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## Latinos and NYC Mayoral-elect de Blasio's Transition Team

By Angelo Falcón (November 26, 2013)

"We want to make sure that we have a government that looks like New York City, and that means a strong Latino representation."

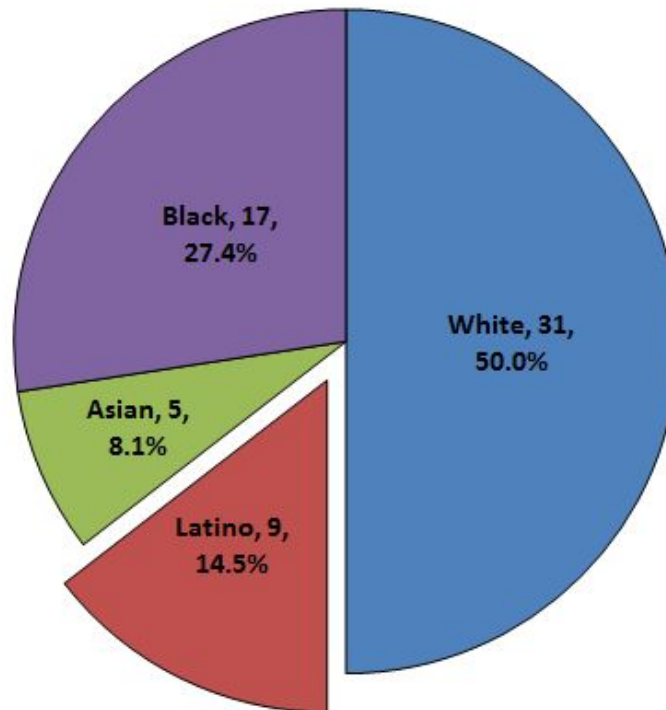
---[NYC Mayor-Elect Bill de Blasio](#)  
at the *Somos El Futuro* Conference,  
San Juan, Puerto Rico (Nov. 9, 2013)

The landslide election this year of Bill de Blasio as Mayor of the City of New York included an overwhelming 81 percent of support from the city's Latino voters. His campaign theme of a "tale of two cities" and targeting of the problems of growing income inequality and the lack of diversity in city government have raised expectations in the Latino community that this new progressive Administration will finally be more responsive to its needs. After two decades of Giuliani and Bloomberg regimes in which Latino concerns were mostly minimized, especially at the policy-making levels, the incoming de Blasio Administration is expected to be different and more inclusive at all levels.

One important initial concrete indicator of such Latino inclusion is the composition of the Mayor-Elect's Transition Team. His [announcement on November 19th](#) of the 60 members of his Transition Team, following his appointment of this committee's co-chairs, was met with much approval, except for Catholics who complained loudly that their clergy was unfairly excluded (others have pointed to the lack of small business advocates, Republicans, the public safety community and other sectors). In the Latino community, there was much excitement about their representation on this panel given its diversity and the absence of the "usual suspects."

However, more in-depth examination of the nature of Latino representation on the de Blasio Transition Team provides a less sanguine assessment. The Latino population in New York City numbers about 2.3 million comprising 29 percent of the total. But of the 62 members of de Blasio's Transition Team, only 9 or 14.5 percent are Latino.

### Racial-Ethnic Breakdown of Mayor-elect Bill de Blasio's Transition Team (N = 62) as of Nov. 20, 2013



During the campaign, [the Mayor-Elect criticized Mayor Bloomberg for having an Administration that did not look like the city](#). It would, therefore, be expected that his first major initiative, his transition, would immediately address this criticism. Overall, the composition of his Transition Team is much more reflective of the diversity of the city's population except, that is, for Latinos. Although Whites are no longer the majority of the city's population, they make up exactly half (50.0 percent) of the Transition Team members, but this is a lower percentage than of past NYC mayoral transition committees. The percentage of Blacks and Asians on the Transition Team is more reflective of their share of the population.

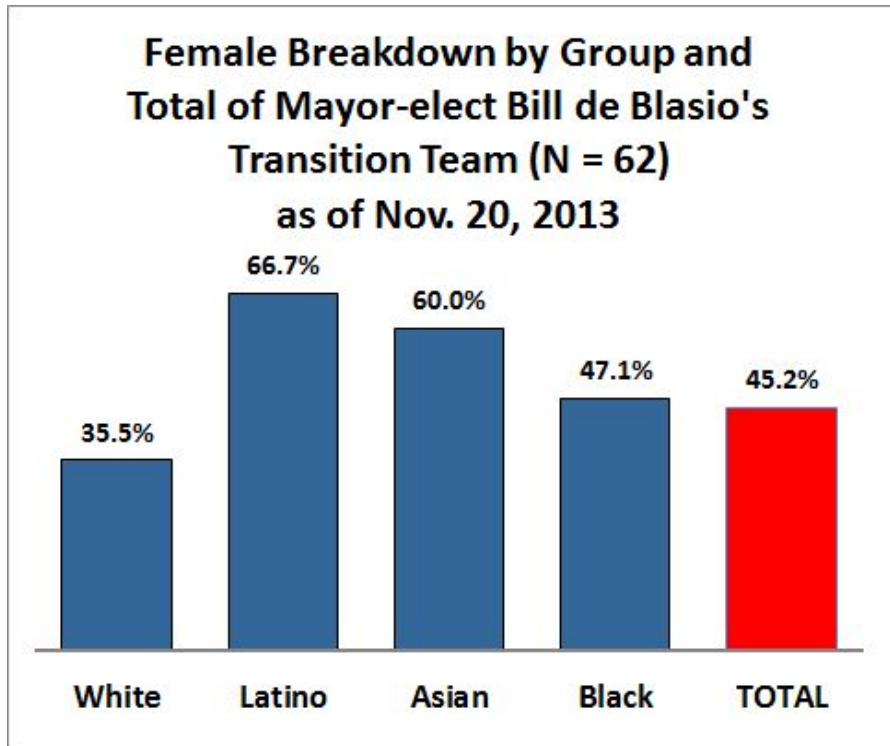
This raises the question of why Mayor-Elect de Blasio was less inclusive of Latinos in his Transition Team?

The argument could be made that the issue here is one of quality not quantity, though this appears not to have been a consideration for other groups. On this score, of the 9 Latinos on the Transition Team 7 (77.8 percent) were from the nonprofit sector, one from labor and one from public service (retired). This obviously does not reflect the diversity of the Latino community in completely excluding representation from the private and religions sectors.

Clearly, de Blasio has focused on nonprofit representation in his transition committee, a sector that makes up about two-thirds (67.7 percent) of the total

members. But while only about half of the Whites on the transition team are from the nonprofit sector (51.6 percent), two-thirds or more of the members of color are (67.7 percent of Blacks, 82.4 percent of Asians and, as already pointed out, 77.8 percent of Latinos). This means that the networks that Latinos and other people of color on this panel will mainly draw on in their recommendations of appointments and for policy ideas are more limited than those of the White members.

Another group that has been historically under-represented is women. In the de Blasio Transition Team, however, women make up close to half (45.2 percent) of total members, which is an improvement over past transition committees. Women were best represented among the Latino members of the de Blasio Transition Team, where they were two thirds (66.7 percent) of this group. Women were also the majority of the Asian members (60.0 percent) but were most under-represented among the White (35.5 percent) and Black (45.2 percent) members of the Transition Team.



While Latinos were under-represented on the de Blasio Transition Team's membership, they are better represented on the Transition Team's staff. At least its Deputy Director and talent recruiter are Latinas, Ursulina Ramirez, deputy public advocate under de Blasio, and veteran journalist Maite Junco, respectively. However, the role of staff in this process is not the equivalent of the actual Transition Team members.

### 1977-2013 Racial-Ethnic Transitions in NYC Mayoral Transitions

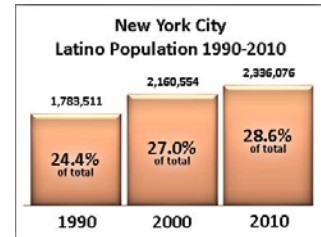
How does the de Blasio track record on Latino representation on his Transition Team look historically? Examining the racial-ethnic composition of New York

mayoral transition committees from 1977 to the present reveals an historic under-representation of Latinos that de Blasio is continuing. Click here for full lists of the [Koch](#), [Dinkins](#), [Giuliani](#), [Bloomberg](#) and [de Blasio](#) transition team memberships.

In comparing the transitions of past mayoralities, it is important to note that no uniform pattern exists. Transition committees have varied considerably in function and composition. For example, Ed Koch's transition council in 1977 only had 11 members, with de Blasio's 62 members being the largest since then. Others establish subcommittees or task forces on specific policy areas or create search committees. Usually a report of the recommendations of such a transition team is published either by the mayor-elect or an independent group like the Talking Transition organization that is currently in operation.

The challenges facing these transition committees also depended on different circumstances. Ed Koch was faced with addressing the effects of one of the worst fiscal crises the city had faced. In addition, as a same party successor to the Democratic Administration of Abraham Beame he also had the limitation of having to keep on many patronage appointments from that previous government. As the first African-American Mayor, David Dinkins faced the challenge of being more inclusive of Blacks in his Administration while also supporting Democratic Party patronage. From Rudy Giuliani to Bloomberg, there was a different dynamic given the change in parties from Democratic to Republican to independent.

Between 1977 and 2013, representation on New York mayoral transition committees remained well below their share of the city's population. This Latino representation did not increase over time despite this being one of the fastest-growing segments of the city's population.



<b>Racial-Ethnic and Female Representation on NYC Mayoral Transition Teams 1977-2013</b>					
	<b>Koch 1977</b>	<b>Dinkins 1989</b>	<b>Giuliani 1993</b>	<b>Bloomberg 2001</b>	<b>de Blasio 2013</b>
<b>Latino</b>	None	14.3	19.0	16.1	14.5
<b>White</b>	100.0	57.1	61.9	58.9	50.0
<b>Black</b>	None	23.8	14.3	19.6	27.4
<b>Asian</b>	None	4.8	None	5.4	8.1
<b>Female</b>	9.1	28.9	23.8	33.9	44.4
<b>TOTAL MEMBERS</b>	11	21	20	56	62

compiled by the National Institute for Latino Policy (NILP)

Latino Members of NYC Mayoral Transition Teams 1977-2013				
Koch 1977	Dinkins 1989	Giuliani 1993	Bloomberg 2001	de Blasio 2013
None	Luis Alvarez	Herman Badillo	Luis Garden Acosta	Vincent (Vinny) Alvarez
	Josephine Nieves	Elizabeth Colon	Ricardo R. Fernandez	Alexa Avilés
	Dennis Rivera	Carlos M. Rivera	Alfred P. Placeres	Paula Gavin
		Ninfa Segarra	Dennis Rivera	Rafael Lantigua
			Rossana Rosado	Conchita M. Mendoza
			Ninfa Segarra	Elba Montalvo
			Susana Torruella Leval	Marta Moreno Vega
			Andy Unanue	Ana Oliveira
			Das Elias Velez	Arnie Segarra

compiled by the National Institute for Latino Policy (NILP)

While the expectation this year that Latinos would be well-represented on a de Blasio Transition Team since it represented the return of the Democratic Party to City Hall, this historically was not the case. Counter-intuitively, Latino representation since 1977 was highest in non-Democratic Party transitions than in those of the Democratic Party. It was highest during the Giuliani (19.0 percent) and Bloomberg (16.0 percent) transitions. It was lowest in the Koch transition (no Latinos) and about the same in the Dinkins (14.3 percent) and de Blasio (14.6 percent) transitions. It is important to note that Koch relied on the high profile roles that two politicians of color played in his transition and who became deputy mayors in his Administration, Herman Badillo and Basil Paterson.

Overall, over the period 1977 to 2013, the membership in New York mayoral transition teams generally reflected changes in the city's demography, except for Latinos. Black and Asian representation grew, and White representation decreased (although Whites remain best represented despite their decline in the total population). There was also an overall significant increase in the representation of women on these mayoral panels in this period.

Between 1977 and 2013, the composition of the NYC mayoral transition committees reflected in the end the increasing diversity within the city's Latino population. Until 1993, the Latino transition members were exclusively Puerto Rican. In 2001, Bloomberg included one non-Puerto Rican, a Cuban, making up 11.1 percent of the Latino members that year. This year, the majority (55.6 percent) of de Blasio's Latino transition members were non-Puerto Ricans (2 Cubans, 1 Brazilian, 1 Dominican and 1 Venezuelan).

### Discussion

Why, despite all the rhetoric about diversity and the importance of Latino inclusion, do Latinos experience such a persistent under-representation? In terms of elected office, Latinos appear to be well-represented on the NYC Council in relation to their electoral strength --- they are about 23 percent of eligible voters and 21 percent of the members of the City Council. However, [in terms of employment in NYC government](#), despite being 25 percent of the civilian labor force, Latinos only make up 18 percent of the municipal government work force (15 percent outside of the Police Department). In the Bloomberg Administration, of the top 11 positions of Deputy Mayors and other executives, only one (9 percent) is Latino.

The problem of Latino under-representation in government appointments is a national one. Latinos, for example, are the most underrepresented group in Federal government employment --- although 15 percent of the civilian labor force, Latinos are only 8 percent of the federal work force. In Chicago, in 2011 in

[Mayor-Elect Rahm Emmanuel's 117-member Transition Committee](#), Latinos made up only 11.1 percent of total members, despite being 29 percent of that city's population.

Latino under-representation, as we have shown, has continued during Mayor-Elect de Blasio's transition, in which only 14.5 percent of his Transition Team are Latino. This low level of Latino representation has continued a long-term pattern by New York City Mayors, at least over the last 35 years. Why is this the case?

There are a number of factors that may explain this persistent problem:

**1. The Role of the Democratic Party.** As one of the most loyal voters to the Democratic Party, Latinos have found themselves taken for granted by the party. This has resulted in complaints that the Democratic Party has failed to nurture adequately Latino political leadership in the city and state. With a de Blasio Administration representing the return of the Democratic Party in control of City Hall, the lack of this party's responsiveness to the Latino community is reflected in the Transition Team's composition.

**2. The Existence of a Latino Political Vacuum.** The 2013 Mayoral election revealed the failure of the usual key political players in the Latino community ability to deliver the Latino vote for their preferred candidate. An interlocking network of political sectors --- what is left of the Latino Bronx Democratic organization, Dominican elected officials in northern Manhattan, political operatives in the consulting firm of the MirRam Group, and the former Publisher of *El Diario-La Prensa* --- all supported the candidacy of Bill Thompson in the Democratic Primary but the Latino vote went to Bill de Blasio. This created a political vacuum that different political players like Councilmember Melissa Mark Viverito and others have been filling when it comes to a de Blasio Administration. This is reflected in the Latinos that were appointed to his Transition Team.

**3. The Lack of Independent Latino Advocacy.** Outside of the issue of immigrant rights, Latino policy advocacy has become increasingly marginalized by the growing dependence of Latino community organizations on government funding and increasing specialization. The few citywide Latino organizations that exist with primary advocacy functions tend to concentrate mostly on budgetary lobbying and not on policy issues. For example, the only Hispanic agenda presented during the mayoral campaign, produced by the Hispanic Federation, was focused on the needs of Latino nonprofits for funding and support, and did not address the problem of the under-representation of Latinos in the municipal work force.

**4. The Failure of the Latino Political Class.** Despite having 33 Latino elected officials in Congressional and state and local legislative positions in New York City, this political class has failed to coalesce in effective ways to develop and promote much-needed citywide Latino policy and political agendas. As with other communities, but with a disproportionate impact on theirs, a significant number of Latino politicians have been convicted of corruption or are under investigation. The composition of the de Blasio Latino Transition Team members clearly shows the lack of influence this

political class has had.

**5. Persistent High Latino Income Inequality.** New York City's Latino population continues to have the highest poverty rate in the city, about 25 percent, and the largest number of low wage workers. This state of affairs has depressed Latino electoral participation and resulted in less responsiveness to its needs from city and state government. The de Blasio Latino Transition Team choices reflect the limited power networks that Latinos occupy in the city.

**6. Latino Diversity.** The diversity of the city's Latino population, coming from over 21 Latin American countries, has provided an excuse for policymakers to avoid Latino issues because they see them as too complex and potentially divisive. The de Blasio Latino choices on his Transition Team reveals major gaps in capturing adequately this diversity.

**7. Latinos as "Foreigners" and "Newcomers."** Despite the long Latino presence in the United States, and of Puerto Ricans specifically in New York, there is the perception that all Latinos are immigrant newcomers and not really "American." This has created an ambiguity on the part of many policymakers who exhibit nativist and xenophobic tendencies. The notion of Latinos as the "newest New Yorkers" also gives the impression that the city's policymakers may not see large segments of this community as ready for full participation in its politics and government because of citizenship status and language barriers.

Taken together, these and other factors present major challenges for the city's leaders in developing policies and practices inclusive of the Latino community. For a de Blasio Administration with its professed progressive politics, these are challenges that will require an extraordinary commitment and creativity that his many supporters in the Latino community and the city in general believe the Mayor-Elect possesses.

The de Blasio transition, as the first phase of his new Administration, is an important indicator of his future policies and practices. The under-representation of Latinos in contrast to other groups in this committee does not augur well for the Latino community if it turns out to be representative of what the de Blasio Administration's relationship to it will be over the next four years.

The hope is that by raising these concerns at this early stage in his planning that Mayor de Blasio will make the necessary course corrections to be fully inclusive of Latinos in his Administration. A starting point will be the appointment of, as he put it, "a strong Latino representation" in policy-making positions at all levels of city government. Some argue that this is just tribalism and that simply having a representative bureaucracy is not the basis of effective governing. Usually, however, those who make such arguments are already well represented. Latinos are not.

**Angelo Falcón** is President of the National Institute for Latino Policy (NiLP), a nonpartisan policy center. For further information on NiLP, visit our website at [www.latinopolicy.org](http://www.latinopolicy.org). He can be reached at [afalcon@latinopolicy.org](mailto:afalcon@latinopolicy.org).