

The NiLP Report

on Latino Politics & Policy



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National Institute for Latino Policy (NiLP)
25 West 18th Street
New York, NY 10011
800-590-2516
info@latinopolicy.org
www.latinopolicy.org

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NiLP Latino Datanote

The Illusion of Inclusion? President Obama's Latino Political Appointments

By Angelo Falcón (November 15, 2015)

It has been well-documented that Latinos are the most underrepresented group in the federal government work force --- although 18 percent of the country's population, Latinos make up only 8 percent of federal government employees. While this continues to be a long-term problem no matter which political party occupies the White House, in the short-term one avenue for addressing it has been putting pressure on whoever is President to correct this exclusion through his political appointments. However, the assessment of a President's Latino appointments record has been largely based on anecdotal evidence about individual appointments as they are made. So, for example, President Obama's early historic appointment of Sonia Sotomayor as the first Hispanic member of the United States Supreme Court provided the impression that this administration's appointments of Latinos was being responsive to the Latino community and seemed gender balanced. However, these impressions have never been systematically examined.



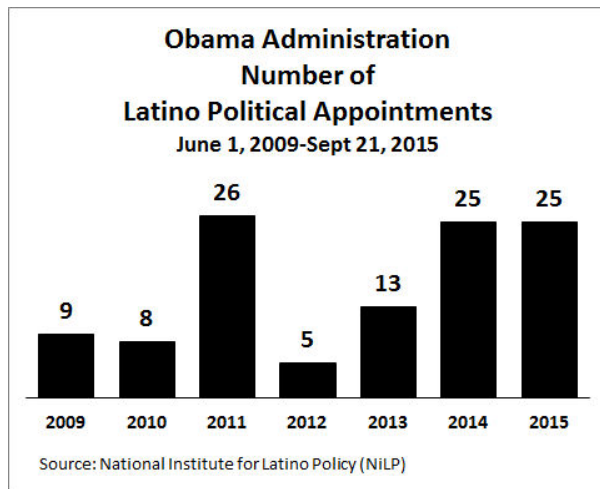
The National Hispanic Leadership Agenda, a Washington, DC-based coalition of 40 of the country's leading national Latino civil rights organizations, created in 2013 what they referred to as a "first-of-its-kind" talent bank and program, made possible by a grant from The Ford Foundation. Its purpose is to support entry- to candidate level Latino professionals interested in serving as presidential appointees in President Barack Obama's Administration. The NHLA Latino Federal Appointments Project reports on the number of Latino appointments made but has not yet analyzed what percentage of the White House's appointments Latinos constitute, making it difficult to assess the project's impact on the underrepresentation problem.

To begin to address this question, the National Institute for Latino Policy (NiLP) conducted a preliminary analysis of all of President Obama's appointments since taking office in 2009. This listing of [White House nominations and appointments](#), compiled by Socrata, consisted of a total of 1,572 appointments, as of September 28, 2015. A count of Spanish-surnamed appointees yielded a total of 110 Latino appointments, which represents 7.1 percent of the total. While using Spanish-surname as an indicator of Latino identity has its limitations, it is a good indicator of the Latino presence on this list. It should also be noted that our analysis does not take into account those named who have left their positions.

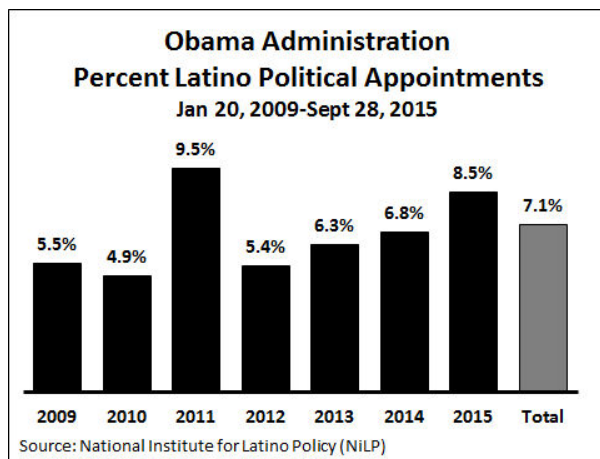
Our finding that Latinos make up only 7.1 percent of the Obama Latino appointments since 2009 points to the persistence of the Latino underrepresentation problem in the

federal work force. If the Latino community has expressed strong concerns about making up only 8 percent of total federal government employment, the fact that President Obama's political appointments are below this figure should be cause for even greater alarm. It appears that despite the general perception, the appointments process has not been a useful avenue to address the Latino underrepresentation problem in policy level positions and has, in fact, simply reinforced this inequality..

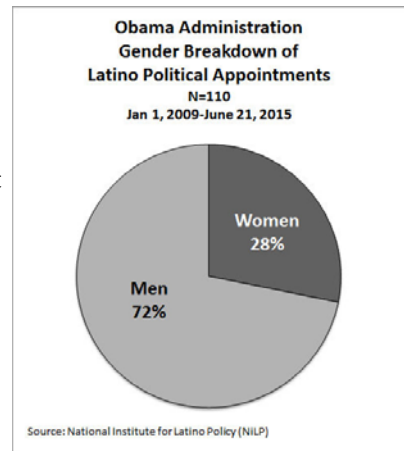
What has been the pattern of Latino appointments over time? Our analysis reveals that over the 2009 to 2015 period, the number of Latino appointments has generally increased. The pattern that emerges is one in which Latino appointments peak in the year preceding a Presidential election, with its lowest following the election cycle. Latino appointments during this period varied from a low of 5 in 2012 to a high of 26 in 2011.



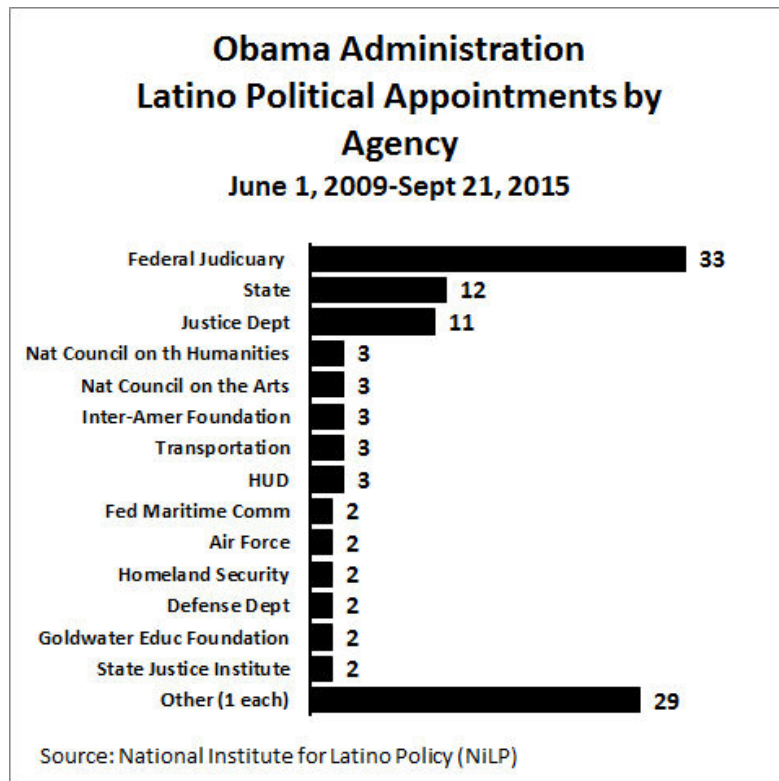
What percentage of total appointment did Latinos represent in each year? On this basis, Latino appointments made up a low of 4.9 percent of total appointments in 2010 and a high of 9.5 percent in 2011. Please note that the figure for 2015 only covers the first nine months of the year. Overall, the pattern seems to respond to the election cycle and the evidence appears to be that the creation of the NHLA Latino Federal Appointments Project in 2013 has had the effect of establishing a steady increase in Latino appointments. This would indicate that this type of direct intervention can have a positive effect, although it has not been able to overcome the general Latino underrepresentation problem.



As mentioned above, the early appointment of Sonia Sotomayor to the Supreme Court by President Obama gave the impression that the administration was especially sensitive to the need for greater Latina women's representation. However, our analysis reveals that Latina women comprised only 28 percent of President Obama's Latino appointments. There is, therefore, a need to continue to make the equitable inclusion of Latina women a priority for the Latino community.



Finally, we looked at which federal agencies had the most Latino appointments. By far the largest number of Latino appointments was to the federal judiciary (33), the Department of State (12) and the Justice Department (11). A further analysis of this distribution of Latino appointments as a percentage of total appointments of each agency would be useful but beyond the scope of our current analysis.



This analysis of President Obama's record of Latino appointments is only preliminary and will require further refinement and development. It points to the need for research that allows for an objective assessment of the effects direct interventions are having in affecting policy. To do so would require a comparison with previous administrations.

There is, therefore, a need to go beyond general perceptions based on anecdotal evidence that could be misleading as evidence of progress being made, a phenomenon dubbed by some as the "illusion of inclusion." The bottom line of this analysis is that the Obama

Administration has, unfortunately, not had a discernable impact on the extreme Latino underrepresentation in federal government employment.

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