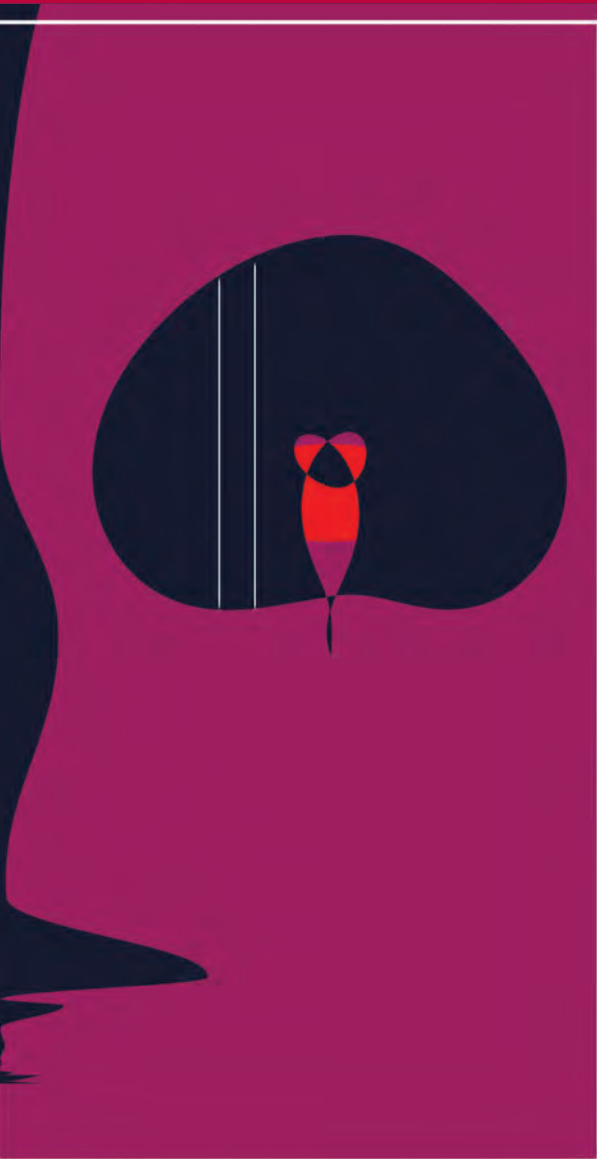


Spring 2021

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# Harvard Kennedy School **JOURNAL OF HISPANIC POLICY**

*A Harvard Kennedy School student publication*



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Volume 33

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# A Note of Gratitude to Longtime *HKS* *Journal of Hispanic Policy* Executive Advisory Board Member Kenneth C. (Ken) Burt

In a recent Facebook post, Kenneth C. (Ken) Burt announced that he has been diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's Disease.

This is hard news to absorb about a cherished colleague who has done so much to advance the Harvard Kennedy School Journal of Hispanic Policy's work and the cause of justice for Latino Americans.

Ken, who is a Kennedy School graduate (MPA '84) and the longest-serving member of the journal's Executive Advisory Board, has also suffered in recent years from Parkinson's Disease.

Over the years, as political director of the California Federation of Teachers, Ken has been one of the nation's most important strategists and donors in national Democratic Party circles.

He has worked with iconic Latino/a leaders—from the late Los Angeles Congressman Edward Roybal to UFW co-founder Dolores Huerta and from the late legendary voting rights activist Willie Velasquez to the recently appointed US Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra.

During his impressive career, Ken additionally advanced our community's standing in his dealings with leading non-Latino political figures, including former President Bill Clinton, former California Governor Jerry Brown, and the late US Senator and Kennedy School champion Edward M. (Ted) Kennedy.

We publish this appreciation of Ken's many good works on behalf of Latinx community advancement in the United States with a deep appreciation of the role he has played as an ally, a cherished friend, and an exemplar of the best of what America has to offer. We wish him and his family peace and enduring love during this very difficult time.

—Henry A. J. Ramos, Founding Editor, MPA '85

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## Editor's Note

As I reflect on the events of the past year, I am struck by the extent of the pain and hardship that many people in our community have experienced during the pandemic. Virtually every family in our community has been touched by the unprecedented economic and public health crisis that we are still enduring, with far too many people having felt the loss of a loved one or been deprived of access to basic economic necessities. Pervasive inequities in education, healthcare, and housing have only been exacerbated by the pandemic, with much of the burden being borne by communities of color. Even as we continue on the path to recovery and a return to some form of normalcy, the benefits of our attempt at a national renewal are once again being distributed in a grossly inequitable way that only perpetuates this nation's longstanding tradition of upholding exclusion and inequity.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, millions of people in the Latinx community have courageously served as essential workers. Their bravery and sacrifice ensured that our hospitals continued to provide life-saving care to those stricken by COVID-19, our youth could continue to look to our public schools for support and guidance, and every American did not have to endure the shortages of basic necessities that we experienced early in the pandemic. The very survival of American society was ensured by millions of Latinx people whose sacrifice was not reflected in their pay, whose identities forced them to endure systemic racism, and whose government largely failed to ensure their safety and economic well-being.

Despite the challenges brought on by the pandemic, 2020 gave us an opportunity to reflect on the values and norms that define our nation's approach to racial injustice, economic inequity, and disparities in political representation. The murder of George Floyd forced a long-overdue national discourse over the extent of police violence in the United States and contributed to the political mobilization of millions of young people. Yet, as we stand together and proclaim that "Black Lives Matter," we must also recognize anti-Blackness in our own community. In doing so, we must collectively strive to amplify the voices of Black Latinx, many of whom are disproportionately impacted by chronic poverty, lower health outcomes, and a lack of political representation.

Like much of 2020, the 33rd volume of the Harvard Kennedy School *Journal of Hispanic Policy* highlights the social, economic, and political inequities that are pervasive in American society. The pieces contained in this volume reflect a critical view of current policy and provide various methods for promoting greater inclusivity and responsiveness in the formulation and implementation of public policy. Several of the volume's pieces provide insight into how each of the two major political parties navigated the complex political ideologies in the Latinx community during the 2020 presidential election. The volume also briefly explores inequities in access to affordable housing, the systemic discrimination that was imbedded in the federal government's response to the pandemic, and the tragic persistence of domestic violence among Latinx children. In recognition of the unique challenges that the Black Latinx community continues to face both within and outside the Latinx community, this volume also provides a perspective on how we can prevent the erasure of Black Latinidad.

Each piece in this volume provides insightful commentary and research that I hope fosters conversation on the opportunities and challenges facing the Latinx community.

I am thankful to the members of our Executive Advisory Board for their continued dedication to supporting and empowering the journal's staff as we sought to amplify the voices of our community. In particular, I would like to thank Gail Smith and Grace Flores-Hughes for their support and guidance throughout the past year. I would also like to thank Martha Foley, Assistant Director of Student Services, and Professor Richard Parker, our faculty advisor, for their continued dedication to student-run policy journals at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Finally, I am also grateful for the support of the entire editorial team. Each of you came together and invested your time and passion into this journal, and I am sincerely grateful for your strength and dedication in amplifying the voices of Latinx and Hispanic communities throughout the United States. My experience leading the Harvard Kennedy School *Journal of Hispanic Policy* would not have been the same without the support and perspectives that each of you provided to this project.



It is my sincere hope that the 33rd volume of the Harvard Kennedy School *Journal of Hispanic Policy* informs our continued national dialogue concerning racial injustice, economic inequity, and disparities in political representation. In a year where the survival of our democracy was thrust into question by a resurgence of far-right extremism and white supremacist ideology, our pursuit of bold and visionary policy change is more critical than ever.

Making our voices heard will ensure that future generations have an opportunity to live in a truly equitable and inclusive society.

Sincerely,  
Daniel A. Estupiñan  
Co-Editor-in-Chief, 2020-2021

## Commentary

# Lessons from California, Arizona, and Georgia on Latino Organizing and Political Power in the Face of an Aging White Electorate and Majority-Minority Nation



Dedication:

In honor of Jeanette Marie Acosta  
Harvard Kennedy School Alumnus '12  
Former Managing Editor,  
Journal of Hispanic Policy

Sonja Diaz is a practicing civil rights attorney and policy advisor. As Founding Director of the UCLA Latino Policy & Politics Initiative (LPPI), Diaz co-founded the first multi-issue policy think tank focused on Latinos in the University of California. Prior to LPPI, Diaz served as Policy Counsel to Vice President Kamala D. Harris during her first and second terms as California's Attorney General, managing legal

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Sonja Francine Marie Diaz, JD,  
MPP

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and policy issues of statewide and national importance, including civil rights, consumer protection, criminal justice, immigration, and privacy and technology policy. In 2016, Diaz directed a robust voter protection program to support Democratic candidates in Virginia as part of the Clinton-Kaine presidential campaign's battleground state apparatus, including a commonwealth-wide election monitoring program for language minorities. Diaz has also managed domestic policy portfolios at three California nonprofits, clerked in the White House's Domestic Policy

Council during President Barack Obama's first term, and supported litigation efforts at MALDEF, the Civil Rights Division of the US. Department of Justice, and California's Bureau of Children's Justice.

Diaz routinely briefs state legislators and local elected officials from across the United States on evidence-based governance and emerging trends in domestic policy. Her research and commentary has been mentioned in major news outlets, including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, NBC, NPR, Politico, and Univision. She is a contributing political analyst to KTLA 5, a benchmark of Los Angeles news television.

Diaz received her law degree from University of California Berkeley's School of Law, holds a master's degree in public policy from UCLA's Luskin School of Public Affairs, and a bachelor's degree in politics from University of California Santa Cruz. She is

a University of Michigan Public Policy & International Affairs fellow, valedictorian of People for the American Way's Frontline Leaders Academy, and LatCrit's unanimous student scholar awardee for her paper on Latino voting rights.

With the United States projected to become a majority-minority nation by the year 2043, California is a critical case study on the power of organizing Latino voters as pundits try to make sense of the 2020 presidential election and the nation's political future.<sup>1</sup> Across the country, we saw marginalized voters—those who face the most barriers to accessing the ballot box—turn out in record numbers amidst a global pandemic, widespread misinformation and disinformation campaigns, and sophisticated voter suppression.<sup>2,3,4</sup> The Democrats' 2020 successes at the top of the ticket were made possible by a coalition of Black, Latino, Asian American, and Indigenous voters who were mobilized by a cadre of community-based civil society organizations that operate with a fraction of resources and encapsulate a longer-term vision for lasting political change.<sup>5</sup> A confluence of factors, including changing population dynamics and a medley of existential crises that exposed widespread cracks

across American domestic policy, have irreversibly altered the electoral map.<sup>6,7</sup> Ultimately, data from the last two elections makes clear that Latino voters have a central role in shaping electoral outcomes.<sup>8,9</sup> The UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Initiative estimates that 16.6 million Latino voters cast a ballot in the 2020 presidential election, representing a 30.9 percent increase in ballots cast between 2016 and 2020; this is nearly double the nationwide growth (15.9 percent) and the single largest four-year increase in the Latino vote ever.<sup>10</sup> Candidates, political operatives, and organizers seeking to recalibrate electoral strategies to harness the lessons learned from 2020, especially the electoral transformation of Arizona and Georgia, are best served by reacquainting themselves with Latino political mobilization in 1990s California and accepting the ways in which an emerging and youthful electorate of color counteracts the nation's aging white electorate.

As political operatives and major party leaders scramble to ascertain what worked and what went wrong in 2020, one needs only to look at California for answers. California showcases for conservatives the fate of the Republican party if it continues to ignore changing demographics and promulgate nativist policy reforms that curb economic opportunity and social inclusion for non-white Americans.

Moreover, California plainly illustrates for liberals the consequences of failing to accelerate Latino political mobilization and of steamrolling diverse Latino candidates from competing for key statewide offices such as governor, US senator, and attorney general. For both parties, California presents a demographic future that is taking shape across key battleground states across the United States. Whether or not other states' populations will become Latino pluralities like California or majority minorities is only one part of the calculus.<sup>11</sup> The real question is how these demographic changes will challenge the policy preferences of an aging white electorate that is too often inapposite to the needs of a majority-minority nation.<sup>12</sup>

In the mid- to late 1990s, California's conservative powers made innumerable tactical failures to bring about the state's current political reality. Not only did they refuse to integrate a growing Latino community into the core of the state's political infrastructure and policy agenda, but they actively passed measures that would alienate that population for the long term. In 1994, California voters passed Proposition 187, which prohibited undocumented immigrants from accessing public benefits. In addition to the passage of Proposition 187, Republicans advanced a series of other racist, xenophobic, and anti-Latino ballot initiatives that

advanced mass incarceration, ended affirmative action, and ended bilingual education for students with limited English proficiency.<sup>13,14,15</sup> This type of regressive policy making set off a spark of organizing and activism that has fundamentally shifted California's political landscape, spurring the rapid decline of the Republican Party in the state and ushering in a new era of progressive politics on issues ranging from immigrant rights to climate change.

This Governor Pete Wilson-led racist and anti-immigrant agenda—which organizers are still working to dismantle today—succeeded in the short term but only to his detriment and that of the state's Republican Party. In short, Wilson's 1996 presidential bid lasted only a month and a day, foreshadowing the rapid demise of California's conservative political elite. Now, under California's top-two primary process, instituted in 2011, Republicans struggle to field candidates that advance to a statewide general election. And for seats in the US Congress, even once historically red districts have turned blue. This has left the Governor's mansion and other statewide constitutional offices solidly Democrat for the foreseeable future, both chambers of the statehouse with Democratic supermajorities, and growing Democratic control of once solidly red House seats. Ultimately, scapegoating Latino Californians

for the state's economic recession and architecting a blueprint for regressive state-level policies has left the California Republican Party a powerless and obsolete power broker in the nation's most populous and prosperous state.<sup>16,17</sup>

The racist policies advanced by Republicans in the 1990s was the beginning of the end for their state party because they underestimated the organizing it would spark and the ability to build political power in a community that they saw as poor and insignificant. The party failed to see the exponential growth that would happen within the Latino population that would make them the plurality in the state. They also failed to look forward and recognize that the citizen children of the undocumented immigrants they were denigrating would one day become a part of the electorate.

California has lessons for Democrats too. Until Governor Gavin Newsom appointed Secretary of State Alex Padilla to the US Senate to fill Vice President Kamala Harris's vacancy, no Latino had ever occupied either of the state's two Senate seats or the governor's mansion for over 170 years. Worse, the national Democratic Party has yet to endorse a Latina or Latino to run statewide for California Governor or US Senate.<sup>18,19,20</sup> At the turn of the century, Democratic leaders elected to bypass the first Latino to

hold a constitutional office in more than 120 years, Lieutenant Governor Cruz Bustamante, as a write-in candidate during Democratic Governor Gray Davis's 2003 recall election.<sup>21</sup> The Democrats' willful neglect of a Latino write-in candidate of choice propelled body weight champion and Hollywood action hero Arnold Schwarzenegger to the governor's mansion for two terms of Republican policy responses to an energy crisis and the Great Recession.<sup>22</sup> The failure of the state's Democrats and the national party to advance a Latina or Latino to a top-tier position has left emerging electorates in and beyond California without a national figurehead for decades. This void is only now being addressed by the 2016 appointment of Xavier Becerra to California Attorney General and the 2021 appointment of Padilla to the US Senate.

An aging and declining white electorate coupled with a growing youthful electorate of color, who represented an estimated 30 percent of eligible voters in the 2020 presidential election, only serve to intensify the need to mobilize the greatest share of new voters.<sup>23</sup> Democrats and Republicans will only continue to pay the price for ignoring Latino voters in mobilization, candidacy, and policy agenda formation for cycles to come. Even as voters of color have consistently turned out for the Democratic Party in reliable voting blocs,

misguided perceptions towards voters of color have left them with election cycle after cycle of underinvestment and willful neglect. Looking towards 2022 and 2024, party operatives and political candidates need only look to Arizona and Georgia for two clear-cut examples of the power that lies with voters of color in national politics.

Arizona and Georgia, two solidly conservative states with influential Latino electorates, sent Joe Biden to the White House and changed the calculus of the US Senate.<sup>24</sup> In Arizona, the work of Latino and Indigenous organizers from civil society organizations like One Arizona, Mijente, Lucha Arizona, and others were consequential in overcoming a xenophobic state law, defeating racist Sheriff Joe Arpaio at the ballot box, ensuring a successful criminal conviction that was shortchanged by a presidential pardon, and sending two Democrats to the US Senate. Similarly, the work of African American community organizations in Georgia, including the New Georgia Project and Black Voters Matter, joined by Latino and Asian American leaders, greatly expanded the electorate by hundreds of thousands of voters, driving up civic engagement, combating voter suppression, and successfully sending two Democrats to the US Senate, stripping Mitch McConnell of his leadership post. Ultimately, these victories were made possible

not by political party bosses but by community leaders in response to the realized threats to dignity and opportunity as a result of the lack of substantive and descriptive representation from the local level to the White House. They, like California in the 1990s, are not the only states with the same characteristics to shape electoral outcomes, but the potential for future candidates and campaigns to replicate these political transformations rely on moving Latino voters from the periphery to the core.

Like Proposition 187 in California, Arizona's 2010 SB 1070, a bill that set up the strictest immigration regulations in the country and encouraged racial profiling of Latino residents, along with the proliferation of anti-Latino Republican leaders, has mobilized a new generation of progressive political power. Instead of wallowing in despair, Latino organizers committed to building a movement that would transform state politics. And in 2018, the first major result of their hard work and the power of Latino voters resulted in the first Democrat from Arizona being sent to the US Senate in an open race since 1975 and the fielding of a Latino gubernatorial candidate on the general election ticket against the incumbent Republican governor.<sup>25,26</sup> Also in 2018, a number of State House districts flipped to Democrats along with one congressional district, and

the first Latina was elected as Tucson's first female mayor, largely due to the 52 percent increase in ballots cast between 2014 and 2018 in the state's Latino precincts.<sup>27</sup> Going into 2020's 54th legislative session, two Latinas held two of the top three positions in the state's Democratic Party—House Minority Leader Charlene Fernandez and House Minority Whip Athena Salman. A scant two years later, Arizona has delivered the Democrats a second US Senate seat and flipped the state to Biden, the first Democrat to win the state's presidential contest in almost a quarter century.<sup>28</sup> Also in 2020, Arizona voters sent the first Latina to statewide office by electing a Republican and a Democrat to the Arizona Corporation Commission, a feat that remains to be accomplished in neighboring California because of the Democrats' willful neglect of Latino candidates for top-tier positions.<sup>29</sup> With the upcoming 2020 Census count, Arizona is slated to gain a congressional seat, which, coupled with 2021 redistricting and the 2022 open gubernatorial race, will determine how far the state has truly come since SB 1070.

Georgia provides yet another example of the power of civil society organizations in building the political voice of Black and Latino communities to swing elections, even in the face of political spending that favors investing in a white electorate that increased

its support for Donald Trump from 54 percent in 2016 to 57 percent in 2020.<sup>30</sup> Georgia, like California and Arizona, has architected repressive policies that seek to criminalize immigrants, restrict immigrant student's access to public universities, restrict access to the voting box, and permit racial terror.<sup>31,32,33,34</sup> In 2011, Georgia passed HB 87 “to eliminate incentives for illegal aliens to cross into our state,” taking a direct cue from California’s Proposition 187, Arizona’s SB 1070, and countless other copycats.<sup>35</sup> At the time of the law’s passage, the share of Georgia’s Latino population grew by 66 percent between 2000 and 2010, and the number of eligible Latino voters in the state increased by 181 percent—no doubt reshaping the state’s electorate and political status quo.<sup>36</sup> Ultimately, as a result of the anti-Latino legislation, labor shortages triggered an estimated \$140 million in agricultural losses, and officials in Georgia dispatched prisoners to the state’s farms to harvest the fields.<sup>37</sup> Ultimately, Black and Brown communities in Georgia mobilized in response to restrictive policy making that criminalized their fundamental rights and limited their social mobility. In 2016, Gwinnett County voters elected Brenda Lopez Romero, the first Latina elected to the Georgia General Assembly.<sup>38</sup> In 2018, a coalition of Black and Brown voters coalesced around Stacey Abrams

in the state gubernatorial primary and sent her to the general election where she came within 0.4 percentage points of Secretary of State Brian Kemp.<sup>39</sup> Ultimately, Georgia’s place in electoral history was affirmed in 2020, when the state gave Biden its 16 electoral votes, electing a Democrat to the White House for the first time since 1992.<sup>40</sup> Although Latinos only represented 3.6 percent of voters in Georgia, these voters preferred Biden to Trump by over 20 percentage points in high-density Latino precincts.<sup>41</sup> Latinos’ preference for the Democrat at the top of the ticket by a two-to-one margin in the 2020 presidential election provided the slim margins necessary to bolster African American voters’ overwhelming support of Biden and send him to the White House. Just after the presidential race, Georgians elected the first Latina District Attorney, Deborah Gonzalez, after she overcame an unlawful attempt by Kemp to delay her election until November 2022.<sup>42</sup> One month later, a majority of Latino, African American, and Asian American voters, coupled with a minority of white voters, sent two Democrats to the US Senate in the January 5, 2021 runoff election.<sup>43</sup> Senator Raphael Warnock became the first African American to represent Georgia in the US Senate; with Senator Jon Ossoff, they are the first Democrats to be elected to those seats since Senator Max Cleland’s



1996 election.

With the swearing in of Padilla, Warnock, and Ossoff to the US Senate by Vice President Harris—a daughter of California—the stories of California, Arizona, and Georgia do not have to be an anomaly for Democrats. Latinos are youthful and diverse, projected to make up 27.5 percent of the US population by 2060.<sup>44</sup> The capacity of Latino voters to cast a ballot, cycle after cycle in and beyond Arizona and Georgia, translates into immense political power as more Latinos age into the electorate in places like Texas, North Carolina, and Florida. Yet, the California lens offers a glimpse into how the changing demographics of our country can fundamentally shift the political status quo. But more importantly, they offer a model for what is possible through a strategy of expanding the electorate by registering new voters of color, really understanding what their needs are, and mobilizing them to cast a ballot by prioritizing their candidacy in top-tier elections. Both parties have the opportunity to compete for these votes, and 2022's open gubernatorial races in Arizona, Maryland, and Texas and open US Senate races in North Carolina and Pennsylvania will be the first test of which party is willing to truly compete by running Black and Brown candidates and investing in the mobilization of voters of color. Ultimately, the next two presidential

elections this decade will be the true test as to whether either party is committed to sustainability and viability by expanding and engaging a youthful electorate of color or destined to repeat the willful neglect of non-white voters in favor of an aging white electorate.

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## Commentary

# Policies, not Personality: The Defining Characteristic of the 2020 Latino Vote



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### Introduction

In the 2020 presidential and congressional elections, the Latino community once again proved that we are a powerful and influential demographic—and far from being a monolithic voting bloc.

Both political parties have been put on notice. For Democrats, it means they cannot take the Latino vote for granted. For Republicans, it means that even though they made

considerable gains in places such as South Florida and South Texas, they still have some considerable work remaining to win the Latino vote.

In the end, specific policy issues made the difference, not party loyalty or personalities. This alone is remarkable given the backdrop of a global pandemic and one of the most contentious and politically charged presidential elections in recent history. Many Latinos decided to see past all of this and vote on the basis of issues like jobs and the economy, healthcare, education, and immigration to a lesser degree.

Of course, many Latinos voted for the Democratic Party in 2020, just like they have been doing for generations. As far back as the early 1960s, Democrats have been investing in Latino outreach.<sup>1</sup> They have also benefited from Democratic-leaning advocacy groups, nonprofits, and labor unions that have long

prioritized Latino engagement. And yet, as the 2020 presidential election showed, the Democratic Party cannot claim to have the Latino vote locked down.

Republicans are playing catch-up. After assuming they could win a respectable share of the Latino vote with nominal investment, Republicans have been increasingly ramping up outreach to Latino voters. And instead of increasing their investments solely in election years, Republicans built an infrastructure in places that are not often perceived to have large Latino communities and in non-election years.

On paper, it is clear that Democrats won the Latino vote in 2020.<sup>2</sup> But a more careful reading reveals that Republicans have reason to believe they can peel away more voters from the Democratic Party, especially if progressives continue pushing for policies that will dissuade moderate and independent Latino voters with calls to “defund the police,” “Medicare for All,” and the “Green New Deal.” Similarly, calls to reclassify Latinos as Latinx “puzzled” many Hispanics, according to a Politico article citing conversations with more than a dozen experts on the Latino electorate in six states.<sup>3</sup> One poll, conducted by Pew, found that 97 percent of Latinos do not identify with the term Latinx.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, Democrats have plenty of places to point to as positive trends

they hope to build on in future elections. For example, young Latinos overwhelmingly voted for Democratic candidates.<sup>5</sup> Democrats hope these voters will remain loyal as they start a family, leave urban areas, and begin paying more taxes as their incomes rise.

Republicans can look to Florida and Texas as proof that their message centered around limited government, increased personal responsibility, and respect for traditional values resonates with some Latino voters.

Ultimately, the 2020 presidential election was beneficial to the Latino community because it means that both parties must continue investing resources into courting the Latino vote. It also means that Latinos will continue to have a seat at the table of major policy issues.

Additionally, we are also seeing a rise in Latinos running for office at the local, state, and federal levels.<sup>6</sup> In 2021, the number of Latinos in Congress increased to six in the Senate and 46 in the House of Representatives, including Republican Representatives Maria Elvira Salazar and Carlos Gimenez, who each upset Democratic incumbents in Florida.<sup>7</sup> These wins were also coupled with other important Republican victories, including Republican Representative Mike Garcia, who won re-election in November after winning a special election in May of the same year.

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## Jobs and the Economy

To understand why the Republican Party exceeded expectations with the Latino vote in 2020, it is helpful to reflect on the years leading up to the election. Before the COVID-19 global pandemic wreaked havoc on the economy, Hispanics were benefitting from one of the fastest-growing and vibrant economies in recent history. For example, in the fall of 2019, the Latino unemployment rate was at a historic low.<sup>8</sup> Two years prior in 2017, the Latino poverty rate was similarly low—its lowest level since estimates were first published during the Nixon administration.<sup>9</sup> And on the eve of the pandemic, the National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals released a report showing the Hispanic homeownership rate had increased for the fifth year in a row.<sup>10</sup>

These positive economic conditions did not happen in a vacuum. Since taking office, President Donald Trump worked with Congress to embrace pro-growth economic policies that helped spur the private sector to create jobs and expand economic opportunity.

Foremost, but perhaps least-noticed, Executive Order 13771 directed agencies to repeal two existing regulations for every new regulation created.<sup>11</sup> This decision may help explain why a 2017 Council of Economic Advisors report estimated Trump's deregulation efforts would increase

real income by \$3,100 per household over 5–10 years.<sup>12</sup>

Rulemaking seldom makes front-page news, but its impact can have a real and immediate impact on everyday Americans. According to an analysis by the Bureau of Labor and Statistics, in President Trump's first 21 months in office, 281,000 new manufacturing jobs were created.<sup>13</sup>

These numbers help explain why Roberto Barrera, a resident of Zapata County, Texas, voted for President Trump in 2020 and helped the Republican Party win the county for the first time in 100 years.<sup>14</sup> As someone employed in the oil and gas industry, Zapata told a reporter that he made his decision after hearing then-Vice President Joe Biden say he would “transition from the fossil fuel industry.” “The way I see it, they'd cut my job,” Barrera said.<sup>15</sup>

Beyond deregulation, the Trump administration also enacted the largest tax relief in a generation. Despite receiving no Democratic votes in Congress, President Trump rallied support to enact the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, which simplified the tax code, lowered the corporate tax rate, and provided tax relief to millions of Americans. According to one analysis, around 8 in 10 Americans reaped the benefits of tax relief.<sup>16</sup>

It is easy to gloss over this point, but it is worth repeating: a large majority of Americans, including Latinos, were



able to keep more of their hard-earned money to save, spend, and invest as they saw fit thanks to policies enacted by the Trump administration.

This did not go unnoticed. In the closing months of the 2020 presidential election, several Latino small business owners organized a roundtable in support of President Trump in South Florida.<sup>17</sup> According to the news article, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 was one of several reasons why they were supporting the incumbent.

Additionally, the Trump campaign effectively packaged the administration's commitment to pro-growth economic policies and reminded Latino voters of the threat posed by big-government economic policies. This pitch resonated with voters—particularly those living in Florida, who escaped communist Cuba and socialist Venezuela.<sup>18</sup>

For the growing Venezuelan community in South and Central Florida, socialism is not an abstract concept; it's one many have personally lived through. In their lifetimes, they have seen their fairly prosperous country decimated by socialist economic policies. In its wake, Venezuela's poverty rate has skyrocketed as civil society and basic democratic institutions have been destroyed or hollowed out.<sup>19</sup> According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, five million Venezuelans have left their country in recent years, creating one

of the largest displacement crises in the world.<sup>20</sup>

While in office, President Trump took a hardline approach against the Nicolas Maduro regime and sided with opposition leader Juan Guaido. In one of the most public and high-profile signs of the administration's commitment to the Venezuelan pro-democracy cause, President Trump invited Guaido to the 2020 State of the Union Address.

President Trump's support for Guaido and the pro-democracy cause resonated with voters like Andreina Kissane of the Venezuelan American Republican Alliance, a group created to bolster support for President Trump.<sup>21</sup> Some of the most passionate Trump supporters among the Venezuelan community began to call themselves "Magazolanos," a play on words between the Trump campaign slogan "Make America Great Again" and Venezolanos (Venezuelans in Spanish).<sup>22</sup>

Beyond economic issues, President Trump recognized early on that Latinos comprised a sizable part of the social conservative coalition that highly values faith. One recent study found that while 65 percent of Americans describe themselves as Christians—down 12 percentage points from the last decade—77 percent of Latinos identify as Christians.<sup>23,24</sup> The same study found that nearly 84 percent of Latinos deem faith an important part of their lives.



The president and his team sent a strong signal to Latinos that he also valued faith, family, traditional values, and religious freedom. Reverend Gabriel Salguero, founder of the National Latino Evangelical Coalition, and the Reverend Tony Suarez, Vice President of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, said the Trump campaign aggressively courted Latinos of faith with the creation of the “Evangelicals for Trump” initiative and multiple visits to Spanish-speaking churches in Central Florida.<sup>25</sup>

Ultimately, Latino evangelicals, particularly in Texas and Florida, may have made the difference in favor of President Trump, according to Gaston Espinoza, a professor at Claremont McKenna College and an expert on Latino voters.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, Trump’s support of educational freedom was also an important part of his outreach to Latinos. Although education policy typically happens at the state level, President Trump made a point of bringing up his support for school choice in speeches and describing the ability of parents being able to choose a school that works best for their child as the “civil rights issue of our time.”<sup>27</sup>

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### **President Trump’s Office of Hispanic Engagement**

In conversations with Dr. Andrea Ramirez, the former director of Hispanic Engagement at the White

House, it is clear that there was a deliberate and well-organized structure in place to consistently and effectively communicate President Trump’s policies to the Latino community. According to Dr. Ramirez, this was done by communicating to Latino leaders across the country. The coalition included leading figures in local government, business, and the faith community, among others.

These individuals were invited to participate in conference calls with high-ranking government officials, including President Donald Trump. On one occasion I was able to join one of these calls and directly ask a question on behalf of The LIBRE Initiative to President Donald Trump and express our concern about unnecessary and reckless government spending.

Beyond conference calls, there were in-person meetings at the White House and across the country to help the administration dialogue with members of the Latino community.<sup>28</sup>

For a community that values personal relationships and cooperation, these meetings went a long way in signaling to the Latino community that the administration was genuinely interested in hearing their concerns.

This approach, according to Dr. Ramirez, was authentic and one where “people felt cared about and understood.” Dr. Ramirez said that people were hungry for this type of personal engagement and felt like they were not

being pandered to but instead being treated as unique individuals with a wide variety of issues and concerns.

I couldn't agree more.

Despite publicly voicing our opposition to certain policy issues, the White House welcomed my group and I to various meetings, conversations, and social functions. The dialogue was always respectful even when there were disagreements.

By the summer of 2020, the Trump administration had organized many of these ideas in what he was calling the White House Hispanic Prosperity Initiative<sup>29</sup>, a detailed list of policy priorities geared towards expanding educational and economic opportunity for the Latino community.

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### **The Democratic Party's 2020 Latino Strategy**

In 2020, the Democratic Party's Latino outreach strategy was primarily intended to focus on President Trump's personality. At every turn, the Democratic Party made it a point to tie the former president with xenophobia and racism. Several Spanish language media outlets helped amplify this message. Although, unlike previous elections in which the Republican Party and the Republican presidential nominee would look the other way in the face of personal attacks, President Donald Trump pushed back with varying degrees of success.

Many Latino voters decided to see past this and make their decisions on

whom to vote for based on pocket-book issues like jobs and the economy, healthcare, and education. Of course, immigration mattered to many Latinos in the 2020 presidential election, but like it has in previous elections, immigration was seldom the most important issue for many Latino voters.

This was not entirely unique to 2020. In previous years, including during non-presidential elections, Republicans have been able to remain competitive when pursuing the Latino vote. There are several examples, including the 2014 US Senate race in Colorado, where exit polls show Cory Gardner won about half of the Latino vote, and in Texas, where Governor Greg Abbott won more than 40 percent of the Latino vote in 2014 and in 2018.<sup>30,31</sup> In both of these examples, the candidates ran on pocketbook issues like jobs, the economy, and expanding opportunity. The point here is that the messenger matters, but so does the message.

Democrats can certainly take steps to consolidate their share of the Latino vote, but it is unclear if they will be able to contain their party's most progressive voices in order to appeal to more moderate, independent, and conservative-leaning Republicans. Among the many lessons of the 2020 election was not just that sound policy was appealing to Latinos, but that Latinos also rejected bad policies.

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## 2020 and Beyond

As the Latino electorate continues to grow, Latino voters may make the difference in close elections. As the 2020 election proved, there are several states that are becoming increasingly competitive, including Georgia, which has seen its Latino population double between 2000 and 2010 and is now surpassing one million.<sup>32,33</sup>

Like other voting blocs, Latinos will demand more from elected officials and those running for office. And as Latino community groups and civic organizations grow in influence, Latinos will hold their local, state, and federal elected officials accountable to the promises made on the campaign trail.

Cutting a campaign ad in Spanish is not enough. Campaigns will need to spend the time, energy, and resources to craft an ad that is authentic and speaks to the concerns of the local Latino community that, at times, can be different from one ZIP code to another. In short, the Latino electorate is maturing and becoming increasingly discerning.

All Latinos, regardless of political affiliation, should celebrate this and demand more. For far too long, the Latino community was outside looking in, despite our rapid population growth. But in the span of one generation, this is now increasingly changing as more and more Latinos are running for office and leaving a

lasting impact on our local communities and on our country.

Of course, considerable work remains.

In the short term, Latinos have been especially hard hit by COVID-19.<sup>34</sup> Latinos have a higher COVID-19 death rate, and many are facing job loss and financial insecurity because of pandemic-related restrictions on the hospitality, leisure, retail and construction sectors—industries that employ a large number of Latinos.

Additionally, many Latino students are unable to exercise educational freedom and customize an education plan that works well for them because of rigid restrictions that in many places have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Beyond jobs and education, Congress has failed to address inefficiencies in our country's immigration system, keeping far too many hard-working and determined individuals from being able to plan for a life in the United States.

These are just some of the many barriers that are getting in the way of each Latino being able to live out his or her own American dream. But as long as the Latino community continues to make its multiple voices heard and demand that our leaders treat us like individuals with unique perspectives, the future is bright for us—and for our entire country.

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## Research

# Seeking Representation: College-Educated Latinos and Elected Office



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Amilcar Guzmán, PhD, and  
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of Maryland, College Park. As part of his dissertation, Amilcar launched the National Latinx Alumni Engagement Survey, a first-of-its kind survey instrument designed to examine how Latinx college graduates engage civically. The American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education recognized his dissertation as one of its Outstanding Dissertations of the Year in 2020. Amilcar also holds a master's degree in educational leadership and policy from the University of Maryland and a bachelor's degree in psychology and sociology from Lycoming College. His research and writing on K-12 and postsecondary education has appeared in *Inside Higher Ed*, *Harvard Journal of Hispanic Policy*,

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Educational Researchers inducted him as an AERA fellow in recognition for his contributions to research in postsecondary education. In 2018, the Fulbright Organization named him Fulbright Specialist. Dr. Cabrera has also been a member of the editorial board of the most prestigious journals of higher education (Journal of Higher Education, Review of Higher Education, Research in Higher Education, and Journal of College Student Development)

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### **Abstract**

Drawing on a national sample of respondents to the National Latinx/a/o Alumni Engagement Survey (NLAES), the authors examine whether civically engaged Latino college graduates have run for and served in elected office in recent years. Our results indicate that a small fraction of college-educated Latinos, just 6 percent of the respondents to our survey, have run for elected office at any levels, while less than 1 percent have held office at any level.<sup>1</sup> In order to increase the number of Latinos that seek elected office, bold and visionary policy reforms are necessary to reframe how elections are financed and who is eligible to run for public office.



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## A Growth in Population and Presence at the Polls

The Latino population accounts for roughly 18 percent of the total population in the United States. Moreover, the Latinx population is one of the fastest growing in the United States. In 2019, the US Latino population reached a record 60.6 million, nearly double the size of the Latino population in 2000. Relatively speaking, the US Latino population even surpasses the population of many Latin American countries. It is half the size of the total Mexican population, and six times as large as the one in Dominican Republic. Since 2010, the Latino population growth in states such as North Carolina, North Dakota, Montana, and New Hampshire represents some of the largest in the nation.<sup>2</sup> The majority of this population growth is attributed to the rise of younger Latinos, or Latinos under the age of 35. The median age of Latinxs is just 30, with nearly six in ten Latinos being under the age of thirty-five.<sup>3,4</sup> By 2050, researchers estimate the Latino population will be more than 100 million, representing the second-largest demographic group in the country.<sup>5</sup> These demographic trends provide a clear picture: the Latino population is growing across the country, is younger, and is poised to comprise a larger percentage of the US population for decades to come.

Mirroring the growth in the Latino

population, nonprofit organizations and political groups have placed an increased emphasis on ensuring that more Latinos vote. Since 2000, several national, state, and local organizations have launched campaigns to register, contact, and mobilize Latinos to vote in elections. Many of these initiatives have centered on outreach efforts through in-person contact and through social media.<sup>6,7,8</sup> One component of these efforts has focused on recruiting Latinos to run for elected positions as Latino candidates can play a role in mobilizing Latino voters.<sup>9</sup> These long-term efforts culminated in 2020 as more Latinos were driven to vote. Estimates indicate that nearly 16.6 million Latinos voted in 2020, a 30 percent increase from the 2016 presidential election.<sup>10</sup> What follows is a discussion of one potential driver: Latinos in elected office at the federal, state, and local levels.

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## Latinos in Elected Office: A Brief History

In the 1800s, the first Latinos were elected to the US Congress, representing Florida, New Mexico, and California. These individuals played a key role in shaping the expanding scope of the early United States.<sup>11</sup> In 1928, the first Hispanic senator was elected from the state of New Mexico. During the 1960s and 1970s, the presence of Latinos in Congress increased. In 1976, five Hispanic congressmen

formed the Congressional Hispanic Caucus in an effort to draw attention to pressing issues facing the US Latino community.<sup>12, 13</sup> In recent years, Latino representation in Congress has reached historic heights. During the 116th Congress, 36 Latinos served in the US House and four served in the US Senate.

While the number of elected Latino officials has grown in recent years, Latinos are still underrepresented in federal, state, and local office. A 2018 analysis conducted by the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) revealed there are only 6,749 Latino elected officials at the federal, state, and local levels. This included 81 state senators; 146 state representatives; 2,206 municipal officials; and 2,496 education and school board members. Just 37 percent of all Latino elected office holders at all levels were women.<sup>14</sup> The total number of Latino elected officials equated to just 1 percent of all federal, state, and local elected officials across the country.<sup>15</sup> These data provide a sobering picture of the recent status of Latino elected officials in the United States.

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## Purpose

The purpose of this article is to examine the current state of college-educated Latinos in elected office in the United States. To this end, we seek to answer the following two questions:

1. Within the past five years, how many college-educated Latinos have run for elected office at the local, state, and federal levels?
2. Within the past five years, how many college-educated Latinos have held office at the local, state, and federal levels?

We draw on a national sample of civically engaged Latino college graduates to answer these two questions. The original sample is part of a larger study seeking to answer several questions regarding how Latino college graduates engage civically.<sup>16</sup> This particular article, however, seeks to answer one of these questions; namely, what proportion of college-educated Latinos have run or served in elected office at the local, state, and federal levels. Our sample is an ideal group to base our analysis and subsequent recommendations. Given the connection between postsecondary education and civic engagement, college-educated Latinos have the potential to serve as a new generation of civic leaders—a generation that is poised to serve in elected office at the federal, state, and local levels.<sup>17,18</sup>

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## Survey Administration and Data Analysis

To understand the current state of college-educated Latinos in elected office, we relied on a 2019 national survey of college educated Latinos.

**Table 1**

<b>Demographics</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>% Missing</b>
<b>Latinx Regional Diversity</b>			
Mexican	748	55	5
Caribbean	206	15	
Central American	159	12	
South American	181	13	
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	425	31	5
Female	840	61	
Trans Male/Trans Woman	2	.01	
Genderqueer/Gender Nonconforming	5	.01	
Different Identity	19	2	
<b>Region</b>			
Northeast	36	3	1
Mid-Atlantic	519	38	
Southeast	95	7	
Mid-West	229	17	
Southwest	232	17	
Northwest	24	2	
West	214	15	
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>			
Bachelor's Degree	600	44	3
Master's Degree	513	38	
Professional Degree	88	7	
Doctoral Degree	123	9	
<b>Undergraduate Graduation Year</b>			
1960-1969	2	.001	.001
1970-1979	18	1	
1980-1989	26	2	
1990-1999	123	9	
2000-2009	473	35	
2010-2019	712	52	

**Table 1. Sample characteristics**

The National Latinx/a/o Alumni Engagement Survey (NLAES) appraises civic engagement in six dimensions: 1) voting, 2) volunteering, 3) advocacy, 4) giving financially, 5) serving as a cultural and political resource, and 6) running for and serving in elected office. The NLAES is a first-

of-its-kind survey instrument in that it is specifically designed to examine how college graduate Latinos engage civically. To date, no comprehensive database exists that measures the civic engagement of college-educated Latinos. Therefore, the NLAES is the only data source to answer the two

questions posed in this article.

To administer the NLAES, we partnered with eight of the most prominent Latino professional organizations in the country. Those organizations were: (a) Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute Alumni Association; (b) Prospanica; (c) Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE); (d) Hispanic National Bar Association (HNBA); (e) Congressional Hispanic Staff Association (CHSA); (f) Hispanic Alliance for Career Advancement (HACE); (g) Association of Latino Professionals for America (ALPFA); and (h) the Hispanic Women’s Network of Texas.<sup>19,20,21,22, 23,24,25,26</sup>

We used SPSS statistical software (Version 26) to conduct the descriptive analyses. The data represent 1,367 alumni from 378 four-year not-for-profit institutions of higher education (see Table 1). Respondents attended a variety of institution types, including doctoral universities, master’s colleges and universities, and baccalaureate colleges.<sup>27</sup> The majority of Latinos in the sample are female (61 per-

cent); men constitute a third of the sample (31 percent), while 2 percent of the survey participants identified themselves as “Genderqueer/Gender Nonconforming,” “Trans Man/Trans Woman,” or “Different Identity.” Nearly 40 percent of the sample lives in the Mid-Atlantic region, in states such as Maryland and Virginia. Moreover, 34 percent of the sample resides across the Midwest and Southwest. Lastly, 17 percent resides in the Southwest, primarily in the state of California. Overall, our sample of Latino college graduates is more geographically diverse compared to the general population of Latinos. Twenty-seven percent of Latinos reside in California and 19 percent live in the Southwest region, primarily in the state of Texas (see Table 1).<sup>28</sup> The sample provides a wider picture of college-educated Latinos in the United States. Twelve percent of the sample has Central American origins and 13 percent has South American origins. In comparison to our sample, 10 percent of the general population of Latinos are from Central

**Table 2**

Latinx/a/o Regional Group	N	Sample %	General Population of Latinx/a/os % <sup>a</sup>
1. Mexican	748	55	62
2. Caribbean	206	15	17
3. Central American	159	12	10
4. South American	181	13	6

**Table 2. Sample diversity**

a US Census Bureau Current Population Survey, 2017.

**Table 3**

Behaviors	Number of Respondents Running for and Serving in Elected Office Total Respondents= 1,367	Percent of Sample Running for and Serving in Elected Office for and Serving in Elected Office
I have run for local elected office.	86	6%
I hold/have held local elected office.	69	5%
I have run for state elected office.	26	1%
I hold/have held state elected office.	15	1%
I have run for national elected office.	10	0%
I hold/have held national elected office.	6	0%

**Table 3. Sample running for and serving in elected office.**

American countries and 6 percent are from South American countries. In our sample, more than 55 percent of the college-educated Latinos are of Mexican origin, while 15 percent are from Caribbean countries. In comparison to the general population, 62 percent of Latinos are from Mexico (see Table 2).

### Limitations

There are two principal limitations associated with this research. First, the results of this study are bound by the characteristics of the sample. Specifically, respondents were all college graduates, predominantly female, primarily residing in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, and mainly graduated from public universities within the past 20 years. Additionally, the results of this work can only be viewed through the lens of Latino college graduates. Thus, the findings of civic engagement among

college-educated Latinos cannot be extrapolated to non-college-educated Latinos. Second, as an exploratory study, our work only examines the frequency of civic engagement. Future research should provide insight into examining the why behind Latino college graduates' civic participation. Specifically, particular attention should be paid to examine what motivates this group to engage civically.

### Results

A small percentage of our sample of Latinos college graduates have run for or served in elected office. Only 6 percent of survey respondents have run for local elected office and 5 percent have held local elected office, defined as school board or city council. Just 2 percent of respondents have run for state elected office, and merely 1 percent have held state elected office, defined as state representative or state senator. Lastly, less than 1 percent

of the respondents have run or held federal elected office, defined as a member of Congress (see Table 3).

A number of respondents highlighted three key barriers to their ability to run for and serve in elected office.<sup>29</sup> First, several respondents indicated a lack of financial support and structural support. In the words of one respondent: “I don’t have the money to launch a viable campaign. We as Latinos do not have the networks to help raise the big money needed to be competitive.” Second, respondents singled out legal status as a barrier to their ability to run for elected office; “I would like to run for office, but I can’t because of my immigration status.” Third, respondents indicated the need to balance their cultural identities with the responsibility of running for and serving in elected office. One respondent stressed personal sacrifices as a deterrent: “I think I would have to sacrifice too much of myself in order to run for office. I don’t want to have to become less Latino in order to be an elected official.” One respondent also noted, “I don’t want to have to jump back and forth between being Latino and White.” The burden of compromising one’s identity appears to provide initial insight into why college-educated Latinos might shy away from running for elected office. Lastly, several Latino college graduates who were federal employees noted the

Hatch Act (Public Law 103-94) as an impediment to their ability to engage in political campaigns or to run for office.<sup>30</sup>

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## **Recommendations**

The results of our analysis provide a roadmap for reforms at the local, state, and federal levels. The reforms we present address four key barriers identified by our survey respondents: 1) financing, 2) maintaining Latino cultural identity, 3) meeting requirements for public office, and 4) the Hatch Act. These recommendations can be implemented by policy makers while being a point of political rallying for organizations devoted to increasing Latino representation in elected office.

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### ***Public Financing***

In recent years, policymakers have taken steps to reshape political contributions to candidates.<sup>31</sup> Public financing programs provide candidates with public funds for campaign expenses. To receive the public funds, candidates must adhere to conditions such as only accepting small-dollar private contributions, limiting campaign expenditures, and participating in public debates. At the core of public financing programs are two principles: amplifying the voices of citizens through the increased importance of small-dollar contributions and reducing the influence of corporations and

**Table 4**

<b>Program Name</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Areas of Focus</b>
Emerge America Candidate Training (Women)	The Emerge training program is a unique opportunity for Democratic women who want to run for public office. It is the only in-depth, six-month, 70-hour training program that inspires candidates to run and gives them the tools to win.	Public Speaking Fundraising Field Operations Technology
Emily's List Run To Win (Women)	Run to Win is a national recruitment and training campaign focused on helping pro-choice Democratic women around the country run for office—and win.	Public Speaking Fundraising Field Operations Technology
New American Leaders (New Americans)	New American Leaders is a unique two-track advanced campaign training for New Americans who want to run for office.	Fundraising
Running Start (Women)	3 programs designed to help women in high school and college learn about running for office	Experience in Congressional offices
She Should Run (Women)	We motivate women from all walks of life to explore the possibility of public office by identifying and tackling the barriers to elected leadership.	Virtual trainings and an online community
VoteRunLead	The mission of VoteRunLead is to train barrier-breaking women to unleash their political power and run for office.	Public Speaking Fundraising Field Operations Technology
LGBTQ Victory Fund (LGBTQ)	Campaign and candidate training programs	Elections Governance Movement Building Movement Technology
Wellstone (Women)	We uncover the existing leadership that exists in our communities, with an emphasis on women of color.	

**Table 4. Candidate programs for diverse populations.**

special interests. The two most common types of public financing models are matching funds and vouchers.<sup>32</sup> Through the matching funds model,

a government jurisdiction matches a candidate's small-dollar contributions, typically at a 1:1, 5:1, or even 8:1 ratio. Through the voucher model,

a government jurisdiction distributes a small amount of funds to every eligible resident to be donated to political candidates.<sup>33</sup> A recent analysis conducted by the National Conference of State Legislatures indicates that just 14 states provide some sort of public financing for state-level political campaigns.<sup>34,35</sup>

In 2018, Washington, DC, launched its public financing program: Fair Elections. The initiative incentivizes more candidates to compete in elections. It amplifies the voices of residents through matching small-dollar donations at a 5:1 ratio. Candidates can use the public funds for financing campaign operations in the District of Columbia.<sup>36</sup> During the 2020 City Council elections, three Latino candidates participated in the Fair Elections program.<sup>37</sup> All of the candidates ran for citywide office for the first time.<sup>38</sup> While none of the Latino candidates won a seat on City Council, the Fair Elections program can serve as a blueprint for Latino candidates in Washington, DC, who are interested in running for political office.<sup>39</sup> As research indicates, public financing helps foster diversity in the electoral process. By removing barriers to fundraising, more members of traditionally underrepresented groups can run for office at all levels.<sup>40</sup>

Federal policymakers have also taken steps to reshape political fundraising in national elections. The For

the People Act of 2021 (H.R. 1 in the House of Representatives and S.1 in the US Senate) transforms federal campaign finance laws.<sup>41,42</sup> A signature provision of the legislation is the implementation of a small-dollar donor matching program that would amplify small contributions to participating federal candidates. Specifically, the program would match small donations of up to \$200 to participating congressional candidates at a 6:1 ratio. Participating candidates would be subject to lower contribution limits and strict anti-fraud provisions.<sup>43</sup> Critics of H.R. 1 contend that the legislation is costly and encroaches on states' rights to manage their electoral processes.<sup>44,45</sup> However, recent estimates from Congressional Budget Office indicate that the legislation would amount to less than 1 percent of the overall federal budget over the next 10 years.<sup>46</sup> The successful passage of the For the People Act in the US House of Representatives and in the US Senate has the potential to reshape the political landscape for federal elections in 2022, 2024, and beyond.

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### ***Training Programs***

Since 2000, the number of programs focused on training diverse leaders to run for political office have grown (See Table 4).<sup>47</sup> Some of the largest and most well-known programs include Emerge America Candidate Training, Emily's List Run to Win Trainings, the



LGBTQ Victory Fund's Campaign, and Candidate Training Programs. The majority of these programs focus on areas critical to a successful political campaign: public speaking, fundraising, field operations, and technology (See Table 4). Many of these leadership development programs describe the power of their alumni network in shaping candidates' successful election and service while in office.<sup>48</sup> One study indicates that participation in leadership development and candidate training programs yield favorable results for diverse populations.<sup>49</sup> For example, being accepted into a training program, and subsequently completing it, increases the likelihood of women of color to run for office. While these results are encouraging, there is a need to develop programs that specifically focus on recruiting, training, and supporting Latino candidates for elected office.

National, state, and local nonprofit organizations can launch programs focused on recruiting, training, and supporting the success of Latino candidates for political office. All programs should include two pillars that are central to the success of Latino candidates. The first pillar is a sharp focus on the skills necessary to run a successful campaign and serve in political office. These skills include developing a campaign plan, fundraising, public speaking, and coalition building. A particular focus should be

on raising funds as many potential Latino candidates cite fundraising as a barrier to running for office.<sup>50,51</sup> The second pillar is centering the Latino experience in all facets of training. The results of our survey indicate that many respondents shy away from running for office due to the perceived difficulties of balancing their Latino identity with garnering support from the non-Latino public. This balancing act can be exhausting and lead Latino candidates to choose to give up their authentic selves in order to operate in a distinct political world. This notion of navigating two worlds is not germane to the experience of potential candidates but can be heightened as one seeks elected office in the public eye.<sup>52</sup> In 2021, local elected officials in California and Maryland have faced this challenge head on as they have endured criticism about their native accent.<sup>53,54</sup> Candidate training programs should help candidates embrace their Latino background and leverage it as an asset once in elected office.

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### ***State Policy Reforms to Requirements***

States should reform their requirements to allow undocumented immigrants to seek political office. The results of our survey reveal that numerous respondents are interested in running for political office but find their immigration status to be the main

barrier. In recent years, state and local entities have enacted reforms seeking to allow undocumented individuals to run for and hold public office at various levels. For example, in 2018, state legislators in California introduced legislation allowing undocumented immigrants and other non-citizens to hold positions in the Democratic Party at the county and committee levels.<sup>55</sup> In 2019, Governor Gavin Newsom signed legislation that permits undocumented immigrants and other non-citizens to serve on state boards and commissions in California.<sup>56</sup> Equal representation stands as a core democratic value of California, and these legislative initiatives enable more California residents to have the opportunity to be equally represented within the state.<sup>57</sup> States across the country should look to California as a model for reforming candidate requirements for elected office. “Reforms at the local and state level are vital to ensuring the ability of undocumented and non-citizens to serve in political office. As many appointed local and state positions can serve as stepping stones for candidates to continue to higher elected political positions.”<sup>58</sup>

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### ***The Hatch Act***

Existing federal law can also be a deterrent for college-educated Latinos to run for office. The Hatch Act is a law that prohibits federal employees

from engaging in political activities, including contributions to individuals and organizations.<sup>59</sup> However, many aspects of the Hatch Act remain unclear, including the parameters of public support, volunteering, and fundraising for political candidates.<sup>60,61</sup> For college-educated Latinos employed by the federal government, the Hatch Act could serve as a barrier to seeking elected office. As a result, political candidates might have to make the difficult choice of leaving their full-time employment to run for political office. More clarity and guidance is needed on the Hatch Act in order to facilitate college-educated Latinos who may work for the federal government to run for elected office.

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### **Conclusion**

This article assesses the current landscape of college-educated Latinos in elected office. Despite recent campaigns to incentivize Latino participation in elections, there is a dearth of college-educated Latinos serving in political office at the federal, state, and local levels. Less than 5 percent of our sample of civically engaged Latino college graduates has even considered running for political office. These data provide a bleak outlook for the future of the kind of political leadership Latino college graduates may exert in the United States. As the Latino population continues to increase, we need a new generation

of college-educated Latinos to run and serve in elected office. Policymakers at all levels, as well as nonprofit organizations, have a role to play in removing the barriers that currently exist for college-educated Latinos to seek elected office. By doing so, more Latinos can shape critical policies across all facets of American society—policies that will in turn shape the long-term success of all Latinos in the United States.

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## Endnotes

- 1 The terms Latinx, Latino, Latina, and Hispanic are used interchangeably in this article.
- 2 Luis Noe-Bustamante, Mark Hugo Lopez, and Jens Manuel Krogstad, “U.S. Latino population surpassed 60 million in 2019, but growth has slowed,” Pew Research Center FACTTANK, 7 July 2020, accessed 5 February 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/07/07/u-s-hispanic-population-surpassed-60-million-in-2019-but-growth-has-slowed/>.
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  - 19 The CHCI Alumni Association represents nearly 4,000 Latinx/a/o professionals across the country. Since 1998, the organization has focused on providing high-quality civic engagement and leadership experiences to Latinos in some of the most populous Latinx cities in the country.
  - 20 Prospanica represents more than 4,000 Latinx professionals. Since 1988, this organization has empowered Hispanic business professionals to achieve their full educational, economic, and social potential.
  - 21 SHPE represents over 10,000 Latinx college graduates who work as engineers or participate in other science, technology, education, and math (STEM) careers.
  - 22 The Hispanic National Bar Association is comprised of more than 5,000 Latina/o lawyers from across the country. Since 1977, the organization has focused on advancing and developing Latinos in the legal profession and providing professional development opportunities for Hispanic lawyers.
  - 23 The Congressional Hispanic Staff Association is comprised of the more than 400 Hispanics who work in the US Senate and the US House of Representatives.
  - 24 The Hispanic Alliance for Career Advancement is comprised of over 64,000 Latino professionals from across the country. Since 1982, the organization has worked to support Latinos in every phase of their careers by ensuring their employment and career advancement.
  - 25 The Association of Latino Professionals for America is comprised of more than 14,000 Latino college graduates throughout the country in cities such as Boston, Philadelphia, San Diego, and San Francisco.
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## Opinion

# Making the Invisible Visible: Health, Data, and Race-Conscious Latinidad



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Tomás Díaz, MD, and Mark Díaz,  
PhD

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performance. His work explores approaches to involving members of historically marginalized groups in the development and evaluation of algorithmic systems.

“What is your race and ethnicity?”

“I’m Black Latino.”

“Well, I don’t have that on my form.

Are you Black or Hispanic?”

“I’m both.”

“You can only pick one.”

Mark’s experience at a Palo Alto medical office is all too familiar for many of us who identify as Black Latinx and exemplifies the illegibility of Black Latinidad to prevailing modes of data collection in the United States.

In the United States, the project of anti-Blackness has manifested



as exclusion, segregation, and anti-miscegenation. In Latin America, anti-Blackness has manifested as *mestizaje*—that is, race mixing as a means of Black and Indigenous erasure. This history contributes to the mythology in many Latin American countries of a post-racial society, a colorblind community where *todos somos mestizos*. Of course, Latinx do see color as evidenced by commonly used skin tone classifications such as *prieto* or *mulato* and phrases such as *mejorar la raza*. Phenotypes associated with beauty, wealth, and power among Latinx in both Latin America and the United States indicate that the racial hierarchies introduced with European colonization and the *casta* system persist. The problem with the idea of blended racial colorblindness is that it silences racial discourse and essentializes the color of Latinidad into a vague beige, which then maintains and upholds the racial status quo. Racial privilege and oppression go unnoticed but are nonetheless reproduced.<sup>1</sup>

In the United States, Black Latinx experience higher rates of unemployment, lower median household incomes, and higher rates of poverty than white Latinx.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Black Latinx reside in neighborhoods with higher proportions of residents living in poverty than white Latinx, which is associated with decreased access to nutrient-rich foods and clean air. “The

Latino paradox” is an epidemiological phenomenon that has identified that Latinx in aggregate have lower mortality rates than non-Latinx whites regardless of socioeconomic status or access to care. But, this finding is misleading.<sup>3</sup> Black Latinx report higher rates of hypertension and are more likely to self-rate their health as fair or poor than white Latinx. Darker-skinned Latinx are more likely to report discrimination, which has consistently been associated with greater stress, anxiety/depression, and health behaviors linked to chronic diseases, such as smoking and physical inactivity.<sup>4,5</sup> Among Latinx, health outcomes are heterogeneous, with racism contributing to worse health outcomes among Black Latinx.

Attempts to study Black Latinx communities are complicated by the racial paradigms and data collection methods used to document them. Black Latinx representation in health datasets is mediated by both inconsistent documentation and racial categories, which have been unstable historically.<sup>6</sup> The instability of racial categories renders incompatible datasets that record race using differing paradigms. For example, “Hispanic” and “Latino” were absent from the US Census until 1980 and 2000, respectively, while the ability to select more than one race emerged only in 2000.<sup>7,8</sup> Adults who today identify as “Black” and “Latino” could not have



identified as such before 2000, making comparisons over time difficult or impossible.

Even when a racial paradigm remains consistent, the race of an individual across records may not. An individual's race across official records can vary depending on whether it was recorded based on self-report, phenotypic observation by a government worker (such as a police officer), or copied from an existing record.<sup>9</sup> This inconsistency distorts Black Latinidad even when it is, in theory, visible. Inconsistencies are a concern for any data analysis; however, inconsistencies that describe historically marginalized groups stand to undermine public health efforts targeting structurally oppressed populations and compound historical inequities.

In the 2010 US Census, 37 percent of the Latinx population selected "some other race," which suggests that, in standard US Census race categories, many Latinx do not see their racial identity represented.<sup>10</sup> Among US self-identified "Afro-Latinx," only 18 percent report their race as Black while 39 percent report their race as White. This may seem curious, but it is indicative of the complexity of racial identity among Afro-Latinx and makes it unlikely that simply adding "Afro-Latino or afrodescendiente" to the Black race category will be sufficient to appropriately capture useful data. Issues of colonialism,

colorism, and anti-Blackness, as well as self-determination and resistance to US-imposed categorization, may all be at play. The legacies of European colonization and US imperialism impact conceptualizations of identity among Latinx in ways incompletely understood. Nevertheless, Latinx who identify as White report higher levels of education, higher income, and greater civic enfranchisement than those who select "some other race." In this regard, for Latinx, whiteness may represent perceived belonging, inclusion, and safety, a direct influence of the *casta* system and its imposed racial hierarchy.<sup>11</sup>

Robust policy requires robust understanding of Latinidad. A race-conscious Latinidad begins with disaggregated data collection to combat the erasure of Black Latinidad. However, the results of disaggregation, and thus their ability to challenge essentialized Latinidad, hinge on the racial measurements chosen in data collection and reporting.<sup>12</sup> Thoughtful data collection must build not only from scholars of Latinidad but also from Black Latinx themselves, who can directly provide their racialized identities and experiences. Dissecting how Black Latinx identify across social contexts can shed light on the limitations of existing paradigms. These failures, in turn, inform the levels of disaggregation needed to give Black Latinx visibility and appropriately

direct policy interventions.

Beyond the validation of Black racial identity and pride, acknowledging racial difference among Latinx has important policy implications. The boxes checked during Mark's initial exchange in Palo Alto are consequential. If we are to appropriately describe racial inequities among Latinx and identify effective policy interventions, we will need a race-conscious Latinidad.

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## Commentary

# The Great American Pandemic Recovery: Tackling Systems of Inequality that Impede Full Latino Inclusion in the COVID-19 Response



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immigration policy issues under the Obama administration, and an immigration law practitioner representing predominantly low-income immigrants. Carlos earned his law degree from the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law and his bachelor's degree from University of Virginia.



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The United States is at a crossroads. The direction our leaders take this year by enacting—or failing to enact—a combination of policy interventions to stem the health and economic pain wrought by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) will have a long-term impact on the lives of millions of Americans. The policy and, frankly, political choices that Congress makes will determine whether we find ourselves on a path that further strains our social fabric or one that leads to a stronger nation. For Latinos, the stakes are particularly high, as deep racial disparities and historic income and wealth inequalities predating the pandemic have been exposed and magnified by the current health and economic crises.<sup>1</sup> Without a comprehensive and visionary policy response that addresses these systemic inequities, we stand to lose further ground

on the road to recovery.

When COVID-19 struck the United States in early 2020, the American unemployment rate was the lowest it had been since the World War II era, and most workers had access to paid sick leave, employer-sponsored health insurance, and paid vacation.<sup>2</sup> As COVID-19 closed down the economy, the past contributions most workers had paid into unemployment insurance (UI) helped them defray lost wages, and the social safety net—albeit imperfect—helped their families weather the pandemic. Yet even before COVID-19, there were indications that the economic foundation supporting large segments of Black and Latino communities was fractured.

Nearly a century of culminating policy choices has reinforced systemic racial and ethnic inequality in America's social safety net. The Depression-era Social Security system and the Fair Labor Standards Act offered retirement security and basic worker protections—like the minimum wage—to predominantly white office, industrial, and craft workers but excluded farm laborers, domestic workers, and other jobs largely held by Blacks and Latinos.<sup>3</sup> When the Interstate Highway System, government-subsidized mortgages, and mortgage interest deduction fueled a massive increase in suburban homeownership after World War II,

formal and informal housing discrimination relegated most Latino and Black families to poor-quality housing in segregated neighborhoods with few economic opportunities and under-resourced schools.<sup>4</sup> The Great Society era of the 1960s led to the creation of critical support programs, including housing assistance, job training, Medicaid, and the Food Stamp program (SNAP's predecessor), but so-called "alien exclusions" soon followed, which bar most immigrants and their lawfully present spouses and children—predominantly Hispanic—from vital economic, health, and nutritional supports.<sup>5</sup>

The pandemic has exposed the unequal social and economic foundations on which communities of color must build their lives, in part due to decades of explicitly discriminatory policy decisions. Hispanics and other communities of color are more susceptible to contracting COVID-19 as they comprise the largest share of essential workers but are most likely to experience economic hardship due to the virus and have a far-less comprehensive safety net to fall back on when they do.<sup>6</sup> For our nation to survive and emerge stronger from this crisis, a successful policy response must alleviate the inequities which underpin the systems, institutions, and practices that we rely on during natural disasters and times of economic hardship.

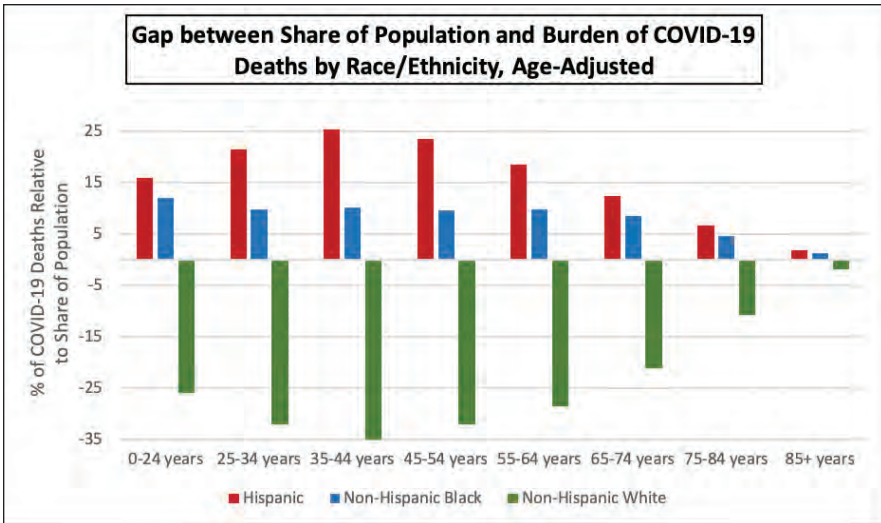
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## COVID-19 and the Latino Community

COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic on March 11, 2020, and a national emergency by the United States on March 13, 2020.<sup>7</sup> One year later, more than 29 million confirmed cases and 528,000 deaths were attributed to the disease in the United States.<sup>8</sup> The nation's largest Latino civil rights organization, UnidosUS, was early in bringing attention to the disparate impact on Latino communities through original analysis, engagement with lawmakers, and more than 20 virtual community events that placed the disparate effects of the pandemic within the context of broader structural inequities.<sup>9</sup>

To be clear, the hundreds of thousands of COVID-related deaths are tragic, regardless of race or ethnicity. Nonetheless, throughout the pandemic, data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has consistently shown that Latinos are contracting and dying from COVID-19 at higher rates than the general population. As of March 4, Latinos make up 18.5 percent of the US population but compose 21 percent of COVID-19 cases, while non-Hispanic Whites represent 55 percent of the US population and comprise 56 percent of deaths.<sup>10</sup>

Close examination of the public health impact of the pandemic across age groups reveals significant



**Figure 1: UnidosUS interpretation of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

Health Disparities: Race and Hispanic Origin, [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid19/health\\_disparities.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid19/health_disparities.htm)

disparities between Hispanic and non-Hispanic loss of life. COVID-19 was initially thought to primarily infect and ultimately lead to mortality among the elderly. However, the pandemic has had an outsized impact on Latinos under the age of 49, who continue to succumb to COVID-19 at the highest rates relative to their share of the population and, in some age groups, at the highest rates of all US cases and deaths.<sup>11</sup>

The impact on Latino children—95 percent of whom are American citizens—cannot be overstated.<sup>12</sup> Cases among youth began to accelerate in the summer of 2020 as many local governments began to relax quarantine guidelines, including in Florida, Texas, and California,

which have large Latino populations. In Florida and California, the number of children testing positive for COVID-19 grew more than 130 percent and 150 percent, respectively, from July to August. Texas saw nearly 100,000 new child cases in just two weeks at the end of July.<sup>13</sup>

Experts point to underlying structural factors in the disparate case and death rates among Hispanic children. While no consistent evidence links school openings to surges in COVID-19 in general, children who live in poverty—41 percent of whom are Latino—disproportionately attend schools with substandard facilities that undermine virus mitigation strategies and place students and staff at higher risk.<sup>14</sup>

These children are also more likely to live with an essential worker family member or in multigenerational housing, which also increases risk of exposure.<sup>15</sup>

Even as youth mortality rates remain low compared to older patients, the potential long-term impacts of COVID-19 on an entire generation of Americans should spark significant concern among policymakers; research suggests the disease can lead to major organ damage, psychiatric disorders, and multisystem inflammatory syndrome.<sup>16</sup> With such a disproportionate number of young Latinos falling ill, it is not unreasonable to assume that Latinos will also share an outsized burden of the disease's long-term health effects.

### Imperfect Patchwork: The Social Safety Net and Latinos

Disparities in public health are only one factor in the various crises the Latino community now faces. An analysis from UnidosUS has shown that the gap between Latinos and the national average on several key economic and well-being indicators has widened since the start of the pandemic. Latinos have experienced the highest rates of unemployment and loss of household income, despite having the highest labor force participation rates of any racial and ethnic group.<sup>17</sup> Even so, Latinos remain over-represented in the essential workforce.<sup>18</sup> They are also more likely than other groups to be employed in jobs that cannot be performed

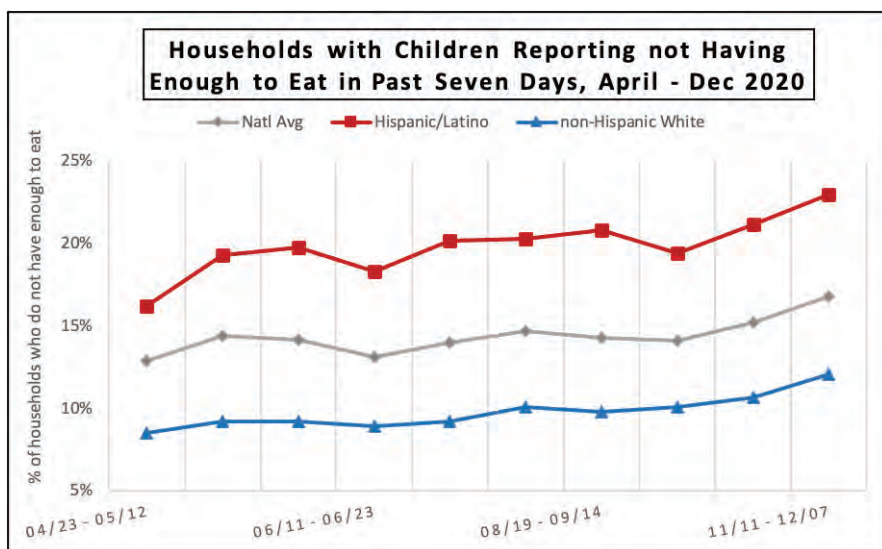


Figure 2: UnidosUS, "By the Numbers: Latinos in the Time of Coronavirus,"

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remotely, placing them and their families at greater risk of exposure.<sup>19</sup>

Compounding the financial consequences of losing work, Latinos receive traditional safety net benefits at among the lowest rates of all racial and ethnic groups. For example, Latinos make up the smallest share of unemployed workers who receive UI benefits.<sup>20</sup> In a recent UnidosUS poll, roughly half of Latino respondents indicated they did not apply for UI benefits, primarily because they felt they would not qualify or that the process was inaccessible.<sup>21</sup> Among all workers who do apply, Latinos and non-Hispanic Blacks are approved at the lowest rates.<sup>22</sup>

In other instances, many Latinos are barred from receiving economic relief altogether. Recent policy decisions—in response to COVID-19 and changes to the tax code—have expressly excluded many families living in mixed-immigration status households from accessing economic impact payments (stimulus checks) or antipoverty programs such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit (CTC).<sup>23</sup> An estimated 5.5 million US citizens and green card holders did not receive stimulus checks under the CARES Act because they live in households where one member files taxes without a Social Security Number.<sup>24</sup> Although income-eligible US citizens and green card holders were eventually included

in the two most-recent pandemic relief packages, including the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, these changes only came after intense advocacy by organizations like UnidosUS and more than a year of millions of families struggling without support. Meanwhile, the legacy of the so-called “alien exclusions” persists, barring lawfully admitted immigrants from federally funded benefits for their first five years in the United States.<sup>25</sup>

Intensified by the toxic anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric of the Trump administration, immigration policy remains deeply personal to millions of Latino families, despite 8 in 10 Latinos being US citizens.<sup>26</sup> Research on Trump-era immigration policies shows that many eligible children and family members living in mixed-immigrant status households are dissuaded from seeking supports to which they are legally entitled. An estimated 6 million children who are US citizens live with a loved one who is undocumented or has temporary immigration status, and many feared accessing vital economic, health, and nutritional supports before the pandemic.<sup>27</sup> The patchwork of community health centers, food banks, churches, and emergency rooms have been further stretched, as they remain critical lifelines for many immigrants seeking urgent care and assistance (though growing reports of “excess deaths” points to increasing incidence



of people dying at home).<sup>28</sup> Thus, the impact of “alien exclusions” may prove far-reaching in their harmful long-term effects on Latino children.

Disparities appear to be widening further among Latinos and people who are undocumented. The already high rate of uninsured Latinos has grown even larger as displaced workers lose employer-sponsored health coverage and cannot afford coverage through the marketplace. Since the start of the pandemic, more than 20 percent of Latinos have reported lacking health insurance, per US Census data.<sup>29</sup> Many families also continue to experience food insecurity because of the pandemic’s economic fallout. As of December 2020, nearly one in four Latino households with children did not have enough to eat.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, many Latinos are also experiencing housing insecurity, which threatens to exacerbate the affordable housing crisis.<sup>31</sup>

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### **Building Back Better? The Moral and Economic Imperative of an Inclusive Recovery**

Our country faces a reckoning with the systemic inequities that have contributed to the disproportionate health and economic impacts of the pandemic on the most vulnerable people in our society. Greater inclusivity in the pandemic policy response via the American Rescue Act is a

“down payment” toward improving the social safety net and the ability of Latinos and other communities of color to access it during periods of great upheaval, but more is needed. Failing to effectively and rigorously respond to the inequities exacerbated by the pandemic will further widen disparities and make the road toward a more just and equitable society far more difficult, expensive, and protracted.

An inclusive health care system that promotes equity is essential. Universal access to testing, treatment, and vaccines is vital for containing and defeating COVID-19. Consequently, restrictions in Medicaid must be lifted, coverage must be expanded to the uninsured and underinsured, and discriminatory eligibility restrictions on SNAP must be abolished.

Our recovery depends on measures being taken to ensure that all workers, regardless of immigration status, are included in policies that help families financially survive the pandemic and beyond. This requires equal access to stimulus checks and the EITC and CTC; paid sick and family leave; premium “hazard pay” to honor and incentivize essential workers; and immigration policies that protect essential workers and stabilize the workforce.

At nearly 60 million strong, America’s Latino community has made significant social, economic, and

political contributions to our nation. The battle against COVID-19 is no different. Latinos are on the frontlines as essential workers and will play a critical role in rebuilding our nation after the pandemic. Including their voices and perspectives in policy decisions at the local, state, and federal level is critical in ensuring an inclusive and equitable recovery.

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## Endnotes

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## Commentary

# Mitigating the Impacts of Childhood Exposure to Domestic Violence on Latino Children in California



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By Marina Sangit, MPP, survivor and Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute Child Welfare Graduate Fellow

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Marina Sangit was born in Los Angeles, California, and is a proud mixed-race, Mexicana-Gujarati woman. As a survivor, public servant, and advocate, she uses her lived experiences and professional experiences to advance change that can help improve the lives of children and families impacted by violence through public policy.

Marina attained her double bachelors in gender and sexuality studies and public policy at University of California Riverside. There she was given access to education that gave her the language to describe the violence she witnessed in her life and ways to mitigate it. Recognizing the need for campus-wide education,

she went on to institutionalize the Campus Advocacy, Resources, and Education (CARE) department — a department responsible for advocating for survivors of sexual and domestic violence — and establish sexual violence prevention education standards. While educating her campus community, she found that these interventions were coming too late for many students and shifted her focus to early childhood violence prevention and intervention strategies.

Researching violence prevention strategies for children led her to child welfare policy and to her pursuit of a master of public policy degree from Pepperdine

University. As a graduate student, she worked for Pepperdine’s Health, Wellness, and Resilience department doing mental, physical, and community health education and programming. Additionally, she interned at Los Angeles Board Supervisor Sheila Kuehl’s office and California State Senator Robert Hertzberg’s office, where she conducted research looking at public health outcomes and social policy projects. Now she’s taken her advocacy one step further in serving as the Child Welfare Graduate Fellow for the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI). After her fellowship ends, she hopes to continue advocating for her communities in the child welfare policy space.

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## **Introduction**

Fifteen and a half million children in the United States live in households where they are exposed to domestic violence.<sup>1</sup> The saliency of this issue continues to be amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic and the “stay-at-home” orders, which have increased domestic violence at alarming rates.<sup>2</sup> Research shows that children exposed to domestic

violence generally suffer worse physical, mental, and behavioral outcomes.<sup>3</sup> For Latino youth, the impacts of domestic violence are worsened by disparities in health and poverty, structural racism, and familism. Despite representing over 4 million Californians and 48 percent of the total child population, Latino children in California are not centered in domestic violence prevention policy.<sup>4</sup> Standard methods of prevention are not effective in mitigating the impacts of childhood exposure to domestic violence and must shift to more reliable methods. Growing bodies of research have found that prevention education is a reliable method that mitigates the harmful impacts of exposure to domestic violence, and some states have shown that passing comprehensive prevention education is possible. To best protect one of its most vulnerable populations, Latino children, California must pass a culturally competent and comprehensive prevention education policy.

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## **Background**

### ***Defining Domestic Violence***

Using the California Department of Public Health’s definition, domestic violence is defined as “a spectrum and often a pattern of behaviors that

includes physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse and/or economic control used by adults or adolescents against their current or former intimate partners in an attempt to exercise power and authority, which has a destructive, harmful effect on individuals, the family and the community.”<sup>5</sup> This definition is important because it is inclusive of a range of intimate relationships and family structures. Further, a clinical study done by Kaiser Permanente and the Centers for Disease Control on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) found a strong graded relationship between the breadth of exposure to abuse or household dysfunction during childhood and multiple risk factors for several of the leading causes of death in adults.<sup>6</sup> Domestic violence is considered an ACE, a traumatic event occurring before the age of 18.<sup>7</sup> While the Kaiser Permanente study did not examine the intersection of ACEs and Latino identity, more recent studies show that Latinos report significantly higher rates of exposure to ACEs.<sup>8</sup>

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### ***Impacts of Childhood Exposure to Domestic Violence***

Children who are exposed to domestic violence suffer worse physiological, psychological, and emotional outcomes.<sup>9</sup> Physiologically, some may experience stomach aches or headaches in the short term; in the long

term, they may be at higher risk for diabetes, heart disease, and obesity.<sup>10</sup> Other physiological symptoms include trouble falling asleep, bed wetting, showing signs of terror, and engaging in risky behaviors such as imbibing in drugs or alcohol.<sup>11</sup> Psychologically, children who are exposed to domestic violence may develop fear, anxiety, and depression.<sup>12</sup> Children may also develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).<sup>13</sup> In fact, children who were exposed to violence for more than 75 percent of their lives exhibit significantly more PTSD problems than children who are not exposed.<sup>14</sup> Emotionally, children may express a number of behaviors or responses due to exposure including intense terror, fear of death, fear of loss of a parent, rage, feelings of guilt, and a sense of responsibility for the violence.<sup>15</sup> This is supported by evidence in maternal reports that state 47 percent of children responded to violent incidents with intense levels of emotional distress.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, children exposed to domestic violence are a high-risk population for either becoming abusers or entering abusive relationships themselves.<sup>17</sup> Children may experience one or all of these symptoms and outcomes due to exposure to domestic violence.

In a study focused on the relationship between parental intimate partner victimization and youth adolescent abuse, researchers found that



different kinds of exposure to violence translated into similar patterns in adolescent and adult relationships.<sup>18</sup> It can be concluded that exposure to domestic violence is likely to predispose children to enter into violent relationships as adolescents and adults. While the impacts of domestic violence are varied based on the level of exposure children have, Latino youth face increased vulnerability due to other risk factors such as poverty or citizenship status.<sup>19</sup> Latino youth also show higher rates of delinquency and alcohol use as a result of exposure to domestic violence.<sup>20</sup>

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### **California Domestic Violence Prevention Policies Cannot Be Effective Until They Address the Unique Challenges Latino Children Face**

Despite Latinos making up 48 percent of the total child population in California, statewide domestic violence prevention policies do not address the compounding disparities (e.g., economic and health disparities) Latino children face while being exposed to domestic violence.<sup>21</sup> Economic and health disparities, structural racism, and familism intensify the impacts of exposure to domestic violence on Latino children.

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### ***Economic Disparities***

In comparison to other racial groups, Latinos are disproportionately im-

poverished, comprising 51.4 percent of poor Californians but only 39.6 percent of the state population.<sup>22</sup> The widespread level of poverty across the Latino community is significant because poverty restricts the resources used to develop healthy habits and behaviors.<sup>23</sup> Poverty is also associated with a variety of adverse health outcomes.<sup>24</sup> These outcomes include shorter life expectancy, higher rates of infant mortality, higher death rates for the 14 leading causes of death, and these can alter children's cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical development.<sup>25,26</sup> That means Latino children who are impoverished are also more likely to be food insecure, more likely to develop toxic stress, and are at the greatest risk for poor life outcomes.<sup>27</sup>

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### ***Health Disparities***

One of the ways to mitigate impacts of exposure to domestic violence is through preventative medicine or through medical interventions (e.g., therapy, medicine). However, for many Latino children this is not a viable option due to structural barriers to access. Structural barriers are obstacles that collectively and disproportionately affect a group by perpetuating or maintaining disparities in outcomes.<sup>28</sup> Structural barriers to accessing health care, in this case, are policies and practices that systematically disadvantage the Latino community.<sup>29</sup>

A key structural barrier to accessing health care is health insurance, and in the United States, Latinos have the highest uninsured rates of any racial or ethnic group.<sup>30</sup> The high uninsured rates are affected by a lack of employer coverage (e.g., Latinos are overrepresented in the essential and gig labor economies) and citizenship restrictions.<sup>31</sup> Without insurance, Latino families often weigh medical needs equally to other basic needs, like transportation and food, due to the high cost of medical care without insurance.<sup>32</sup> In fact, uninsured patients are charged two to four times more than what health insurers or public programs pay for hospital services, and in many cases they are asked to pay up front before they receive care.<sup>33</sup> Although federal health insurance policies have widened access for low-income Latino families, Latinos who are undocumented do not have access to federal health insurance coverage (Medicare, Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance Program, or the Affordable Care Act).<sup>34</sup>

Even if Latino children are able to access healthcare, they must still contend with language and cultural barriers that exist within the medical system.<sup>35</sup> Despite laws dictating that hospitals and other medical facilities provide meaningful access to their patients, many continue to fall short and rely on family members or friends to interpret for them.<sup>36</sup> That means

when Spanish-speaking members of the Latino community attempt to access medical treatment, they are likely not receiving accurate and quality care due to barriers in communication.<sup>37</sup>

Further, Latino children face physiological health disparities and are at greater risk of heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes.<sup>38</sup> This may be due to a lack of access to preventative care (e.g., check-ups, screenings for preventable diseases).<sup>39</sup> Though medical care can be used to address the impacts of domestic violence, it is clear that it is not necessarily a reliable or accessible option for many Latino youth.

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### ***Structural Racism & Familism***

Structural racism negatively impacts typical pathways to mitigate exposure to domestic violence, which include utilizing social services (e.g., home visitation, assigned social workers), accessing prevention policies, and using other resources (e.g., nonprofits or mutual aid networks that provide services for families impacted by domestic violence). However, these pathways tend to disadvantage the Latino community. In many instances, Latinos must overcome a language barrier in order to use these resources.<sup>40</sup> Other factors that dissuade and inhibit the Latino community from accessing resources are a lack of familiarity with the legal system, a fear of deportation, and a limited knowledge

about the resources that are available.<sup>41</sup> Domestic violence prevention policies also tend to be punitive and result in out-of-family support rather than in-family support.<sup>42</sup>

Latino children may also be instructed not to seek help by their families due to familism.<sup>43</sup> Familism is a multifaceted traditional Latino cultural value that dictates norms, expectations, and beliefs about the family.<sup>44</sup> Key features of familism that can impact Latino youths' ability to seek help are:

1. the subjugation of one's individual needs to those of the family;
2. greater expectations surrounding family responsibility compared with non-Latino white individuals; and
3. obedience and respect for those in positions of authority within the family.<sup>45</sup>

Familism in Latino households is meant to serve as a protective mechanism for Latino youth; however, when it comes to domestic violence, familism may also cause youth not to seek help even if they are under immense stress. Speaking out could be perceived as uprooting the family, disobedience, and putting the needs of the child before the safety and cohesion of the family. In a household experiencing domestic violence, seeking help or speaking out can also increase risk of harm for Latino

children.<sup>46</sup> A potential consequence of Latino youth who seek to intervene by seeking help or speaking up is victimization, which means Latino youth may also become targets of abuse (e.g., abuse can range from verbal, physical, psychological, or emotional).<sup>47</sup>

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### ***The Intersections of ACEs and Risk Factors***

Policies that view exposure to domestic violence independently from other risk factors, such as economic disparities, health disparities, structural racism, and familism, cannot appropriately mitigate the impacts of Latino children exposed to domestic violence. Such policies lack the cultural competencies needed to understand the full scope of the problem and how to solve it.

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### **Limitations of Current Domestic Violence Prevention Policies in California**

The greatest limitations of domestic violence prevention policies in California are that they are not equipped to meet the needs of Latino children. California domestic violence prevention policies do not consider the structural and cultural factors that prevent Latino children who are exposed to domestic violence from seeking help. As a result, Latino youth are effectively left out of prevention considerations.

Due to Latino youth not being centered in prevention efforts, resources and policies are geared towards support services for adults with little help available to Latino children. These policies place the onus of seeking help on an adult rather than building access for youth who are being harmed by exposure to domestic violence. This leaves Latino youth in an incredibly difficult situation if adults in their household are not seeking help and can result in Latino youth not receiving the help they need.

Latino youth who do end up in the welfare system are also at risk of further traumatization due to caseworkers, mandated and other reporters, being discriminatory or making decisions based on racial biases.<sup>48</sup>

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### **Culturally Competent, Youth-Centered Prevention Policies Are Needed to Effectively Mitigate the Impacts of Domestic Violence on Latino Children**

Current interventions in California, at the state and agency level, are not equipped to address the needs of Latino youth because there is no existing legislative infrastructure in place for prevention. A prevention policy that does not exist cannot mitigate the impacts of exposure to domestic violence, let alone address the specific needs of Latino youth. Prevention policies and strategies

must take an innovative approach to helping Latino youth. A culturally competent prevention policy should be driven by the following objectives:

1. Focus prevention on building resilience and capacity in Latino youth to deal with exposure to domestic violence at home.
  - i. Resilience should be defined as “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress.”<sup>49</sup>
  - ii. Prevention policies should focus on building resilience and capacity by promoting protective factors.
  - iii. Protective factors are defined as “conditions or attributes of individuals that, when present, promote wellbeing and reduce the risk for negative outcomes in children exposed to domestic violence.”<sup>50</sup>
  - iv. Protective factors should include, but are not limited to, teaching children self-regulation skills (e.g., emotional awareness, anger management, stress management, and cognitive coping skills) and problem-solving skills (e.g., adaptive functioning and the ability to solve problems).<sup>51</sup>
2. Develop a plan that is culturally competent and takes on

a comprehensive approach to addressing the unique disparities Latino youth face.

i. Cultural competence should be defined as “the integration of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific standards, policies, practices, and attitudes used to increase the quality of services; thereby producing better outcomes.”<sup>52</sup>

ii. The plan should consult Latino community members (e.g., parents, children, community leaders), entities doing prevention work (e.g., mutual aid networks, nonprofits), and available state data (e.g., kidsdata.org) to discern what their needs are.

iii. Prevention policies should be comprehensive, meaning the policy addresses structural barriers (e.g., language, citizenship) and disparities that the Latino community faces.

3. The prevention policy should measure the effectiveness of the program.

i. The policy should use assessments that measure the effectiveness, defined as “Latino youth meeting learning outcomes and objectives that help them better navigate violence at home.”

ii. The assessment or survey used to measure effectiveness should receive technical assistance from entities like, but not limited to, the American Pediatric Association in order to design an assessment that most accurately evaluates how effective the policy is.

These objectives can be reasonably achieved through a comprehensive prevention education policy. A comprehensive prevention education policy in California would require that students receive age-appropriate domestic violence education from K-12 schools and that Latino students receive tailored domestic violence education that considers the specific challenges they face. The policy would couch the domestic violence education requirement within the California Department of Education’s Health Education Framework for students and expand the sexual health requirement to include topics such as consent, healthy and unhealthy relationships, and how to cope with violence at home. Teachers who teach health would be required to deliver this information along with other educational objectives outlined in the Health Education Framework. Tailored domestic violence education should include topics that are tailored towards addressing potential challenges Latino youth may have in identifying domestic violence, how to

build resilience while being exposed to domestic violence, and how to access confidential, non-punitive resources. It is also imperative that domestic violence education is offered in Spanish because of the 1.148 million English learners in California public schools, 81.44 percent of whom speak Spanish.<sup>53</sup>

*A Journal of Youth and Adolescence* report on adult victimization and the impact on children concluded that their findings support prevention programming for children to recognize and address challenging familial patterns.<sup>54</sup> Federal agencies like the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the US Department of Health and Human Services made the same determination: prevention education is one of the most effective ways to mitigate the overarching impacts of exposure to domestic violence on children. It is critical to note that multiple states, including Rhode Island, Nebraska, Florida, Ohio, Virginia, Oregon, and Louisiana, show that it is possible to pass successful statewide, mandatory prevention education policies focused on mitigating the impacts of domestic violence.<sup>55</sup> The successful enactment of these statewide policies seem to rely on similar legislative strategies that incorporate prevention education into existing statewide education policies. A significant majority of these states situate domestic violence prevention in their state health ed-

ucation curriculum or framework; expand on existing health education curriculum; set educational content standards all school boards must meet, including the definition of domestic violence, warning signs of dating abuse, and characteristics of a healthy relationship; and purposefully target students in grades 7 through 12, which is consistent with CDC findings that show that 11-to-17-year-old children are a high-risk group.<sup>56</sup> While we do not yet know the specific impacts of these policies, these states show that legislating statewide domestic violence prevention policy is a viable option to address domestic violence prevention, and research validates the reliability of prevention education policy in mitigating the harmful impacts of exposure to domestic violence.

California should expand beyond what states have previously accomplished and aim to create a culturally competent and youth-centered prevention education policy. Not only is this feasible, but the state has the ability to amass political support for this measure given the established facts involved and the importance of elevating the issues impacting Latino children. The state can also find natural partners, such as local Domestic Violence Councils and advocacy groups, in education efforts to curb domestic violence. The state has access to the necessary education and public school data housed within

the Department of Education, public health data housed within the Department of Public Health, and economic data housed in the Population Reference Bureau to craft an educational framework that can best serve Latino children. It is recommended that California create content standards for domestic violence education, mandate that schools incorporate domestic violence education into their health education framework and health courses for students enrolled in K-12 public schools, and establish cultural competency standards directly linked to serving Latino children.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the severity of the impact of domestic violence on Latino children and the deep disparities that are embedded into systems meant to protect them. Without addressing the long-standing health and economic disparities, structural racism, and familism compounding the negative social, behavioral, developmental, and health impacts of domestic violence on Latino children, effective prevention is not possible. California has the opportunity and the resources to give Latino children the tools they need to build resilience and capacity when exposed to domestic violence. Given its demographics, California should implement a model statewide prevention education policy that is culturally competent and centers the needs of Latino children in order

to promote resilience and mitigate the impact of exposure to domestic violence.

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## Commentary

# Digitalization and the Latino Workforce



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### Abstract

The American workforce has been the foundation of the American economy. Working is ingrained in American culture and continues to be the ongoing force to obtain the American Dream. However, the American workforce is constantly changing, and currently it is undergoing rapid changes due to the digitalization of jobs across the economy. Thousands of Americans are displaced from their jobs every year because of the automatization of jobs and tasks that lead to the creation of a digital economy.<sup>1</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has allowed for these displacements to become a more-present trend and speed up the process of those in industries and jobs that do not involve digital skills to become displaced and left unaccounted for in the workforce. The Latino community is particularly at risk of being displaced by digitalization in sectors they overrepresent, such as hospitality

and construction. A failure to prepare Latinos for the digital economy will cause economic repercussions to the US economy by creating a shortage of skilled workers in a workforce that is gradually shrinking and aging.<sup>2</sup> Such shortfalls can create further greater economic disparities within the community.

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## Introduction

*Digitalization* refers to the digital representation of physical objects, attributes, or skills. An example of digitalization is the copy of a document; instead of physical handwriting and copying an original document, a scanner/printer can scan a paper document and save it as a digital document. Digitization is the connection between the physical world and software technology. It is the enablement and improvement processes of digital technologies to collect data, causing the integration of digital technologies into everyday life. Digitalization is usually used to change and modernize business models, providing fresh new ideas and opportunities to allow a business to prosper and have a competitive edge.

In the late 1990s, digitalization was promoted to increase internet connections.<sup>3</sup> Now, with the development of fast mobile internet such as 5G and advanced robotics, digitalization is seen as promoting efficiency and productivity, enabling new forms

of skills crafted by technology and absolving the need for human labor—potentially causing workforce displacement.

In recent decades, the introduction of digital technology into almost every business and workplace has and continues to transform the US economy, the workplace, and the workforce. While digitalization has made waves of progress and contributed to the success of many businesses and companies, it has also caused a series of unintended consequences like workforce displacement.

The US workforce is made up of more than 157 million Americans.<sup>4</sup> Out of those millions, almost 27 million are Latinos.<sup>5</sup> And from the entire US workforce, Latinos have accounted for nearly 75 percent of all labor growth in the past six years.<sup>6</sup> This is a significant number of Latinos who might be impacted by the consequences of digitalization if proper action is not done to mediate the transition from low digital-skilled workers to high digital-skilled workers.

Digitalization has hit all industries from medical to auto mechanics to retail. Nurses are relying on technology to detect diagnosis that they could not have detected before; auto mechanics use technology to make sure a car's engine is running; and retail workers are using iPhones and EasyPay technology to process transactions.

While digitalization has created

massive opportunities for businesses and increased their empowerment and profits, it has caused the American workforce anxiety over their ability to work and questioning whether their skills are being overpowered by the future of technology and machines that can easily complete those tasks for them.

Despite there being little to no data on the spread of digitalization across industries and workplaces, The Brookings Institute released a report that provided a detailed analysis of changes in the digital content of 545 occupations that make up almost 90 percent of the workforce in all industries since the early 2000s.<sup>7</sup> The report also highlights the rapid transition and increase of digital usage.

The widespread expansion of digitalization in different industries has caused an increase in wanting and needing a large share of US jobs to require a substantial digital skillset. From 2002 to 2016, the need for digital skills increased in the workplace from 40 percent to 48 percent for mild digital skills and 5 percent to 23 percent for advanced skills. While the need for digital skills increased overall during that time period, the need for no digital skills decreased from 56 percent to 30 percent.<sup>8</sup>

While digitalization impacts the need for businesses to hire workers with medium to high-level digital skills, it also impacts American workers

who do not have those skills, as they have spent their whole lives working in industries that require little to no digital skills. As technology becomes more widely available in developed countries like the United States, the costs of production technology lowers, making it easier for production to be digitalized while the need for manual labor decreases.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to understand that as technology becomes more efficient and productive, labor will become less important for expansion, allowing businesses to prioritize workers who are digitally skilled and push aside workers who do not have digital skills. When certain labor-intensive jobs begin to digitalize, workers will not be as necessary as they used to be. A workforce that is highly digitally skilled will then be required. Workers with no digital skills set will no longer have the ability to continue to work in industries that are prone to digitalization leading to workforce displacement.

Multiple managers and employees have stated their concerns towards industries that are at risk of digitalization and displacement. In a Pew Research study, Mark Maben, a general manager at Seton Hall University, wrote, "Right now, we are ill-prepared to manage how artificial intelligence will disrupt the nature of work across the globe [. . .]. Humanity has to plan immediately for the loss of literally

billions of jobs around the world as AI and automation replace people in all types of work. This means governments must step up to provide for displaced workers through benefits like [. . .] guiding people to accept a new definition for what it means to perform meaningful work.”<sup>10</sup>

Industries that include the demographic of low digitally skilled workers and are at high risk of displacing their human assets are manufacturing, health and social work, hospitality, retail, and construction.<sup>11</sup> And with the COVID-19 pandemic causing digitalization to rapidly increase in those industries, workers need to develop digital skills set to overcome digitalization and avoid displacement.

The National Skills Coalition released a fact sheet in April 2020 that highlighted the digital skill gaps of American workers across the five major industries, and it found that 1 in 3 American workers have limited or no digital skills.<sup>12</sup> The main findings of this report are the following:

- 50 percent of construction, transportation, and storage sector workers have limited or no digital skills.
- 37 percent of workers in retail, wholesale, and auto repair have limited or no digital skills.
- 36 percent of hospitality workers have limited or no digital skills.

- 35 percent of manufacturing workers have limited or no digital skills.
- 33 percent of workers in the health and social work sector have limited or no digital skills.

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## Problem

While digitalization impacts American workers across the nation, it particularly impacts Latinos who disproportionately make up industries that do not require digital skills and are underrepresented in industries and job selections that do require digital skills or transfer skills into digital skills. Latinos are underrepresented in industries with the highest degrees of adoption of digital technologies: professional and business services, finance and insurance, education and health services, and information and communications technology. These four industries provide jobs that are less likely to be displaced by automation. The underrepresentation of Latinos in highly digitalized industries shows the need to increase access to education and training opportunities to upskill the Latino workforce.<sup>13</sup>

Workers with a high school degree or less are four times as likely as those with a bachelor’s degree to be displaced by automation. Workers without any college education are less likely to be able to work remotely and more likely to have lost their jobs,

when compared to their college-educated counterparts.<sup>14</sup> This means that the 25 percent of Latino workers who do not have a high school diploma are at a higher risk of being displaced, compared with less than 10 percent for other racial and ethnic groups.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the progression of Latinos being represented in digital jobs, they are still underrepresented severely. Only 6.8 percent of Latinos have digital jobs.<sup>16</sup> And while Latino workers are around 14 percent of all workers, they make up 35 percent of those with no digital skills and 20 percent of those with limited skills.<sup>17</sup>

COVID-19 has particularly impacted the Latino workforce as numerous workplaces have digitized due to social distancing restrictions, such as implementing teleworking. Currently about 59 percent of Latinos live in households that have experienced job loss or pay cuts due to the pandemic.<sup>18</sup> And many more Latinos remain at high risk due to the overrepresentation of Latinos in industries that are disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>19</sup>

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, one in four Latinos were vulnerable to losing their jobs to automation. As the pandemic speeds up the charge of activity replacement, professionals estimate that within 5 years, 6 percent of the overall US personnel will get replaced by means of machines as half of the country's workplace jobs

are automated. These changes are inflicting a structural shift inside the economy as more human beings work remotely or participate in distance learning. At the same time, as lots of those shifts are likely to be effective in the lengthy time period, it is creating disruptions for the Latino community, mainly for workers who maintain jobs that cannot be performed remotely.

The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2020 predicts the upward push of machines and automation will do away with 85 million jobs by 2025.<sup>20</sup> However, WEF additionally expects 97 million new jobs can be created in the course of that point. The addition of 12 million jobs is expected to include a developing demand for facts analysts, scientists, and statistics safety analysts. As these new jobs are created, they may require people to study digital skills. With projections displaying that by 2030, 30 percent of the US population will be Latino, making sure Latino workers have the abilities and training needed to successfully attain and perform those new jobs is vital to the future of the US digital economy.

The US economy needs Latinos to be as strong as possible as they are the population workforce who is the future of America, contributing \$2.6 trillion annually.<sup>21</sup> Latinos account for almost 17 percent of the American workforce and are the fastest-growing

share of the labor force and will become almost 30 percent of the total US population by 2060.<sup>22</sup>

A recent report done by the Aspen Institute and UCLA found that although the Latino population and workforce are growing, they are at the most risk of being displaced by automation.<sup>23</sup>

If present trends continue, Latino workers are likely to be more affected by the economic transformation of digitalization since they remain concentrated in occupations that have less demand for digital skills and perform more routine tasks. Consequently, Latinos face one of the highest risks of displacement by digital technology compared to other racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Previous studies estimate that Latinos have a potential displacement rate of 25.5 percent with approximately 7.4 million Latino workers nationwide employed in occupations at risk of digitalized displacement.<sup>24</sup> Comparatively, previous studies estimate that non-Hispanic white workers have a significantly lower potential displacement rate of just 22.4 percent.<sup>25</sup>

Latinos represent trillions of dollars in gross domestic dollars, and where Latinos are is where the economy is going to grow. And various states represent the future of the tech economy, such as Arizona, New York, Texas, and California—states that have a large Latino population. In each of these

states, the largest industries are going more and more digital. For example, in Arizona, healthcare, industry, and defense are all adding tech-related positions. At these rapid rates of digitalization and the increase of digital jobs occurring across the country, the need to make sure Latinos are digitally skilled is imperative.

However, the need for digital skills is not limited to the tech industry. By 2030, two-thirds of jobs in the United States will require at least midlevel digital skills. Many Latino workers have “fragmented knowledge”; they are comfortable doing some tech tasks, such as texting a photo, but not comfortable with others, such as creating a spreadsheet.<sup>26</sup> To ensure Latinos are prepared for the future job market, they need opportunities to gain digital skills.

These opportunities are rooted within the educational system and the accessibility Latinos have to obtain internship, apprenticeships, and career pathways that will allow them to obtain digital skills.

A safety net is needed to protect the Latino workforce from being displaced by digitalization and to avoid a serious economic consequence from happening. Two solutions in addressing this issue are 1) growing and designing apprenticeships and career pathways programs tailored to Latinos that provide employable and transferable skills and 2) increasing

Latino representation in higher-level education.

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### Policy Solutions

United States apprenticeship programs have become very popular in recent years given their success in allowing participants in those programs to become economically mobile. According to the US Department of Labor, people who complete an apprenticeship program can earn an estimated average annual income of \$60,000.<sup>27</sup> And while the percentage of Latinos who participate in apprenticeships mirror those Latinos who participate in the workforce, there is a significant lack of Latino representation in STEM apprenticeships in technology-based careers, such as engineering, cybersecurity, and computer science. Only 8.3 percent of Latino apprentices are in STEM-related apprenticeships while 18.6 percent are in non-STEM apprenticeships.<sup>28</sup> This significant disparity signals the need for stakeholders, both public and private, to invest in apprenticeships and career pathways programs focused on technology and geared towards Latinos.

Organizations like Hispanic Federation, Google, UnidosUS, and Verizon are all investing in the Latino community to ensure they are upskilled to succeed in the digital economy. The Hispanic Federation and Google are working together to strengthen work-

force development and digital training programs among institutions, which will provide digital skills training to over 10,000 Latinos in the next two years.<sup>29</sup> UnidosUS and Verizon have teamed up in funding \$1 million for their Latinos @ Work program, which seeks to improve digital literacy rates among Latino workers in the United States.<sup>30</sup>

As there is a need for more Latinos to become incorporated in STEM-related apprenticeships and career pathways programs, there is also a need to ensure that Latinos are represented in these areas in higher-level education. As of 2018, only 6 percent of Latinos are represented in staff/faculty in higher-level education.<sup>31</sup> While the enrollment and representation of Latino students in higher-level education continue to grow, Latino representation among faculty does not. Studies have demonstrated that students of color have higher levels of success in grades and graduation retention when engaging with faculty or staff that represent their race or ethnicity—particularly Black students. The same impacts were shown when those students were Latino.

Latinos are increasing their interest in STEM-related fields and jobs that are suited for the digital economy, thus there needs to be a more prominent representation of Latino faculty in these fields to promote motivation and a deeper



understanding of the compounded struggles that the community faces. A challenge to this is the pay disparity among white faculty versus Latino faculty; to ensure representation, pay equity is an obstacle that needs to be addressed when it comes to people of color representation among higher-level education faculty.

With a majority of jobs requiring mid- to high-level digital skills, making sure Latinos are well-equipped to perform these jobs is crucial to the success of their economic well-being and preparation for the inevitable digital economy. With support from apprenticeships and career pathways programs, alongside the constant necessity of making sure there is Latino representation in higher-level education, Latinos can be set up for a successful trajectory when being met by the needs and demands of a digital economy.

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## Conclusion

Currently Latinos are suffering from the repercussions of a global pandemic. Latinos have experienced an all-time high of 18.5 percent in unemployment. One of six Latinos, approximately 56 percent, have experienced a job loss during the year the pandemic has taken a toll on the country, compared to only 43 percent of the others in the United States stating the same.<sup>32</sup> Out of the 18 percent of Latino workers, 35 percent have

no digital skills and 20 percent have limited digital skills. These inequalities are no coincidence; they are the result of broken policies and a lack of investment in a community that is the main source of energy for the US economy. By re-shifting priorities and realigning the commitment to a growing community in the United States by investing in apprenticeship programs, career pathways initiatives, and higher-level education, Latinos will be able to continue contributing their heavier lift to the economy. It is imperative on us to ensure we create an inclusive economy in order to create a stronger society for the future.

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## Research

# Queremos Transformar Comunidades: Incorporating Civic Engagement as an Equity Strategy in Promotor-Led COVID-19 Response Efforts in Latinx Communities

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### Abstract

Health inequities have long been entrenched in communities of color, but the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 has brought renewed attention to the role of social determinants of health on disease vulnerability. Emerging research often fails to consider the importance of civic engagement in response efforts. This study presents a *promotor*-led intervention in Latinx communities of southern California that (1) elucidates the ways in which COVID-19 vulnerabilities are associated with the ability to participate in the political process, (2) presents innovative mechanisms of civic engagement for citizens and non-citizens alike, and (3) informs future efforts to rebuild with resilience and equity.

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### Introduction

In the United States, working-class Latinx communities are among the most impacted by COVID-19 infections and deaths.<sup>1,2</sup> Emerging research and frameworks analyze the role of social determinants of health (SDoH) on disease vulnerability and likelihood of survival.<sup>3,4,5</sup> Such research has primarily focused on healthcare access, economic stability, food insecurity, and housing as both risk factors and negative outcomes of the pandemic.<sup>6,7,8</sup> Yet, few of these discussions link how systemic racism and exclusion left communities of color without the necessary infrastructure to respond

to COVID-19 and the conditions that have created increased risk in these communities.<sup>9,10,11</sup> Furthermore, research has not previously examined how civic engagement (or the lack thereof), as part of the SDoH community and social context domain, affects COVID-19 vulnerabilities or resulting social needs. On the other hand, there is also a gap in research on ways to leverage civic engagement for an equitable COVID-19 response and as a foundational practice for building community resilience in the recovery process.

For nearly three decades, Latino Health Access (LHA) has engaged *promotores de salud*, community health workers (CHWs), to work at the intersection of health services, community capacity-building, and community mobilization and advocacy as a strategy to advance health equity.<sup>12</sup> CHWs have been shown to be critical assets to community-based organizations, driving progress in health promotion and advocating for necessary change, as has been the case with LHA. During COVID-19, LHA has implemented a community-engaged response in the most impacted areas of Orange County, California, in partnership with the local healthcare agency.<sup>13</sup> This article provides an empirical example of how LHA integrates civic engagement as a tool for equity in COVID-19 response efforts and in preparing for long-term

recovery. It also demonstrates the ways in which *promotores* activate and sustain such engagement among historically marginalized communities. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to (1) shed light on the ways in which civic engagement, as a SDoH, impacts COVID-19 vulnerabilities; (2) contribute to the empirical knowledge of community-led pandemic response efforts, rooted in equity and political participation; and (3) better understand the mechanisms by which *promotores* champion and create mechanisms for civic participation as a critical element of the COVID-19 response. This article presents a story of community resilience, fueled by Latinx communities' commitment to center response efforts around the experiences of those most affected by the pandemic. Lessons from this study can also provide a blueprint for recovery efforts in communities of color. Ultimately, rebuilding with equity requires addressing the root causes that gave way to the pandemic's devastation in these communities.

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## Literature Review

Voting rates have historically been lower among the Latinx community, compared to other racial/ethnic groups, but such measures reflect structural inequities, including but not limited to restrictive naturalization processes and voter suppression. As such, there is a need to broaden or

re-frame how the Latinx community can participate in the political process through civic engagement that encompasses all the ways in which immigrants express their interests or exert their power. Incorporating this new definition, evidence shows relatively high engagement among Latinx communities in religious groups, community-based organizations, volunteering, public demonstrations, and school-based associations.<sup>14,15</sup> Such involvement is driven by critical reflections of structural inequality and lived experiences of discrimination and exclusion, motivating efforts to improve the welfare of their communities, increase representation, and mitigate future instances of discrimination.<sup>16,17</sup> Barriers to engagement include, most prominently, competing family and job responsibilities, fear related to documentation status, and limited information being offered in Spanish.<sup>18</sup>

Because *promotores* come from the same communities they serve, they are uniquely positioned to reach and activate the most marginalized members of society.<sup>19,20</sup> Yet, historically, the roles of *promotores* within health systems have been confined to direct services that support health prevention, health promotion, and healthcare access, missing an opportunity to leverage their unique position to mobilize communities to address SDoH at the systems level.<sup>21,22,23,24,25</sup> Globally,

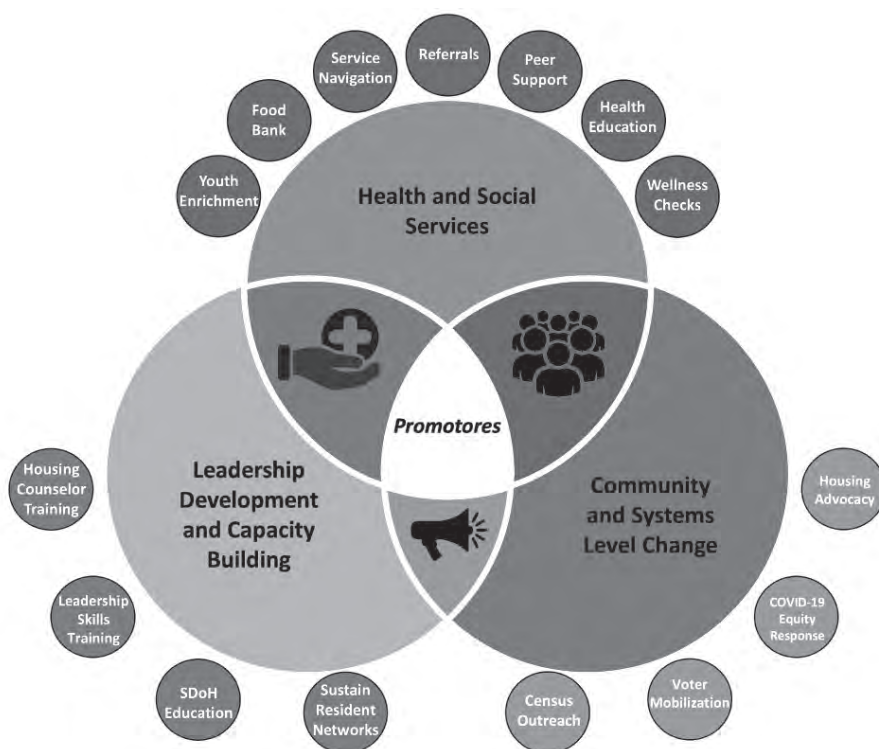
*promotores* have been on the frontlines of responding to disease outbreaks, epidemics, and disaster relief, and experts have proposed expanding the infrastructure of *promotores* in the United States to respond to COVID-19.<sup>26,27,28,29</sup> Current investments in *promotor* activities for COVID-19, however, focus on addressing social needs alone, providing immediate relief but do not address the SDoH that require changes in systems and policies.

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### Conceptual Framework For LHA's Approach To Covid-19 Response

LHA *promotores* work within a framework that aligns with what Matthew and colleagues later coined the Multidimensional *Promotores/Community Health Worker Model*. The model highlights the foundational concept of *promotores* who not only serve as educators and service facilitators but also as agents of change.<sup>30,31</sup> This is especially important to build equity and address SDoH within communities that are disenfranchised or have been historically excluded from decision making and policymaking and, thereby, experience health and social disparities.<sup>32</sup>

This model was at the foundation of LHA's strategy for COVID-19 response (see **Figure 1**). First, *promotores* had to ensure continuity and enhancements of direct services to meet the



**Figure 1. LHA Model for Integrating Civic Engagement in COVID-19 Response.**

rising health and social needs in their communities as COVID-19 cases and deaths began to climb. Given that these disparities were affecting the poorest neighborhoods in Orange County, *promotores* also worked to mobilize community residents to advocate for policies that address systemic change, mitigating the social and economic impacts of the pandemic. Although advocacy has been part of the work of LHA *promotores*, stay-at-home orders and the transition to virtual platforms created a new context and new needs for skills and capaci-

ty-building for community members. Nevertheless, because activating civic participation is at the core of LHA's model, *promotores* ensured that the very communities disproportionately affected by COVID-19 were prioritized and offered a seat at the table to strategize on how to respond.<sup>33</sup>

### Description Of Lha's Covid-19 Response

From March through June of 2020, LHA implemented Phase I of its COVID-19 response program, which included making outbound phone



calls with the purpose of conducting wellness checks with community members, collecting data to understand the emerging needs of the community, disseminating COVID-19 prevention information, deploying essential services in response to those needs, and designing and implementing advocacy campaigns to protect the rights of community members being affected by the health, economic, and social impact of the pandemic. Twenty-four LHA *promotores* contacted participants belonging to two distinct groups: (1) 393 Orange County Latinx voters newly identified for outreach through Political Data Inc. (PDI) during LHA's non-partisan voter mobilization campaign for the primary election, and (2) 1,861 existing participants of LHA's programs, who were mostly non-voters. At the point of contact, *promotores* reviewed a script that included questions related to understanding of COVID-19 symptoms, ability to self-isolate, non-medical health-related social needs, and need for additional resources.

During this same time period, LHA also created a blueprint for policy and systems change strategies to be implemented in tandem with its direct service modifications or enhancements. Prior to COVID-19, *promotores* hosted *cafecitos*, intimate community gatherings where resi-

dents organized, problem-solved, and engaged in community building. *Promotores* also conducted trainings to strengthen leadership and advocacy skills of community members, using the *Desempacando Habilidades* curriculum. *Promotores* co-developed the training program with LHA program coordinators. Training focuses on assisting participants in building advocacy skills and developing critical consciousness about the relationship between health disparities, SDoH, and the role of civic engagement in creating a healthier and more equitable community. Triangulating community feedback and emerging data trends, *promotores* prioritized the community mobilization strategy of LHA's COVID-19 Phase I response around (1) sustaining organizing spaces and networks through virtual settings; (2) housing advocacy; (3) Census outreach and engagement; (4) voter mobilization; and (5) building the infrastructure for Phase II of the response, which included intensive on-the-ground outreach and increasing testing in the most impacted zip codes. *Promotores* tabulated their voter engagement and Census efforts, detailing the attempted number of individuals and the number of individuals reached, to evaluate successes related to policy advocacy, capacity building, and mobilization.

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## Study Methods

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### *Study Design*

This study adopts a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach, in which quantitative data were collected and analyzed, followed by qualitative data capture with interviews and focus groups.<sup>34</sup> Such an approach has the advantage of contextualizing and explaining quantitative findings, all while informing policy and program development in an actionable manner.<sup>35</sup> Quantitative data provide insights on the social needs and burdens for non-voters (vs. voters), who require additional support to participate in the civic process through advocacy. The term *non-voter* refers to individuals who have not cast a vote in previous elections. It is used intentionally because LHA does not collect information on immigration status or eligibility for voter registration, but the majority

of LHA's program participants are foreign-born, earn less than \$30,000 annually, and are monolingual Spanish speakers—all of which present structural barriers to participation in the political process. The focus groups were conducted following an analysis of the quantitative data and operated within a transformative paradigm to (1) examine assumptions about power, social justice, and cultural complexity; and (2) illuminate the social realities of the communities this research intends to impact.<sup>36</sup>

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### *Study Site*

Latino Health Access is a *promotor*-driven community-based organization located in Orange County, California, primarily serving working-class Latinx immigrant communities. Its mission is to “partner with communities to bring health, equity, and sustainable change through education, services, consciousness-raising,

**Table 1**

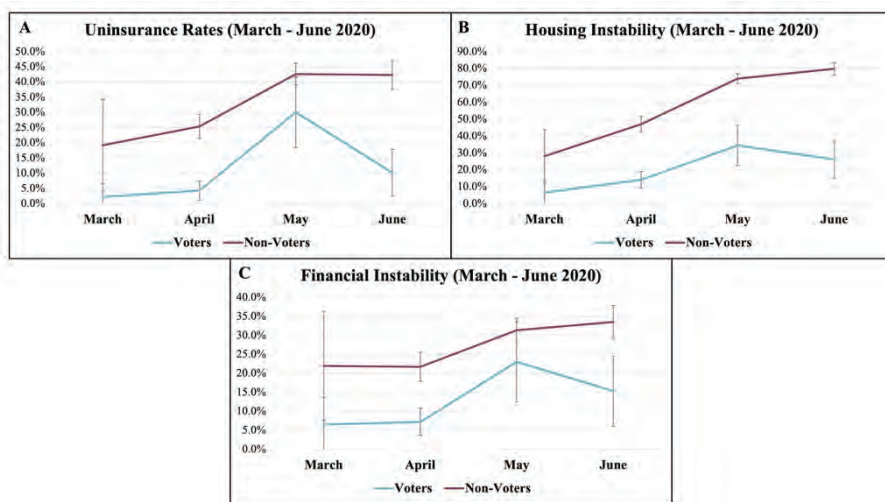
Characteristics	Voters	Non-Voters	P-Value
Food Insecure	9.7% (n=393)	19.8% (n=1861)	<0.001***
Uninsured	9.8% (n=326)	37.5% (n=1657)	<0.001***
No Medical Care	25.5% (n=94)	26.5% (n=1088)	0.94
Work Hours Reduced	38.3% (n=350)	64.1% (n=1765)	<0.001***
No Space to Isolate in the Home	14.0% (n=314)	59.3% (n=1667)	<0.001***
Financially Unstable	11.1% (n=360)	29.5% (n=1745)	<0.001***
Housing Insecure	18.6% (n=366)	67.8% (n=1757)	<0.001***
Limited Knowledge About COVID-19 Symptomatology	5.8% (n=363)	20.0% (n=1709)	<0.001***

**Table 1. Effect of Enfranchisement on Social Needs**

and civic participation.”<sup>37</sup> Embedded in its mission is an equitable relationship with communities, whereby participants are not seen as clients or patients but as partners in creating and sustaining health. Latinx immigrant communities in Orange County have been devastated by COVID-19 due to entrenched social inequities. As of January 30, 2021, there were 229,757 cumulative COVID-19 cases and 2,975 deaths in Orange County, California.<sup>38</sup> Latinx individuals make up 44 percent of cases and 38 percent of deaths, despite being only 35 percent of the county’s population.<sup>39</sup>

### Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

During one-on-one sessions with participants, data were captured by each *promotor* in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, using a 12-character unique identifier. Analyses were conducted to compare social needs between voters (PDI participants) and non-voters (LHA participants) over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. The following social needs were considered: food insecurity (dichotomous: yes/no), financial instability (measured as inability to pay rent), housing instability (measured in alignment with



**Figure 2. Comparison of Voter Status and Social Needs Over Time.** Latinx non-voters, compared to Latinx voters, experience significantly higher rates of uninsurance (A), housing instability (B), and financial instability (C). A decline in social needs is ob-

served in June for voters but not non-voters. Error bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals. All comparisons are significant at the  $P < 0.001$  level.

the Healthy People 2020 definition of meeting one or both conditions: inability to pay rent, overcrowding), health insurance coverage (dichotomous: yes/no), medical care (dichotomous: yes/no), work hours reduced or temporarily laid off (dichotomous: yes/no), and knowledge of how to respond if COVID-19 symptoms present in the household (dichotomous: yes/no).<sup>40</sup>

Analyses were conducted to assess (1) the effect of voter status on social needs and (2) changes in the effects of voter status on social needs from March to June 2020. Pearson's  $\chi^2$  test of independence was employed to identify statistically significant differences in demographic characteristics and social needs. Yates's continuity correction was applied when any cell in the contingency table had a frequency  $< 10$ . Pearson's  $\chi^2$  test was also used to compare the effects of voter status on social needs at the beginning of the pandemic (March 2020) to most recent data when relief policies came into effect (June 2020). Significance was established at  $\alpha=0.05$ . All analyses were performed using R Statistical Software.<sup>41</sup>

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### ***Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis***

Qualitative data were collected via semi-structured interviews conducted by telephone with three *promotoras* in December of 2020 and a one-hour virtual focus group with three

*promotoras* who specialize in civic engagement and advocacy and the organization's policy analyst in January 2021. Interviews and the focus group were conducted in Spanish.

Interviews have been used as a method of collecting data and making meaning of processes and experiences in healthcare and public health.<sup>42</sup> For this study, interviews were used to better understand the role of *promotores* in creating equity within the COVID-19 response and understanding *promotores'* operationalization of equity within their work. The focus group method aligns with LHA's ongoing practice of reflexive learning and unlearning, in which all staff collectively "re-think and re-name [their] practices, and re-tell [their] stories and aspirations" with the purpose of creating meaning and elevating community practices, which are often excluded from the dominant discourse and processes of creating knowledge.<sup>43</sup> In the focus group, *promotoras* reflected on their processes and mechanisms for the civic engagement of participants based on the equity practices they outlined, such as navigating the digital divide with technical support and training, hosting civic engagement skill-building workshops, and rewriting dominant narratives of power.

Interview data underwent thematic analysis using a two-step process that incorporated emergent coding and a

*priori* codes based on the conceptual framework.<sup>44,45,46</sup> Data were analyzed in Spanish and organized into themes. Results from quantitative data analyses and the interview themes were shared with *promotoras* in the focus group to engage them in interpretation of results within the Multidimensional *Promotores/Community Health Worker Model*.<sup>47</sup> Final themes were then translated into English and organized in Microsoft Word tables to prepare for integration in the discussion. Representative quotes from the themes discussed were extracted and translated for inclusion in the manuscript.

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## Results

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### *Demographic Analysis*

A majority of LHA participants are female (72.4 percent), Latinx (98.2 percent), foreign-born (95.4 percent), aged 18–54 (48.7 percent), monolingual Spanish speakers (89.8 percent), and earn less than \$30,000 annually (84.6 percent). Demographic data from the PDI database show that the majority of voters are female (52.5 percent), Latinx (97.5 percent), born in the United States (71.2 percent), aged 18–54 (68.9 percent), and earn \$50,000–100,000 annually (70.1 percent). Groups differ significantly by sex ( $P<0.001$ ), country of birth ( $P<0.001$ ), age ( $P<0.001$ ), and income (96.7 percent of LHA participants earn less than \$50,000

annually vs. 11.8 percent of PDI voters,  $P<0.001$ ) but not by ethnicity ( $P=0.053$ ).

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### *Effects of Enfranchisement Over Time*

To assess the effect of voter status on social needs, comparisons were made between voters in the PDI database and LHA participants. Results are shown in **Table 1**. Initial analysis showed non-voters experienced significantly greater social vulnerabilities across all categories ( $P<0.001$ ), with the exception of not having medical care (25.5 percent among voters vs. 26.5 percent among non-voters,  $P=0.94$ ). Notably, non-voters, compared to voters, experienced heightened vulnerabilities that negatively influence ability to respond to COVID-19, including limited space to isolate in the home (59.3 percent vs. 14.0 percent,  $P<0.001$ ) and limited knowledge about how to respond to a COVID-19 outbreak in the household (20.0 percent vs. 5.8 percent,  $P<0.001$ ).

**Figure 2** shows that non-voters were the first to experience the social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As early as March 2020, non-voters, compared to voters, experienced significantly higher rates of uninsurance (19.2 percent vs. 2.2 percent,  $P=0.038$ ), financial instability (21.9 percent vs. 6.5 percent,  $P=0.040$ ),

and housing instability (28.1 percent vs. 6.5 percent,  $P=0.022$ ). While the voter population also saw an increase in related social needs, such as financial and housing instability, the impact was less severe across every month, compared to the non-voter population. By June, non-voters, compared to voters, experienced significantly elevated rates of uninsurance (42.3 percent vs. 10.2 percent,  $P<0.001$ ), housing instability (79.8 percent vs. 26.2 percent,  $P<0.001$ ), and financial instability (33.5 percent vs. 15.3 percent,  $P=0.0071$ ).

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### ***Thematic Analysis***

Trends in social needs beginning in March 2020 highlighted the lack of infrastructure for testing, access to care, and delivery of social services in Orange County. Advocacy was needed to increase direct prevention and mitigate the health and socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on communities that already experienced disproportionate economic hardship. *Promotores'* local policy advocacy included several facets (see Table 2). The qualitative component of this study sought to better understand the mechanisms and processes by which *promotores* effectively mobilized community members to be civically active, despite the new challenges that COVID-19 brought to organizing and advocacy.

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### ***Linking Social Need to Social Determinants of Health and Systemic Oppression***

One of the foundational strategies to mobilize participants is building consciousness about the linkage between social needs, lack of services, and how systemic oppression works to perpetuate these disparities. *Promotores* view every service delivered as an opportunity to build and activate this awareness, which is fortified through the leadership and skills development workshops they facilitate. One of LHA's *promotora* coordinator said:

*Queremos transformar comunidades (we want to transform communities). Transformation begins when participants begin to understand the social determinants of health, how the conditions in the Zip Code where you live or where you were born determine your quality of life and lifespan. That's what sparks the beginning of change.*

For *promotores*, it is crucial that discussions of SDoH go beyond a recognition of social needs and barriers to accessing care. For them, approaches that, for example, merely provide bus passes to address lack of accessible transportation or provide access to meals to address food insecurity at the community level are insufficient. *Promotores* prioritize approaches that address the systemic conditions

that determine people's lifespan and quality of life. They also call for an open discussion of the history of discriminatory policies and for a community-based participatory approach to investigating how they impact the neighborhoods where participants live.

During COVID-19, these conversations happened through one-on-one support sessions, information forums, and group organizing meetings. *Promotoras* recounted how COVID-19 made it clear for participants where systems failed to be equitable and provided an urgency by which to act. One of LHA's *promotoras* mentioned:

*Our job is to help people make the connection that it's not a coincidence that people have two or three jobs, that wages are low, that housing is not just, and we have to weave those conversations to uncover the root causes with our participants.*

Yet, in these conversations about community activation, *promotoras* also understand the need to address the immediate needs that participants have, especially in the rise of the pandemic (shown in **Table 1** and **Figure 2**). They also mobilize resources within LHA and connections with community partners to meet the needs of participants. They accomplished this through advocacy that expanded rental assistance programs at the local level to undocumented immigrants,

coordination of food delivery, and step-by-step coaching for community members to access local rental relief. In so doing, *promotores* helped participants find some stability that enabled them to advocate for changes at the systems or community level. However, in order to mobilize a community that is largely disenfranchised, *promotores* must be intentional in re-framing civic participation and creating the opportunities by which community members can take action.

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### *Re-framing Civic Participation*

All *promotoras* spoke about the fear that took hold of the predominantly immigrant communities they served during the pandemic. Already, these communities lived on the margins due to societal neglect, exacerbated by the “public charge” rule that was announced during this time, restrictions in immigration policy, and criminalizing rhetoric. An LHA *promotora* who leads immigration advocacy campaigns stated:

*Over the last four years, our people have been hurt by language, labeled as criminals, as people who are worthless. Part of our work has to be to reframe that: to help people see that they have inherent value, that their culture is a strength, and that they belong at the table where decisions are made.*

*Promotores* open pathways to



civic participation by building the capacity of community members to engage with systems and simultaneously holding systems and policymakers accountable for listening to and incorporating the voices of all community members, regardless of citizenship. One of LHA's lead *promotoras* said:

*One thing we do in our Community Engagement and Advocacy Program is dismantle the idea that a person seated in a position of power is powerful on their own. We foster the idea that they are there to serve the people and their responsibility is to ensure our community has a better quality of life, and it becomes the community's responsibility to hold them accountable. When people power is in motion, there's nothing that can stop it.*

A key strategy to advance policy advocacy during the pandemic was to host meetings with local elected officials and those in city government. *Promotores* facilitated roundtables with Santa Ana and Anaheim city council members, a California senator, and a congressman, where community members voiced their concerns about housing, job loss during the pandemic, and access to healthcare. It was also *promotores* who organized translation for these roundtables and other logistics for these meetings. While serving a population that may not have the

opportunity to elect these individuals due to an undocumented immigration status, *promotores* ensure that this same population continues to have opportunities to engage with those who will be making critical decisions that affect the community's resources and opportunities.

During COVID-19, LHA also invited participants to be engaged in other ways to respond to the crisis with a view towards recovery. For example, it was primarily undocumented immigrants who engaged in collecting signatures from voters to place a rent control measure on the ballot. With the assistance of the civic engagement *promotoras*, residents designed a drive-through signature collection campaign. Residents, including working-class immigrants, have also been trained as "housing counselors" to facilitate "Know Your Rights" workshops, disseminate housing policy updates, and provide one-on-one eviction prevention support to other community members. Residents have led popular education prevention campaigns and have assisted in coordinating mobile testing sites in these neighborhoods. During a time when so much has been lost in the working class Latinx communities, *promotores* have also activated community members to lead acts of remembrance, solidarity, and hope through activities, such as a mobile *Día de los Muertos* altar



float that visited highly impacted neighborhoods. These new opportunities for community members to be engaged expand the notions of civic engagement and present opportunities for individuals who are traditionally excluded from political participation to lead initiatives in policy advocacy, community building, and community healing.

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### *Promotores as “Acompañantes”*

In framing their role in helping community residents move along a “continuum of participation,” *promotores* refer to themselves as “*acompañantes*” (companions) through the entire process of community transformation.<sup>48</sup> One of the lead *promotoras* recalled walking with a participant in one of the midsummer protests following George Floyd’s murder:

*At the end of the protest, the participant said “Thank you” to me for walking with her because, for the first time, she experienced what it was like to be in a place where people call for change with a single, united voice.*

She used this image as an example of the role of the *promotor*, where they are not there to simply train participants in the art of public speaking, facilitate meetings, or simply mobilize. Rather, they are companions to community members in the process of building health for themselves and working collectively towards a better

future for their communities. The concept of *promotores* as companions to community members in health improvement is foundational, but LHA *promotores* call for an extension of this process to include support along the process of civic engagement to advance health equity and social justice.<sup>49</sup>

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### **Discussion And Recommendations**

Decades of disinvestment and restrictive immigration policies, both of which are rooted in structural racism and nativism, have created disparate social conditions for Latinx communities in the United States with limited resources and opportunities.<sup>50</sup> Exclusion of these communities from decision making has also been a risk factor for SDoH.<sup>51</sup> Our study has shown how LHA’s approach to civic engagement is necessary at this juncture, as COVID-19 continues to exacerbate the social needs among individuals who are typically excluded from the political process (non-voters). By operationalizing a broad definition of civic engagement, LHA *promotores* have activated and maintained the mobilization of Latinx communities to achieve several policy wins that are intended to root out the systemic barriers to health equity. Strategies discussed in this article, including the *Promotor* model, civic engagement and community

**Table 2**

Issue Area	Capacity Building and Mobilization	Community Policy Wins
Housing Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tutorials for joining virtual city council meetings to advocate for enhanced local rent moratorium</li> <li>• Creation of a resident-led Housing Policy Monitoring Committee with 7 members, 4 of which are renters</li> <li>• One-on-one meetings with city council members and city staff</li> <li>• Participants sent 130 letters to the Santa Ana City Council requesting a 6-month extension of rent moratorium</li> <li>• Distributed templates of letters to be sent to landlords to qualify for emergency rental assistance</li> <li>• Promotor-led technical support call to Anaheim city councilmember around housing movement-building</li> <li>• Training of 24 new community housing counselors to assist renters in eviction frontline response and to understand their rights under new local policies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Santa Ana City Manager issues rent moratorium via executive order from March 17–May 31, 2020</li> <li>• City of Santa Ana allocates \$1.6 million from CARES Act funding to direct rent relief (March 19, 2020)</li> <li>• Santa Ana City Manager extends moratorium until June 30 (May 22, 2020) and then again until September 30 (July 24, 2020)</li> <li>• Santa Ana City Manager issues executive order to halt rent increases while CA Governor’s Executive order (N-28-20) is in place (April 7, 2020)</li> <li>• City of Anaheim issues an emergency eviction moratorium (March 24, 2020)</li> <li>• The City of Anaheim rolls out \$3M plan for community economic recovery, prioritizing rental assistance for tenants experiencing financial hardship due to COVID-19</li> </ul>
Census Outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From March–October 2020, promotores made attempts to contact 63,460 individuals, reaching 44,714 (70%)</li> <li>• Outreach conducted via one-on-ones, presentations, telephone calls, text messages, social networking, caravans, and tabling</li> <li>• Creative strategies implemented included an “Infomovil” with combined COVID-19 prevention and Census messaging, delivered via loudspeaker attached to LHA van and driving into hard-to-count communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accomplishing a 70.5% Census response rate in Santa Ana, which was higher than the 2010 response rate (67.7%)</li> </ul>

**Table 2. Promotor-Led Mobilization Efforts and Community Policy Wins by Issue Area**

Voter Mobilization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational forums to residents to explain what was on the ballot, the new election process for city council/mayor, and voting rights and options during COVID</li> <li>• Mobilization by promotores to infrequent voters in low-turnout precincts with 1-2 contacts in the 2020 primary and general elections (via text messaging and telephone calls)</li> <li>• Phone banking by non-voter volunteers to Get Out the Vote, trained by promotores</li> <li>• Hiring of community members as Get Out the Vote canvassers, identified and trained by promotores</li> <li>• Organized virtual candidate forums</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in the number of voters that intended to vote from 75% (n=965) in the 2020 primary election to 96% (n=3,804) in the 2020 general election</li> <li>• From October 2020 to the 2020 general election, attempts were made to 10,729 individuals, reaching 3,390 (32%)</li> </ul>
COVID-19 Equity Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotores advocate internally at LHA for expansion of community foodbank after administrative staff suggest closing it down for safety reasons</li> <li>• Promotores present stories of community members in countrywide multi-stakeholder in advocacy efforts to release zip code-based COVID-19 data to organize neighborhood-based response</li> <li>• Promotores represent community in co-designing neighborhood-based response</li> <li>• Promotores identify, train, and refer more than 70 community members to be hired as new promotores to work in neighborhood-based response</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LHA maintains and expands food distribution with promotor-organized safety measures that align with CDC and local health guides.</li> <li>• Zip code data were published by the local health care agency</li> <li>• Local health care agency funds \$3M Latino Health Initiative in most impacted zip codes (Phase II of LHA's COVID-19 response)</li> </ul>

**Table 2. Continued**

mobilization, and COVID-19 pandemic relief, are a culmination of over 28 years working directly with the Latinx community in Santa Ana and Orange County and have informed the recommendations below.

**Invest in understanding the impact of SDoH and addressing SDoH at the community and systems levels rather than only on individual-level outcomes.** Currently, most SDoH research has focused on individual-level interventions that address immediate

social needs. Yet, these interventions are insufficient to address the root causes that have created and perpetuated health disparities. Drawing on ecosocial theory, it has been conditions of social inequality that are the basis of long-standing Latinx health disparities in the context of chronic disease.<sup>52,53</sup> Latinx health disparities have widened over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has disproportionately impacted communities subject to structural violence. Latinx communities account for the greatest disparities of any other racial or ethnic group in terms of case, hospitalization, and mortality rates.<sup>54</sup> Such disparities can be explained by the concentration of Latinxs in the essential workforce, such as agriculture, construction, food service, and food processing—the same occupational sectors with the highest rates of excess mortality due to COVID-19—because they do not have the option of working from home and, thus, face heightened risk of exposure.<sup>55,56</sup> Other structural vulnerabilities in the Latinx population, such as high rates of coexisting medical conditions, lack of insurance, and multigenerational homes, can explain COVID-19 disparities.<sup>57</sup> All of these issues are systemic issues that go unexamined when the focus of SDoH research is on individual-level outcomes instead of system- or community-level outcomes.

Furthermore, trends by race/eth-

nicity fail to capture the heterogeneity of the Latinx population in the United States—namely, the stark contrast between Latinx voters and non-voters presented in this study. Voting status serves as a rough proxy for socioeconomic status (SES) and immigration status, and as such, our findings have critical implications for exploring the effects of SDoH on access to care. For non-voters, rising uninsurance rates were accompanied by elevated rates of job loss or reductions in work hours, once again highlighting the pitfalls of coupling health insurance with employment. Uninsured rates continued to climb among non-voters, while the rates among voters increased from March through April and then sharply declined in June. As programs such as the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and/or Medicaid eligibility expanded for voters, it conceivably could not be accessed by non-voters, especially given the introduction of the “public charge” rule guidelines in the middle of the pandemic.<sup>58</sup> This may have deterred some immigrants from pursuing testing or assistance despite being eligible to receive COVID-19 services without penalty.

**The COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated the importance of efforts that enhance civic engagement to combat increasing social needs, inequities, and disempowerment in the Latinx community.** Through work

pre-dating COVID-19, LHA gathered significant knowledge about such strategies, and the work of *promotores* demonstrates that it is possible to build innovative mechanisms of civic participation that can be accessible to all residents, regardless of citizenship.<sup>59</sup> Their example calls for a re-envisioning of civic engagement, anchored in health equity. It is especially important that these efforts center around those most impacted by the pandemic as these communities experienced the most inequities prior to its start. Civic engagement efforts need to be rooted in a frank analysis of the role of structural racism and other root causes of these inequities and their impact on health.<sup>60</sup>

As an example, disparities in rates of housing instability are striking, with rates over three times as high among non-voters (67.8 percent) as voters (18.6 percent). While these disparities may be due, in part, to eligibility criteria for public assistance, the federal government, the state of California, and the cities of Santa Ana and Anaheim implemented protections in the form of eviction moratoria, executive orders, and rent moratoria, respectively, in March 2020. To qualify for rental protections, however, tenants were required to provide letters to their landlord, posing a barrier to many LHA

participants who are monolingual Spanish speakers. Linguistic challenges could also explain the disparities in knowledge about COVID-19 symptomatology, considering nearly four times as many non-voters responded that they did not know what to do if COVID-19 symptoms presented in the household as did voters. As such, *promotores* responded by (1) involving community members in the development of effective messaging about COVID-19 symptoms and prevention, (2) providing templates of letters to provide landlords in order to qualify for rental protections, and (3) instilling trust in COVID-19 testing by directly referring individuals and staffing the testing sites. These disparities speak to the importance of eviction prevention measures and culturally and linguistically accessible messaging—both of which were the result of community mobilization—to address health inequities.<sup>61</sup>

While the pandemic brought additional challenges, qualitative data sheds light on the possibility to mobilize communities around policy advocacy that directly addresses the urgent social needs exacerbated during the pandemic. As future directions, it will be necessary to reach new communities without historical experience in organizing

or advocating and building inroads to civic participation. Furthermore, given the success of engagement in local city council meetings afforded by virtual options, local governments should institutionalize these mechanisms for engagement even after the end of the pandemic.

**Early findings point to policy amendments that could equally benefit voters and non-voters.**

Trends in financial instability between non-voters and voters mirrored uninsured trends, in that rates continued to climb from March through June among non-voters, while rates declined from May to June among voters. These disparities illustrate that the benefits experienced by citizens in terms of public assistance, such as the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, were not shared with non-voters, as non-citizens were not eligible to receive the stimulus checks that were disbursed in April 2020 nor Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or supplemental security income (SSI) because of “public charge” rules. Of note, the disparities in financial instability between voters and non-voters may be even more pronounced in other states, as cash benefits are available to non-citizens in California who do not qualify for SSI through the state-funded Disaster Relief Assistance for Immigrants (DRAI). Future relief packages should

consider all residents with Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITINs), rather than just those with social security numbers (SSNs).

**CHWs should be engaged in vaccine deployment to lend expertise in combating issues related to vaccine access.** The actions taken by *promotores* illuminate the critical role of CHWs in responding swiftly—and with an orientation towards equity—to communities’ immediate and long-term needs via basic services and policy advocacy. This is possible because of their presence in the community, trusted relationships, and local expertise, which lies at the intersection of a multi-dimensional model of community health work. As the United States plunges forward with vaccination goals, the Biden-Harris administration has deployed Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to assist with vaccine distribution.<sup>62</sup> *Promotores* are best positioned to reach impacted communities, making it possible for them to address barriers related to the vaccine through one-on-one navigation. *Promotores* are also positioned to inform vaccine strategies at the systems level, given their knowledge of the local communities.

In addition, emerging research points to the long-term problems created by the pandemic, with significant reductions in the life expectancy in the United States, disproportionately impacting Latinx and Black

communities.<sup>63</sup> Hiring and training additional CHWs to implement a community-engaged approach to recovery and rebuilding can present a vigorous economic development program in communities of color where the pandemic has brought about financial devastation.<sup>64</sup>

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## Conclusion

Despite the unique perspective this study offers, there are several limitations. For one, the authors relied on data that were collected virtually by *promotores*. As such, demographic data were not available for each encounter, but *promotores'* review of the quantitative data confirmed those served through the community engagement and advocacy program were representative of LHA participants. Second, it is possible that we have not seen the complete effects of various COVID-related relief policies during the study period. However, declines in social needs among voters suggest that the impact of the policies were observed as early as June. Third, the qualitative data were collected from a seemingly small sample of *promotores* (n=5), but they represent those engaged in the organization's advocacy programming. While this is a single-site study with no comparison group, LHA has over 28 years of experience working with Latinx communities in southern California, and previous comparison studies have

shown the benefits of their *promotor* model. Furthermore, we felt it was imperative to share these results as we look to COVID-19 programs in other states that do not incorporate a SDoH approach at the systems level.

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the need for grassroots community mobilization to address systemic barriers to equity. Our findings point to salient COVID-19 vulnerabilities associated with the ability to participate in the political process. As such, there is a need for future response and recovery efforts to incorporate a broadened definition of civic engagement that extends beyond participation in the political process to include all activities in which individuals can build community power. *Promotores* have been key assets in creating such opportunities for civic engagement for all community members, regardless of citizenship status, mobilizing communities to advocate for change at the systems level to ameliorate the conditions that have ravaged communities of color over the course of the pandemic. As COVID-19 cases continue to surge and vaccine administration lulls in communities of color, lessons from this study can inform future efforts to respond and rebuild with resilience, addressing the root causes of the pandemic's devastating impact.

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## Opinion

# Affordable Housing and Latinx Families: An Opportunity for Relief in the Current Pandemic

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Andrew Cobian, Alexis Smyser,  
and Jorge Iván Soto

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**Abridged Biography:** This op-ed was published by members of the Association of Latinx Students for Social Justice at the University of Chicago's Harris School of Public Policy. Together, they have built the Harris School's first organization for Latinx students, with their mission being to promote discussion and better understanding of the social, political, economic, and cultural issues facing the US Latinx community through a public policy and social justice lens.



Andrew Cobian is a second-year master's of public policy student with experience in local government and is currently focused on issues of racial justice and environmental equity.



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Jorge Iván Soto is a community organizer and staunch labor activist. He is passionate about labor rights

in the immigrant community and hopes to gain more insight on developing organizing efforts throughout Chicago.

As the Biden administration seeks effective, comprehensive, and bipartisan solutions to address the pandemic and bolster economic growth, all future relief packages, legislation, and policies must address the urgent needs and inequities adversely impacting the Latinx community. In particular, the federal government must address the affordable housing crisis, which has historically had a disproportionate impact on Latinx families. This is an impact that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has further devastated economic security and public health among these historically marginalized and underserved people.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the federal government must implement policies that alleviate the rent and housing burdens faced by Latinx families and address the systemic barriers preventing increased access and availability of affordable housing. This article explores several of the pandemic's nuanced effects on housing issues and proposes strategies that would promote greater equity in housing policy.

While the economic burden of the pandemic has been widely felt, much of it has been borne by Black

and brown renters.<sup>2</sup> Underlying these disparities are several challenges that these households faced prior to the pandemic. Communities of color have historically experienced systemic housing discrimination due to redlining and more recent segregationist measures, such as California's crime-free housing policies that empowered landlords to reject or evict tenants with a criminal record.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the increased cost burdens of housing in these communities are largely rooted in inequities in educational attainment and disparities in wages.<sup>4</sup> Some of the most expensive cities in the United States are home to large Latinx populations, and studies have shown that Latinx families living in these cities are more likely to be renters that are rent-burdened.<sup>5</sup> A significant number of these rent-burdened households are paying over half their wages for housing.<sup>6</sup> Other contributing factors include the type of employment many Latinx workers occupy, as they make up large portions of the workforce in industries that have reduced their personnel as a result of the pandemic, such as the hospitality and service industries.<sup>7</sup>

Latinx communities have also faced disproportionately high rates of eviction as a result of these economic and labor market disruptions.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, absent sufficient financial assistance, the Latinx community continues to face a high risk of mass

eviction. Legislation that addresses the housing insecurity many Latinx people face in this pandemic must therefore consider the systemic and historic nature of the barriers and inequities these individuals and families faced prior to the pandemic in order to equitably address the affordable housing crisis during and after the pandemic.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Congress has struggled to adequately address the economic challenges faced by the Latinx community due to the economic shutdowns stemming from the various state-level stay-at-home orders. Among the significant federal aid that was enacted was the CARES Act and the \$900 billion pandemic relief bill, which provided stimulus checks and an expansion of unemployment insurance benefits, among other things, to assist households burdened by the economic slowdown.<sup>9</sup> Congress has also passed the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan, which requires a new round of stimulus checks and further expands unemployment insurance benefits to eligible Americans. The reality, however, is that these relief packages have not adequately addressed the needs of the Latinx community.

Several public opinion surveys show that Americans believe the stimulus checks should be larger, which would provide critical assistance to those struggling with high rent bur-

dens.<sup>10</sup> These stimulus packages have also done little to address the rent burden of those who entered the pandemic underemployed, as studies have shown that “most households who were cost burdened before the COVID-19 crisis do not receive unemployment [. . .]. Much of the current assistance flows to higher-income renters because they were more likely to have previously participated in the labor force [. . .].”<sup>11</sup> This also extends to mixed-status Latinx families because their citizenship status disqualified them from receiving CARES Act stimulus checks, and some were also barred from receiving unemployment insurance.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to extending the current nationwide eviction moratorium implemented by the Centers for Disease Control, federal policymakers must also focus on providing emergency and short-term rental assistance—particularly through funds that are distributed to neighborhoods and communities that have been hardest hit by the crisis in terms of unemployment and rate of attempted evictions. Relief should be prioritized for Black and brown communities that were already overburdened by housing costs pre-pandemic and are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19.<sup>13</sup>

After the most immediate housing concerns are addressed, policymakers must direct their attention to dismantling the systemic and structural barri-

ers that have long barred Latinx people from accessing housing assistance. Over the last several years, the Trump administration implemented several rules affecting public housing eligibility, including the highly controversial “public charge” and “mixed-status” rules that barred low-income immigrant communities from accessing public housing assistance.<sup>14</sup> These policies discourage Latinx families from participating in public assistance programs they are otherwise eligible for, which is especially true for Latinx households with members who are undocumented or are fearful of disrupting their current path to citizenship.

The social and economic disruptions stemming from the pandemic have disproportionately impacted the Latinx community and now require a bold and visionary policy response to alleviate their impact. While much of the nation has been adversely impacted by the pandemic, members of the Latinx community are contracting and dying of COVID-19 at disproportionately high rates.<sup>15</sup> This is a crisis that requires the implementation of a targeted social safety net that ensures the most basic of human needs: a safe and secure home for even the most vulnerable members of our society.<sup>3</sup>

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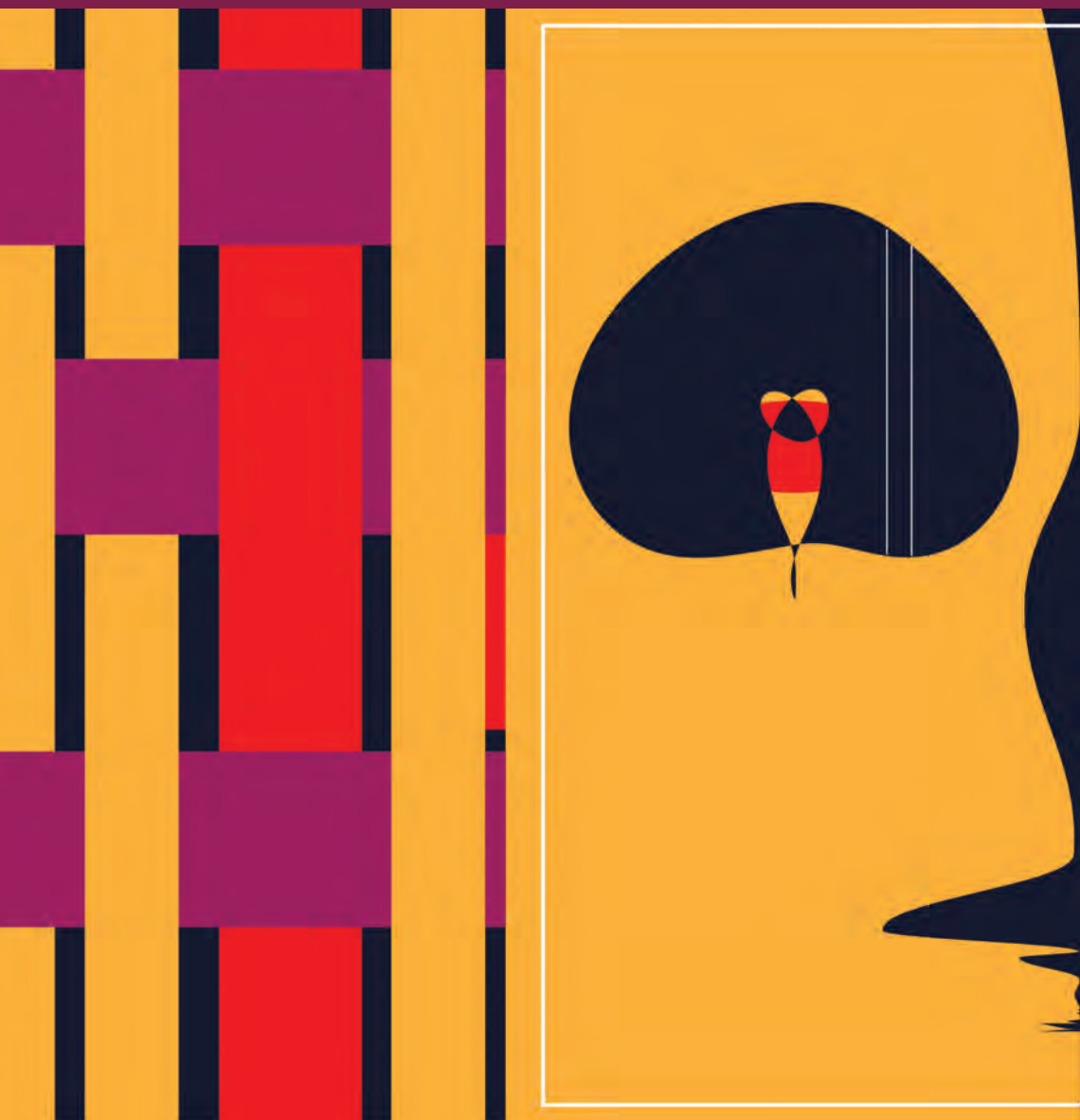
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