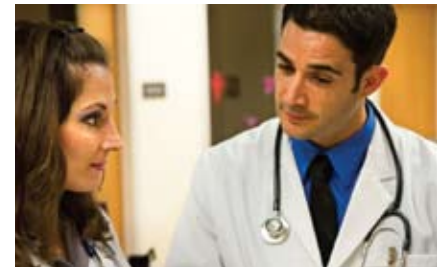


# The State of Latinos 2008



## Defining an Agenda for the Future



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## About the University of Denver Center for Community Engagement and Scholarship

The University of Denver Latino Center for Community Engagement and Scholarship (DULCCES) was founded in 2005. DULCCES is a consortium of interdisciplinary faculty from the University of Denver who are dedicated to creating and advancing knowledge that gives voice to the history, politics, culture, and legacies of Latino communities.

## About Grupo Salinas

Grupo Salinas is a group of dynamic, fast-growing and technologically advanced companies focused on creating shareholder value, contributing to building the middle class of the countries where it operates, and improving society through excellence. Created by Mexican entrepreneur Ricardo B. Salinas, Grupo Salinas operates as a management development and decision forum for the top leaders of member companies TV Azteca, Azteca America, Grupo Elektra, Banco Azteca, Afore Azteca, Seguros Azteca, and Grupo Iusacell. Each of the Grupo Salinas companies operates independently with its own management, board of directors and shareholders. Grupo Salinas has no equity holdings, however, member companies share a common vision, values, and strategies for achieving rapid growth, superior results, and world-class performance.

## About Azteca America

Azteca America is the fastest-growing Hispanic network in the United States. The network is a wholly owned subsidiary of TV Azteca, S.A. de C.V., one of the two largest producers of Spanish-language television content in the world. Azteca America currently has a presence in 60 Hispanic markets.

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# AGENDA LATINA

## The State of Latinos 2008: Defining an Agenda for the Future

### Authors

Dr. María del Carmen Salazar

Dr. Miriam Bornstein-Gómez

Dr. Salvador Mercado

Dr. Lisa M. Martínez

Dr. Debora Ortega

Dr. Oscar U. Somoza

Wendy Méndez

Ana L. León

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	4
Background & Acknowledgments	7
Methodology	9
Overview	10
Executive Summary	13
Agenda Latina for the Future	16
Education	20
Economy	36
Health	50
Immigration	62
Political Engagement	74

## FOREWORD FROM UNIVERSITY OF DENVER LATINO CENTER FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SCHOLARSHIP

Education, health, immigration, the economy, and political engagement are the five policy areas addressed by Agenda Latina: The State of Latinos 2008. The participants in this project are trained to think about and research these issues somewhat independently and separately. Our experts on education know that the school system is failing our community because of the low rates of school persistence and access to higher education. Our health experts know that health access and poor health outcomes are a problem in our community. Our economists know that high cost of living, unemployment and our current economic downturn mean that Latino families are struggling to feed their children. It is in examining these issues, not as separate entities but as an accumulation of cause and effect, that we begin to see the true impact on the lives of Latinos. Consequently, Agenda Latina reveals that when schools fail our children, these failed students may become the “working poor” for most of their lives. They or their family members will likely have less access to the healthcare system, which may be unaffordable to them because they have to make a choice between health and food. Each issue, whether it is political engagement, immigration, or education, when coupled with the other equally important issues, paints a portrait of the real, lived experiences of our community as we struggle to have our part of the American dream. It is our hope that Agenda Latina will be one of the vehicles that advances our collective American dream.

Agenda Latina would never be a reality without the vision of Azteca America. This vision clearly grew out of the love and concern for Latino people across the nation. It is with great pride that DULCCES participated in such an important and timely community dialogue. It is our belief that this gift of Agenda Latina only serves to make our community stronger.

Dr. Debora M. Ortega

Director

University of Denver Latino Center for Community Engagement and Scholarship  
DULCCES

## FOREWORD FROM AZTECA AMERICA

I would like to commend the stellar and professional work of Professor Salazar and the entire team at the University of Denver's Center for Community Engagement and Scholarship (DULCCES) for their timely and scholarly efforts. The mobilization and broad participation of the organizations included in this document is a testament to the DULCCES community dedication and prominence.

The issues presented in this paper and in the Denver forum held this spring are not new. Education, economy, health, immigration, and political engagement are areas of interests that have been on political agendas for decades, if not centuries, in the history of this great country.

Nevertheless, precisely at the time when the United States' Latino population is larger and more politically engaged than ever, the community has become a scapegoat for a plethora of issues from coast to coast.

As the Latino community continues to experience the backlash of an anti-immigrant sentiment that has crossed party lines in some cases, it is more important than ever to establish a concrete response that equally straddles both sides of the aisle.

There is a large convergence of the agenda for Latino and the agenda for the United States population in general. Nevertheless, there are differences, starting with language.

Disparities between the Latino community and the general population when it comes to high school dropout rates means that the current education system needs to work harder. Latino students currently represent 20 percent of the student body at public school. The figure is expected to almost double in the next two decades.

A lack of confidence and communication with the traditional health care network is likewise creating a huge liability for the country going forward.

The economy is a national and global issue, however, the sectors with the most intensive Latino participation, namely housing construction, are being hit the hardest.

Finally, the lack of a comprehensive immigration solution hurts the entire Latino community and the United States as a whole. There is a significant portion of the population living in fear of deportation, avoiding all unnecessary societal contact that is not absolutely necessary. These are hardworking individuals, who like our forefathers came to the United States in search of an American Dream. And, like our forefathers, they landed in the United States without papers.

Some of the conclusions of this report might sound like common sense. Nevertheless, these are precisely the tools that our policy-makers need as the next administration and Congress approach.

The organizations represented by “State of Latinos” represent millions of members throughout the nation. I hope that this document serves to concentrate the many voices it represents into a single message that supports the Latino community and the country as a whole.

Luis J. Echarte  
Chairman  
Fundación Azteca America  
Azteca America Network

## BACKGROUND & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The University of Denver Latino Center for Community Engagement and Scholarship (DULCCES) participated in a national town hall meeting sponsored by the Azteca America Network, Azteca America Colorado, Fundación Azteca America, and KBNO Radio Que Bueno. The event was titled: *The State of Latinos: 2008 Colorado Town Hall Meeting - Latinos Defining the Agenda for the Future*. The stated goal of the meeting was to develop an Agenda Latina to empower Latinos to become politically aware and active, through discussion of issues such as the economy, health, education, immigration, and the Latino vote.

The event took place on May 30, 2008, and it was nationally televised on June 20, 2008. Participants included nine nationally recognized experts from the following organizations: Congressional Hispanic Leadership Institute; Labor Council for Latin American Advancement; National Council of La Raza; Voto Latino; NDN; National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials; Organización de Hispanos por la Igualdad; Southwest Voter Registration Education Project; and the Republican National Hispanic Assembly. Audience members included local Latino community leaders, Senator Ken Salazar, and Colorado Governor Bill Ritter.

Azteca America requested that DULCCES prepare a comprehensive document aimed at building the knowledge base on the most pressing issues facing the Latina/o community in relation to health, education, immigration, political engagement, and the economy. Additionally, DULCCES was to address these issues with specific recommendations.

DULCCES held its own community forum with local leaders from the Latino community in order to narrow the issues and explore possible recommendations on a national level. Contributors included: Denise Delgado, Development Director, Clínica Tepeyac; Dean José Roberto Juárez, University of Denver, Sturm College of Law; Dr. Antonio Esquibel, Board of Trustees, Metropolitan State College; Dr. María Guajardo, Executive Director, Mayor's Office for Education & Children; Karina Sánchez, owner, Azteca Marketing Business Solutions; Gerardo Xahuentitla, Immigrant Justice Advocate, Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition; Grace López Ramirez, Colorado State Director, Mi Familia Vota; Sherri Vasquez, host and producer, Latin View; Antonio Equibel Jr., Principal, Abraham Lincoln High School; Arturo López Levy, faculty, Institute for the Study of Israel and the Middle East; Miriam Tapia, Director of Diversity Enrollment, University of Denver; and Marco Núñez, Director of Organizing, Padres and Jóvenes Unidos.

Special thanks to University of Denver's Center for Multicultural Excellence and thanks to local consultant and business owner Francisco Jerez.

The greatest thanks are for University of Denver and DULCCES faculty and staff who waged an unfaltering and exhaustive commitment to develop and disseminate the Agenda Latina. In solidarity:

#### **DULCCES Contributing Research Faculty and Staff:**

Dr. Debora Ortega  
Director, DULCCES  
Associate Professor  
Social Work  
*debora.ortega@du.edu*

Dr. Miriam Bornstein Gómez  
Associate Director, DULCCES  
Associate Professor  
Languages & Literatures  
*mbornste@du.edu*

Dr. Oscar U. Somoza  
Professor  
Languages & Literatures  
*osomoza@du.edu*

Dr. Lisa M. Martínez  
Assistant Professor  
Sociology  
*lisa.martinez@du.edu*

Dr. Salvador Mercado  
Assistant Professor  
Languages & Literatures  
*smercado@du.edu*

Wendy Méndez, M.A.  
Lecturer  
Languages & Literatures  
*wmendez@du.edu*

Ana León  
Program Assistant, DULCCES  
Student, Institute for Public  
Policy Studies  
*aleon4@du.edu*

#### **Lead Research Faculty for Agenda Latina Project:**

Dr. María del Carmen Salazar  
Assistant Professor  
Morgridge College of Education  
*msalazar@du.edu*

#### **Special Note:**

This document does not necessarily represent the views of the University of Denver or contributors to the University of Denver programs.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of the issues facing Latinos in the U.S. However, DULCCES faculty and staff are committed to continue research and scholarship efforts in these areas in order to promote greater depth of understanding on the complex issues presented. In the future, the DULCCES faculty and staff plan on engaging in efforts to address additional topics that impact Latinos in the U.S. such as: the justice system, social services system, mental health, and the advancement of a bilingual or multilingual Latino nation.

# METHODOLOGY

## Compilation of data from the town hall meeting

The initial town hall meeting sponsored by Azteca America was transcribed into Spanish by DULCCES faculty. The information was organized into various segments, including comments by participants on specific topics. In addition, panelists had the opportunity to contribute to the findings and recommendations of this paper as faculty consulted them via email. Emerging themes from the town hall meeting were used to shape the contents of this document.

## Roundtable discussion

DULCCES faculty and staff held a roundtable discussion of the issues and began to devise a plan to develop and disseminate a comprehensive document to define the Agenda Latina.

## Local community forum

In partnership with the Latino community, DULCCES faculty held a forum with local experts, scholars, and community advocates in order to narrow the issues and devise action steps.

## Review of the research

DULCCES faculty conducted an intense review of the most recent national research, ranging from 2004-2008, related to the five topics that were identified. This includes peer-reviewed academic research. Faculty consulted government databases such as the U.S. Census as well as national databases such as Pew Hispanic Center, National Council of La Raza, League of United Latin American Citizens, and the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute. Faculty also consulted websites of the nine national panelists from the town hall meeting and from local organizations.

## Comprehensive data analysis

Data analysis conducted by faculty on specific topics was based on the town hall meeting, local community forum, national research data bases on Latinos, and information posted on websites of national and local organizations serving Latinos.

## Internal & external peer review

University of Denver faculty, local experts, and national representatives of Latino organizations were involved in an internal and external peer review process of the final draft.

## NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

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The term **Latino** is used in place of another commonly used term, Hispanic. The terms are not synonymous, nor are they widely accepted by all. In addition, there are political issues involved in labeling that are outside the scope of this document. The term Latino is used in place of Latino/a or Latina/o to increase readability of the document.

The terms **Latino community** or **Latino communities** are used interchangeably

and include an acknowledgement of the intragroup and intergroup diversity that exists. It is important to note that the statistical information provided varies across subgroups and the information provided in this document addresses Latinos in general terms.

The terms **white** and **black** are used to describe persons of non-Latino origin.

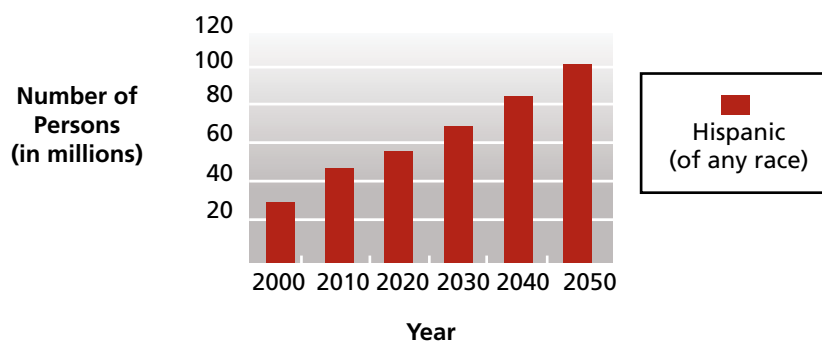
## OVERVIEW

Latinos represent the largest racial and ethnic minority group in the United States. It is estimated that Latinos comprise approximately 15 percent of the total U.S. population. A snapshot of the Latino population reveals the following:

- Latinos are the fastest growing and youngest ethnic population in the country.<sup>1</sup>
- Nearly 40 percent of the Latino population is under the age of 19.<sup>2</sup>
- Nearly 25 percent of the Latino population is under the age of five.<sup>3</sup>
- The median age for Latinos is 27.<sup>4</sup>
- Approximately 60 percent of the Latino population is native born and 40 percent is foreign born.<sup>5</sup>

The Latino population is projected to account for 60 percent of U.S. population growth between 2005 and 2050, which means it will nearly triple in size.<sup>6</sup> Various reports indicate that Latinos will comprise between 24 and 29 percent of the U.S. population by 2050.<sup>7</sup>

### Projected Hispanic Population of the United States



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2004. "U.S. Interim Projections by Age, Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin." [www.census.gov/ipc/www/usinterim/proj/](http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/usinterim/proj/).

While most Latinos reside in urban areas, new demographic patterns reveal increasing numbers of Latinos in rural regions. Rural Latino populations in the Midwest, Southeast, and Northwest are growing far more rapidly than all other racial and ethnic groups.<sup>8</sup> This phenomenon is revitalizing languishing towns across the U.S. While some local residents are appreciative of the growing presence of Latinos, others react with fear and intolerance.

Latinos are often described as a monolithic group; however, they represent a vast heterogeneity in terms of national origin, language proficiency, language variety, acculturation patterns, political orientations, socioeconomic status, values, and much more. The Latino category includes persons often residing in the United States who are of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and South or Central American culture or origin, regardless of race. It includes residents who can trace their ancestry to the 16th century, as well as recent immigrants. Among Latino subgroups, Mexican heritage residents make up the largest percentage (64 percent), followed by Puerto Ricans (9 percent) and Cubans (3.4 percent).<sup>9</sup> While the information in this report addresses general issues and trends impacting Latinos, distinct subgroups are impacted in diverse ways.

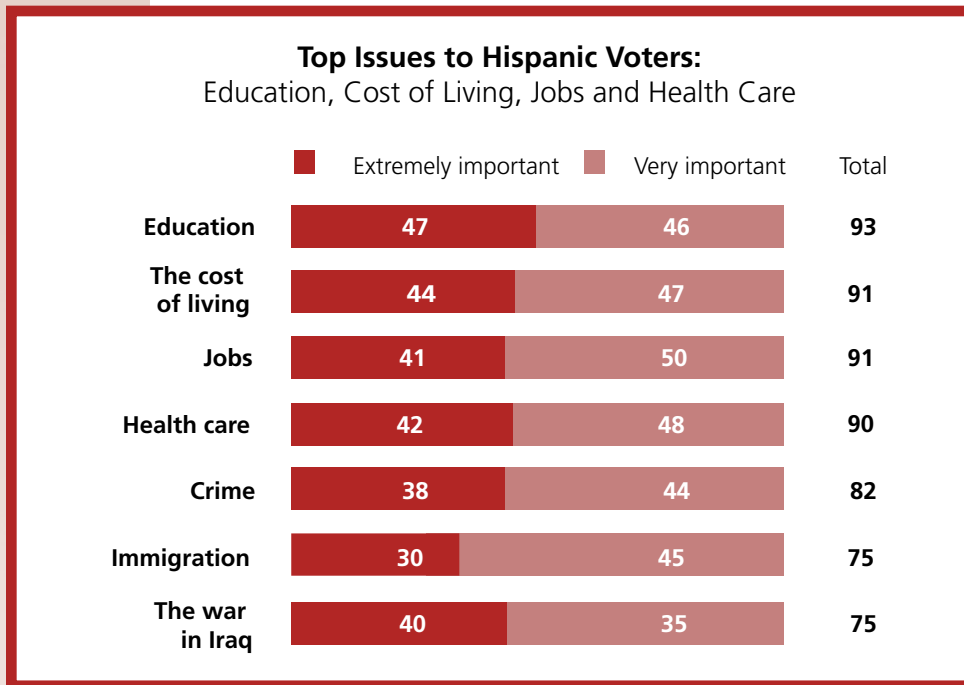
Regardless of country of origin, Latinos are facing increasing citizenship demands. For Latinos, citizenship is not simply a matter of documentation. Latinos claim cultural citizenship as a means of incorporating themselves into U.S. society while simultaneously maintaining and developing cultural forms of expressions related to identity and heritage that significantly enrich the cultural whole of the country.<sup>10</sup> We maintain that this form of citizenship is unifying and strengthens a multicultural nation. Latinos are also increasingly represented as U.S. citizens and must be prepared to advance democracy as the voters of tomorrow. In some instances, Latinos may hold dual citizenship in the U.S. and their country of origin. Finally, Latinos are citizens of the world; they are engaged in global efforts as transnational advocates.

Our perspective is that Latinos enrich the United States of America. The nation must not fail to capitalize on the vast economic, cultural, and political resources the Latino community offers, including: bilingual competency; multicultural perspectives; a rich cultural heritage; a historical legacy of achievement and resiliency; family values; child-centered views; community-centered approaches; respect for the elderly; optimistic and appreciative attitudes; a strong faith; good will; transnational connections; and a robust work ethic.

Latinos are America's past, present, and future.

## KEY ISSUES FOR LATINOS

Latino registered voters rank education, the economy, and health care, respectively, as the most important issues facing Latinos in the U.S, as indicated by a 2008 poll conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center. Immigration also ranks as a key concern for the majority of Latino registered voters.



From "National Survey of Latinos 2008: Hispanic Voter Attitudes." M. Lopez & S. Minushkin. Pew Hispanic Center. 2008. <http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=90>.

Like most Americans, Latinos want access to a quality education, well-paying jobs, adequate housing, reasonably priced food and gas, and quality health care. Unlike most Americans, Latinos face significant disparities in their access to the most basic services. It is becoming evident that as the Latino population grows, the disparities continue to widen. Furthermore, immigration status continues to be a central factor in increased disparities.

The Latino electorate wants change. Among Latino registered voters, 93 percent plan to vote in the upcoming 2008 presidential election.<sup>11</sup> They advocate for access to high quality education, greater access to quality health care, and stable economic prospects. Most want a pathway to citizenship for undocumented men, women, and children who contribute to the nation. Latinos are one of the most sought-after electorates in the nation. They will be exerting their political will in the upcoming presidential election, sending a message to politicians and their fellow Americans about what matters most to them.

This report presents an Agenda Latina for the future. It is inclusive of the issues that are most pressing to the Latino community and it delineates action steps that are vital to the future of Latinos and the nation.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The section that follows delineates overall findings as well as findings and recommendations for each of the topics addressed in the Agenda Latina: education, economy, health, immigration, and political engagement. Subsequent sections present detailed findings and recommendations.

### OVERALL FINDINGS

- Latinos face major challenges in accessing quality education, health care, and economic services.
- Lack of comprehensive immigration reform increases disparities and limits the future progress of the Latino community and the nation.
- Latino community development is key to advancing the future prosperity and well-being of Latinos and the nation.
- Latino communities want to be self-sufficient and contribute to U.S. society.
- Latino communities need greater access to essential services and opportunities in order to thrive and to offer their rich potential.
- Alliances are vital in facilitating access to resources.

### LATINOS & EDUCATION

#### Key Findings

- The Latino community is invested in education.
- The need for school reform is one of the most important issues of concern in the 2008 presidential election.
- Latinos comprise the largest and fastest growing student population in U.S. public schools.
- Latinos experience a persistent achievement gap from preschool to graduate school in the U.S.
- The most pressing educational issues impacting the future stability of the Latino community include low high school and college graduation rates.
- A significant number of Latinos are unprepared for the demands of the 21st century.
- Latinos often experience barriers to educational and workforce success.

## LATINOS & THE ECONOMY

### Key Findings

- Latinos are vital contributors to the U.S. economy.
- Unemployment rates are on the rise for Latinos.
- The high cost of living has had a significant impact on Latino families.
- Latinos face increasing wealth disparities in the U.S.
- Latinos have limited access to affordable credit.

## HEALTH

### Key Findings

- The central issue facing the health of the Latino community is the lack of access to quality care.
- Various factors impact Latino access to quality health care, including: growing racial and ethnic disparities; a widespread lack of insurance; lack of health-related education; inadequate supply of bilingual language services and culturally competent services; and immigration status.
- The health of the Latino community is vital to the nation.

## IMMIGRATION

### Key Findings

- There is an atmosphere of intolerance and fear across the nation related to immigration issues.
- The human impact of immigration is often neglected.
- There is a pressing need for comprehensive immigration reform.
- There is a lack of transnational solutions in the immigration debate.

## POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

### Key Findings

- Immigration reform and increased rates of naturalization are catalysts for political engagement.
- Latinos are becoming increasingly engaged in the political arena and represent an electorate with great potential for significant impact.
- Latinos age 18-24 are a growing sector of registered voters.
- Efforts are needed to increase Latino voting rates.
- Personal outreach is most effective.
- Latinos are underrepresented in the national government.
- Greater geographic, economic, cultural and political visibility have focused attention on Latinos as agents of social and political change.

## OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase access to quality education, health care, and economic services.
- Build the wealth and financial stability of the Latino community.
- Invest in Latino community development as a means of promoting self-sufficiency.
- Increase linguistically and culturally relevant practices in education, health care, economic access, immigration reform, and political engagement.
- Advance comprehensive and humane immigration reform.
- Enact federal legislation to protect Latinos against discriminatory and predatory practices.
- Increase opportunities to build alliances among organizations that support Latino community development.

# AGENDA LATINA FOR THE FUTURE

## 1. Invest in the future of the Latino community.

For Latinos, community is essential to survival, not only in terms of neighborhood or geographic locale, but also in terms of collective identity and assets. The nation must not see the Latino community as needing to be changed, fixed, or saved, but rather as a dynamic and resilient community with strong intellectual, cultural, linguistic, economic, political, and familial resources.

The nation must invest in the Latino community by strengthening family connections to quality educational, health, economic, and civic engagement opportunities. In return, building the capacity and self-sufficiency of Latino communities promotes economic stability and progress for the entire nation.

Community development is crucial to the advancement of Latinos. Community development programs often build on the assets of Latinos and help expand their natural advantages. Federal and state governments should support community development programs by increasing funding, facilitating better access to statewide agencies and resources, providing technical assistance, leadership training, and coalition building.

The nation should continue to encourage the integration of Latinos into U.S. society through education, civic engagement efforts, acquisition of English, and respect for U.S. norms and laws. However, integration must not equal loss of the resources communities need to survive and thrive. The nation must also foster and expand the social, cultural, linguistic, intellectual, and familial resources of the Latino community in order to promote inclusiveness and enhance the skills needed for an increasingly globalized economy.

## 2. Increase the access of the Latino community to vital educational, health, economic, and civic opportunities.

Increasing access to culturally and linguistically responsive services is essential to the integration and advancement of Latino communities. Such services, coupled with other forms of support, enlarge the knowledge and skills of Latinos in navigating the U.S. system, and also sustain self-sufficiency.

It is imperative to support education initiatives within the Latino community. This includes quality, culturally and linguistically responsive preschool, K-12, and higher education. Furthermore, health education, financial education, naturalization education, and English language and bilingual education are also vital to the advancement of Latino communities.

It is equally important to review and dismantle legislation that restricts access to important services and other forms of support.

### 3. Build coalitions.

Leaders must increase dialogue around issues that impact the future sustainability of the nation. Dialogue is essential to developing a deeper understanding of complex issues. The National Council of La Raza has multiple initiatives aimed at increasing dialogue around issues that are vital to the Latino community, including: “Take the Hate Out of the Immigration Debate” and the “National White Ribbon Campaign for Dialogue.” Federal, state, and local governments should foster efforts to increase dialogue and understanding around divisive issues.

In addition, it is essential to build state, local, national, and transnational alliances, networks, and coalitions in order to pool resources and connect knowledge and expertise.

### 4. Increase research and dissemination of findings.

It is essential to increase funding for research and development that enhances knowledge on the most vital challenges facing the Latino community. In order to craft appropriate solutions, policymakers, community organizers, educators, and leaders need to be aware of the intricate nature of the challenges Latinos face.

Furthermore, research funds should be targeted to demystify promising practices for Latinos. This includes quantitative and qualitative research. Qualitative research is a powerful tool to unearth the complexity of issues and engage the Latino community in developing solutions.

It is important to create a national clearinghouse aimed at pooling and disseminating the most recent research on the Latino community. This clearinghouse should condense the research on promising practices as a blueprint for reform. It should also be a primary resource base for organizations that serve Latinos. The clearinghouse should also provide technical support on how to use the data to identify outcomes and to refine and improve practice. The goal should be to collect information and build the capacity to use it, including through online forums designed to share expertise and resources.

### 5. Establish a presidential advisory commission to advance the Agenda Latina.

We urge the future president to create a presidential advisory commission to advance an Agenda Latina. This commission should be comprised of national, state, and local leaders representing the Latino community. The commission should incorporate grassroots efforts and be productive. This national coalition of Latinos would engage in the following:

- Identify the most pressing issues impacting Latinos in the U.S.
- Identify gatekeepers to access for the Latino community in regards to education, health care, economic prosperity, immigration, political engagement, and other relevant issues.
- Engage in strategic planning for an Agenda Latina for the future.
- Foster the collaboration and coordination among Latino organizations as well as other national groups serving underrepresented populations.
- Propose workable and realistic solutions.
- Pool knowledge and resources on the Latino community.

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Statistical portrait of Hispanic in the United States. (2006). Pew Hispanic Center. Retrieved July 10, 2008, from <http://pewhispanic.org/factsheets/factsheet.php?FactsheetID=35>.
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- <sup>3</sup> Statistical portrait of Hispanic in the United States. (2006). Pew Hispanic Center. Retrieved July 10, 2008, from <http://pewhispanic.org/factsheets/factsheet.php?FactsheetID=35>.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> William Kandel, John Cromartie: (2003) Amber Waves: Hispanics Find a Home in Rural America. Retrieved July 15, 2008 from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Amberwaves/Feb03/Findings/HispanicsFind>.
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- <sup>10</sup> Flores, W., & Benmayor, R. (1998). In W. Flores and R. Benmayor (Eds.), *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights* (p. 16, direct quote). Boston: Beacon Press.
- <sup>11</sup> Lopez, M. H., & Minushkin, S. (2008). Pew Hispanic National Survey of Latinos: Hispanic voter attitudes. Retrieved July 21, 2008, from <http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=90>.



# EDUCATION & THE LATINO COMMUNITY

## INTRODUCTION

The Latino community is invested in education. Indeed, education ranks as the top concern of the Latino community according to a 2008 poll conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center.<sup>1</sup> Their investment in education is vital as Latinos are the largest and fastest growing student population in U.S. public schools. Recent statistics indicate the following demographic trends:

- Nationwide, Latinos account for 20 percent of total public school enrollment.<sup>2</sup>
- Approximately 45 percent of Latino children enrolled in K-12 schools are English Language Learners (ELLs).<sup>3</sup>
- It is estimated that close to 80 percent of ELL students are U.S. citizens.<sup>4</sup>
- ELLs are the fastest-growing student population and are projected to comprise 25 percent of the U.S. student population by the year 2025.<sup>5</sup>

Latinos will continue to have a major impact on U.S. public schools. Projections indicate that over the next 25 years, the Latino population ages 5 to 24 is expected to increase by 82 percent.<sup>6</sup>

The growing numbers of Latino youth create moral, economic, and civil rights imperatives for the nation. While educational progress has been made over the past decades, wide disparities persist between the achievement of white students and Latinos. Such disparities remain widely unchanged since 1971.<sup>7</sup>

Education researchers argue that a considerable sector of Latinos are miseducated and undereducated.<sup>8</sup> They warn that the nation must make visible gains in narrowing the persistent achievement gap that Latinos experience in the U.S. educational system, from preschool to graduate school. Researchers also question whether the gap is related to achievement or a lack of resources and equitable practices, pointing to the shortcomings of the U.S. educational system.<sup>9</sup>

The section that follows presents the case that high school and college completion are vital to the future prosperity of the Latino community and the nation. This section also identifies initiatives needed to advance the educational attainments of Latinos in the U.S., from preschool to graduate school.

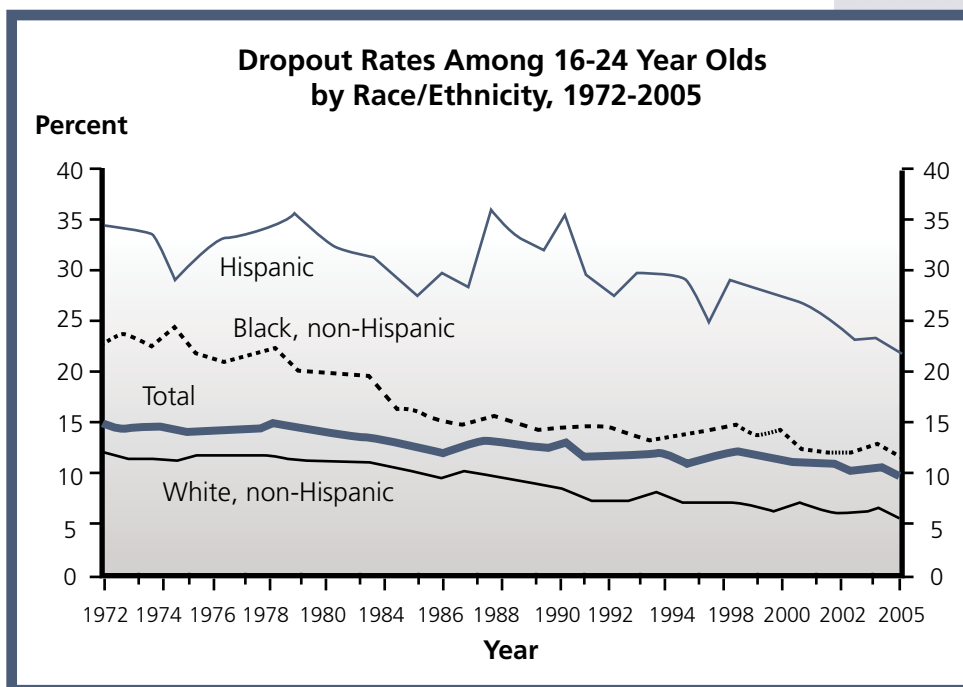
## ISSUES & RECOMMENDATIONS

### Issue No. 1: Latinos face persistent disparities in high school completion.

Currently, there is little state or federal oversight of graduation and dropout rate reports. As a result, calculations vary widely. While rates vary by subgroup, various reports indicate that nationwide, only 53 percent of Latino youth who enter 9th grade will receive a high school diploma in four years. In addition, the Latino dropout rate is reportedly 2.5 times higher than that of blacks and 3.5 times higher than the rate of whites.<sup>10</sup> *Education Week* recently reported that 58 percent of Latino students do not complete high school. Critics argue dropout rates are often overestimated.

Latino voters identify high dropout rates to be the greatest educational problem for the Latino community in the U.S., according to a recent poll by the National Council of La Raza.

In 2005, Latinos accounted for 22 percent of 16 to 24-year-olds who did not complete high school and did not earn a high school diploma or equivalent credential, compared with 10.7 for blacks and 5.8 for whites. Although dropout rates have declined for Latinos since 1972, significant disparities persist between the educational attainment of Latinos and whites.



Source: National Center for Educational Statistics. 2007. "Status dropout rates of 16- through 24-year-olds, by race/ethnicity: October 1972-2005." <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2008/section3/table.asp?tableID=900>.

The rate at which Latinos leave school varies by generational status, with foreign born 16 to 24-year-olds at 38.4 percent, first-generation Latinos at 14.7 percent, and second-generation or greater at 13.7 percent.<sup>11</sup> These rates are noticeably higher than the rates for blacks and whites. Future projections indicate that by the year 2015, 75 percent of Latinos ages 16 to 24 will not have a high school diploma.<sup>12</sup>

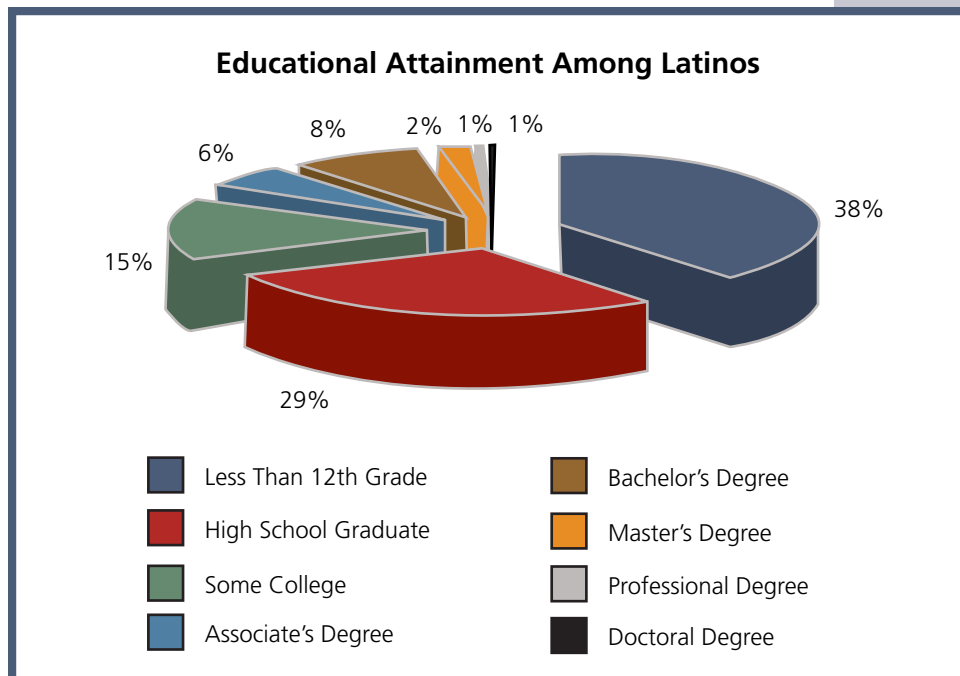
Educational scholars have questioned whether Latino students are dropping out of school, or if educational inequities are fueling a *pushout* phenomenon. For instance, in a recent study, Latino students indicated that they accepted responsibility for opting out of school. However, they also reported that their schooling played a significant factor in their decision in that they did not feel motivated or inspired to work hard.<sup>13</sup>

High school plays a pivotal role for the future of the Latino community. High school dropouts have limited career advancement opportunities. They are more vulnerable to unemployment; less healthy; likely to die earlier; more likely to become parents when they are young; at greater risk of entering the criminal justice system; more likely to need social welfare assistance; earn reduced lifetime earnings; and negatively impact tax revenues.<sup>14</sup> According to Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, over their lifetime, dropouts from the class of 2007 alone cost the nation more than \$300 billion in lost wages, taxes, and productivity.<sup>15</sup> Improving graduation rates for Latinos is imperative to the nation's economic success.

## Issue No. 2: Many Latinos are unprepared for college and experience low college completion rates.

While high school graduation is an important goal, it is insufficient when a diploma is a ticket to nowhere.<sup>16</sup> By the end of 12th grade, Latinos' average math and reading scores are virtually the same as white 8th grade students.<sup>17</sup> Latinos are more likely to be enrolled in lower-level language arts, math, and science courses than any other ethnic group.<sup>18</sup> In addition, a large percentage of Latino students are required to complete remedial coursework before they are admitted to degree-granting institutions. Research shows that students who enroll in remedial courses in college are less likely to graduate.<sup>19</sup>

In 2007, the U.S. Census Bureau conducted a survey of 29,637 Latinos ages 18 and over and found that 38 percent of respondents had less than a high school education. In total, 82 percent of respondents indicated they had not received a college degree.



Note: Total survey population 29,637

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey. 2007. "Educational Attainment of the Population 18 Years and Over, by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin." <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/education/cps2007.html>.

The following statistics capture significant disparities in education:

- In 2007, about 34 percent of Latino 25 to 29-year-olds had completed some college, compared with 50 percent of their black peers and 66 percent of white peers.<sup>20</sup>
- Most Latinos attend two-year colleges while most black and white students attend four-year colleges.<sup>21</sup>
- Almost 50 percent of Latino students who start at a two-year college do not complete a degree and are no longer enrolled six years later.<sup>22</sup>
- Latinos who begin their college experience in a two-year college are less likely to transfer to a four-year college and attain a bachelor's degree.<sup>23</sup>
- Of every 100 Latino kindergartners, only 13 will obtain a bachelor's degree.<sup>24</sup>
- Five percent of graduate degrees (master's and Ph.D.) are awarded to Latinos, compared with 70 percent for whites.<sup>25</sup>

Latinos face significant disparities in college readiness and college completion. At the same time, increasing workforce demands indicate a growing need for higher education, as revealed by the following indicators:

- 67 percent of new jobs in 2007 require some education or training beyond high school.<sup>26</sup>
- 85 percent of current jobs and 90 percent of new jobs in occupations with both high growth and high wages will require workers with at least some post secondary education.<sup>27</sup>

- 90 percent of the fastest-growing U.S. jobs require at least some postsecondary education.<sup>28</sup>

## RECOMMENDATION: ENVISION AND ENACT A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO EDUCATION

In order to build a community that sustains Latino youth, the nation must be prepared to envision and enact a holistic approach to education known as the P-20 system. The P-20 is often described as a comprehensive and integrated system of education designed to raise student achievement at all levels of the educational continuum, from preschool to graduate school.<sup>29</sup> The P-20 system consists of a community of educators focused on increasing student access to a quality education by preparing students for the worlds of higher education, work, and citizenship.

The initiatives and recommendations that follow can support the goal of increasing access to a quality education across the P-20.

### I. Advance alignment and innovation across the P-20 system

#### Key Findings

**Alignment across the P-20 system supports student achievement.** The nation's schools need clear, coherent, rigorous academic standards, benchmarks, curriculum, and assessments that are linked from preschool to graduate school. Forty-four states across the nation are charting new terrain in aligning their policies and school systems from preschool to graduate school.<sup>30</sup> However, there is little communication between states and limited funding and resources to hasten these efforts. Unfortunately, planning for alignment across P-20 often excludes the communities that are supposed to benefit from such efforts.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Provide resources and incentives for innovative educational partnerships across the P-20.** In order to pool the nation's resources and expertise, innovative educational efforts should focus on alignment in standards, benchmarks, curriculum, and assessment from preschool to graduate school. It is essential to maximize the power of partnerships that have strong potential to produce results, particularly partnerships between institutions of higher education, K-12 schools, early childhood centers, community organizations, and the business community.

- **Provide national leadership on P-20 initiatives.** Create a Presidential P-20 Council to advance the work already in progress in 44 states. Provide incentives and resources to states to adopt and advance the P-20 system. Emphasize that P-20 alignment must be developed with community support.

## II. Start early

### Key Findings

**Quality early education significantly improves school readiness and benefits the nation.** A vast body of research shows that participation in intensive, high-quality early education can improve school readiness and close the educational gap.<sup>31</sup> Research has demonstrated that increasing access to early education benefits the nation, resulting in fewer students held back; fewer special education placements; higher job satisfaction for teachers and lower teacher turnover; reduced need for substitute teachers; reduced spending on school safety; and reduced pressure on student-aid services.<sup>32</sup>

**The educational gap for Latinos can be traced to early childhood.** Research shows that 80 percent of the educational gap at grade four, between Latino students and white students, is present before they begin attending school. Half of the math and reading gap for high school seniors can be attributed to the gap at school entry.<sup>33</sup>

Latinos have less access to early education programs. Latino children ages three to five, are less likely to participate in early education programs compared with black and white children.<sup>34</sup> In 2005, 43 percent of Latino children participated in early education programs compared with 66 percent of black children and 59 percent of white children. In addition, only 36 percent of Latino children living in poverty participated in early education programs.<sup>35</sup>

Latinos advocate for greater access to preschool. According to a recent poll by the National Council of La Raza, 76 percent of Latinos want the federal government to spend more for access to preschool.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Offer high quality, comprehensive, culturally and linguistically appropriate early education services and supports.** Culturally appropriate early learning services build on the knowledge, resources, and values of the Latino community in order to advance the knowledge and skills of children. Latino children also need access to bilingual early education services in order to develop bilingual skills that will serve them in an increasingly globalized economy.

- **Embed early education services in the Latino communities in order to increase access.**<sup>36</sup> Latino families may entrust their children to family members, friends, or neighbors, often because of lack of access to early education services in their communities.<sup>37</sup> While social networks are a strong resource for families, studies show that early childhood education accelerates school readiness. Preschools should be located in Latino communities. Preschool registration drives should be held in local community sites.
- **Link early learning services with family development.** Increased resources are needed for family initiatives to develop parents' knowledge and skills in supporting children from preschool to graduate school. Resources should be targeted toward programs that provide opportunities for family literacy, and that link Latino parents with support services such as health screenings.

### III. Develop and sustain educator quality

#### Key Findings

##### **Quality teachers are a critical factor in student success.**

Researchers advocate that the single most important factor in determining students' performance is the quality of their teachers.<sup>38</sup>

**Latino students have less qualified teachers and principals.** A vast body of research indicates that there is a gap in teacher and principal quality for poor and minority youth as compared with their more affluent and white peers. Reasons cited for the quality gap include:

- Inadequate training on issues of cultural and linguistic diversity in teacher and principal preparation programs
- Lack of access to resources that capitalize on the strengths of the Latino community such as curriculum materials
- Negative perceptions of Latino students and parents
- Low expectations for Latino students
- Low numbers of Latino teachers

**Latinos cite cultural competence as a barrier to meeting the needs of Latino students.** In a recent survey of Latinos, parents reported that Latino students lag behind because teachers are not able to bridge cultural divides in classrooms.<sup>39</sup> In addition, educational researchers cite a lack of authentic and critical experiences in communities as a critical factor in teachers' ability to teach, and learn from, the communities they serve.<sup>40</sup>

**Reform efforts focus on teacher subject matter knowledge.** Solutions for decreasing the educational gap often focus on increasing teachers' subject matter knowledge. While teachers' subject matter knowledge is an important consideration in decreasing the gap, it simplifies a complex issue. To impact the

quality of education offered to Latino students, the nation must move beyond a focus on teachers alone. The focus should be placed on developing a quality community of educators, inclusive of all who contribute to the educational success of children such as principals, paraprofessionals, school counselors, and every professional in the school building.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Raise the quality of teacher and principal preparation.** National leadership is needed to increase accountability for the wide array of teacher and principal preparation options available. It is necessary to create minimum national and state standards that provide students with culturally and linguistically appropriate educational practices. Such standards should be created by teachers, community leaders, experts in the field, and students. Culturally and linguistically appropriate practices enable students to develop a vision of possibility for themselves, their families, the country, and the world. Educators must be provided with training on effective culturally based curriculum, instructional and assessment strategies, relationship building, differentiation, and community outreach.
- **Re-envision colleges of education as central to school reform.** Colleges of education should be flagships for a community of educators with a common vision and common goals. Colleges of education should be given the opportunity to foster innovation zones in order to advance visionary agendas.
- **Increase recruitment and retention efforts of Latino educators.** It is vital to provide Latino students with educators who reflect their own experiences, struggles, and opportunities. Latinos should be represented in school staff as teachers, paraprofessionals, principals, counselors, etc. Increasing scholarship opportunities is essential to the recruitment of Latino teachers.

## IV. Provide universal and early orientation to college and career pathways

### Key Findings

**Orientation to college and career pathways begins early.** College preparation begins in early childhood with the acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary for educational success. Orientation to college and career pathways accelerates in the middle grades, and intensifies in high school. Latino students often face difficult transitions to high school. It has been reported that students who fail the ninth grade carry a stronger risk of dropping out of school.<sup>41</sup> Middle school should include a strong focus on high school preparation and early college readiness. Innovative K-12 academies often provide supportive transitions along the educational continuum.

### **A college and career-ready diploma prepares students for the 21st century.**

A college and career-ready diploma prepares students with the skills and knowledge necessary for college, work, and citizenship.<sup>42</sup> It aligns to college entrance requirements and college entry exams. Such a diploma also indicates that a student is able to master 21st century knowledge and skills such as academic mastery of essential content areas; critical thinking and problem solving; effective use of technology; information and media literacy; real-world application of knowledge and skills; career planning; intergroup communication; knowledge of world cultures; cultural competence; self-direction; collaboration; bilingual or multilingual proficiency; and civic-mindedness.<sup>43</sup>

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **Offer college and career-ready diplomas.** Every high school in the nation should offer college and career-ready diplomas. National, state, district, and community support is needed to define standards for such diplomas. In addition, high schools should provide students with access to the following:
  - A rigorous college prep curriculum
  - Access to gateway and advanced placement courses
  - Rigorous courses that advance science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM)
  - Rigorous and applicable world languages coursework
  - Counseling for college preparation such as entrance exams, admissions, enrollment, retention, and financial aid
  - Career internships and career mapping
  - Increased focus on study skills and organization skills
  - Engagement of parents by increasing knowledge of college opportunities and supports
  - Dialogue and resources to address difficult issues that may arise in college life such as a sense of alienation, isolation, or discrimination
  - Access to Latino mentors who successfully navigated the higher education system
  - Service learning opportunities
  - Technology literacy
  - Extended learning opportunities to acquire necessary skills and knowledge
- **Transform dropout factories.** Dropout factories are high schools that graduate less than 60 percent of their students. In 2000, high school dropout factories produced 66 percent of Latino dropouts, accounting for half of all dropouts in the U.S.<sup>44</sup> Rather than penalizing these struggling schools, federal and state government agencies should broker innovative partnerships and increase resources to help transform them into effective communities of learning.

- **Increase funding for innovative approaches that provide students with the necessary skills to succeed in college and beyond.** It is important to support programs that are making inroads with college attendance and matriculation for Latino students such as:
  - Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO)
  - Early college high schools
  - Career and college preparatory academies, including community-based schools, faith-based academies and charter schools
  - Initiatives established to support Latino students such as Exito Escolar, Gear Up, and ENLACE

## V. Increase funding and accountability for higher education

### Key Findings

#### **College cost and available financial aid are key to college enrollment.**

College cost and financial aid are among the most significant factors that influence a Latino student's decision to enroll in college.<sup>45</sup> In a recent survey, 77 percent of Latinos reported that tuition cost and the need to work were the greatest barriers to college enrollment and graduation. Latinos receive the lowest average amount of financial aid awarded to any ethnic group. This includes grants, work study, and loans.<sup>46</sup> Essentially, Latino students are being priced out of college.<sup>47</sup> The full cost of college for one year at a public university consumes one-third of the annual median household income for Latinos compared with one-fourth of whites. This is due to rising costs, decreased public assistance for college, and a decline in the median family income. The median family income for Latinos declined by 4 percent compared with 2 percent for the nation.<sup>48</sup>

#### **Higher education should be included in the accountability wave.**

While accountability is increasing in K-12 schools, there are few efforts to hold higher education accountable for their dismal retention rates of students. Institutions of higher education must also adapt to the changing demographics of the nation. Latinos make up the fastest-growing college enrollment group in U.S. colleges and universities.<sup>49</sup> By 2020, Latinos will constitute almost 25 percent of total traditional college-age population, ages 18 to 24.<sup>50</sup> Currently, half of all Latino undergraduate students are enrolled in more than 242 colleges categorized as Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI).<sup>51</sup> More than 100 additional higher education institutions are on the verge of becoming eligible to be designated HSI.<sup>52</sup> Department of Education reports show progress in Latino student enrollment but not the direct impact of services on student retention.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Provide an affordable path to college.** The federal government must increase access to financial aid through grants, loans, work study, tax credits, lower interest rates, Pell grants, loan forgiveness, and service scholarships. It must also provide incentives for innovative approaches to funding.<sup>53</sup>
- **Increase accountability for institutions of higher education.** Higher education institutions must continue to align with national and global workforce demands. They must respond to the changing demographics of the nation, including curriculum reform that emphasizes inclusiveness; faculty professional development focused on working with diverse students; programs of study that attract Latino students; increased retention efforts; and increased funding opportunities.
- **Provide HSIs with resources and expect results.** Provide increased resources for the growing number of Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) and connect partial funding to the retention of Latino students. In order to serve Latino students, they must be retained in the system. It is essential, however, that these institutions be given increased resources that are needed to address the lack of college readiness of Latino students.

## VI. Build on the resources of the Latino community

### Key Findings

**Educational reform should not happen *to* the Latino community; it should happen *with* the Latino community.** Latino families must be engaged in school reform. Latino parents indicate that they are eager to take responsibility for ensuring children's success, and are willing to take part in school reform. In fact, Latino parents identify higher rates of engagement than white parents.<sup>54</sup> Most importantly, school reform should be situated in the communities that are most impacted. Latino education scholars argue that Latino communities themselves must establish the structures and norms to strengthen the education of Latinos.<sup>55</sup>

**Latinos have identified the need to develop the linguistic resources of Latino youth.** In a recent survey, 92 percent of Latinos stated that teaching English to Latino children is very important. In addition, 88 percent of Latinos indicated that schools should help Latino students maintain their native language. Interestingly, in the same study, 57 percent of white respondents indicated that it was important to maintain the native language of Latino youth.<sup>56</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Redefine the definition of success.** Educators have not been successful if they have stripped students of the cultural, linguistic, and familial resources they need to survive and thrive. If Latino youth need to leave their resources behind, the cost of success is too high.
- **Increase development and implementation of bilingual education.** This includes quality maintenance bilingual education programs, dual language academies, and challenging secondary Spanish for native speakers (SNS) programs.
- **Support community-based schools and faith-based organizations, and provide resources for faith-based schools.** Such organizations and schools have often represented beacons of hope for the Latino community as evidenced by high achievement rates and college attendance rates of Latino youth attending such schools. Increasing numbers of Latino youth are attending faith-based schools. These schools, however, often do not have access to the resources they need to adequately serve Latino youth such as bilingual programs, gifted and talented programs, English as a second language programs, or special education programs.
- **Increase leadership positions for Latinos.** It is essential that Latinos are represented in leadership positions such as upper administration, governance roles, and boards. Research demonstrates a correlation between leadership representation and minority groups' success.<sup>57</sup>

## VII. Provide access for all

### Key Findings

**There is an increase in the number of undocumented children under the age of 18.** Approximately 1.8 million of the nation's 11 million undocumented immigrants are under the age of 18.<sup>58</sup> Many of these children have lived in the U.S. since early childhood and self-identify as Americans.

**The majority of states restrict the access of undocumented students to higher education.** Each year, U.S. high schools graduate an estimated 65,000 undocumented students, of whom only 5 percent ever attend college.<sup>59</sup> Currently, in 40 states, undocumented students are required to pay non-resident or out-of-state tuition, which costs an average 140 percent more than resident tuition. For most undocumented immigrants, the major barriers to post secondary access are both financial and legal.<sup>60</sup>

A common sense solution is needed. In recent years, 10 states have passed laws that permit undocumented students to pay in-state tuition rates.<sup>61</sup> In a nation

struggling to advance the educational and economic attainment of all of its youth, it is common sense to invest in youth that can contribute to the prosperity and well-being of the nation. Penalizing undocumented youth negatively impacts the future economic prosperity of the nation.

## RECOMMENDATION

- Pass a federal DREAM act. First introduced in 2001, the DREAM Act permits high school graduates who immigrated to the U.S. as minors, who have stayed out of trouble and lived in the U.S. for at least five years, to apply for legal status. The DREAM Act also eliminates a federal provision that discourages states from providing in-state tuition to immigrant students.<sup>62</sup>

## CONCLUSION

A society cannot function when vast numbers of its members are underserved and unprepared to meet national and global demands. The educational attainment of Latinos is vital to the nation's future. The acknowledgement of the issues and implementation of these recommendations by the next president and Congress of the United States will advance the educational attainments of Latinos in the U.S. from preschool to graduate school.

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# LATINOS & THE U.S. ECONOMY

## INTRODUCTION

Latinos are vital contributors to U.S. economic health and growth. Financial indicators demonstrate that the purchasing power of Latinos has grown to 700 billion dollars and is likely to increase to a trillion dollars by 2010. Latino small businesses are growing at three times the national average. In addition, in 2006, 68.7 percent of Latinos participated in the labor force demonstrating higher labor force, participation rates than either white or black workers.<sup>1</sup>

The Latino population in the United States represents a relatively young population. Consequently, Latinos will continue to enter the workforce as aging baby boomers retire. Public policies that support the economic stability of Latinos not only impact the quality of life of the Latino community but potentially provide infrastructure support for the nation through property, income, sales tax, consumer spending, and contributions to social security, to name a few areas.

While their contributions to the economy have grown, Latinos continue to be economically vulnerable. Many of the economic gains achieved by Latinos in prior years are threatened because of rising unemployment and cost of living, increasing wealth disparities, and inequitable credit structures that create opportunities for predatory lending and discrimination.<sup>2</sup>

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) reported that in 2007, 31 percent of Latinos were “very worried” or “fairly worried” about their economic security, compared with 22 percent of blacks and 18 percent of whites. When polled about their specific concerns, Latinos were more worried than blacks and whites about losing their job, finding a job, and having enough money to put food on the table.<sup>3</sup>

The policy areas that affect economic growth and stability are wide ranging, however, the following areas were identified as the most pressing issues affecting Latinos in the United States:

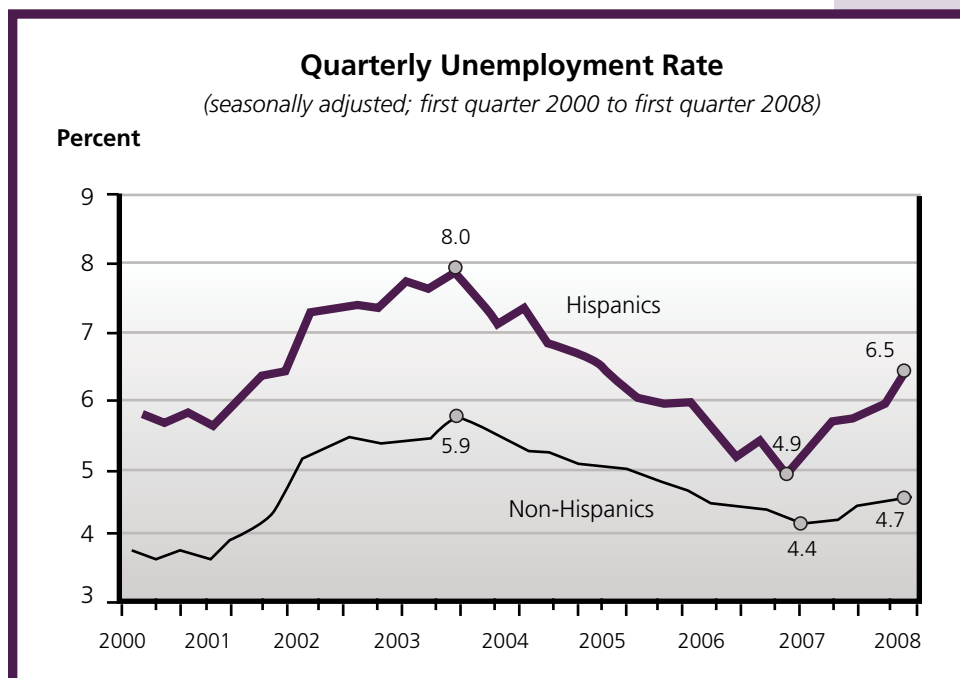
- Rising unemployment rates and underemployment
- The rising cost of living
- Increased wealth disparities
- Structural barriers in securing affordable credit
- Development of financial literacy

## Issue No. 1: Unemployment is on the rise for Latinos.

### Key Findings

**Labor market projections indicate growing unemployment for the Latino community.** Economic growth related to an increased number of jobs led to economic gains in the Latino community until 2008. However, low-wage industries, an area in which Latinos are over-represented, tend to be the most vulnerable to unemployment during difficult economic times. The housing and construction crisis of 2008 disproportionately affected Latino workers who tend to be employed in this sector. One in three construction workers are Latino, resulting in a labor sector comprised of approximately 2,238,555 Latino workers. Consequently, in the construction sector alone, approximately 250,000 Latino jobs were lost during the current economic downturn.<sup>4</sup>

Unemployment is rising faster among Latinos than the rest of the U.S. population.<sup>5</sup> Due mainly to a slump in the construction industry, the unemployment rate for Latinos in the U.S. rose to 6.5 percent in the first quarter of 2008, well above the 4.7 percent rate for all non-Latinos. Latinas face even greater unemployment than their male counterparts. In 2008, their unemployment rate increased from 5.6 percent to 7.0 percent.<sup>6</sup> In 2009, Latino unemployment rates will likely rise to 7.5 percent, the highest in five years.<sup>7</sup>



From "Latino Labor Report 2008: Construction Reverses Job Growth for Latinos."  
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**Latinos are less likely to use unemployment benefits.** Latino workers access unemployment insurance benefits at a rate about 25 percent less than other workers despite being eligible. Lack of information about the availability of the benefit and language factors in the application process are two factors that interfere with Latino workers' access to unemployment benefits, creating additional economic hardship.

**Latinos experience under-employment.** Immigrant Latinos may find themselves employed in jobs below their trained skill level or earning potential. The term underemployment has multiple meanings, one of which includes the employment of workers with specialized skills in low-skill, low-wage jobs.<sup>8</sup> Foreign-born workers who are structurally prohibited from working at their specialized skill level are not only economically hobbled but also do not contribute to the United States tax structure to their maximum earning potential. In some cases, these workers may choose to participate in the cash-in-hand economy, a system where workers earn cash. They are paid less, have no work security, and have no health insurance.

**Many Latinos lack adequate pathways to stable employment because of a lack of education, training, and limited English proficiency.** The link between education and economic advancement has been extensively documented. Economists have found that an additional year of schooling typically raises an individual's earning power between 8 and 15 percent. Recent studies show that four years of college boosts earnings approximately 65 percent.<sup>9</sup>

Traditionally the belief was that a healthy labor market would provide opportunities for low-wage earners to move into well-paying stable jobs. Research indicates that low-wage earners have difficulty obtaining even modest economic gains without a high school diploma. In 2005, 22 percent of Latinos between the ages of 16 to 24 were not enrolled in high school and did not earn a high school diploma or equivalent credential.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, in 2006, 30 percent of Latinos earned less than \$20,000.<sup>11</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Increase federal commitment to comprehensive workforce development.** Since 1979, expenditures on Department of Labor workforce development efforts have dropped more than 70 percent.<sup>12</sup> Currently, the United States spends 0.1 percent of its annual Gross Domestic Product on workforce development—a rate lower than most industrialized nations spend.
- **Fund integrated job training programs.** Job training programs should have the flexibility to meet the needs of participants with limited English proficiency. Job training programs require flexibility to train workers for good quality jobs in growth markets. Training programs should include innovative

projects in geographic areas where there is a need for bilingual workers.

- **Increase job training in high demand sectors.** Despite the lagging economy, various sectors of the economy are still adding jobs. From retail and health care to transportation and “green” industries, good-quality jobs await well-prepared workers. Increasing federal funding for successful job training programs in growing industries means well-paying jobs in high demand areas of the labor market.
- **Create simple outreach plans that ensure that workers with limited English proficiency have assistance and information about applying for entitled unemployment benefits.** Currently, 15 states maintain favorable policies that provide for translation and interpretation of the application process.<sup>13</sup> It is essential to increase access to linguistically appropriate assistance and documents.
- **Support the growth of Latino-owned businesses.** The U.S. Department of Labor asserts that small businesses are the primary mechanism by which people who have been socially and economically marginalized enter the workforce.<sup>14</sup> In fact, self-employment is an important mechanism for advancing economic opportunity and independence. Latinos constitute the largest minority business community. Despite impressive gains in small business ownership in the last 10 years, Latinos account for nearly 15 percent of the U.S. population yet only 7.2 percent of U.S. businesses.<sup>15</sup> In addition, Latino-owned businesses often have lower profit rates and higher closure rates than white-owned businesses.<sup>16</sup> Greater support is needed to facilitate Latino small business growth. However, it is also important to enhance their sustainability by providing resources for development and growth.

## Issue No. 2: Latinos are disproportionately impacted by the rising cost of living.

### Key Findings

**According to NCLR, the rising cost of living has put a particular strain on Latino families.** NCLR reports that more than one in three Latinos sacrificed going to the doctor or buying something their children needed in the last year because of the cost. Latinos are often disproportionately impacted by the rising cost of living in the U.S., partially due to the fact that white households have incomes 40 percent higher than Latino households.<sup>17</sup>

Low-income and lower-middle class Latino working families are struggling to purchase enough food for their families. The percentage of Latinos who struggled to provide food for their family jumped from 17.9 percent in 2005 to 19.5 percent in 2006. Data from the U.S. Consumer Expenditure survey for the 2000 to 2005 period showed that in Latino households, the share of total annual

expenditures going for utilities, fuels and public services increased by 12.1 percent on average, while the share of their spending going for food decreased by 15.8 percent on average. In white households, the percent was somewhat lower, with a 3.2 percent increase in average proportion of spending for utilities, fuels and public services, and a 6.7 percent decrease in average spending for food.<sup>18</sup>

Latinos do not access food subsidy programs (such as the Food Stamp programs) at the same rates as non-Latino whites or blacks.<sup>19</sup> Eligible Latinos often do not participate in Food Stamp programs because of fear, lack of information or misinformation about eligibility standards, and linguistic barriers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Increase assistance to families in need.** Energy and food assistance are vital to many Latino families. In addition to being an intervention against hunger for poor families, Food Stamp programs positively affect agriculture and retail growth. For instance, for every \$5 of a new food stamp benefit, \$9.20 is spent in the community.<sup>20</sup>
- **Improve access to food stamps.** Hire current and former food stamp recipients as community outreach workers to increase participation from eligible and underserved communities. Evaluate the verification procedures for food stamp eligibility for the purpose of reducing excessive paperwork and procedures that are unreasonably burdensome to poor families.

**Issue No. 3: Latinos experience increasing wealth disparities because of barriers to asset accumulation.**

### Key Findings

**Asset-building increases the financial stability of a community.** While work-related income is the mainstay of Latino families, the long-term financial security of Latinos is also impacted by their assets and financial wealth.<sup>21</sup> Vehicles for asset-building include homeownership, retirement security, savings, stocks and bonds, and access to affordable bank accounts and credit.<sup>22</sup> In 2002, 25 percent of Latino households did not own any assets other than a vehicle or held unsecured liabilities (e.g., credit card debt), compared with only 6 percent of white households. While significant gains have been made in areas such as homeownership, a significant wealth gap exists between Latino and white households. For example, the median net worth (what people own minus what they owe) of Latino households in 2002 was just \$7,932 compared with \$88,651 for whites.<sup>23</sup>

**Latinos face persistent barriers to asset-building.** Age, length of time in the U.S., English proficiency, educational level, geographic concentration, and

remittance practices often impact accumulation of assets for Latinos.

- The Latino population is much younger than the U. S. national average. Younger people who are typically beginning their careers do not accumulate assets at the rate of older workers.
- New immigrants, by virtue of their recent arrival, have not established employment longevity and accumulation of assets.
- Recently arrived immigrants often experience limited English proficiency impacting economic opportunities.
- Latinos experience lower educational levels; this is significantly related to not only current income level but the possibility of economic upward mobility.
- Latinos are geographically concentrated in high cost regions such as California and New York and therefore they have less available dollars for accumulation of assets.
- Latino workers are often financially responsible for their families in the United States and abroad. Remittance rates, or the sending of money from Latino workers in the United States to their relatives in Latin American countries impact accumulation of personal wealth.<sup>24</sup>

**Latinos often face structural barriers in accessing banking services.<sup>25</sup>**

Latinos are often referred to as unbanked, in that they often lack a positive and ongoing relationship with a banking institution. Studies indicate that 56 percent of Latinos are unbanked. Financial experts argue that having a bank account is often the first step to building and managing financial assets. Overall expense and identity requirements are often cited as the major barriers to opening and maintaining bank accounts.<sup>26</sup>

**Participation in a credit/debit economy may be unfamiliar.** Immigrants may not understand how banks operate or how financial products work. In addition, they may distrust the stability of banking systems based on experiences in their countries of origin, or they may be concerned about privacy issues.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, Latinos often underutilize savings accounts in proportion to their percentage of the population. A pervasive myth is that Latinos do not save. This myth can be disproved by remittances from the U.S. to Latin American countries estimated at \$55 billion in 2005. Approximately 42 percent of Latinos living in the United States regularly remit money to their family and friends abroad; some estimate between \$100 and \$300 on a monthly basis.<sup>28</sup>

**Latinos face a retirement gap.** The fastest-growing population among those age 65 and over is Latino. Between 2003 and 2050, the number of non-Latino whites age 65 and over will nearly double to 53.2 million. In contrast, the elderly Latino population will increase sevenfold to 15 million individuals and will be the largest minority group in the older population.<sup>29</sup>

Less than one-third of Latinos participated in an employer-sponsored retirement plan in 2006, compared with over half of whites. In addition, in 2001, 63 percent

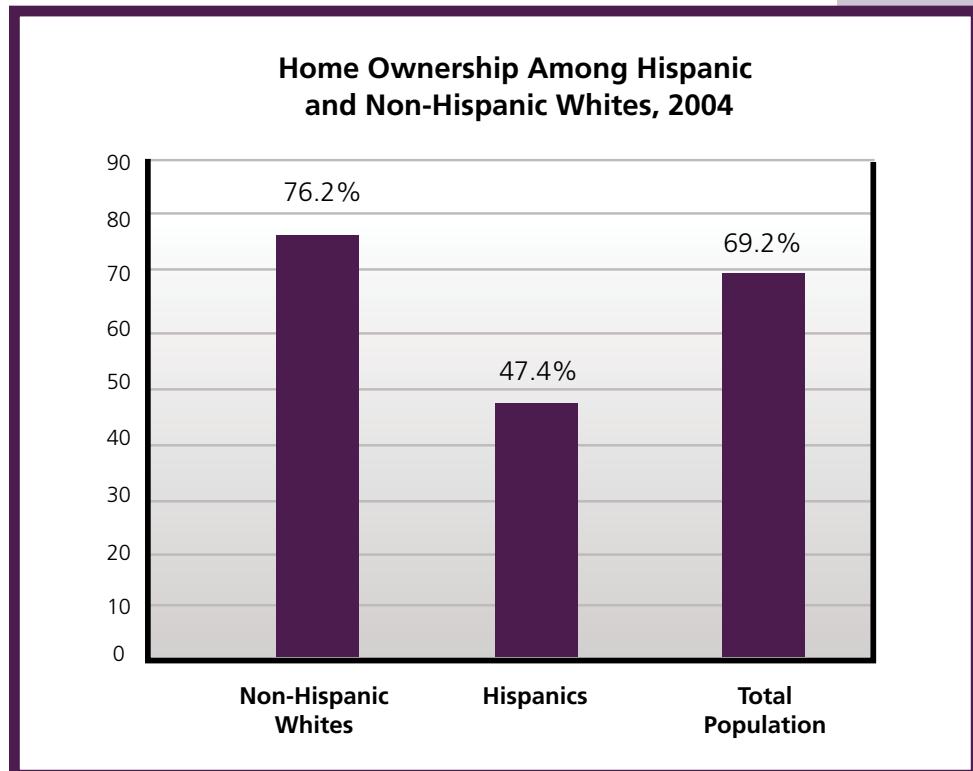
of Latinos and 44 percent of blacks worked for employers who did not offer pension plans, compared with 41 percent of whites. The lack of access to pension plans often makes Social Security the most important source of retirement income for Latinos. The share of income from Social Security for median elderly couples and individuals with Social Security income, from 2001 to 2003, was 66 percent for whites, 82 percent for blacks, and 84 percent for Latino. Social Security is the only source of cash income in retirement for 38 percent of Latinos compared with 18 percent of whites.<sup>30</sup>

**Immigrant Latinos may engage in an informal cash economy.** Empirically validated information about the informal cash economy of any community, national or international, is minimal at best. For example, an employer hires low-wage earners, charging the customer a set price and paying the workers in cash. The employer thus avoids paying federal employment taxes, thereby cutting labor costs and increasing profit. A cash-for-work arrangement is attractive to low-wage workers, regardless of immigration status, because it may appear to be more beneficial to the worker. U.S. workers and employers lack, at best, an understanding of the responsibility, benefits, and consequences of fully participating in the formal economic system through tax contributions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Increase access to mainstream financial institutions.** Provide incentives for financial institutions to adopt appropriate savings products and services for Latinos such as no minimum balance accounts and remittances at low cost.
- **Increase access to Individual Development Accounts (IDA).** The National Council of La Raza reports that one of the most effective savings tools for low-income workers is an Individual Development Account (IDA). IDAs are matched savings accounts by financial institutions that allow families to save money to purchase their first home, pay for postsecondary education, or start a small business. NCLR reports that IDAs are sparse even though evaluation results have shown substantial and positive participation for Latinos.<sup>31</sup>
- **Engage in a national educational bilingual campaign about the benefits of work related taxes.** Specifically, an educational campaign describing the benefits of social security, unemployment insurance, as well as other employment taxes to all wage earners. This campaign should also address the risks involved in participating in the informal economy such as the ineligibility of accessing unemployment, the lack of assistance for work place injuries (Latinos have the highest rate of work-related injury deaths among U.S. workers), and the inability to verify income for homeownership, car loans, and lower insurance premiums.

- **Engage in an educational campaign to inform foreign-born residents about the United States credit/debit system.** Foreign-born Latino residents are exposed to financial structures in their countries of origin. These structures are more than likely dissimilar to U.S. banking practices and policies and possibly reinforce distrust of banking institutions, depending on the economic and political stability of their home countries. Latino asset accumulation will be positively impacted by education about habits of savings (including retirement and college education accounts), federal banking policies and safeguards, and credit profiles.



Source: Hispanic National Mortgage Association. 2004. "Hispanic Homeownership Gap." <http://www.hnma.com/hispanic-homeownership-gap.html>.

**Issue No. 4: Latinos face structural barriers in securing affordable credit in credit card, automobile, and mortgage markets.**

### Key Findings

**Latinos are more likely to have little or no credit history.** Studies indicate that Latinos are more likely than whites or blacks to have little or no credit history. According to a 2001 study by the Center for Community Capitalism, 22 percent of Latino borrowers had no credit score compared with 4 percent of whites and 3 percent of blacks. It is often difficult for Latinos to build credit as low cost financial products are often reserved for those with a good and easily verifiable credit history.<sup>32</sup>

**Credit card usage and debt are on the rise for Latinos.** Credit card usage among Latinos grew from 43 percent to 53 percent between 1992 and 2001. The average credit card debt for Latinos increased 20 percent over that same period. Reports indicate that usage among Latinos is 56 percent, compared with 80 percent among whites. Among the barriers to getting credit cards or good interest rates are low income, a lack of credit history, credit card industry policies, and a lack of comparison shopping.<sup>33</sup>

**Latinos often face blatant discrimination in automobile financing.** Recent reports indicate that Latinos and blacks, on average, pay additional interest for financing their car at dealerships than whites with similar credit histories. In fact, a recent study in Florida found that Latino car buyers were more likely than white car buyers, regardless of credit worthiness, to have a “marked-up” auto loan. A markup is an undisclosed subjective charge added to a consumer’s approved interest rate and split between the dealer and the lender.<sup>34</sup>

**Home equity is often the greatest source of wealth and financial stability for the Latino community.**<sup>35</sup> The Pew Hispanic Center reports that in 2002, 61 percent of the mean net worth of Latino households was derived from their home equity, compared with 38.5 percent of white households. NCLR advocates that the single-most successful wealth-building strategy is homeownership. Homeownership has the potential to enable families to live in secure neighborhoods, increase access to good schools, and help families finance college. Latinos experienced the most dramatic increase in home ownership of any group since 1999.<sup>36</sup> Despite these increases, according to 2004 statistics, there continued to be a 29 percent gap between the homeownership rates of Latinos and whites.

Recently, dramatic increases in foreclosure rates threaten to erode gains in homeownership. Experts often site risky loan practices as a key contributor to high foreclosure rates, including subprime loans. Subprime loans are often reserved for individuals who pose a greater risk of nonpayment to the lender. They often include higher interest rates and fees. It is reported that financial institutions no longer issue subprime loans because it is a high-risk business practice. However, Latinos were twice as likely as whites to receive subprime loans.<sup>37</sup> Subprime loans accounted for more than 40 percent of Latino purchase mortgages and nearly a quarter of refinance mortgages in 2002, compared with 18 percent of white purchase mortgages and less than 1 percent of refinance mortgages.<sup>38</sup> New loan seekers are not likely to be swept into the subprime loan industry; however, there is a significant population of Latino homeowners who now find themselves saddled with high rate 30 year subprime home loans. These Latino homeowners may be at the greatest risk of foreclosures.<sup>39</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Promote safe home buying and help owners keep their homes.** Congress must increase funding for programs that help low- and middle-income families purchase homes using safe and affordable mortgages. The current system creates an environment that leaves Latino borrowers susceptible to unscrupulous or predatory lending practices.
- **Create federal policies and programs that will respond to the difficulties of those borrowers with high-rate subprime loans.** Many of these loans were targeted to low-income communities. Without assistance, these homeowners who were targets of predatory lending will be paying the 30 year consequence of poor lending practices.
- **Increase federal regulations.** There are a number of important federal laws that aim to protect consumers. Unfortunately, the laws are enforced sporadically and ineffectively or are not comprehensive. Policies should prohibit unfair and discriminatory practices in home mortgages, auto loans, credit cards, tax policies, and remittance markets, to name a few. It is vital to strengthen licensing standards and fund enforcement activities. Finally, it is also essential to create incentives to better serve the Latino community.

Issue No. 5: Latinos need increased financial literacy that addresses the needs and expectations of the United States economic structure.

### Key Findings

**NCLR reports that for Latino families, lack of access to quality financial information and advice is a barrier to building wealth.** NCLR also found that current financial education efforts often provide broad, generic information in the form of classroom-style lectures, workbooks and internet-based seminars. According to a report by NCLR, there is no evidence to suggest that these efforts are helping low-income Latino families.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Create an infrastructure of community-based financial counselors.** Financial planners are often inaccessible to many Latino families because they work based on commission structures, creating little incentive to work with low-income earners.<sup>40</sup> Community Based Organizations (CBOs) are critical to providing financial counselors that are accessible to low-income communities. These CBO financial counselors provide advice on budgeting, banking, saving, retirement security, buying a car, completing loan applications, purchasing insurance, foreclosure prevention, filing

income tax returns, and avoiding predatory lending. By strengthening the CBO infrastructure, the barriers to asset-building for Latinos will decrease. In addition, providing a refundable federal income tax credit for low-income families will help to cover the cost of obtaining one-on-one financial counseling services. One-on-one counseling to low-income families has been shown to be a meaningful and effective tool for both building financial knowledge and improving wealth levels. In addition, CBOs have the potential to wage linguistically and culturally relevant educational campaigns designed to increase the abilities of Latinos to proactively participate in U.S. financial structures.

## CONCLUSION

Clearly, Latinos constitute a growing portion of the nation's future workers and investors. National economic prosperity will increasingly depend on the extent to which wealth progresses for the Latino community. The acknowledgement of the issues and implementation of these recommendations by the next president and Congress of the United States will address the future economic stability of Latino families and the nation.

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# HEALTH CARE & THE LATINO COMMUNITY

## INTRODUCTION

Currently, an estimated 75 million individuals lack adequate health care or are uninsured.<sup>1</sup> Americans are increasingly convinced of the need to overhaul the health care system and increase access for all Americans to quality, affordable health care services.

As the debate on health care reform unfolds, Latinos face greater hurdles in accessing quality health care than other Americans. Research shows that racial and ethnic minorities in the United States experience poorer health, have trouble accessing care, are likely to be uninsured, and receive lower-quality care more often than other Americans.<sup>2</sup> Researchers have found that nearly every health disparity Latinos experience could be prevented or more effectively managed given timely access to health care.

A central issue facing the Latino community is the lack of access to quality care. Various factors impacting Latino access to quality care include the following:

- Growing racial and ethnic disparities in access and quality of care
- A widespread lack of insurance
- Lack of health-related education
- Inadequate supply of bilingual language services and culturally competent services
- Immigration status

This section explores health issues focusing on specific barriers to quality care in addition to presenting recommendations to improve access to quality of care for Latino communities. We maintain that a healthier outlook for the fastest growing population is essential for the prosperity of the entire nation.

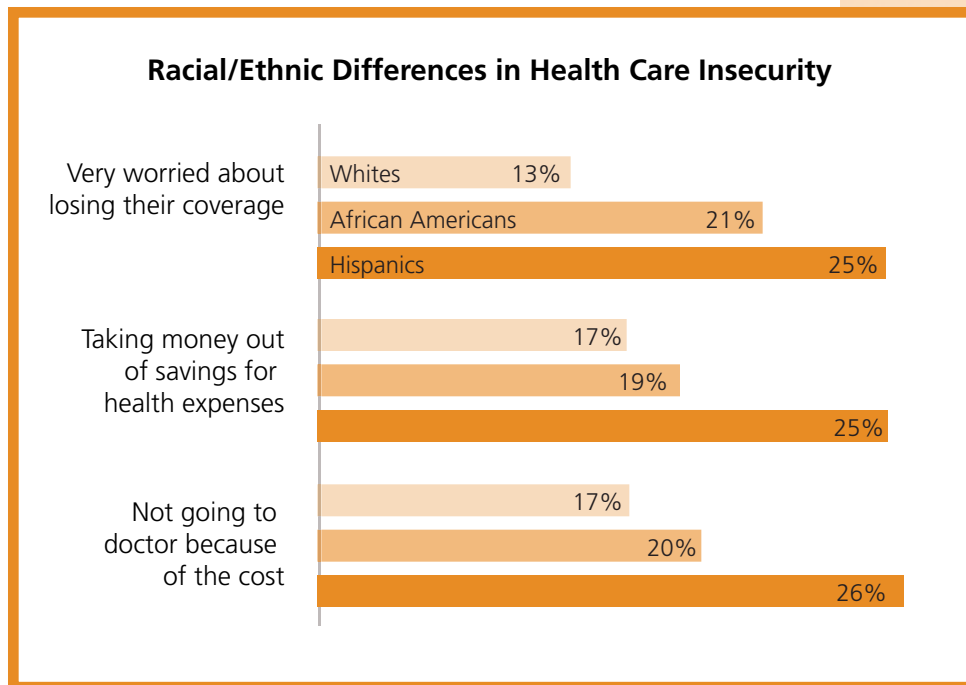
## ISSUES & RECOMMENDATIONS

**Issue No. 1: Racial and ethnic disparities exist in health care access, and they are growing wider.**

### Key Findings

**Health disparities are widening between whites and other ethnic groups.**

In 2007 Latinos reported greater health care insecurity as compared with other ethnic groups, including anxiety over losing health coverage, taking money out of savings for health expenses, and not going to a doctor because of the costs.



Source: The Rockefeller Foundation. 2007. "American Worker Survey."  
[http://www.rockfound.org/initiative/amer\\_workers/american\\_worker\\_survey.pdf](http://www.rockfound.org/initiative/amer_workers/american_worker_survey.pdf).

Generally speaking, U.S. minorities receive lower quality health care than whites, leading to significant—and increasing—health care disparities.<sup>3</sup>

**Latinos face higher risk of developing chronic health conditions.** Due to a lack or limited access to quality care Latinos often face life-threatening diseases and chronic health conditions. When compared with the white population, Latinos are more likely to suffer from conditions such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes, but they are less likely to receive regular, continuous care. In fact, cancer deaths make up 20 percent of all Latino deaths in the U.S. In addition, the incidence of breast cancer is increasing faster among Latino women than any other group.

A large body of research has established that Latinos have less quality of care compared with other ethnic groups in the following areas:

- Immunizations
- Prenatal care
- Cancer screenings
- HIV/AIDS treatment
- Smoking cessation treatment
- Obesity, including childhood obesity
- Mental health care
- Substance abuse treatment

## RECOMMENDATION

- **Support the “Health Equality and Accountability Act.”** This act endorses a comprehensive approach to the elimination of health care disparities. This act will require data collection based on race, ethnicity, and language, to develop strategies that will improve health conditions among communities experiencing disproportionate disparities in health care issues.<sup>4</sup>

### Issue No. 2: A significant number of Latinos lack health insurance.

#### Key Findings

**Latinos experience higher uninsurance rates.** Although Latinos are the fastest growing minority group, they experience the highest uninsurance rates in the U.S.<sup>5</sup> Uninsurance rates vary by national origin, with Mexican and Central and South Americans experiencing greater rates of uninsurance as compared with Puerto Ricans or Cubans.<sup>6</sup> Generally speaking, Latinos under the age of 65 are 2.5 times more likely than any other population to lack health insurance. In 2006, 34.1 percent of Latinos lacked health insurance, up from 32.3 in 2005.<sup>7</sup> Latino children represent 38.8 percent of the approximately nine million uninsured children in the U.S.<sup>8</sup>

**Latinos experience higher unemployment rates, leading to increasing numbers of uninsured.** The Kaiser Foundation recently reported that an increment of one percent in the rate of unemployment will lead to an increase of one million uninsured individuals in the U.S.<sup>9</sup> Latinos are overrepresented in jobs such as agriculture, construction, and domestic and food services. These sectors are increasingly impacted by rising unemployment. This will guarantee a significant share of employment losses to Latino workers, and subsequently, loss of health insurance.

**Latinos lack employment-based health insurance.** Latinos are more likely than non-Latinos to work for an employer that does not offer health coverage.<sup>10</sup> Latinos are often employed in low-wage jobs, often in small firms, within industries that either do not offer health benefits or restrict eligibility. Latino/a workers have lower rates of Employment-Based Health Insurance (EBHI) than other racial and ethnic groups. Statistics indicate that in 2006, only 40 percent of Latinos were covered by employer-based insurance.<sup>11</sup> Even after years in the workforce, many Latinos are denied access to employer-based health insurance. In 2005, 65.9 percent of Latinos worked for an employer that offered EBHI to its employees, compared with 85.9 percent of black and 87.7 percent of white workers.<sup>12</sup>

**Latinos are less likely to be offered health benefits.** In the construction industry, for example, 64 percent of whites are eligible for and offered health benefits, compared with 46 percent of Latinos.<sup>13</sup> Some reports indicate that Latinos are just as likely as whites to accept health care benefits. Conflicting reports indicate that Latinos are not likely to accept benefits because they cannot afford the premiums.<sup>14</sup>

**Latinos are more likely to report delaying services.** Latinos are more likely to report delaying essential medical services for financial or insurance reasons.<sup>15</sup> As a result of lack of continual care Latinos are less likely to participate in or receive the benefits of preventative care. Additionally, Latinos have inadequate access to a range of services, including routine office visits, emergency room care, and dental care.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Increase Latinos' access to low-cost, high-quality primary care.** Increase knowledge of existing federally funded health care programs and provide assistance for families applying for health care insurance. Increase funding for federal health programs such as Medicaid and SCHIP. Government sponsored health programs, such as Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), are important to many Latinos who are less likely to have access to employee-based insurance coverage.<sup>16</sup> Current significant restrictions to federal health coverage programs, for both legal and undocumented immigrants, cause more racial and ethnic disparities in the health care system.<sup>17</sup>
- **Increase Latinos' access to higher education.** Education level is positively related to health. In a recent study, 72 percent of respondents with a bachelor's degree or higher reported being in excellent or very good health. This compares to 50 percent of high school graduates, and 39 percent of those with less than a high school education.<sup>18</sup> This may be attributed to the fact that high-wage earners have greater access to comprehensive health care options.

### Issue No. 3: Latinos need greater access to health information.

#### Key Findings

Despite the growing number of uninsured individuals, many Latinos are eligible for federal health programs. Nonetheless, they are often misinformed or not fully informed about these programs because of a lack of language and cultural outreach efforts on behalf of institutions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Increase health education programs.** Increase health information on the following:
  - Promoting health
  - Preventing disease
  - Importance of preventative care
  - Organ donations
  - Nutrition
  - Child safety
  - Dental care
  - Mental illness
- **Promote health education campaigns using bilingual and culturally relevant messages and mediums of communication.** Promote health care as vital to the well-being of the family, such as the initiative Mi Familia es Saludable (My Family is Healthy). Wage a campaign focused on Latina mothers who are often the primary health managers of the family. Target mediums of communication such as television and radio. Increasing access to information is important because one in four Latino adults report obtaining no health care information from a medical professional in the past year. Also, 8 in 10 Latinos receive health information from alternative sources such as television and radio, according to a survey released in 2008 by the Pew Hispanic Center.<sup>19</sup>
- **Start Early.** Invest in health education curricula in schools. Students in K-12 schools are facing health issues such as childhood obesity, teen pregnancy, asthma management, tobacco use, depression and teen suicide. It is important to start early and provide Latino-specific curricula through high-quality health promotion programs and practices in school. Furthermore, existing school lunch nutrition programs should be encouraged to ensure meals are reflective of Latino nutritional and dietary needs linked to health disparities. This will ensure that Latino children get the guidance they need to lead healthy and productive lives.<sup>20</sup>
- **Create an accurate health profile for Latinos in the U.S.** There is a need for more disaggregated research that takes into consideration the differences among Latino subgroups. This will help establish a more concise health profile of Latinos and lead to improved treatment options and targeted health education initiatives.<sup>21</sup>

## Issue No.4: Inadequate supply of language services and culturally competent services

### Key Findings

**The U.S. health care system is not equipped to serve the growing diversity of the United States.** Most health care providers are not prepared to provide their patients with culturally and linguistically appropriate services. This situation deprives human beings of critical health care because they are unable to receive the services they require. For example, miscommunications due to language proficiency can lead to failure to comply with medical instructions or improper medicine intake.

**Communication challenges impact care.** Latino adults often describe their health care providers as failing to listen, not explaining things clearly, not respecting what they have to say, and not spending enough time with them.<sup>22</sup> Latino immigrants often report additional challenges communicating with physicians and difficulty understanding instructions for prescription medicines and written information. Latino immigrants are less likely to follow patient regimens due to lack of, or difficulty accessing, bilingual services.<sup>23</sup> Effective communication is central to the process of health care delivery. It has a profound effect on patient-provider relationships and the quality of health care people receive.<sup>24</sup>

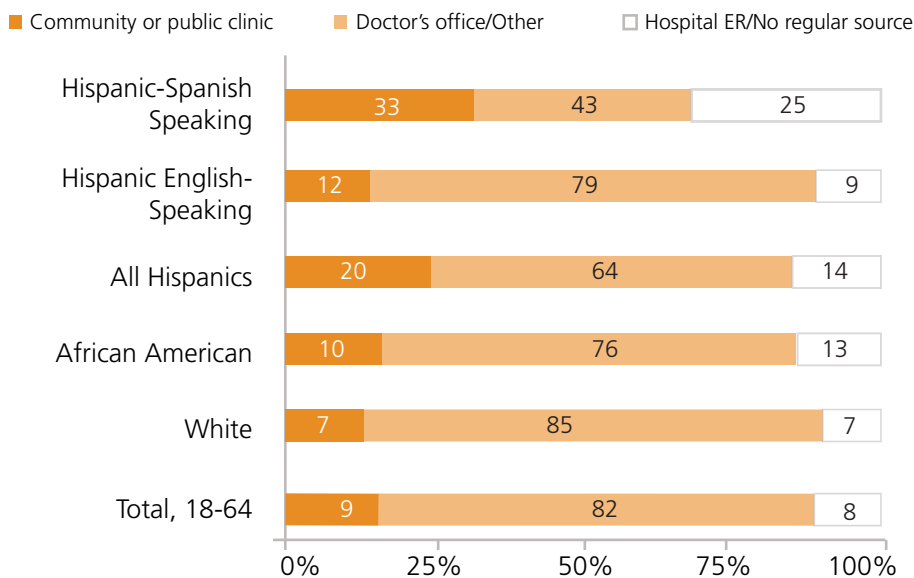
**Community-based health providers are a vital resource.** One approach to increasing the availability of linguistically and culturally appropriate medical services in Latino neighborhoods has been the establishment of community health centers (CHCs). These are local, nonprofit, and community-owned centers that are developed to offer services for specific communities within the health care system.

They provide quality health care to the uninsured when federal health programs are inaccessible. About one-third (36.1 percent) of patients served by CHCs in 2005 were Latino.<sup>25</sup> These organizations also provide prenatal care for immigrant mothers who do not qualify for Medicaid and other federal programs. Through these centers, community health workers offer Latinos the opportunity to receive medical services from bilingual, bicultural individuals who serve as liaisons between the health care system and immigrant patients.<sup>26</sup>

Community-based health providers have a wealth of linguistically and culturally appropriate knowledge to meet the health care needs of Latino families. They build their practices, and even their physical structures, around the needs of Latino communities and provide the following services:

- A family-oriented approach
- Personal contact and relationship building
- Personalized follow-up care

### Hispanics Are More Likely to Rely on Community or Public Clinics as Their Regular Source of Care, 2001



From "Hispanic Patient's Double Burden: Lack of Health Insurance and Limited English." M. Doty. The Commonwealth Fund. 2003. [http://www.commonwealth-fund.org/usr\\_doc/Doty\\_Hispanic\\_chartpack\\_charts.ppt?section=4039#1](http://www.commonwealth-fund.org/usr_doc/Doty_Hispanic_chartpack_charts.ppt?section=4039#1).

- Integration of alternative medicines
- Temporary child care
- Bilingual services
- Detailed description of medical regimens
- Communication through multiple modalities, such as: oral, written, and multimedia<sup>27</sup>

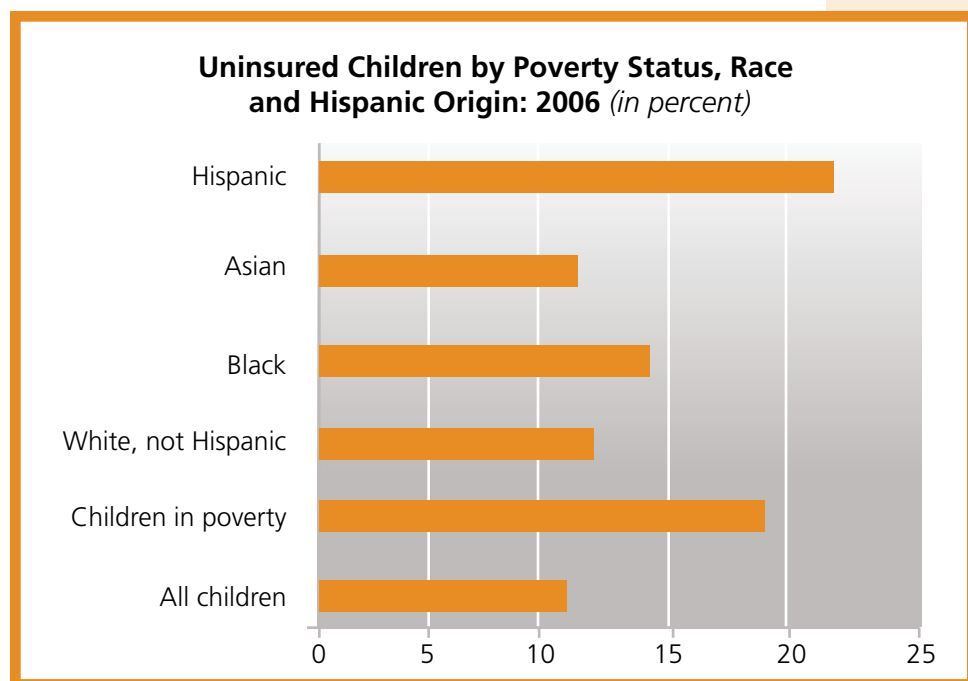
## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is vital to increase access of the Latino community to linguistically and culturally competent health practices and practitioners.

- **Increase funding to support existing Community Health Centers (CHCs) and create new CHCs.** It is essential to increase centers in rural areas as Latinos are increasingly migrating in search of jobs. Increased funding for health education is essential, as are training opportunities for bilingual and cultural competence. In addition, there is a growing need to pool resources and connect CHCs with existing state and federal sponsored providers.
- **Support the integration of linguistically and culturally competent health practices across the health care system.** It is important to integrate health care services in Latino communities in order to increase their access to health

care. However, it is also imperative to support linguistically and culturally competent health practices across the spectrum of the health care system so that CHCs are not primarily responsible for the well-being of those who have the least access to health care.

- **Support passage of the “Community Health Workers Act.”** Provide grants for community health workers to inform the uninsured about important health issues. These individuals serve as a connection between the health care system and the uninsured. Community health care workers are important conduits to helping immigrants understand and navigate complex government programs. They perform a variety of functions, including informal counseling and social support, health education, enrollment in health insurance programs, advocacy and referral, and follow-up services.<sup>28</sup> They are bilingual and bicultural members of the community who understand the health care issues of Latinos across the lifespan.
- **Increase the number of linguistically and culturally competent physicians and other health service providers. Increase the proportions of Latino health professionals.** Latinos represent 4.2 percent of registered nurses, 3.1 percent of physicians, and 6.7 percent of physician assistants. It is imperative to increase the number of Latino and health providers who can provide culturally relevant services and bilingual services to patients.<sup>29</sup> Create incentives for programs in the medical field to institutionalize the development of bilingual skills and cultural competence.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2008. “Current Population Survey 2008: Annual Social and Economic Supplement.” [http://pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032007/health/h08\\_000.htm](http://pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032007/health/h08_000.htm).

## Issue No. 5: Undocumented immigration status increases health care disparities.

### Key Findings

**Immigration status restricts health care coverage.** Disparities in health coverage have increased due to government-imposed immigrant restrictions to the federal health insurance programs, such as Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). These restrictions put limitations on the health care coverage of undocumented immigrant children and pregnant women, creating risk for the healthy development of children who are future citizens of the U.S. Research suggests that Latino parents of children who are citizens or lawful residents in the U.S. are reluctant to enroll their children in federal programs, for which they are eligible, for fear of drawing attention to their own immigration status.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, a deplorable practice is occurring in hospitals across the nation. *The New York Times* reports that hospitals are taking matters into their own hands and deporting seriously injured or ill immigrants because they have no options for long-term care.<sup>31</sup> The fiscal viability of hospitals is cited as a primary cause of the deportations; however, this practice violates the basic principals and values of the nation, that all men and women are created equal.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Support passage of the “Legal Immigrant Children’s Health Improvement Act (ICHIA).”** This bill will allow states the option to provide Medicaid and SCHIP to otherwise ineligible immigrant children and pregnant women.<sup>32</sup>
- **Increase information to both providers and undocumented immigrants around rights regarding accessing care.** Providers must understand they cannot deny care for a child whose parent may be undocumented. A doctor’s office cannot initiate legal action if they come in contact with an undocumented parent whose child is eligible for services. Undocumented immigrants need information on how to mitigate fear in seeking out a provider. Offer a system for Latinos to register complaints when trying to access care, particularly for families with mixed immigration status.
- **Pass comprehensive immigration reform.** It is only through comprehensive immigration reform that the nation can uphold its commitment to human rights and provide all men, women, and children in our borders access to quality and humane care.

## CONCLUSION

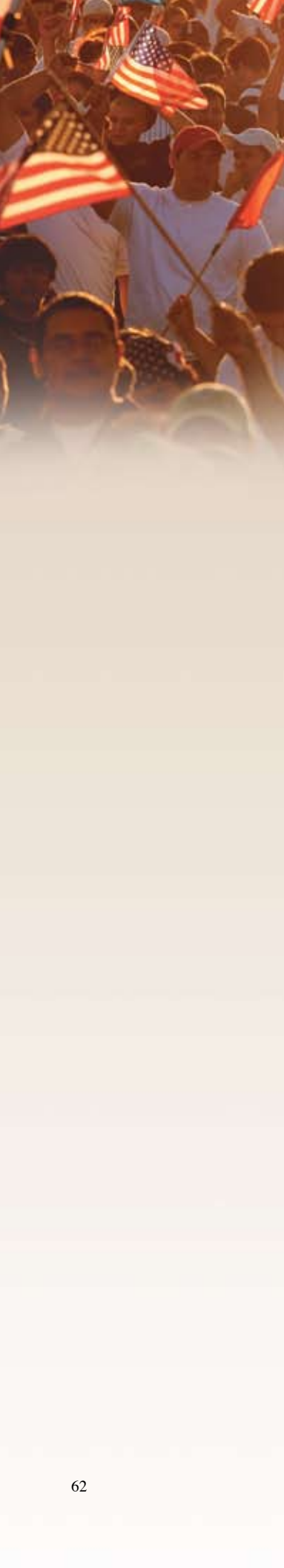
The acknowledgement of the issues and implementation of these recommendations by the next president and Congress of the United States will address the need for greater access to quality health care as essential to the future health and well-being of Latino families and the nation.

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# IMMIGRATION & THE LATINO COMMUNITY

## INTRODUCTION

America's history has been colored by its immigrant past. Immigrants, past and present, have enriched the nation's tapestry, and invigorated U.S. communities. Latino immigrants in particular have contributed a rich immigrant history, language, culture, and strong social networks.

The phenomenon of immigration is core to our humanity; it is a search for basic survival. Inadequate economic opportunities in native lands provoke immigration to other countries. New places of residence may present opportunities for jobs and reunification with family members. However, immigrants are also likely to experience racial prejudice, as well as economic, political, and social barriers.

The nation is currently experiencing demographic shifts, including dramatic growth in the Latino population and settlement in new destination cities across the U.S. These trends have made immigrants more visible, especially in areas that have historically been homogenous.<sup>1</sup>

An estimated 11 million to 12 million undocumented immigrants are currently living in the U.S. Of those, approximately 78 percent are Latino.<sup>2</sup> They have limited access to social benefits, health care, and educational opportunities. This situation creates a permanent underclass and ignores immigrant contributions to the nation's economic, cultural, political, and social fabric.

The need for immigration reform will be one of the most important issues in the 2008 presidential election.<sup>3</sup> Latinos (foreign-born and native-born) generally see undocumented immigrants as beneficial for the Latino community and for the U.S. economy in general.<sup>4</sup>

This section will present recommendations to advance comprehensive immigration reform. It begins with the description of the following pressing issues impacting immigration:

- National atmosphere of intolerance and fear
- Human impact of immigration
- Need for comprehensive immigration reform and transnational solutions

## ISSUES & RECOMMENDATIONS

**Issue No. 1: There is an atmosphere of intolerance and fear across the nation.**

### Key Findings

#### **Public discourse perpetuates myths and misconceptions about immigrants.**

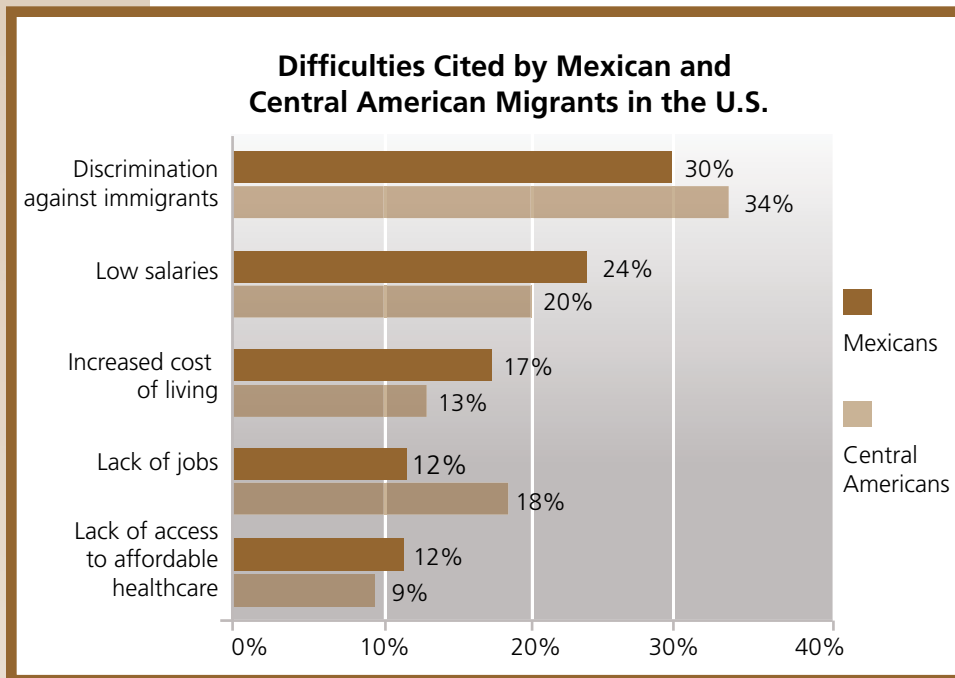
Common myths and misconceptions about immigrants often permeate public discourse, thereby perpetuating damaging stereotypes.

*Myth No. 1: Immigrants take scarce jobs.* One popular myth suggests that immigrants steal jobs away from native workers, undercut or drive down native workers' wages, and hurt the economy. Empirical evidence suggests otherwise. A study of immigrants' impact on native workers' wages in California found that during 1990-2004, immigrant workers exerted a complementary effect on wages for the average native worker.<sup>5</sup> Although immigration opponents blame immigrants for the decline of the middle class, the real issues are often overlooked. These include a downshift in the economy, increases in the cost of living, a virtually stagnant minimum wage for the last 30 years, and a shift away from manufacturing to service sector employment that requires higher levels of education and training.<sup>6</sup>

*Myth No. 2: Immigrants refuse to adapt to the nation's norms.* A preponderance of evidence suggests current immigrants assimilate at a faster rate than earlier waves of immigrants.<sup>7</sup> By the second-generation, the majority of Latinos are bilingual, proficient in English and Spanish. By the third generation, 86 percent of third-generation Latinos are English-dominant and monolingual.<sup>8</sup> While this statistic is positive because it increases opportunities for Latino communities, it is also an indicator that the bilingual resources of Latino youth are being squandered.

*Myth No. 3: Immigrants increase crime.* Another misconception revolves around the myth of immigrant criminality. In debates about the immigration issue, opponents often cite statistics claiming that immigrants are more prone to criminality than U.S. citizens. A 2007 study found that immigrants were less likely to be incarcerated relative to native-born men.<sup>9</sup>

*Myth No. 4: The uncontrolled flow of immigrants is threatening the nation.* While the nation's fear and intolerance of immigrants has increased, the flow of immigrants to the U.S. is no greater today than it was at the start of the 20th century. In other words, though the total number of migrants has increased, the proportion of migrants is no different than it was over 100 years ago. In fact, immigration rates rose quicker in the late 1800s and early 1900s than today.



Source: Inter-American Development Bank. 2007. "Survey of Mexican and Central American Immigrants in the United States." <http://idbdocs.iadb.org/wsdocs/getdocument.aspx?docnum=1096583>.

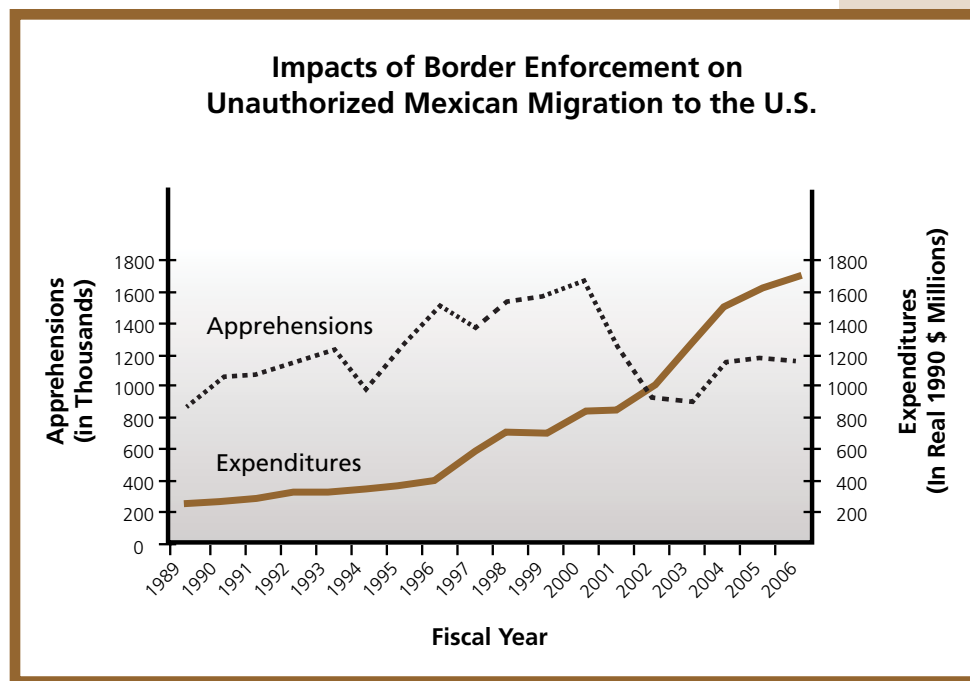
**Latinos in U.S. report negative effects due to increased public attention on immigration.** Latinos in the United States are feeling the negative effects from the increased public attention and heightened enforcement measures that have accompanied the national immigration debate. Slightly over half of all Latino adults in the U.S. worry that they, a family member, or a close friend could be deported. Nearly two-thirds say the failure of Congress to enact an immigration reform bill has made life more difficult for all Latinos. The difficulties Latinos report include: decreased work or housing opportunities, less likelihood of using government services, less likelihood of traveling abroad, and increased incidents of requests to prove their immigration status.<sup>10</sup>

**The nation is experiencing a rise in nativist (anti-immigrant) sentiment and violence toward Latinos.** Nativist and nationalist sentiments tend to rise during times of increased migration and/or during times of economic downturns.<sup>11</sup> The need often arises to import workers in times of war or rapid industrialization, but inevitably, politicians are pressured to support strict immigration restrictions. Such restrictions are followed by the capture and deportation of immigrant workers by the implementation of "legal" means.

The criminalization of undocumented people perpetuates fear and intolerance. This is evident in anti-immigrant public demonstrations against Latino immigrants in general, but more typically, anti-Mexican bashing. This has resulted in the proliferation of violence, and physical and verbal abuse against Latino immigrants, including a recent racially motivated murder in a small Pennsylvania town.<sup>12</sup>

Civil rights organizations have warned that there has been a sharp rise in anti-immigrant hate groups, such as the Minutemen, White Supremacists, Neo-Nazis, and the KKK, among others. Such hate groups have taken it upon themselves to patrol the ports and borders with no legal authorization, other than federal and state government officials turning a deaf ear to their inflammatory rhetoric and activities.

**A fence is a symbol of intolerance.** Studies of increased border enforcement suggest that, despite the million of dollars spent on upgrading technology and hiring border enforcement agents, these efforts have done little to stem the tide of illegal immigration.<sup>13</sup> The human costs are also too high as more migrants attempt crossing into the U.S. via southern Arizona. This shift has resulted in countless deaths of men, women, and children.<sup>14</sup> Our perspective is that leaders of the country should promote common ideals that sustain and advance both the U.S. and Mexico, rather than erect a fence. As the border wall cuts the land, it cuts the communities of the border, widens differences, and fosters intolerance.<sup>15</sup>



From "Impacts of Border Enforcement on Unauthorized Mexican Migration to the U.S." W.A. Cornelius. *Border Battles: The Immigration Debate*. Social Sciences Research Council. 2006. <http://borderbattles.ssrc.org/Cornelius/>.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Support national organizations that promote inclusiveness.** The National Council of La Raza has designed an initiative titled, Take the Hate Out of the Immigration Debate, as well as the White Ribbon Campaign for Dialogue. Increase resources for national organizations that promote inclusiveness. Provide incentives for media organizations to partner with such organizations in order to build a strong political, economic, and cultural image of Latinos and other underrepresented ethnic groups.

- **Stop criminalization of undocumented immigrants.** Latinos oppose enforcement measures. A recent survey found that 75 percent of Latinos disapprove of workplace raids; some 79 percent prefer that local police not take an active role in identifying undocumented immigrants; and some 55 percent disapprove of states checking for immigration status before issuing driver's licenses.<sup>16</sup>

Provide access to driver's licenses and identification cards. The REAL ID Act has increased the number of unlicensed, uninsured drivers on the road, and it has impacted every person applying for a driver's license in the U.S. The REAL ID act will cost more than \$11 billion over five years. It will have a major impact on services to the public and impose unrealistic burdens on states. It also places an undue burden on vulnerable populations such as the elderly.<sup>17</sup>

Oppose E-verify and No-Match Letters. Such policies risk increasing abuse and discrimination by employers and infringe on the privacy of all citizens and residents of the U.S. In addition, lawful immigrant and U.S. citizen workers may be harmed and lose their jobs without due process.

## Issue No. 2: The human impact of immigration is often neglected.

### Key Findings

**Undocumented people have limited access to social services.** Undocumented immigrants contribute to the United States by paying taxes and Social Security. They are often denied social services such as preventative health care, and the use of Social Security benefits upon retirement. It is estimated that immigrants earn approximately \$240 billion a year, pay about \$90 billion in taxes, and only use approximately \$5 billion in public benefits. Another estimate is that immigrants pay \$20 billion to \$30 billion in taxes more than the amount of government taxes that they use.<sup>18</sup> Analysts have argued that undocumented immigrants' contributions, which total in the billions, could be the answer to our nation's Social Security dilemma.<sup>19</sup>

**Undocumented people have little recourse against exploitative employers.** Undocumented immigrant workers are vulnerable and susceptible to exploitation by employers. In fact, Latino immigrant workers are more vulnerable to workplace accidents. Also, Latino immigrants experience more fatal workplace accidents than all other ethnic groups.<sup>20</sup>

**Families are torn apart because of deportation.** Three million American-born children have at least one parent who is an undocumented immigrant. One in 10 American families has mixed immigrant status, which means that at least one member is an undocumented immigrant.<sup>21</sup> Families are torn apart and thousands of children are left behind as a result of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids in homes and in the workplace.<sup>22</sup> Parents are arrested and deported

with no consideration for the welfare of children. Their children, typically U.S. citizens, are left behind with friends or ill-equipped relatives who are juggling families and jobs of their own. Some infants and toddlers are stranded in day-care centers. In addition, older siblings may be left in charge of brothers and sisters. Children that had been living happily with their families may experience major depression disorders marked by nightmares, bed-wetting, frequent crying, and fights at school. They may even fail classes, mutilate themselves, and have suicidal thoughts.<sup>23</sup> For these children, physical separation often feels like death.<sup>24</sup> These broken families are becoming a greater challenge to social services agencies, mental health clinics, and schools.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Support for grassroots immigrant advocacy organizations.** Increase resources for grassroots organizations who advocate for immigrant rights. Such organizations often monitor the growing atmosphere of intolerance toward immigrants, provide increased access to preventative health services, and provide information on complex immigration laws. Community grassroots organizations also assist in locating children whose parents have been deported, and they offer basic survival techniques to fathers who are not familiar with changing diapers and warming formula. They also provide baby supplies through donations, and make child care arrangements. Organizations such as United Way and Catholic Charities also assist with rent, utility bills, and provide phone and grocery store gift cards.<sup>25</sup>

### Issue No. 3: There is a need for comprehensive immigration reform.

#### Key Findings

**Immigrants have limited opportunities to enter the country legally.** The process to become a legal citizen can take years, as immigrants must first prove they can live and work in the U.S. and are of “good moral character.” This is just the first step to becoming eligible for citizenship and shows the contradictions of immigration laws. For example, immigrants must live and work in the U.S. before being considered, but they must live in the U.S. illegally for years before becoming eligible. This situation places immigrants in a precarious position during that time.<sup>26</sup>

**Immigrants face obstacles toward naturalization.** NALEO reports that there are three major obstacles toward naturalization: 1) access to reliable information, 2) language and exam preparation, and 3) fees. In addition, NALEO notes the existence of a considerable backlog in naturalization applications and has proposed setting deadlines for processing.<sup>27</sup> Federal oversight is necessary to ensure a more just process within a reasonable time. Another recommendation is increasing financial support to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) instead of increasing USCIS processing fees.

**There is a pressing need for comprehensive immigration reform.** Twice in the past two years, the U.S. Congress tried but failed to pass comprehensive legislation for immigration reform. Congress is not expected to take any action until the new president takes office in 2009. This places an undue burden on state and municipal governments to deal with the issue. Federal, state, and local governments have pressed forward with hundreds of new enforcement bills, regulations, and procedures, including stepped up deportations, an increase in workplace raids, and restrictions on access to driver's licenses and other government services and benefits.

**The need for immigration reform will be one of the most important issues in the 2008 presidential election.** A CNN poll found that 43 percent of respondents considered illegal immigration an important issue in the 2006 congressional elections. In terms of proposals to build a fence along the U.S.-Mexico border, 47 percent of respondents favored the proposal, while 44 percent of respondents opposed such a measure. In terms of the public's reaction to immigrants themselves, nearly three quarters felt sympathy toward immigrants. The polls point to a general overall trend suggesting a majority of Americans feel the current immigration system is in need of an overhaul. They differ over *how* to reform the immigration system.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Enact Comprehensive and Humane Immigration Reform**

- 1) Stop focus on enforcement and channel resources into reform.**

Put an end to patchwork legislation by state and local law enforcement agencies. Such efforts only serve to create additional challenges.

- 2) Establish a path to citizenship for the workers who are here already and enable them and their families to obtain legal residence.**

Simplify and expedite the process leading to legalization and/or citizenship. While new applicants should be asked to follow due process by waiting behind those who have already applied for naturalization, the process should be expedited to facilitate the full inclusion of families.

Offer low fees, and expedite FBI background checks and immigration medical exams. Due to long processing times, immigrants are often faced with multiple medical exams because they are valid for only 12 months. In addition, medical exams must be conducted by approved civil surgeons and can cost upwards of \$200 to \$500. FBI background checks can take up to three to five years, due to a backlog of requests. Also important to consider are common misconceptions about FBI background checks and medical

exams. It is important to demystify the process by providing information in the language of the applicant.

Avoid unnecessary penalties as they may impact the most vulnerable: children and the elderly. Costly fees and long wait times impede the integration of immigrants into U.S. society, often harming the most vulnerable.

Create a system for the reunification of families that have been separated by deportation. It is important to consider support of the family unit and its values as a central activity of humanity. This action step can appeal to religious groups, politicians, and legislators who wish to reinforce the family unit. The U.S. government can provide travel permits for immigrants, through their workplace or consulate, for visits with their families in their home country. An option would be to provide a similar permit to spouses and family for travel to the United States.

### **3) Provide legal channels to work in the U.S.**

Establish a guest worker program. A guest worker program should allow immigrants who are employed in the U.S. to move freely. This program is especially relevant in industries and sectors that are in high demand of labor, such as construction and agricultural work.

### **4) Provide resources for integration.**

Provide opportunities to increase integration into U.S. society. Being able to fully integrate the immigrant community as naturalized citizens requires English language proficiency. The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) observes that limited-English-proficient (LEP) adults are denied opportunities to learn English. The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) notes that 57.4 percent of English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) providers have long waiting lists.<sup>28</sup>

### **5) Uphold human rights by protecting the vulnerable and exploited**

Create humane border policies. There is a need for effective and humane border policies. NCLR has long argued that enforcement at the border and in the interior must be conducted in a way that maximizes effectiveness without undercutting our values as a nation. More than a decade of increased enforcement measures along the U.S.-Mexico border have resulted in a steep increase in the number of border deaths without much impact in deterring migration. Border enforcement policies must be both effective and humane.

Repeal laws that work against the humane treatment of immigrants. All workers in this country should be treated in a more humane way in the workplace and should be provided with the following: adequate working

conditions, reasonable salary, and non-discriminatory and exploitative practices on the part of employers.

Provide for the establishment of a federal office for continued monitoring to ensure that immigrants are treated with dignity and respect. It is vital to establish and conduct communication, advice, and coordination through a permanent forum for reflection and legislative action in favor of human life. Call for the signing of multilateral and multinational agreements for the respect of human rights.

#### **Issue No. 4: There is a need for transnational solutions in advancing immigration reform.**

##### **Key Findings**

**Transnational factors impact migration.** Former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Anan stated that nations must better understand the causes of international flows of people and their complex interrelationship with development. Migration does not happen in the absence of social, economic, and political forces that make the costs and risks of migration seemingly worthwhile.<sup>29</sup> These factors, commonly referred to as push and pull factors, demonstrate that migration is not an individual decision. While individuals may decide to migrate to the U.S., they are doing so only in response to social, economic, and political realities in their home country and/or prospects in the receiving country.<sup>30</sup> Push factors include not enough jobs, political fear, poor medical care, not being able to practice religion, loss of wealth, natural disasters, poor housing, and increasing globalization, which have the potential to reinforce inequity and poverty. Pull factors include job opportunities, better living conditions, political and/or religious freedom, educational opportunities, better medical care, security, and family connections.<sup>31</sup>

**Globalization has impacted the economic infrastructures of Latin America.** Increasing globalization has left national economies in Latin America dependent and vulnerable, encouraging migration across borders to more prosperous areas. Investing in building a strong economic infrastructure in countries such as Mexico, El Salvador and Guatemala through a program such as the Marshall Plan would encourage workers to stay and develop their home communities instead of migrating out of economic necessity. Such investment coupled with a Worker Visa Program would also address U.S. demand for immigrant labor.

**Dual citizenship is important for Latinos.** Another consideration is that the immigrant Latino community is in a unique position in that it is able to participate in politics in its home communities. A number of nationalized Mexicans and their children, for example, have dual citizenship and thus the potential to influence the electoral processes around issues impacting Latinos in the United States and Mexico.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Promote and Support Transnational Connections.** The U.S. is no longer in the business of creating Marshall Plans; however, a creatively designed and binationally financed program of targeted development is an idea that deserves serious consideration. This development assistance was procured in massive amounts by northern EU nations to Spain, Greece, and Portugal, prior to and after these countries joined the European Union. It made possible a step-level increase in GDP growth in these countries, reduced the north-south wage differential by half, and eventually turned all of the southern-tier EU countries into net importers of labor. In building transnational partnerships, the nation can impact the push and pull factors that lead to undocumented immigration.<sup>32</sup> The nation must continue to support dual citizenship, thereby building the future stability of the nations of the world.

## CONCLUSION

The acknowledgement of the issues and implementation of these recommendations by the next president and Congress of the United States will advance humane solutions and comprehensive immigration reform.

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## POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT & THE LATINO COMMUNITY

### INTRODUCTION

The equal integration and full participation of multiple communities into the political process are vital in building a strong democratic system in a diverse society. In the case of Latino communities, changing demographics impact political access and power for communities that have historically been misrepresented, underrepresented, and ignored or omitted from public policy agendas. Thus, policy issues of relevance to Latinos must be identified, discussed and incorporated at the local, state, national, and international levels.

In the last few years, this country has seen greater political engagement coupled with Latino population growth and an increased awareness of the need to impact courses of action, funding priorities, and a system of laws that determine societal organization. Public policy affects the present and future quality of life of Latino communities. Therefore, it is through meaningful political engagement that Latinos can more effectively develop and sustain a more prosperous future.

The following section will present pressing issues and propose appropriate action steps to address them. The discussion will focus on key findings and recommendations in three areas that have surfaced in national discussions about political engagement:

- Immigration reform and naturalization as catalyst for political engagement
- Political participation and representation
- Shifting the current political discourse

### ISSUES & RECOMMENATIONS

Issue No. 1: Immigration reform and naturalization are catalysts for political engagement.

#### Key Findings

Latino immigrants report that the most important reason for naturalization is to achieve political voice and to vote.<sup>1</sup> Having access to a naturalization process with the right information and preparation within a reasonable time and appropriate fees is a key component of building and sustaining Latino political engagement.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Promote comprehensive immigration reform.** The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) urges the next president of the United States to renew the call for passage of comprehensive immigration reform legislation that provides a path to U.S. citizenship for tax-paying and law-abiding newcomers and their families, reduces the immigration backlog, allows full access to educational opportunities for all, and stipulates fair and humane enforcement measures.<sup>2</sup>
- **Remove barriers to naturalization and provide sufficient funding for a more effective process.** Encouraging and providing assistance to eligible potential voters to initiate and complete the naturalization process will increase Latino political participation and create a stronger democracy. Barriers such as an unreasonably slow process, making citizenship tests more difficult, and increasing costs need to be addressed.
- **Fund and support a national citizenship drive.** There is a need to facilitate the naturalization process, considering that 85 percent of Latino immigrants intend to apply for U.S. citizenship and two thirds of eligible Latino immigrants have initiated the naturalization process, although only 40 percent have completed it.<sup>3</sup> It is up to elected officials, leaders, political parties, and service agencies to identify resources to support Latinos in the naturalization process. Naturalization drives need to be pursued at both local and national levels.

Issue No. 2: There is a growing need to increase Latino political participation and representation.

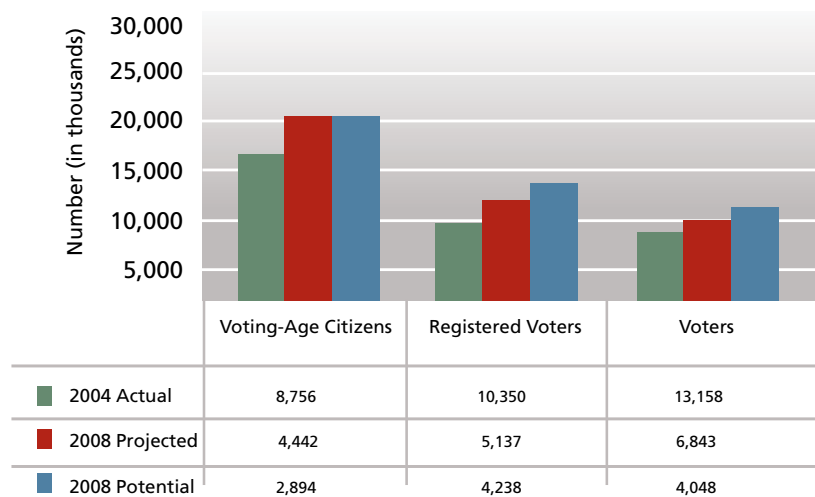
### Key Findings

**Latinos are key to the 2008 presidential election.** Latino voter growth represents an important segment of the electorate in the current presidential campaign, particularly in swing states. According to NALEO, November 2006 saw the highest Latino turnout on record for a midterm election. It notes that the continuing growth of Latino participation, combined with the large Latino population in the earliest states in the new primary calendar, suggest that the community will play a decisive role in selecting the next president of the United States.<sup>4</sup> The social and economic future of the Latino community rests in part on its positioning in playing a key vote for presidential candidates and in other elections.

**Latinos are currently an important and considerable potential electorate.** California (2,455,000) Texas (2,170,000), Florida (924,000), New York (764,000) and Arizona (354,000) were the states with the highest numbers of registered Latino voters in 2004. Compared in percentage to the total registered voter population, registered Latino voters have a strong presence in the following

states: New Mexico (33.7 percent), Texas (22.4 percent), California (17.3 percent), Arizona (14.3 percent), and Florida (11.2 percent). In addition, as a result of demographic dispersion, Latinos will play an increasingly important role in local, state, and national politics in states such as Arkansas, North Carolina, and Georgia as well as other states.

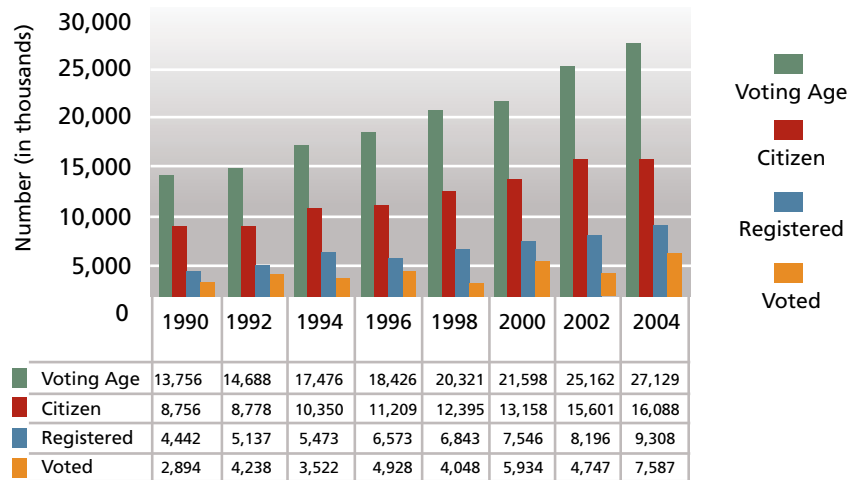
### Potential Growth in the Hispanic Electorate: Effects of Closing the Gaps



From "The Latino Electorate: Profile and Trends." L. Daniels & C. Martinez De Castro. National Council of La Raza. 2007. [www.americanprogress.org/events/2007/02/latino\\_electorate.pdf](http://www.americanprogress.org/events/2007/02/latino_electorate.pdf).

**Latino voter registration and voting rates are increasing.** The Latino population in the U.S. is over 45 million, with a good portion turning 18 this year. The Latino vote has surpassed projected levels of growth from 6.0 percent to 7.4 percent in 2012 and 9.5 percent in 2024.<sup>5</sup> Currently, the Latino vote represents 9 percent of the national electorate with at least 12 million voters and over 8 million residents eligible for citizenship. About one third of eligible Latino voters have registered in the last five years. Based on U.S. Census data, NCLR reports marked increases between 1990 and 2004 in registration and voting by age.

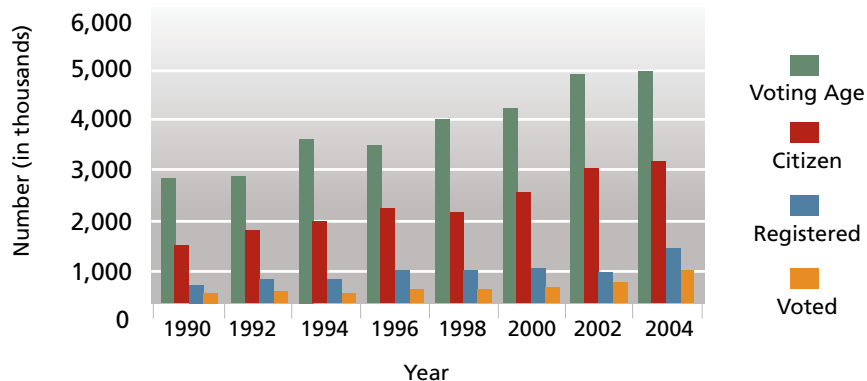
### Reported Registration and Voting of the Latino Voting-Age Population (1990-2004)



From "The Latino Electorate: Profile and Trends." L. Daniels & C. Martinez De Castro. National Council of La Raza. 2007. [www.americanprogress.org/events/2007/02/latino\\_electorate.pdf](http://www.americanprogress.org/events/2007/02/latino_electorate.pdf).

Naturalized citizens, who comprise almost a third of Latino voters, have steadily voted at higher rates than native-born Latinos. Higher registration rates of naturalized citizens, in comparison to native-born Latinos, are noticeable. For naturalized citizens, registration rates in 2000 were 50.6 percent with an increase to 52.1 percent in 2004. In comparison, among native-born Latinos, registration rates in 2000 were 43.6 percent and 45.5 percent in 2004.<sup>6</sup>

### Reported Registration and Voting of Latinos 18-24 years old (1990-2004)



From "The Latino Electorate: Profile and Trends." L. Daniels & C. Martinez De Castro. National Council of La Raza. 2007. [www.americanprogress.org/events/2007/02/latino\\_electorate.pdf](http://www.americanprogress.org/events/2007/02/latino_electorate.pdf).

**Latinos age 18-24 are a growing sector of registered voters.** At 13.2 percent, young Latinos represent a considerable share of the general Latino electorate. They registered a 55.8 percent voter growth between 2000 and 2004 as compared with the overall Latino electorate.

**Efforts are needed to increase voting rates.** The growing number of Latinos registering and voting still lags behind the actual growth of the community. Latinos represent 9 percent of the national electorate but comprise 15 percent of the population.<sup>7</sup> A sustained increase in electoral participation could be expected, but it is important to recognize that many Latinos face specific difficulties that delay and ultimately may prevent their incorporation to the electoral process. A concerted effort from political parties and the government to bridge cultural and language differences is needed in order to facilitate Latino participation and the corresponding strengthening of the democratic process.

**Latino political engagement varies.** Latinos engage politically in several ways, including electoral politics, grassroots organization, interest group politics, foreign policy involvement, campaign contributions, and community mobilization such as lobbying and protests.<sup>8</sup>

**Personal outreach matters.** Political and civic institutions that mobilized new participants in the past have reduced their role in regard to voter registration and turnout. Throughout the 20th century, political parties shifted their focus to fundraising, candidate recruitment, and technical support for candidates, considerably diminishing their role in mobilizing mass political participation. Currently, parties do little to mobilize new voters.<sup>9</sup> However, parties are skilled at identifying voters who turn out regularly. In an election campaign, they emphasize informing regular voters, but they reach out to less regular voters only in the most competitive of races. To pay for their expensive campaigns, candidates spend more time fundraising and less time meeting citizens. Since in the Latino community the proportion of unregistered adult citizens and of registered voters who do not go to the polls are both higher, this strategy works to their disadvantage. Personal outreach, whether by candidates or their supporters, has been shown to spur Latino turnout.<sup>10</sup>

**Latinos are underrepresented in the national government.** Given that the Latino population comprises the largest of all minority groups, the number of Latinos holding public office is disproportionately low. Very few Latinos have ever been appointed to serve in high-ranking posts or cabinet positions. No Latino has ever been appointed to the Supreme Court. Only during the last 20 years have Latino leaders begun to occupy cabinet positions. A handful of Latinos have held such positions in the departments of Education, Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, Energy, Commerce, and in the office of the Attorney General. Still the participation of Latinos in the administration is below what should be expected relative to the population.

The Voting Rights Act (VRA) helped increase the number of Latino officeholders and thus the share of the Latino population represented by Latino officeholders. But the VRA itself has been challenged, particularly in regard to its provisions for majority-minority districting. New gains may have to come at the expense of black populations in some areas. Currently, the number of Latino congressmen (21) is less than half of that of black congressmen (43). In the near future, coalitional politics will be most important for Latino empowerment. All Latinos in the U. S. Congress, and most in state legislatures, represent districts with a high density of Latino population (40 percent or more), but future gains in office holding will have to come from victories in districts with lower densities of Latinos.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Increase support and funding for voter education and registration.** The limited English proficiency of many citizens keeps them in a position of disadvantage to exercise their rights, despite the logistics displayed during elections for compliance with the Voting Rights Act. Contrary to some stereotypes, the overwhelming majority of these citizens are eager to learn English. Frequently, some of the available means are beyond their financial reach, and the more accessible resources are overwhelmed by the demand. The government will do a great service to the community at large by encouraging and supporting widespread availability of accessible, efficient, and relevant English learning programs.

Increasing meaningful civic engagement requires support of political parties and national organizations to create or expand electoral programs responsive to the cultural sensitivities and language needs of the Latino community. Funding a national voter registration campaign targeting Latinos on the basis of cultural values such as family participation is one of the most effective ways of engaging this potential voting sector.

Refocusing investment and effort beyond competitive states and districts would incorporate Latino voters who reside in noncompetitive states or represent small portions of the electorate.<sup>11</sup> Political campaigns need to look beyond frequent voters and reach out to new or sporadic voters. Such efforts are important in particularly tight contests because Latinos are likely to vote according to issues of interest rather than strict party affiliation. Statistics bear out substance-based voting: 74 percent of Latinos base their vote on the relationship of the candidate with the community and on his or her record on Latino issues; 58 percent do not believe that candidates are talking about issues most important to the Latino community. Raúl Yzaguirre, prominent Latino activist and NCLR founder, asserts that for politicians, speaking a few words in Spanish won't work anymore. He adds that, like other Americans, Latinos will vote on issues important to them, and few candidates are effectively addressing those issues.<sup>12</sup>

There is a need to maximize Latino voter registration and vote turnout by supporting community registration drives, utilizing mail-in systems, and merging the efforts of government agencies such as the Department of Motor Vehicles. If there is true interest in including Latinos in the democratic process, a renewed commitment is needed from all parties involved in election politics to reach out to the community. There has to be a return to emphasizing personal contact and recruitment of new voters. At the same time, this cannot be left entirely to the initiative of the political parties. The federal government has to make it its business to create programs to systematically encourage registration of Latino voters. Some organizations (Voto Latino and others) committed to increasing the Latino vote are already making strides in this direction. The federal government would do well to lend them financial or logistical support, and to learn from their methods and experiences.

- **Support the development of generational voter registration and voter turnout strategies.** With regard to the growing number of Latinos registered to vote, most significant are the considerable portion of Latinos who have turned 18 this year, and registered voters ages 18-24. It is important to integrate aspects of Latino culture as well as youth culture in voter registration and voting turnout campaigns. There needs to be more funding and support to engage the youth vote through technology such as text messaging, MySpace, and other popular communication mediums. Expanding the young Latino electorate requires the strategic use of educational institutions. Youth-oriented registration drives on university and community colleges have the potential to harness a growing sector of the Latino electorate. Other strategies include mailing registration forms to youth on their 18th birthday, and partnerships with school districts to register eligible students before they graduate from high school.<sup>13</sup>
- **Protect voting rights and Amendment 14.** The federal government has to comply with its responsibility to ensure the integration of Latinos as full citizens in the fabric of society through greater and more effective oversight and enforcement of voter registration, voting procedures, rule changes, and voter protection. The Voting Rights Act (VRA) contains appropriate provisions such as availability of bilingual election materials and officials to facilitate equal access to the polls for all voters. Section 203 in particular addresses the needs of language minorities as defined by VRA, in jurisdictions as determined by the Census Bureau according to population and educational levels. Evidence suggests that current efforts have been insufficient to provide adequate and consistent enforcement of section 203.<sup>14</sup> Special emphasis should be placed on training poll workers and helping them become sensitive to the needs of the limited English proficiency (LEP) voters, as well as being aware of the importance of their participation. Poll workers should receive specific guidelines outlining handling of materials, including how voting materials should be displayed, so that LEP voters

receive the same information as everybody else and can participate on equal terms. Special effort should be placed in ensuring the presence of a sufficient number of bilingual poll workers in every covered jurisdiction.

Protection of bilingual provisions is vital in order to provide language assistance to certain minority voters whose first language is not English. In addition to such equity protections, there needs to be protection of Amendment 14, which ensures equal protection before the law. Recent attacks on the Latino community include proposals for the removal of citizenship by birthright, one of the most sacred constitutional rights.

- **Provide adequate funding for the 2010 Census.** Jurisdictions covered under the Voting Rights Act are determined according to the census. Adequate funding should be provided for the next census, scheduled for 2010, to ensure a full and accurate count. This is crucial for the protection of the voting rights of all. The number of jurisdictions covered under the Voting Rights Act is likely to rise after the census, and additional funding will have to be assigned to guarantee the implementation of regulations in these new areas. Education of voters, as well as adequate training of poll workers is critical. Federal oversight and enforcement of laws are essential in the creation of jurisdictions that enhance, not diminish, the Latino vote in tandem with census data.
- **Support implementation of innovative and long-term strategies for engaging voters.** Bringing to fruition the full potential of the Latino electorate requires focused research, field testing and strategic development. Currently, community-based organizations are successfully employing culturally based outreach and creative strategies. These efforts need to work in tandem with governmental institutions in order to build and engage current and potential voters.
- **Increase the number of Latinos in local government.** There is a need to expand and support programs to increase the number of Latinos taking part in local government and advancing through the pipeline to more senior positions at the local and national level. This would require commitment from state and federal government to encourage the development of such programs. The Serrano Scholar's program, initiated by Congressman Serrano from the 16th district of New York, offers scholarships for students starting at Hostos Community College, and all the way up to the completion of a master's degree at Columbia University, preparing them for careers in Foreign Service and national security. The Congressional Latino Caucus Institute (CHCI) runs a Public Policy Fellowship Program for recent Latino college graduates, providing significant work experience and skill development to help them move into public policy positions. Programs like these are worth looking at as models for the creation of additional programs to encourage and facilitate access of Latino students and young professionals to public service careers and elected office.

- **Include Latino cabinet appointments.** It would be most appropriate for the next president to appoint at least three cabinet members of Latino descent.
- **Appoint a Latino to the Supreme Court.** It is reasonable to expect that a Latino will fill the next vacant seat in the Supreme Court. It is a necessity, not only for the Latino community but also for the nation at large, to include the cultural sensibility and outlook of the Latino social sector in informing this high court's determinations.

Issue No. 3: There is a need to shift the political discourse.

### Key Findings

Changing demographics impact power. Latinos have become the largest minority group in the country. The Latino population growth and geographic dispersion encompassing every state in the nation in the last 20 years has been remarkable and unique in the history of immigration. Greater geographic, economic, cultural, and political visibility have focused attention on Latinos as agents of social and political change. Simultaneously, certain social sectors register resistance through continued refusal to share wealth, knowledge, and power.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Oppose public discourse that devalues and dehumanizes the Latino community.** Stigmatization of the Latino community through hateful rhetoric ignores and promotes ignorance about the multiple contributions of this community in building and developing the nation. Because of their public visibility and access to media, political leaders should condemn in the strongest possible terms immigrant, Latino, and Mexican bashing. Government officials should be held accountable for their own expressions and for how they influence public discourse.
- **Promote responsible reporting in the media.** In 2008, NCLR introduced the Wave of Hope Campaign, which challenges media to provide balanced reporting when discussing immigration issues and the Latino community. Political leaders should play a decisive role in holding the media accountable for anti-immigrant messages that denigrate an entire community and the democratic principles of the nation.
- **Support a national educational campaign against hate groups and hate speech.** Government agencies should partner with media and community organizations in challenging hate groups and hate speech.

- **Support measures that protect communities and advocates.** Pro-immigrant advocacy efforts run the risk of being thwarted by social sectors and groups that promote aggression. Failure to protect advocates curtails their ability to accurately inform the public about the real challenges and opportunities of integrating immigrants.
- **Examine and oppose the social structure of racial exclusion.** It is not enough to focus on quantitative changes such as the number of elected and appointed officials, registered voters, and naturalized citizens. Numbers are most significant when coupled with qualitative changes. Promoting systemic changes should produce a paradigm shift. In its multiple dimensions (social, economic, cultural), this paradigm shift would take us from the mere discussion of political issues to the empowerment of all Americans.

## CONCLUSION

The meaningful integration of Latinos into the fabric of the nation includes developing new strategies, utilizing and creating new resources, and shifting the political discourse. The acknowledgement of the issues and implementation of these recommendations by the next president and Congress of the United States will advance a democratic electoral process that fully includes and empowers the Latino community.

## ENDNOTES

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Nathalie Rayes  
Executive Director  
Fundacion Azteca America  
[nrayes@gruposalinas.com.mx](mailto:nrayes@gruposalinas.com.mx)

[www.fundacionaztecaamerica.org](http://www.fundacionaztecaamerica.org)



Dr. Maria del Carmen Salazar  
Assistant Professor  
Lead Research Faculty for Agenda Latina  
[msalazar@du.edu](mailto:msalazar@du.edu)

Dr. Debora Ortega  
Associate Professor  
Director DU Latino Center for  
Community Engagement and Scholarship  
[debora.ortega@du.edu](mailto:debora.ortega@du.edu)

<http://du.edu/latinocenter>