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Sunday, July 12, 2009

## Political notebook: Study: Gwinnett Latinos turn out for elections

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Gwinnett County has one of the highest Latino populations, and those individuals are engaged in the political process, a report from the Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials said.

Statewide, the Latino voting population has reached 145,991 or 3 percent of the electorate, the study found. Of those, 53.8 percent turned out to vote in 2008, compared to a national turnout rate of 49.9 percent.

The study found that U.S. Rep. John Linder, R-Duluth, has the highest density of Latino registered voters with 23,185 - 4.6 percent of his electorate. In the 2008 General Election, the Latino turn out rate in his district was 57.7 percent.

"Immigration is an important issue which has increased voter participation and engagement amongst the Latino voters," said Jerry Gonzalez, the executive director of GALEO who authored the report. "Georgia legislators should pay close attention to the Latino voter participation rates. Latino voters have engaged and will continue to exercise their right to vote, while considering the anti-immigrant climate being created by some elected officials.

"As the debate on immigration moves forward, many elected officials are openly discussing the political impact the immigration issue could have in future elections, especially in attracting Latino voters."

Among the findings, Gonzalez said the "non-white" voting population in Gwinnett, which includes black, Latino, Asian, Indian and other categories, has grown at a higher rate than the white voting population. Between January 2003 and June 2009, 111,312 people in the non-white category registered to vote, compared to 37,859 white voters.

Among other local districts, state Sen. Renee Unterman, R-Buford, has 7,737 Latino registered voters in her 45th district, according to the report, accounting for 5.4 percent of her electorate. In 2008, that group demonstrated a 60.9 percent voter turn out.

Sen. Curt Thompson, D-Norcross, has 6,252 Latino registered voters in his 5th district, which accounts for 10.7 percent of his electorate.

"The numbers and the analysis presented in this report indicate a significant Latino electorate that is engaging quickly," Gonzalez said. "The Latino electorate cares about the issue of immigration and has demonstrated a capacity to turn out to vote. As the 2010 election unfolds, candidates and elected officials should consider the Latino electorate seriously because Latino voters in Georgia are engaged and participate in elections."

*Political Notebook appears in the Thursday and Sunday editions of the Gwinnett Daily Post.*

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