse interests and needs of this unfamiliar group while establishing a new societal order to include a previously non-existent demographic.

The state's low rate of unemployment and strong economy, despite national declines, attracted immigrants to its developing manufacturing and construction industries. "Since the early 1980s, Hispanics have come to North Carolina in unprecedented numbers in response to a robust economy and low rate of unemployment, many service jobs and a booming construction

industry.” (Johnson, 2003). This economic prosperity paired with increased border regulations resulted in the settlement of immigrant families in the region instead of the traditional practice of single male laborers sending back remittances to their native country while slowly bringing over family members over the course of multiple trips. Thus not only is the population expanding far faster than the southwest region, it is also comprised of a different kind of Latinos. “We show that Hispanics are growing quickly in Charlotte as a result of family building, not just immigration, and they are suburbanizing quickly and differentiating themselves residentially from African-Americans.” (Weeks et. al. 2006-2007). These young and growing families, have different needs and values than the stereotypical young Latino immigrant working the fields of southern California and therefore have a greater stake in relevant public policies as well as a more noticeable community presence. Continuously, these immigrants also differ in their settlement habits due to their widespread suburbanization. Traditionally, immigrant laborers and low income demographics find housing in the cheap urban sectors of a city, while the more expensive, spacious suburbs are inhabited by wealthier Anglo populations. However, Latinos in the Charlotte region are settling in dense clusters in isolated suburban districts, removed from the heart of the community and civic engagement, further distancing themselves from political inclusion. This issue of accessibility was reflected in a 2006 study which revealed that most social services aimed at Latinos were located in the city center, despite almost no Latinos living there. With an underdeveloped public transportation system and lack of personal vehicles, Latinos in the suburbs have very limited access to necessary services” (Weeks et. al. 2006-2007). Thus it appears that while the African American community is entrenched in the history of the region, noticeably present in the urban centers, and represented in political activity, the new



Latino minority is developing in the context of secluded enclaves, unable to access available resources, and largely removed from public policy decisions which directly impact their livelihoods. This lack of access serves to continue the group's cycle of low socioeconomic status and its negative political implications. Research also suggests that the population's existence outside the visible societal arena not only prevents Latinos from benefiting from existing resources and becoming civically engaged, but it also allows the greater community to remain unaware or uninterested in their presence, without much noticeable consequence. "Within residential areas, a Latino presence remains largely invisible; the only tangible expressions of their presence seem bound to technology..." (Gamez 2010). Latino workers in Mecklenburg County are primarily confined to the manufacturing and construction sectors in low-skill, labor intensive jobs dominated by the new Latino population. This allows the population to work, live, and interact almost exclusively with other Latinos and therefore their role as community members can be ignored by the majority of the public who never witnesses this 'invisible' population. The region's economy can therefore benefit from the cheap labor and "Latino work ethic" without having to adjust to the unfamiliar change of community make-up. "...in many southern locales, Latinos have been accepted as workers but not as community members, a distinction with important implications for long-term community change." (Winders, 2005). This practice of looking the other way seems to have an expiration date when these workers' children and future generations start to dominate the school systems and realize their political and societal rights as US citizens. Notwithstanding, the question remains of how the current population's lack of political involvement will impact the views and participation of future generations.

Overall, contemporary research on the subject of Latino politics in new immigrant destinations is still evolving and in the mean time theoretical approaches based on experiences in the traditional region must not be applied too liberally. The “pulls” of political activity are different in this region due to the lack of strong community roots and increasingly large base of newly arrived immigrants. This is in contrast to other Hispanic communities which are deeply engrained in the tradition of their region and thus conditioned to feel a natural connection to their role in the democratic and social processes. “Moreover, most of them share in the nuevomexicano narrative that New Mexico is their homeland-their turf-where long-standing incorporation in the political system has fostered relatively high rates of Hispanic political participation and maintained a strong Hispanic presence in the state’s political leadership.” (DeSipio and Leal, 2010). The strong historical presence of Hispanic political participation in New Mexico reflects how the southeast region, Mecklenburg County specifically, needs to be analyzed more independently of this preexisting research of traditional settlement areas due to the vastly different context in which each Latino community exists. Focus must now be devoted to understanding how community attitudes and relations within the burgeoning Hispanic population of the Charlotte region will impact its promising political influence. Although the rapid growth of the youthful population suggests a bright future for Latino politics in the region, the role of current socialization and community integration needs to be analyzed in order to determine how their progress is being influenced by regional and national activism and policy.

## II. Methodology

In order to explain the factors hindering and supporting the political advancement of the Latino population of Mecklenburg County this research explores existing literature on the subject, studied secondary sources regarding current national trends in Latino politics as well as the political climate of this region, collected relevant population data, analyzed national and regional exit polls, and conducted interviews with relevant members of the Hispanic or political community. Given the group's rapid rise to prominence, existing scholarly research on the subject was generally limited to recent decades and conducted on behalf of a select group of researchers and organizations. However, there was an abundance of media coverage on the subject, particularly from 2012 surrounding coverage of the presidential election. The narrow scope of existing scholarly research and abundance of news coverage indicated that this topic is rapidly growing in importance and demands further analysis. Existing research on national trends in Latino politics and studies of participation in traditional settlement areas were both heavily utilized due to the lack of research regarding this specific region. This literature was employed to extrapolate relevant analysis to the Charlotte area, but with caution as to not overlook the very unique characteristics of this region that make its political climate so different. Rodolfo De la Garza and David Leal served as the foremost source of scholarly information as their various works chronicle the rise of the importance of the Latino electorate from the end of the 20th century through 2012. Their continued exploration of this topic and dedication to this field of research made these secondary sources particularly reputable and valuable to understanding the role of Mecklenburg County in the larger context. However, I did bear in mind the possible bias that could result from relying on such limited sources of information. Therefore, The Pew

Hispanic Research Center also served as a critical fountain of information and connection to pertinent resources as it is a credible, non-partisan, institute dedicated to understanding the U.S. Hispanic population. This “fact-tank” provided a compilation of reviews of all aspects of the Hispanic American experience from a multitude of contributors through primary, as well as secondary, mediums. These qualitative secondary sources were used to cross-check and enhance information collected from De la Garza, Leal, and associates, to further validate the importance of this research and establish the variables that should be analyzed.

Moreover, the Pew Hispanic Research Center was also a valuable resource in providing necessary quantitative data on this population. The raw data was derived from the U.S. Census Bureau and then framed by the Pew Hispanic Research Center as a basic profile of the dynamic Latino population at large, reflecting changes in size, geographic dispersion, and socioeconomic status. This information further indicated the importance of the Latino vote and the necessity for this nature of research through the consistent population increase and recent trend of geographic dispersion reflected. However, although these data sets were collected by the government and reproduced by the Pew Research Center, both highly reputable sources, they are still vulnerable to error and bias. Most notably, attempts by a government entity to account for the entire Latino population face the issue of undocumented immigrants going uncounted, legal immigrants unwilling to participate due to lack of trust or understanding, as well as the presence of language barriers discouraging some from participating or skewing the responses of some who have difficulty trying to. All of these potential errors are intensified by the national census only being conducted once a decade, which allows ten years for the uncounted or misrepresented sections of this swelling population to diversify and increase in significance. Even if every Hispanic

American Citizen successfully participated in the census, realistic representation of the population in the census far beyond its conduction year is hindered by the recent hyper-growth in new settlement areas, such as Mecklenburg County, where Latino populations have shown to increase over 400% in just ten years. Since these kinds of immense changes are crucial to conducting relevant analysis, this research also employed data collected by the American Community Survey, an annual survey of a portion of the population conducted by the US Census Bureau in order to accurately advise federal and state officials on what their constituents need and why. Although this survey is still vulnerable to the same exclusion bias as the decennial census, its greater frequency and smaller scope allow it to ask more extensive and specific questions, as well as produce more current responses. The Pew Hispanic Research Center used the 2010 ACS results to describe the characteristics of Hispanics in North Carolina's eligible voting population, which enhanced this research's ability to identify trends and relationships between political activity and demographic traits specific to Hispanics in this county. Overall, in spite of the potential accuracy errors, it is still necessary and helpful to utilize this source of data as its extensive scope is unparalleled and its consistency allows for effective internal comparison and analysis as the data sets all share root in a common process and authority.

The Pew Hispanic Research Center also served as a guide to understanding the significance of exit poll data derived from the National Election Pool, originally conducted by Edison Research. Since voting is anonymous, these exit polls provided an overview of who Hispanics have been voting for and why. Exit polls from the 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012 presidential elections were utilized to develop a more comprehensive idea of what motivates Hispanic voters and how these factors change or develop in relation to election cycle or voter

characteristics. Presidential election exit polls were exclusively utilized for the purpose of this research to accurately compare exit polls from North Carolina to responses from across the nation, in order to analyze Mecklenburg County in the context of national trends in Latino politics rather than potential circumstantial participation in regionally specific elections. Moreover, presidential elections demand a high level of mobilization and effort from both dominant parties, as well as third-party candidates, and thus a greater variety of political ideologies is often displayed in national elections than in strong red or blue states where local elections are dominated by one party's agenda. Especially in the traditionally conservative Southeast region where Mecklenburg County lies, strict partisan politics can be discouraging, particularly to new voters who are unfamiliar with the system, and thus presidential election exit polls can reflect a larger spectrum of voter preferences that are not achievable at the state or local level. Additionally, this time period was selected because the Census reflected the first significant presence of Hispanics in Mecklenburg County in the year 2000, a population increase of 517% from 1990, a trend that was mirrored throughout new settlement areas in the Southeast at the time. This research utilized exit polls beginning with the "population boom" when the potential power of this region's Hispanic electorate began to take shape and responses were more likely to reflect attitudes of voters from a burgeoning Mecklenburg Latino community like we see today, rather than the isolated views of the few hundred Latinos in the area during the late 20th century.

Lastly, to develop a more complete understanding of what generates and what hinders this Hispanic community's participation in the political arena, I conducted first-hand interviews with relevant members of the region. These interviews sought to look beyond the role of

demographic changes, regional context, and socioeconomic status, to see what external factors could be influential such as party outreach and Latino advocacy groups. Two groups of interviewees were sought, those based on their role in Democratic or Republican organizations in the region, and those based on their role in local Hispanic community organizations which foster civic participation. Two participants from both the Democratic and Republican party were selected in order to avoid partisan bias, and all four represented different organizations in order to achieve perspectives from varying positions within the political sphere. The political organizations were selected based upon their vested interest in the Latino electorate, accessibility, and responsiveness. Republican representatives included Mr. David Ruden of the Republican National Hispanic Assembly of North Carolina, who was selected for his experience within the GOP on both the state and national level, as well as his personal commitment to the political representation of the Hispanic population and desire for a more progressive, inclusive Republican party. The second Republican interviewee selected was Jason Abernethy, Republican Party Chair of neighboring Iredell County, president of the North Carolina Federation of Republican Men, and member of the NC GOP executive committee, who was selected for his vast knowledge of North Carolina Politics and extensive personal experience in various positions in the state's GOP chapter. Democratic representatives included Jamal Fox of the Young Democrats of North Carolina who was selected due to exceptionally young demographic of this untapped Hispanic electorate as well as his pertinent role as Chair of the YDNC's Minority Affairs Caucus which seeks to promote the involvement of minorities in the political process and democratic party. The last democratic representative interviewed was Charlie Hale, regional field director for the South Carolina Democratic Party, who was selected due to his accessibility,

hands on experience in voter mobilization and registration efforts, and veteran knowledge of what it takes to get people to the polls when it matters. Although a larger sample of interviews with political representatives or a more densely concentrated selection from Mecklenburg County would have only increased the depth of unique primary accounts reflected in this analysis, the time and resource constraints of this particular research prevented a surplus of interviews from being conducted. The diverse backgrounds of the representatives selected was intended to temper this absence of a larger interview pool. Conversely, more informal interviews were also conducted with members of the most influential Latino advocacy organizations in the area, La Coalición, or the Latin American Coalition. This organization was selected due to the scope of its involvement in the Latino community and the intensity of their work. Since this group works to benefit the Latino population in the legal, economic, educational, civic, social, and cultural spheres it is the best representation of an all inclusive approach to societal integration.

### III. National Context and Trends

In order to comprehend the complexities of Latino politics in Mecklenburg County, it is first necessary to understand the exciting changes and movements occurring in Latino politics on a national scale and how this activity relates to this specific region as the turn of the 21st century has marked the beginning of a progressive new era in American politics, one that has begun to reflect the changes in the nation's increasingly diverse population. An important contributing factor to this shift is the rapid growth rate of the Latino population and the future electoral influence that this young demographic promises. Although the burgeoning Latino electorate has not yet demonstrated political influence indicative of its growing numbers, its large underage



population is believed by many to be the key to a more politically active and empowered future for Latinos, with the Pew Hispanic Research Center suggesting that Hispanics will account for as much as 40% of the growth in the eligible electorate in the United States between 2012 and 2030. This change in Latino presence is part of the greater process of diversification of the population at large, a process which has the U.S. Census Bureau projecting that the nation will become a minority-majority by the year 2042. This projection is supported by the fact that 2011 marked the first year in the country's history in which minority babies born outnumbered white babies (U.S. Census Bureau). The 2008 election of the nation's first African-American president, Barack Obama, reflects the political system's process of adapting to this century's demographic shifts. This milestone is regarded by some as an indication of the nation's entry into an era of "post-racial politics". This phrase was the political buzzword of the year in 2008 and encompasses the belief that Americans are now making judgements and decisions on candidates free of racial bias. However, while Obama's 2008 election and 2012 reelection are undeniably positive victories in the movement towards a post-racial America, most Latino citizens would probably have a difficult time agreeing with categorizing the victories as indicative of the achievement of a political system devoid of racial inequalities as Latinos are still grossly underrepresented and isolated in the majority of political institutions. Obama's election serves as a symbol of how far minority groups have come in terms of attaining political inclusion, but the subsequent racial discourse and severe partisan politics show how far is still left to go.

Historically, Latinos have experienced vast levels of political exclusion and disenfranchisement as a result of a myriad of factors plaguing the community. "Inequalities in employment, unequal access to education, limited opportunities for social advancement, and a

cultural bias that privileged the language, customs, and values of whites were difficult to overcome.” (Geron, 2005). Political inclusion of this group was limited throughout the 20th century since most Latinos did not have access to these resources to “go to politics” and have been continuously ignored and at times negatively targeted by candidates and parties who did not need their support to gain or maintain office. The Civil Rights and Chicano Movements had positive impacts on the situation, including the extension of voting rights legislation to linguistic minorities, but these gains were primarily capitalized upon in a grassroots, regional level in dense traditional Latino settlement areas without generating much change in the national political arena (Messah, 2012). However, the end of the century did start to see an increase in Hispanic political participation and representation within these kinds of regions, such as Arizona and New Mexico, whose tradition of long standing Hispanic communities aided the transition into greater political empowerment.

One of the primary challenges to the dispersion of this empowerment outside of historically Hispanic regions is the public’s identification of the group as one homogenous entity existing under the overarching term “Hispanic” or “Latino”. These labels do not acknowledge the incredible degree of variance amongst Latinos due to country of origin, generational differences, state of residency, or the important element of native born versus naturalized citizenship, among others. All of these factors play important roles in determining the political activity and preferences of different Hispanic-Americans, while the creation of one collective “Latino” label suggests that their political identity is static and communal and thus be analyzed and manipulated as such. The beginning of the 21st century has come to reveal the reality that the American political machine can no longer afford to go on ignoring and generalizing the

Latino population in this manner while the community continues to enhance its future political power with surging numbers and geographic dispersion. “Regardless of the forecasts one chooses to make regarding Latino naturalization, registration, and turnout, some degree of political influence will eventually come to this population. Political candidates and parties, we contend, therefore have a clear interest in shaping the political attitudes and identities of these Latinos.” (DeSipio and Leal, 2010). The past decade has been characterized by this realization within the political system that the time has come to court the Latino vote. How the Latino community responds and capitalizes on this

The early 2000’s showed a marked increase in Latino candidates running for high levels of public office, which placed greater attention on the increasing voting bloc even when many of the campaigns ultimately proved unsuccessful. For example, In 2001 Latino candidates ran for mayor in three of the largest cities in the country, New York, Los Angeles, and Houston, while 2002 brought the gubernatorial races of Latino democrats Tony Sanchez and Bill Richardson in Arizona and New Mexico, respectively (*Latino Registration and Voting in Presidential Elections*). These campaigns were a sign of continued progress in terms of Latino political empowerment in traditional states and urban hubs with significant Latino voting bases rooted in a shared history with the region. However, although advancements because they brought about Latino political empowerment, these campaigns do not reflect an era of post-racial politics because they were all primarily characterized by the Latino ethnicity of the candidates. The New Mexico gubernatorial race gained publicity for the novelty of the Hispanic heritage of both major candidates, while in Arizona Rick Perry’s gubernatorial victory over Tony Sanchez made headlines for its negative racial discourse and Perry’s tense relations with the Latino community

(DeSipio and Leal, 2004). It seems natural that these regions with the longest standing Latino presence and tradition of political inclusion would be the first to pioneer nonracial politics, but rather the role of race continues to be a powerful and pervasive force in elections.

It was not until 2004 in Colorado when the Salazar brothers both successfully attained office with nonracial campaigns in a state with a lesser history of Latino political participation and a smaller Latino electorate than those such as Arizona and New Mexico. Moreover, both men ran on the democratic ticket, winning in a state carried by George W. Bush in both the 2000 and 2004 presidential election (DeSipio and Leal, 2004). These victories in spite of the obvious obstacles suggest that a nonracial campaign could be the most effective option for victory for Latino candidates in the 21st century. The Salazar brothers tried to avoid focusing upon “Latino issues” such as immigration and education and rarely referenced their Hispanic heritage in order to avoid limiting their broad public appeal by being strictly identified as representatives of the Latino community. In his statewide race for senator, rather than invoking his Hispanic roots, Ken Salazar frequently highlighted his rural background by donning cowboy attire and speaking of his childhood on the farm in order to garner the votes of the moderately conservative and independent rural voters (DeSipio and Leal, 2004). In his brother’s congressional race, John Salazar mirrored similar tactics and effectively deflected attempts by opponents to evoke controversial comments regarding immigration reform to refrain from ostracizing the non-Hispanic electorate. Both brothers managed to attract this crucial, moderate, non-Hispanic vote without sacrificing their core constituency of Latino support and without needing to hyper-racialize their campaigns or policy platforms. As the nation’s largest minority continues to spread to non-traditional settlement areas across the country and specifically in the traditionally racially-

binary Southeast region, Latinos seeking political office could stand to benefit from the Salazars' tactic of nonracial campaigning by providing the public with contemporary candidates reflective of the multitude of cultures and ethnicities that make up their increasingly diverse constituencies, not just their own personal ethnicity, as has shown to stratify rather than unify the electorate.

Moreover, outside of the recent growth in direct representation of Latinos in elected office, there is also the continuing issue of how to harness the full indirect power of the Latino voters. A large portion of this responsibility, especially on the national level, falls on the political parties to mobilize voters and target the underrepresented Latino demographic. Thus far the 21st century has shown an unprecedented amount of attention to this responsibility as projections for the future power of the Latino electorate continue to increase. Both parties have responded to this power shift in different manners as they grapple to align their policy preferences and public image with their desired Latino constituency. The GOP in particular continues to have significant trouble with attracting a substantial Latino voting base on the national level. This difficulty is due in part to the party's lack of prior efforts, as well as the highly conservative ideology subscribed to by many of its factions, particularly in regards to immigrant policy. Historically, Republican loyalty in the Latino community has been concentrated to Cuban-Americans, a well established and wealthy outlier of the greater Hispanic population (Ramos, 2012). The GOP's tradition of opposition to immigration reform and its predominantly white, male leadership could contribute greatly to the current lack of support from the rest of the Latino electorate. George W. Bush's presidential victories momentarily suggested a break from this trend as he won over 40% of the Latino vote in 2004 and boasted a strong, personal relationship with the Hispanic

community (Messah, 2012). During this campaign Bush was able to gain Latino votes without sacrificing conservative GOP support due to his prior relationship with Tejanos, similar social views as conservative Christian Latinos, and most importantly, his focus on antiterrorism, a communal issue of extreme importance to both Latino and Republican voters. Unfortunately, this support appears to have been very contextual as the party still finds itself void of consistent, widespread Latino support and consequently, on the brink of crisis as it can no longer dominate the political arena depending solely upon its core base of conservative, upper-middle class, white Americans. GOP acceptance of immigration reform and a shift in discourse on the subject from cultural terms to economic could provide the basis for the beginning of a new era of Republicans, one that adapts to reflect the ongoing demographic changes in the nation's electorate (Navarrette, 2012).

Conversely, the Democratic party has historically enjoyed a much greater level of support from minorities nationwide and from Latinos in particular growing since JFK's "Viva Kennedy" clubs. However, democrats have recently learned from elections like George W. Bush's that they cannot automatically assume Latino support for a Democratic candidate over a Republican as they generally do with the African American vote and thus the "sleeping giant", as the untapped power of the Latino electorate is often referred to, although clearly not heavily Republican, is not decidedly blue yet either. However, evidence that this party battle for the Latino vote is approaching an end is visible in the composition of its representatives. "One thing that's always been very startling to me is to see that on the floor of the House of Representatives when you look over on one side where the Democrats caucus and you look to the other side and it looks like two different visions of America,' Edwards, 54, a black woman who has served in Congress

since 2008, said in a telephone interview.” (Homan, 2012). For the first time in history the majority of the Democratic seats in the U.S. House of Representatives are currently held by women and minorities, a visual in stark contrast to the relatively homogeneous pool of Republican representatives. Moreover, democrats say this was not a mere coincidence but rather a concentrated effort to cultivate minority democratic candidates and foster the party’s pluralistic image. “The shift is the result of an increase in the Hispanic population and concerted efforts among the Democratic leadership to recruit and support female and minority candidates coupled with the effect of redistricting, which created large majority minority districts in states such as California, Florida and Texas.” (Abdullah, 2012). It is this kind of party outreach and mobilization efforts that will shape the political identity of the rising Latino electorate and therefore the activity that both groups should have a vested interest in engaging in. These efforts are of particular importance to the democratic party in non-traditional settlement areas in previously red states such as North Carolina and Georgia. Support for the democratic party from these rapidly growing Latino populations could lead to electoral victories for the party in former conservative strongholds and severely damage the GOP’s national presence. In order to realize this potential the democratic party, just like it’s competition, must discover the most effective way to communicate with the often isolated Latino community to successfully cultivate a tradition of political action.

It is in these potential drastic changes to the nation’s political culture that the potential influence of the Latino electorate is truly evident. The reality is that regardless of what the parties and candidates do in the mean time to connect with the Latino community, the future of America is going to hold an incredibly significant Latino electorate due to the birth rates and youthfulness

of the current population alone. "“We're a country that has always presumed male leadership, has always been most comfortable with white male leadership and we're watching the transition of that notion...”” (Abdullah, 2012). Although the political ramifications of the nation’s diversifying population can no longer be ignored, it is during this transitional period that the current members of the political machine have the opportunity to influence how these ramifications are manifested.

#### IV. Demographic Discoveries

Within the context of the greater national development of Latino political inclusion this research reflected a distinct significance in the role of the Mecklenburg County population. As previously mentioned, North Carolina as a whole is part of the six new settlement states in the Southeast reflecting sudden and substantial increases in their formerly nonexistent Hispanic populations over recent decades. Within this regional trend Mecklenburg County has consistently stood out as one of the locales experiencing the most concentrated and intense rates of growth.

Mecklenburg County Hispanic Population Growth 1990-2000

	1990	2000	2010
Hispanic Population	6,693	44,871	111,944
Total County Population	511, 433	695, 454	919, 628
Hispanic Percentage of County Population	1%	6%	12%
Hispanic Population Change		38, 178	67, 073
Percent Change in Hispanic Population		570%	149%

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau*

“According to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey, the total population of Mecklenburg County in 2005 was 780,618, of whom 71,904 (9.2 percent) were Latino.



Charlotte has been labeled the fourth largest "hypergrowth" Latino destination, because between 1980 and 2000 the Latino population grew by 932 percent.” (Weeks, et al. 2006). At the surface this remarkable growth appears random since it defies the traditional Latino immigration narrative of the Southwest, but closer look at the economic context reveals the “pull factor” at play. The last quarter of the 20th century was a time of economic restructuring in the United States to adapt to the increasingly competitive and diverse global market. This restructuring was evident in North Carolina in the transition from an economy dominated by a large agriculture sector, to one thriving on new manufacturing and construction industries. The Charlotte region in particular transformed into a global city with a substantial role in the international marketplace as a result of the foreign investors and relocated domestic enterprises associated with the area’s economic restructuring (Johnson-Webb, 2003). This development created a new demand for large quantities of unskilled labor that since the native population alone could not fill, led to the flood of Hispanic laborers over subsequent decades. The low unemployment rates and consistent financial growth attracted waves of documented and undocumented workers alike to come serve as the foundation of the flourishing industries.

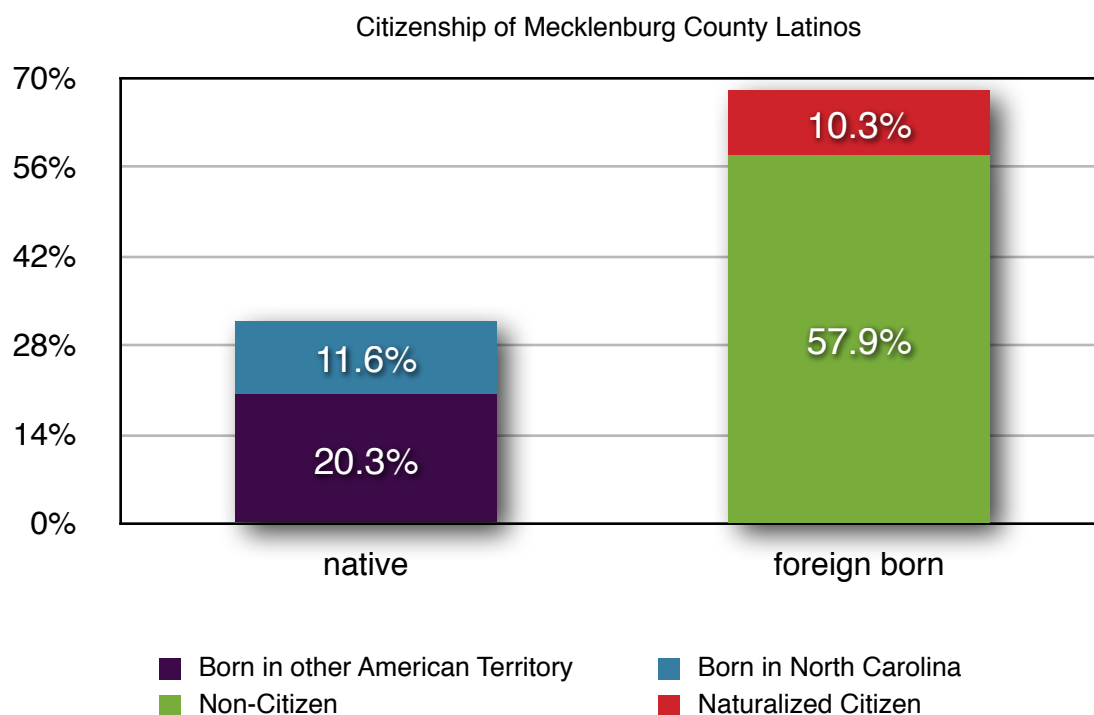
“It is important to note that the region added jobs for both Hispanic and non-Hispanic workers at rates well in excess of the national average. In this respect, the economic context to the growth of the new settlement areas of the South mirrors the demographic context, since Hispanic population growth in the six-state region was accompanied by continued growth in the black and white populations. By contrast, in some states where Hispanics had traditionally settled, such as New York and California, the non-Hispanic white population actually declined.” (Kochhar, et al., 2005).

The uniform growth in employment and population across white, black, and Hispanic demographics is a trend that further differentiates Mecklenburg County and its new-settlement peers from their traditional counterparts. In this new economic landscape Latino immigrants are

still placed in low-wage, low-skill jobs, but with steady growth and job security as the rest of the native population enjoys employment and population gains as well. The cheap labor provided by the enormous influx of Latino immigrants has been incredibly beneficial to the success of the burgeoning industries and the region's economy, however the fruits of this success are disproportionally distributed throughout the population at large and rarely trickle down to the Latino laborers working tirelessly at the lowest levels of employment. "The poverty rate among Latinos in the six Southern new settlement states jumped from 19.7% to 25.5% between 1990 and 2000—a 30% increase compared with a 4% drop for Latinos nationwide. Meanwhile the overall poverty rate in these states dropped by 7% over the decade." (Kochhar, et al., 2005). The substantially lower wages paid to immigrant workers contributed to these unequal poverty levels experienced by Latinos in new settlement areas in comparison to the region's general population and the nationwide Latino population, but it does not sufficiently account for the entirety of the differences. The characteristics exclusive to hyper-growth locations such as Mecklenburg County amplify these wage discrepancies and intensify the preexisting low socioeconomic levels of the Hispanic population due to the insufficient opportunities and resources available to this group handicapped by cultural barriers, a lack of historical presence, and absence of community ties due to the remarkable haste and size of their settlement.

One of the most significant of these population characteristics stemming from the rate of growth of Mecklenburg County Latinos is the substantial portion of foreign born, non-citizens. The brevity and intensity of the hypergrowth experienced in the area precluded the Latino community from developing at a sustainable rate over generations of societal integration like their traditional counterparts. Instead, the county went from an almost entirely biracial

demographic to a sudden continuous arrival of foreign born Hispanics, skipping the phase of balanced reproductive growth.



*Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000*

The population's dominant presence of foreign-born, non-citizens, often lacking language proficiency and legal status, further isolates the Latino community from the general population as it exaggerates cultural differences that are most evident amongst recent arrivals still trying to adapt to life in a new land. This heightened difficulty to integration is largely unique to new settlement areas as their portion of foreign born, non citizens is considerably higher than the rest of the nation.

“About half of the foreign-born Latinos in both the six new settlement states (52%) and the 36 new settlement counties (54%) are relatively recent arrivals—people who had been in the United States for five years or less at the time of the 2000 census (Figure 2). In contrast, recent arrivals made up only about one quarter of Latino foreign-born population (27%) nationwide, and in states with a long history of Hispanic settlement-

New York, New Jersey, California and Illinois—recent arrivals accounted for only about one of every five foreign-born Latinos in 2000.” (Kochhar, et al., 2005).

Once again this population fundamentally differs from the traditional Latino narrative of the United States and thus faces different types and levels of obstacles.

Lastly, direct consequence of the hypergrowth is also manifested in the age distribution of the small population that is native born. Due to the recentness of the community’s settlement, those who are native born are disproportionately underage, first generation citizens. “Data for Mecklenburg County for 2005 from the American Community Survey show that 85 percent of Latinos under the age of 18 were born in the United States, whereas only 16 percent of the adult population was U.S.-born ..” (Weeks et. al. 2006). Even though the youth population possesses higher rates of citizenship than their parents, they are still isolated as members of this overall foreign presence since their existence in the area is smaller and even more unfamiliar than that of non-citizens. Additionally, these young native born Latinos are still likely to associate with the Hispanic immigrant identity instead of culturally assimilating since they are raised by foreign born parents in removed settlement enclaves with no preceding generations to pave the way. Hence, in these new settlement areas, the same type of societal barriers facing foreign born, non-citizens also restrict native citizens since the Latino population is still largely treated as a collective foreign entity, despite internal differences.

Beyond these direct consequences of the context and rate of growth in the area, the distinctiveness of this population is also demonstrated in the overall socioeconomic characteristics of Mecklenburg Latinos. The county’s Hispanic population has consistently possessed lower SES levels than other demographics in the region as well as the national Hispanic population.

### Indices of Economic Well-being in Mecklenburg County Latino Population

Median Household Income (Percentage of Countywide Median)	\$39, 265 (77.6%)
Living in Poverty	22.5%
Children Living in Poverty	24.6%
Home Ownership Rate	25.7%
Experiencing Housing Stress	Renters: 35.4% Owners: 31%
Households Living in Crowded Conditions	34.9%
Households Without a Motor Vehicle	12.5%

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2010*

The lack of social capital and absence of community development amongst the recently arrived population contributes substantially to its marginalized position in the county, and this is further exacerbated by low levels of educational attainment and pervasive language barriers. “Most Latinos in Mecklenburg County have less than a high school diploma and are employed in low average-wage jobs. Among persons +25 years, 48.7 percent have less than a high school education.” (Harrison, 2006). The education issue not only limits social and economic mobility, but also on a more nuanced level plays a crucial role in the presence of communication barriers. Since many of these immigrants lack the education level to be functionally literate in their own native language, they are at an even greater disadvantage in attempting to learn English. This education crisis is far more common in the Latino populations in new settlement states than the rest of the country due to the concentration of recent arrivals as well as the absence of adequate state services for high volumes of non-English speakers, as the demand had up until very recently been nonexistent. “In the six states, 62 percent of adults at least 25 years of age have not

finished high school compared with 43 percent nationwide and 39 percent in the four traditional settlement states. (Kochhar, et al., 2005)”.

Moreover, the discrepancies between the national and regional general Latino populations due to unfavorable socioeconomic and settlement conditions are even more noticeable when exclusively studying the eligible voting populations. The Hispanic population of North Carolina in particular is significantly misrepresented in its weak eligible voter base when compared to its imposing aggregate numerical presence.

**Table 2**  
**Population and Electorate in the United States and North Carolina, 2010**

	U.S.	North Carolina	North Carolina state rank
<b>Total population (all ages)</b>			
All (thousands)	309,350	9,562	10
Hispanics (thousands)	50,730	805	11
Percent Hispanic	16.4	8.4	25
<b>Total eligible voter population (U.S. citizens ages 18 and older)</b>			
All (thousands)	214,972	6,835	9
Hispanics (thousands)	21,509	196	18
Percent Hispanic	10.0	2.9	32
<b>Eligibility of Hispanic population</b>			
Percent of Hispanic population eligible to vote	42.4	24.4	47*

Notes: Percentages calculated before rounding. \*Rankings for "Percent of Hispanic population eligible to vote" are based on the District of Columbia and the 46 states whose Hispanic samples in the 2010 American Community Survey (ACS) are large enough to generate reliable estimates. All other rankings are based on the District of Columbia and the 50 states.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the 2010 ACS (1% IPUMS sample)

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While North Carolina ranks 25th nationally in terms of Hispanic percentage of the entire population, it ranks at a dismal 47th in regards to percent of Latino population eligible to vote. Not only does the state pale in comparison to the better established national Latino electorate, it also lags excessively behind other demographics on the state level. “Less than one-fourth (24%) of Hispanics in North Carolina are eligible to vote, ranking 47th nationwide in the share of the

Hispanic population that is eligible to vote. By contrast, nearly eight-in-ten (79%) of the state's white population is eligible to vote" (Motel and Patten, 2012). No other state demographic is as systematically excluded from the electoral process as the muted political voices of the majority of the Latino population. Additionally, the small portion of the population who do make up the statewide Latino eligible voter base do not accurately represent the defining characteristics of the population at large.

**Table 2**  
**Characteristics of Eligible Voters in North Carolina and the United States, 2010**  
*(% of eligible voters, unless otherwise noted)*

	U.S.		North Carolina	
	All	Hispanics	All	Hispanics
<b>Total population (thousands)</b>	309,350	50,730	9,562	805
<b>Total eligible voter population (thousands)</b>	214,972	21,509	6,835	196
<b>Age</b>				
18-29	21.6	32.8	20.8	37.2
30-44	24.6	29.3	25.8	34.4
45-54	19.4	16.7	19.1	15.3
55-64	16.3	10.9	16.4	7.2
65 and older	18.2	10.4	17.9	5.9
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	48.2	48.3	47.5	49.7
Female	51.8	51.7	52.5	50.3
<b>Type of citizen</b>				
Citizen by birth	92.2	74.9	97.1	74.2
Naturalized citizen	7.8	25.1	2.9	25.8
<b>Language</b>				
Speaks only English at home	86.2	30.7	95.1	38.1
Does not speak only English at home	13.8	69.3	4.9	61.9
<b>Educational attainment</b>				
Less than high school diploma	12.3	24.7	13.7	17.7
High school diploma or equivalent	29.1	28.6	28.0	26.0
Some college	32.4	32.5	33.8	38.2
Bachelor's degree or more	26.3	14.3	24.5	18.0
<b>Marital status</b>				
Married	50.9	44.7	51.7	51.1
Never married	28.1	37.4	25.9	32.6
Divorced/separated/widowed	20.9	17.9	22.4	16.3
<b>With child younger than 18 in home</b>	25.0	31.1	25.2	36.9
<b>Homeownership rate</b>	68.8	58.2	69.4	57.1
<b>Hispanic origin</b>				
Mexican	---	59.1	---	40.5
Puerto Rican	---	14.4	---	24.4
Cuban	---	4.8	---	5.7
Salvadoran	---	2.4	---	3.3
Dominican	---	3.1	---	2.3
Other	---	16.2	---	23.8
<b>Household income</b>				
Less than \$30,000	22.9	25.3	27.3	25.2
\$30,000-\$49,999	18.6	20.7	21.4	25.5
\$50,000-\$74,999	19.6	21.0	20.5	21.2
\$75,000-\$99,999	13.8	13.3	12.8	12.3
\$100,000 or more	25.1	19.7	18.0	15.8

Notes: Eligible voters are citizens ages 18 and older. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the 2010 American Community Survey (1% IPUMS sample)

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Not only is the Latino state electorate of notably higher socioeconomic status than the ineligible Mecklenburg County population, it also reflects a very different Hispanic American identity. Eligible Latino voters in North Carolina are far more diverse in their countries of origin than the overwhelmingly Mexican population of Mecklenburg County. They are also far more likely to be native born citizens rather than naturalized, and unlike the very young native born population of this locale, they are more evenly distributed across older age groups. However, while there is more age variance in the eligible Latino voting population than the ineligible, it still trails far behind that of other demographics. “Latino eligible voters are younger than Asian, black and white eligible voters in North Carolina. Some 37% of Latinos are ages 18 to 29, compared with 28% of Asian eligible voters, 24% of black eligible voters and 19% of white eligible voters.” (Motel and Patten, 2012). Thus it is shown that even amongst the Latino electorate the population is still dominated by the most politically inactive age demographics.

Furthermore, in terms of election results and voting patterns, there exists an interesting relationship between regional political trends and the Latino population. As previously mentioned, since North Carolina has received increasing attention in recent elections as a potential influential swing state, partisanship in the evolving Latino electorate is critically important. In respect to direct representation on the state level, North Carolina has seen a Hispanic official elected to both the state senate and house of representatives in recent decades, both of whom were Republicans. Tom Apodaca continues to serve as a state senator for district 48 which includes the rural counties of Buncombe, Henderson, and Transylvania, while after 18 years as a Hispanic state representative, Danny McComas of New Hanover County resigned in 2009 to take over as chair of the State Ports Authority board (DeSipio and Leal, 2010). Although



the presence of Latino elected officials (LEOs) in a new settlement state such as this suggests progress towards greater representation of Latino interests, it is important to note that the counties which these LEOs represent are not areas with a significant Latino presence.

There has also been a recent presence of LEOs on the local level in North Carolina as well. The prime example of this being Orange County LEO John Herrera, who has served faithfully on the Carrboro Board of Aldermen amongst other grassroots community roles. Herrera is an incredible model of immigrant civic engagement as he was the first Hispanic immigrant to be elected to municipal government in the state, helped create the Latino Community Credit Union, and founded El Pueblo, one of the largest Hispanic advocacy groups in the region. Although it took him over ten years to personally gain citizenship that did not deter Herrera from excelling as a political leader before and after the arduous process (DeSipio and Leal, 2010). Nevertheless, he too does not represent an area experiencing a rapid growth in Latino population. However, on the most relevant local level in Mecklenburg County itself there has also been a presence of LEOs in the past decade. Colombian immigrant Dan Ramirez was the first Hispanic elected in Mecklenburg in 2000 when he assumed the post of county commissioner. However, it is important to note that although a Hispanic official in the hypergrowth county, Ramirez does not share in the communal immigrant experience held by most Mecklenburg Latinos, as he was recruited to migrate to the U.S. three decades earlier in 1970 for a skilled job offer as a civil engineer (DeSipio and Leal, 2010). Overall, it is important to reference the varying backgrounds of these LEOs, the nature of the constituencies which elected them, as well as their Republican affiliations when analyzing their role as direct representations of the interests of the region's new Latino population.

Conversely, with respect to indirect representation, there are also unconventional patterns present within Mecklenburg County. Although not explicitly derived from presence of the Latino population, the voting trends of this county run contrary to the political culture of the rest of the state. While North Carolina remained steadily in the Republican column in the 2000, 2004, and 2012 presidential elections, Mecklenburg County voted firmly democratic, with Obama gaining over 60% of the county vote in 2012. This tone of increasingly democratic tendencies in the area is also reflected in the county's two largest voting blocs being democrats and unaffiliated voters, who recently surpassed Republicans as the second largest. (DeSipio and Leal, 2010). Again, although this pattern is not concretely associated with the Latino population growth, it nevertheless demands critical attention from parties and scholars alike in order to identify the political possibilities lying dormant in this unconventional global city.

#### V. Examination of External Factors

The study of the population profile of Mecklenburg County Latinos and their political identity in the context of the Southeast's important role as a new settlement area within greater national demographic changes has yielded significant insight into what is hindering this particular Latino community from achieving political representation and how these hindrances are being addressed. Primarily, it is clear that due to the recent development of the Mecklenburg Latino community this population is prone to a much higher rate of ineligible voters than their well established counterparts. However, as demonstrated in Latino immigrant political participation theory, the inability to participate in the electorate does not preclude one entirely from the political process as involvement in non-electoral activity, especially in densely concentrated instances, can be extremely influential. Given the demographics of Mecklenburg Latinos, they are a prime example of potential power in non-electoral participation due to their

continuous growth and geographic concentration. Nevertheless, even in engagement of non-electoral participation, the factors plaguing politically inactive sectors of society are still very present. In particular, it is abundantly clear that the negative role of low socioeconomic status in political participation which hinders most marginalized groups is greatly magnified in the case of the Hispanic population, and even more so on the micro level in Mecklenburg County due to cultural and language barriers. The group's high rate of poverty and low educational levels are exacerbated by intense community isolation due to communication issues and a lack of socialization to American society and politics. The lack of preparedness on behalf of state services to accommodate this sudden spanish speaking presence perpetuates the population's low socioeconomic standing and further removes them from opportunities for civic engagement which lie in the heart of the society they are laboring for yet ostracized from. As a result of this isolation the population lacks the resources to effectively advocate for the betterment of their political and social well being. This void is where local Hispanic organizations and party affiliates must rise up and act in order to preserve a better future for this disenfranchised group as Latinos will only continue to become more and more vital to the make up of the national population.

The role of Latino community organizations is of critical importance to the political integration of Mecklenburg Latinos. The work of these organizations is so imperative because they take a comprehensive approach to mitigating the barriers impacting the Hispanic community. This all inclusive approach is necessary in Mecklenburg County because it takes into account how the varying barriers present are not individual issues but rather a dynamic set of problems which interact and influence each other. Unlike other well-established populations

which have dispersed and differentiated themselves based on citizenship, origin, or socioeconomic status, Latinos of Mecklenburg are still very unified as a community despite internal variance due to their collective isolation from general society and relative recent presence. This enclave scenario makes the problems facing different subgroups relevant to the community as a whole due to close relations between all levels of non-citizens and citizens alike.

The two most prominent advocacy groups in the area, La Coalición and El Pueblo Inc., operate to address the needs of the community as a whole at all levels of societal inclusion. The missions of both groups are similar in their three pronged approach to effect change through economic, cultural, and civic advocacy. This comprehensive model is so crucial to the situation in Mecklenburg County because it simultaneously combats the negative consequences of the area's hypergrowth while also promoting positive progress. A greater presence of this type of activism is needed to temper not only the increasingly poor status of Mecklenburg Latinos but also the rising discrimination the group faces as it becomes more visible in society. Mecklenburg community awareness is so important because since the Latino population is largely invisible, knowledge of the group is primarily received through abstract portrayals of the foreign presence in the media, which fail to humanize the group as the average hard-working neighbors that they normally are.

On the most basic advocacy level these groups represent Latinos in the civic arena as protectors of immigrant rights and advocates of favorable legislation since fear and uncertainty prevents many non-citizens from realizing their rights or seeking government assistance. With the high volume of non-citizens in the area, the adoption of favorable legislation at the state or federal level could have incredible implications on the civic participation levels in the Latino

community. Recently, the continued development and implementation of the DREAM Act and DACA (deferred action for childhood arrivals) are items of noteworthy importance to the future of young Mecklenburg Latinos whose lives could be markedly changed by the newfound avenues for obtaining education and legal residency created by these acts. The results of advocacy for this kind of action shape a more educated and eligible future Latino electorate, particularly in highly concentrated counties like this who have experienced hypergrowth. El Pueblo and La Coalición recognize the critical importance of developing successful future generations and thus place a heightened emphasis on their efforts within the vast Latino youth community in the area in terms of leadership building and education initiatives. These youth outreach programs are also all carried out without negating the importance of the Latino culture and identity. This promotion of cultural celebration is of note in an area like Mecklenburg where the absence of a Hispanic tradition, which is further exaggerated by the dominant presence of the strong regional tradition, makes integrating into the Southern Anglo society without abandoning Latino roots difficult. Establishing Hispanic pride amongst the youth will strengthen a pattern of cultural diversity and tolerance in the area without sacrificing community integration or personal identity.

Along with its focus on youth and education initiatives the organizations also work to better the socioeconomic status of current and future population through the cultivation of a strong Latino economic presence. “Latino business owners are the heartbeat of our diverse neighborhoods in Charlotte,” says Jess George, Executive Director of the Latin American Coalition. “Investing in their entrepreneurial spirit revitalizes communities, engages emerging leaders, and strengthens the social fabric of our city.” Since most Mecklenburg Latinos are

employed in low-skill, low-wage jobs, the cultivation of an entrepreneurial spirit in the community and development of more Latino owned enterprises is advantageous to the elevation of the population's general financial condition and view of its role in the county's economy. Implications of organization advocacy like this from the outside of the county's political sphere will over time be manifested in a more inclusive and powerful Latino electorate as the base SES level should see an increase.

Furthermore, although the eligible Latino electorate in the area is disproportionately small compared to its population size, these community organization also work directly within the political arena to promote electoral participation. Since Mecklenburg boasts the highest Latino numbers in the state, the eligible voting base is poised for a substantial increase in influence as more citizens come of voting age and registration efforts expand. "The potential of the Latino vote is even more potent at the local level," said Jess George, Executive Director of the Latin American Coalition. "Especially since Charlotte and Mecklenburg county have the largest Latino electorate in the state." Advocacy groups worked together in the 2012 election to achieve this potential through voter registration drives and election day assistance with Spanish speaking capabilities in order to overcome the language barriers that often keep eligible Latinos from participating. El Pueblo in particular exhausted significant time and resources in its activities through the NonProfit Voter Engagement Network, El Pueblo Cuenta, which spreads the message of the growing importance of the Latino vote and seeks to register new voters.

However, the efforts on behalf of the few Hispanic advocacy programs in the region fail short of meeting the extent of the critical demands of the booming population and the excessive obstacles to political incorporation that it faces. Finite funds and resources common to non-profit

and small private organizations limit the scope and type of impact that these groups can effect in the community. The large and increasing non-citizen presence in the county is the demographic that fails to receive adequate assistance from Latino organizations. Although indirect advocacy for immigration reform reflects positive progress, direct relief to this population continues to be elusive. Especially given the conservative tendencies of the region, non-citizens are unjustly labeled as unilaterally illegal and are routinely targeted as the scape-goats for any negative consequences of hypergrowth. In order to truly elevate the Latino community and promote accurate political representation, the non-citizen population must receive greater assistance in the form of legal assistance and aid in the naturalization process. Court proceedings and the naturalization procedure are both expensive and complicated processes that are viewed as unattainable and often dangerous by even the most qualified of non-citizens. If the state is going to benefit so lucratively from this underpaid labor of Latino immigrants, most of whom are non-citizens, it seems contradictory that they are the most under served, underrepresented Latino constituency. Since state sponsored services are lacking the capability to handle the needs of the boom in foreign population themselves, their monetary support of organizations like these that are familiar with the Latino community would be a proactive measure that would benefit future stability within the county and across the state as well since the population only shows signs of increasing and spreading. Although these groups currently continue to make a substantial positive impact in the Latino community, they do not possess the authority or resources to support the inevitable future growth of the population as the full implications of the hypergrowth activity are realized and the unresolved issues of today such as the conflicting federal and state

immigration policies, deficient ESOL capabilities in the school system, and the thousands of people lacking citizenship, evolve into crippling dilemmas.

The role of political parties and campaigns in this push for Latino social and civic integration although different from that of the advocacy groups, is still incredibly important. Parties and their candidates establish the discourse that defines American political culture and therefore possess the ability to create an environment more inclusive of the Latino population. The unique partisanship and demographics of Mecklenburg County in comparison to the rest of North Carolina makes this role even more influential. An increase in party outreach and responsiveness to the Latino population can only serve to benefit all actors involved by generating new support bases for the parties and increasing representation of Latinos. However, both parties currently differ greatly on their approach to the situation.

The democratic party has expressed renewed commitment to the growing Hispanic population of Mecklenburg and although it boasts a much greater amount of electoral support in the community than its Republican competition, the party still faces difficulty in engaging the full potential of the eligible population. According to Lowcountry DNC representative Charlie Hale, since voting is habitual a lack of Latino community history of participation in the area makes initiating and maintaining party involvement more difficult amongst Latino voters than other demographics and demands a much more intensive outreach program. In 2012 election cycle the North Carolina DNC engaged in this nature of intensive outreach in attempts to tip the possible swing state in their favor through garnering the support of the Latino electorate, and although as previously demonstrated North Carolina Latinos did vote predominantly democratic, the party failed to mobilize and register a large portion of eligible Latino voters and did not win



the state. Once again, the pervasiveness of cultural and language barriers created a disconnect between many Latinos and mainstream society. “The Latino population has a hard time trusting people or other cultures that come into their community. One of the toughest things we see is working in the Latino community with volunteers that know little or no Spanish at all.” says Jamal Fox, Minority Caucus Chair of the North Carolina Young Democrats. In order to attract first time Latino voters the party needs to incorporate Latino volunteers and officers into its ranks who are knowledgeable of the cultural differences and the issues of importance. Having a more diverse presence in national congress is not going to be enough for democrats to win the allegiance of Latinos who possess far more diverse political preferences and hesitations than other minority voting blocs. Clearly this is even more noticeable on this local level where recent arrivals are already untrusting of public officials and the state government is firmly Republican controlled. Although Mecklenburg County has voted as a democratic outlier in recent presidential elections, it still exists in a state system heavily comprised of white, male, Republicans who hold power with minimal threat of the liberal competition that is pressuring compromise in the GOP on a national scale. North Carolina Young Democrats are fighting to get immigrant and early generation Latinos more directly involved in the political scene but are faced with overwhelming opposition described by Fox as, “disheartening to those who want to live the American Dream.” Overcoming this resistance means the party needs to engage in a more concentrated effort on the local level in Mecklenburg County not just during presidential election cycles with the potential for North Carolina to be a swing state, but off years as well. The current absence of any democratic LEOs in North Carolina history poses a serious threat to the party’s ability to relate to the Latino population as there is no visible indication of a Latino

presence for voters to identify with. Supporting the election of Latino democratic candidates in one of the most economically prosperous areas in the state will have long term benefits for the party on a broader level as the tradition of Latino political participation in the county grows and spreads along with the population as it disperses into surrounding districts.

Conversely, the GOP experiences a different set of problems in engaging the Latino political participation. According to David Ruden, co-founder of the North Carolina chapter of the Republican National Hispanic Assembly, the state GOP is having the same identity crisis being experienced on the national level as the party clings to the idea of its white, middle class support base while it slowly dwindles in comparison to the rising Hispanic electorate. Democrats in North Carolina are able to entice Latino voters with their favorable immigration stance, of particular relevance in this heavily foreign born population) and promises of government assistance, while Republicans nearly exclude this community entirely with their refusal to compromise on the immigration issue. Ruden wholeheartedly acknowledges that some level of Republican compromise on comprehensive national immigration reform is necessary for the long term survival of the party, but amongst other state party officials these sentiments are not mirrored. Therefore, in the meantime, as the growing Latino population shapes its electoral identity Ruden proposes a trickle down approach for the Republican party to mobilize Hispanic support. Generating an initial Republican support base amongst urban Latino professionals supportive of party policy will then incrementally spread downward throughout lower social strata to the masses of the population. If state Republicans cannot reconcile their stance on immigration with the majority of the Latino population which is directly affected by it, emphasizing this top down approach based upon conservative social ideologies shared by both

the GOP and heavily Christian Latino population could be relatively effective. Rather than trying to compete with the democratic party's compassionate appeal to the under served immigrant component of the Latino community which currently makes up a very small portion of the Latino electorate, the GOP should use its conservative social views to focus upon those already eligible to vote as the demographics of the Latino electorate are far more accessible to the Republican party than the demographics of the general county Latino population. Using faith and family as common ground, the Republican party could create noticeable direct representation of Republican LEOs that would in term serve as models to first time Latino voters and recent arrivals to the area. The Pew Hispanic Center's 2004 National Survey of Latinos showed 82% of non-citizen Latinos said they would be more likely to go to the polls if there were fellow Latinos on the ballot since as they have no prior experience with the American political system they are more likely to participate based on identification with a Latino candidate than partisan politics or controversial issues. Moreover, the election of a Hispanic-American Republican president like Senator Marco Rubio could increase the party's popularity amongst the Latino population even though he is not necessarily reflective of the reality of the greater Latino experience. GOP efforts to increase Latino involvement with their current committed opposition to immigration reform depend upon the party's ability to target and elaborate upon the mutual socially conservative tendencies of both groups, and given the potential brewing in the entire Southeast new-settlement region for a democratic overhaul through the Latino electorate, there is no other option.

Ideally, the most effective form of translating the Latino population growth in the county into political representation would be the extensive cooperation between these parties, advocacy groups, and government agencies. The fusion of the individual capabilities of these entities to

mobilize the Latino community would increase the pool of eligible voters, elevate direct representation, and alleviate the intensity of the obstacles facing this disproportionately underrepresented Latino population. The fragmented nature of this community's development due to economic context, geographic location, and rate of speed necessitates an increase in involvement and accountability on behalf of third parties unlike that for any other marginalized group in the nation in order to prevent the systematic perpetuation of an impoverished and persecuted subculture across generations.

## VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that the situation of the Mecklenburg County Latino population differs greatly from the rest of the Hispanic-American community and must be treated as such. The political and social integration of the Mecklenburg Latino population will not be achieved organically as has been seen in other populations due to the unsustainable nature of the hypergrowth activity and the complex set of barriers that it has caused. Even the traditional set of obstacles facing minority and low income groups has been demonstrated to be severely exacerbated in this community. Therefore, greater attention and activism must be applied in order to combat the preexisting disadvantages present in the language and cultural barriers facing this community as well as the persistent issues arising from spatial mismatch and societal exclusion that will only proceed to plague the population with greater intensity if action is not taken. Since the entirety of the implications of the period of hypergrowth are still yet to be entirely manifested, continued research will be necessary to monitor any changes in demographics or levels of civic participation that may occur as the population further develops. This continued monitoring of the population will be particularly necessary as the number of naturalized citizens rise and the overwhelmingly underage native born population comes of legal age. Similarly,

additional research should be conducted to focus on changes in party relations within the community as this element of political incorporation appears to be the most influential option available given the unique ideological beliefs of the Hispanic population and Mecklenburg County as a whole. If substantial changes are made to better equip the school system and public services to handle Spanish speaking constituencies and their cultural differences, along with heightened cooperation between advocacy groups and political parties, this currently disenfranchised population could become a political powerhouse in the area.

## VII.Future Works

While this research leaves the state of political integration in Mecklenburg County still unresolved, there are several significant factors at play which could drastically alter the future study of Latino politics both regionally and nationally. These factors take form in concrete transformations presently in progress, possible future implications of current legislative activities, predictions surrounding future changes in the Latino electorate, and also in the continuously evolving national political environment becoming more favorable to minority and Latino incorporation.

In terms of imminent changes to the nation's political culture, there is still the unrealized influence that the DREAM Act and DACA legislation will have on a newly educated and capable rising Latino generation. Access to avenues for citizenship and higher education for a whole generation of youths socialized to American politics will create an eligible voting population with the resources and predisposition to "go to politics" and who ideally, will continue to generate increasingly civic minded Latino generations down the line. This likely scenario reflects a future full of positive changes in political opportunities for Hispanic-Americans not just within the confines of direct political participation, but in terms of greater representation and influence

as well. Moreover, internally, the direct representation of Latino interests within the political system could become far more likely as well as the population continues to swell and disperse geographically, future congressional redistricting reflective of majority Latino districts could result in an increase in local, and eventually state-wide and national, LEOs. Additionally, while this gradual electoral transformation is taking place there is also likely to be a more immediate influx in party attention to the Latino vote in Mecklenburg County in particular as North Carolina is poised to be a potential swing state in the 2016 election and as previously mentioned there is also the possibility of the first viable Latino presidential candidate in Republican Marco Rubio, which could ignite Hispanic-American political involvement with an unknown magnitude of force.

Furthermore, in respect to likely changes in demographic amongst the future Latino electorate, there is also the previously mentioned ongoing salient role of Latino populations gaining generations of establishment and social integration, constantly building a tradition of community presence. This development of a tradition of civic participation and societal integration can only yield optimistic results for the full political incorporation of Latinos, as well as an overall more representative American government, reflecting the reality of its diverse population. Moreover, as these populations become increasingly more visible and the young population comes of voting age, more pressure should be placed upon elected officials and legislative efforts to accurately address the interests of their constituencies. As appropriate attention is paid to Latino voters and issues particularly pertinent to Latino communities are raised, engagement of the full power of the Latino electorate will be progressively more foreseeable.

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