

BY WILLIAM H. FREY

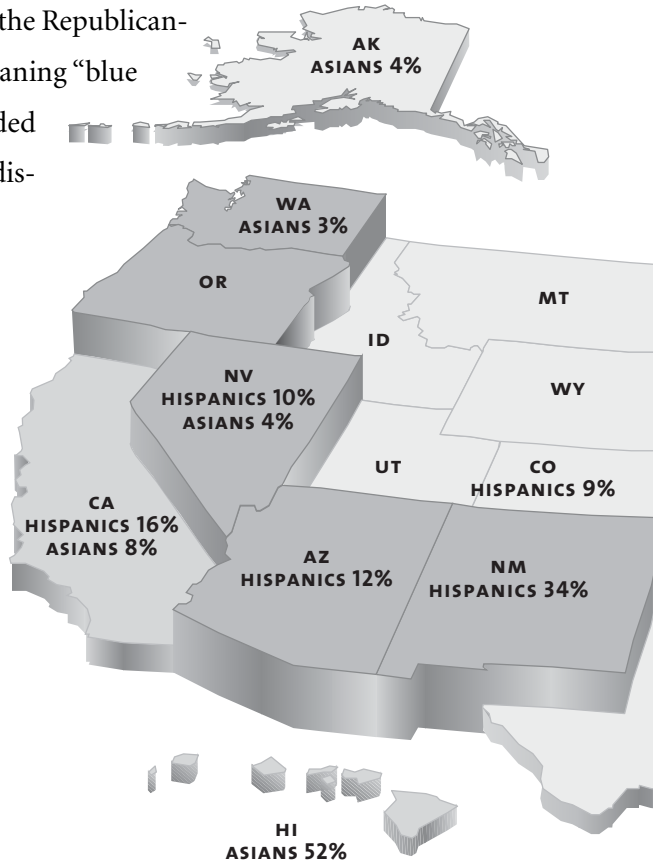
With the election

fast approaching, much attention is focused on the deep cultural divide between the Republican-leaning “red states” and the Democratic-leaning “blue states.” The election, we learn, will be decided in just 17 “battleground states,” where the distinctions are blurred.

But there is an overlay to the red-blue cultural division: race and ethnicity. African-Americans in all parts of the country represent a strong Democratic constituency. By contrast, the allegiance of Hispanics, the nation’s largest ethnic minority, is thought to be in flux.

My analysis of recent Census surveys suggests, however, that the Latino swing vote is more apparent than real. One reason is a translation problem: fully one-third of Hispanics are below voting age, and another quarter are not citizens. Thus for every 100 Hispanics, only 40 are eligible to vote, 23 are likely to register, and just 18 are likely to cast ballots. For blacks the comparable number is 37, and for whites, nearly 50.

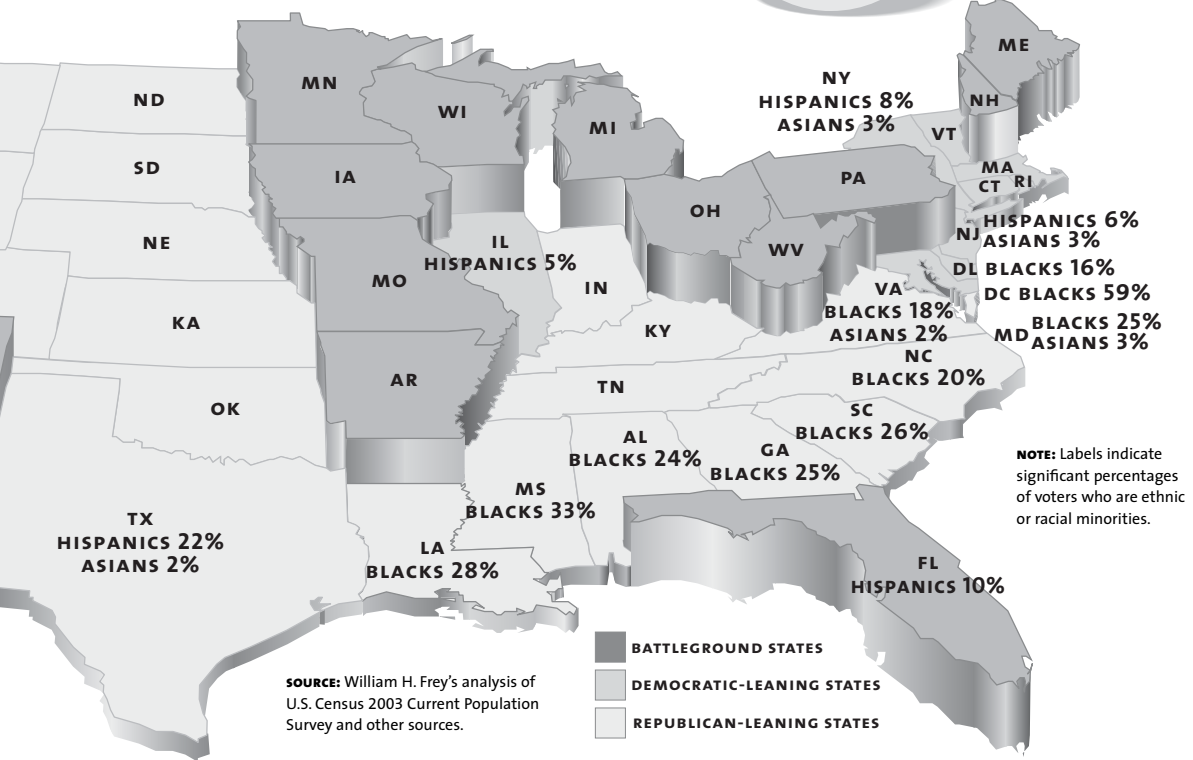
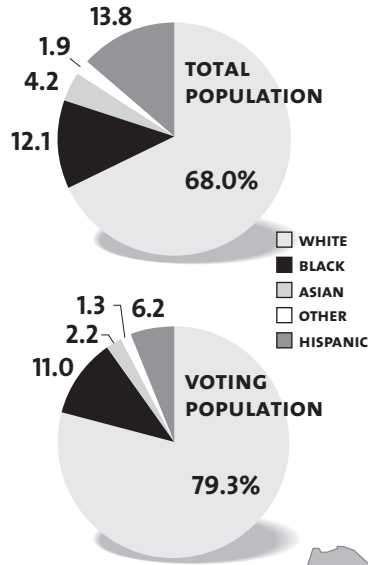
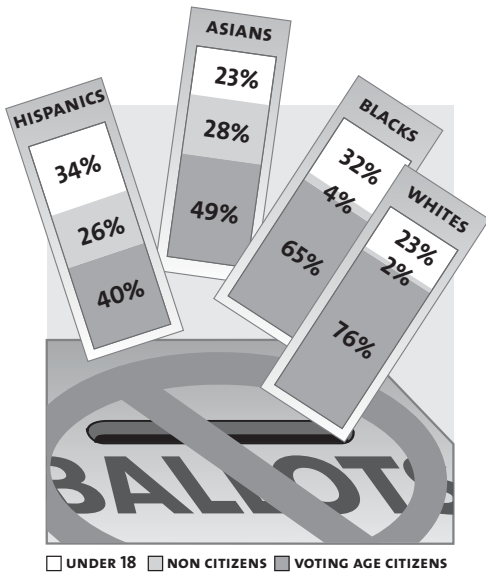
Could Hispanics still decide the election? It’s a long shot. Most large Hispanic concentrations are in states that are safely red (Texas) or blue (California, New York, New Jersey). Arizona and Nevada may be close to the tipping point, but in both, the Hispanic popu-



lation translates poorly into votes. Hispanics account for 29 percent of Arizona’s population, but just an estimated 12 percent of its voters; in Nevada the figures are 23 percent and 10 percent, respectively.

Most battleground states – think Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Missouri – are

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extremely white in the sense that 86 percent of expected voters are white. And their largest minority, African-Americans, is not up for grabs. The only two states where electoral divisions are so close that Hispanics could make the difference are Florida (about 10

percent of expected voters) and New Mexico (one-third of voters). So while American politics may be on the verge of becoming Latino politics, this time around the fight for the White House is likely to play out on more traditional terms. **M**