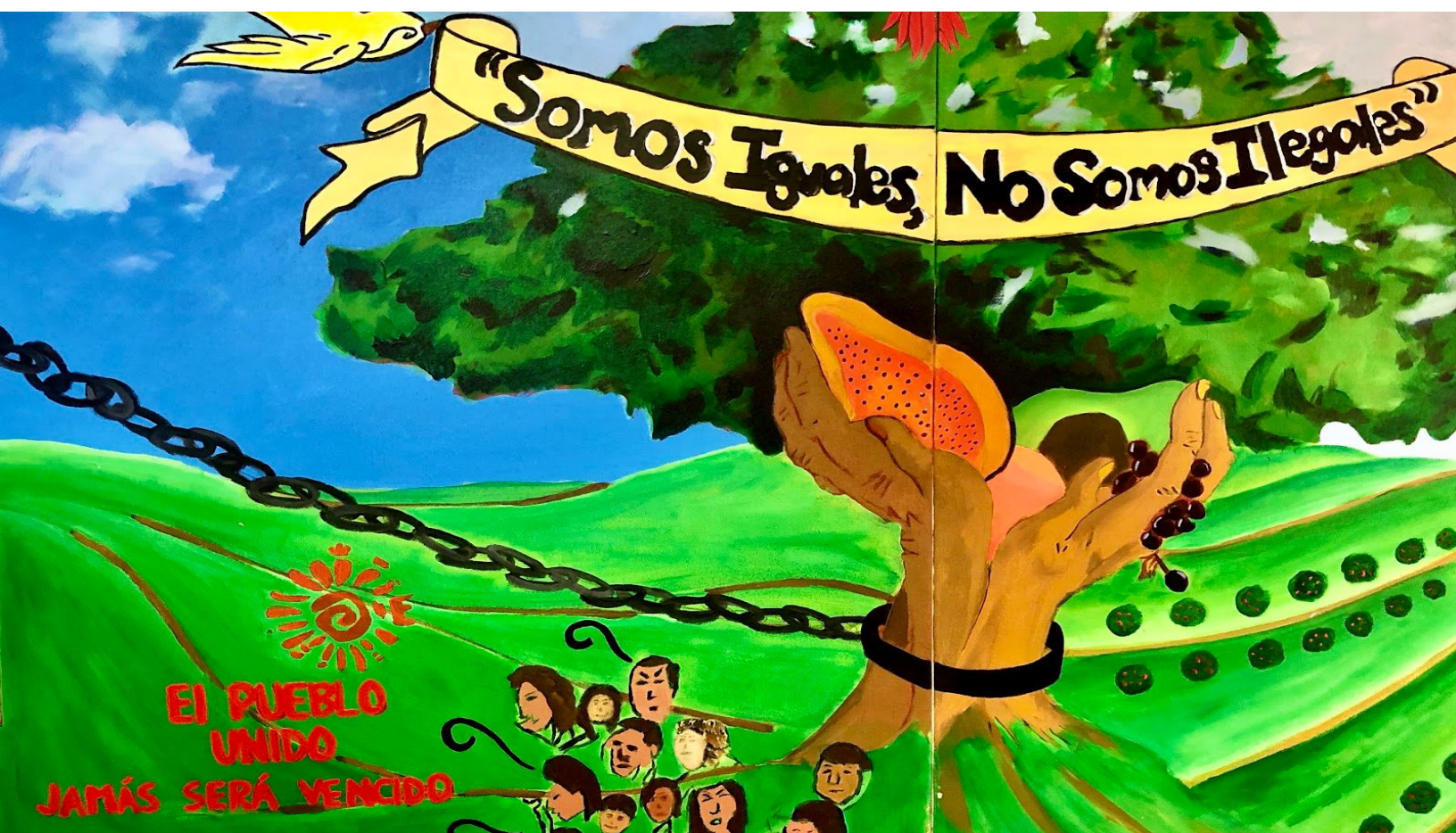


Building an Inclusive Democracy

Behavioral Insights from Latinx Youth in the Southern United States

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Introduction



Individuals between the ages of 18-39 vote at the lowest rates within every race and every state across the country according to United States Census data, and Latinx individuals—particularly Latinx men—vote at the lowest rates within each age bracket.¹ States in the U.S. South, as defined by the Census Bureau, consistently have the lowest voter turnout rates for each racial, ethnic, and age designation of the American electorate. Taken together, young Latinx voters in the South vote at the lowest rates of all demographic groups designated by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Millennials comprised 44% of eligible Latinx voters in 2016 and Latinx communities are predicted to be the largest share of eligible minority voters in 2020.^{2 3} Every 30 seconds, a Latinx individual in the U.S. turns 18 and becomes eligible to vote, which is cultivating nearly 75,000 new prospective Latinx voters each month and 900,000 each year.^{4 5} This growth has been most pronounced in the Southern United States (see Appendix A).⁶

While these numbers suggest an opportunity for the Latinx community to expand their political power, historically low voter turnout rates of Latinx individuals suggest the broader community may not be exercising its electoral impact. This belief is reflected “among Latino leaders and social scientists, [as] there is a growing recognition, and increasing concern, that Latinos are punching beneath their weight [politically], and may

¹ “Population and Voting Rates for Congressional Districts: 2018.” *The United States Census Bureau*, 3 Feb. 2020,

www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/congressional-voting-tables.html.

² Krogstad, Jens Manuel, et al. “Millennials Make Up Almost Half of Latino Eligible Voters in 2016.” *Pew Research Center*, Pew Research Center Hispanic Trends Project, 30 Dec. 2019, www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2016/01/19/millennials-make-up-almost-half-of-latino-eligible-voters-in-2016/.

³ Cilluffo, Anthony, and Richard Fry. “An Early Look at the 2020 Electorate.” *Pew Research Center*, Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project, 30 Jan. 2019, www.pewsocialtrends.org/essay/an-early-look-at-the-2020-electorate/.

⁴ Karas, Tania. “Every 30 Seconds, a Young Latino in the US Turns 18. Their Votes Count More than Ever.” *Public Radio International*, 4 Feb. 2020, www.pri.org/node/184476/embed.

⁵ “2018 Data Release New and Notable.” *The United States Census Bureau*, 13 Feb. 2020, www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/news/data-releases/2018/release.html#par_textimage.

⁶ Flores, Antonio, et al. “U.S. Hispanic Population Reached New High in 2018, but Growth Has Slowed.” *Pew Research Center*, 8 July 2019, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/08/u-s-hispanic-population-reached-new-high-in-2018-but-growth-has-slowed/.

be stuck in a cycle of disconnection.”⁷ The growth of young Latinx voters in the South “presents a critical opportunity to expand Latinos’ electoral clout, which has not [previously] kept pace with the community’s growing numbers” in part because of “the young age of many Latinos in the region.”⁸ It is critically important to the functioning of American democracy that political actors, governmental systems, and voter turnout organizations encourage, rather than depress, voter participation amongst Latinx youth.

This report examines the psychological, behavioral, and social factors that influence voting decisions of Latinx youth in the South. Motivated to better understand the reasons behind their historically low rates of political participation, we began this project with a desire to recommend how to build a more inclusive system of American democracy in which Latinx youth have their voices fairly represented. This project is explicitly removed from partisan ambition: we are not interested in recommending how a given political party can earn more votes from Latinx youth; but rather, how Latinx youth can better exercise their democratic rights. Likewise, this project is not focused on improving mobilization tactics for the next election, but rather, is interested in analyzing the lived social experiences of Latinx youth in the South to uncover behavioral barriers to voting applicable to this demographic. In doing so, we aim to identify sustained solutions to voter participation of the Latinx community that outlast individual electoral efforts.

Our client organization, ideas42, is a nonprofit that uses behavioral science insights to improve lives, build effective systems, and drive social change. ideas42—specifically through the authority of its Vice President, Omar Parbhoo and Senior Associate, Maya Alper—has collaborated with our team to conduct this research. We are building off of ideas42’s work under their Sparking Civic Action portfolio, in which they use behavioral science to design solutions to hidden barriers of voter participation. The organization houses a Nonvoter Innovation Lab that focuses on delivering the value of behavioral science through operational and policy solutions that impact civic engagement. ideas42 shared behavioral science research regarding voter engagement with us that helped inform our literature review. They also formally trained us in interview-methodology in preparation for our interviews; helped us design a behavioral science qualitative interview guide; and consulted with us to support our various needs throughout this process.

To assess behavioral barriers to voting amongst Latinx youth in the South, we designed a qualitative study to learn directly from members of this population. We traveled to North

⁷ Cave, Damien, “Yes, Latinos Are Rising, but So Are Latino Nonvoters,” *New York Times*, 19 Jan. 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/20/upshot/yes-latinos-are-rising-but-so-are-latino-nonvoters.html>.

⁸ Yee, Allie. “The Future of Young Latino Voters in The South: How today’s Latino youth could unlock Latino electoral power in Southern states”. *Institute for Southern Studies*. Jan. 2016, https://www.facingsouth.org/sites/default/files/Latino%20voters%20report_final.pdf.

Carolina, Alabama, and Georgia in January 2020 to interview twenty-seven young Latinx identifying individuals to learn about their voting experiences. These interviewees were between the ages of 18-30 and represent various points along the voting spectrum. Of the 27 total interviewees, 9 had never voted; 12 had not voted in all elections they had been eligible to vote in; and 6 had voted in all elections they were eligible to vote in (see Appendix B).

For this project, we are describing our interviewees as “Latinx” as a gender-neutral alternative to *Latino* or *Latina*. While we recognize that not all members of this community may identify as Latinx, as some may identify as “Latino”, “Latina”, “Hispanic”, or a pronoun that references their specific country of origin, we’ve decided to use the term “Latinx” for inclusivity and uniformity throughout this paper. Additionally, we’ve defined “youth” as anyone between the ages of 18-39, which reflects the age-range of Latinx adults with the lowest voting rates.

The interviewees in our sample and their families came from a wide range of countries of origin across Latin America, including Ecuador, Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia, Honduras, Uruguay, Nicaragua, and Peru (see Appendix B). They expressed a diversity of political ideology and gender identification. Our sample reflects the vast diversity across the greater Latinx community which, contrary to popular portrayal, is not a monolith, but rather, a richly heterogeneous segment of the population that spans a plethora of lived social experiences, identities, countries of origin, political ideologies, and other facets of identity.⁹

Our work was only possible because of the generous support of community organizations who connected us to young people in each state we visited. Specifically, we appreciated the partnerships we built with Mi Pueblo at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, El Pueblo in Raleigh, ¡HICA! (Hispanic Interest Coalition of Alabama) in Birmingham, the Latino Community Fund in Atlanta, and the Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials (GALEO). By working with these trusted community organizations, we were able to gain invaluable insights into the lived experiences of Latinx youth across the South, and we hope this research will be of value to supporting the meaningful work of these organizations. We also acknowledge Michael Jones-Correa of the Center for the Study of Ethnicity, Race and Immigration at the University of Pennsylvania for his contributions to our project.

⁹ Noe-Bustamante, Luis. “Key Facts about U.S. Hispanics and Their Diverse Heritage.” *Pew Research Center*, 16 Sept. 2019, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/09/16/key-facts-about-u-s-hispanics/.

The support we received from Harvard University's Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation and the Behavioral Insights Group at the Harvard Kennedy School made this study possible. Todd Rogers, the faculty director of the Behavioral Insights Group, also dedicated time to help guide our project.

Finally, we would like to thank our advisor, Tova Wang, for her continuous support and steadfast belief in our mission for this project. Tova has dedicated numerous hours to supporting our work and has consistently encouraged us to study voter participation from a non-traditional lens. We express endless gratitude to Tova for connecting us to ideas42, Michael Jones Correa, resources at the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, and for giving us an abundance of meaningful feedback and moral support.

Methodology



To research the lowest voting subgroup of the American electorate, we analyzed U.S. Census Data to determine that Latinx youth in the South—as defined by U.S. Census Bureau categorization—vote at lower rates than any other group of eligible voters. After, then, analyzing voter turnout data from individual Secretary of State offices, and meeting with Michael Jones-Correa, the Director of the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for the Study of Race, Ethnicity and Immigration and an expert on Latinx youth voter participation, we narrowed the scope of our project to focus on North Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama.

These three states rank in the bottom 16% of states nationwide for Latinx voter turnout and all provide public voter turnout data that is disaggregated by race. The availability of data allowed us to identify young Latinx voting trends in these states, which was not possible for some of the lowest Latinx turnout states. According to Census Data on Latinx individuals eligible to vote, Alabama has a voter turnout rate of 13.2%; North Carolina has a rate of 17.6%; and Georgia has a 19% turnout rate.

Professor Jones-Correa suggested we find three states that are structurally similar in terms of voting laws and practices, yet yield different outcomes of voter turnout rates, so that we could assess potentially generalizable findings. His research indicated that North Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama would therefore be good target states. Additionally, because these states had competitive races in the 2018 midterm elections and have received recent attention regarding voter disenfranchisement, we believed individuals in these states were likely to have more recent memories regarding their decisions to vote or not vote. We chose states that represent the geographic stretch of the Southeast, with Alabama representing a “deep South” state, North Carolina as an “upper South” state, and Georgia as something in between.

We received training on behavioral science interview methodology from ideas42, and developed a behavioral science interview guide to reduce biases in interviewee responses. To inform our interview guide, we analyzed results from the 2016 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey¹⁰ to identify potential reasons Latinx youth have for choosing to not vote. We used this data to determine potential behavioral barriers to voting, assessed how these behavioral barriers interacted with contextual

¹⁰ Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey, 2016, <https://cmprsurvey.org/2016-survey/>.

barriers to voting, crafted hypotheses on why Latinx youth do or do not vote based on these barriers, and then designed interview questions to test these hypotheses.

We connected with our interviewees after speaking with a number of Latinx political engagement and advocacy organizations including:

- Mi Pueblo at the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill
- El Pueblo in Raleigh
- The Hispanic Interest Coalition of Alabama (¡HICA!) in Birmingham
- Latino Community Fund in Atlanta
- The Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials (GALEO)

We also connected with Democracy NC, who assisted our efforts in analyzing young Latinx voting trends in North Carolina.

We used a snowball sample method to recruit non-voting, infrequently-voting, and frequently-voting Latinx youth within these states. We traveled to North Carolina, Alabama, and Georgia to conduct 27 interviews between January 20 and January 24, 2020. The majority of these interviews were conducted in-person in Chapel Hill, North Carolina; Raleigh, North Carolina; Birmingham, Alabama; and Atlanta, Georgia. Our sample also included a small subset of interviews that were conducted by phone.

Findings



Section 1 | What's the Point of Voting?

A. What's the point of voting when my vote won't count and nothing will change?

Since Latinx youth were born, they have seen politicians from both parties promise comprehensive immigration reform and plans to improve their lives. However, our interviewees could recall few tangible moments in which they felt their lives have improved as a result of political changes. For many, this instilled a belief that voting will not improve their lived social experiences. Additionally, the vast majority of interviewees had never felt like a politician truly cared about them. Of the 27 interviewees, 18 felt like not having politicians care about their communities made them less likely to vote. This sentiment seems to reflect a deeper, and justifiable, lack of faith in the American political system that may diminish voter turnout amongst young Latinx voters more broadly. As stated by a 25-year-old Alabama male who chose not to vote in the 2016 election:

"I feel like Democrats use Latinos for votes and nothing else. We've been talking about an immigration reform act for so long and nothing's happened. Politics are corrupt. It's outdated, it's not diverse enough."

Similar feelings were reflected by a 20-year-old infrequent female voter from North Carolina. Regardless of rhetoric, political party, or stated interests, this individual expressed:

"It's hard to trust any type of politician because you don't know if they're saying something to get a vote or get support from a community...like are they exploiting us or do they actually care about our interests?"

A 19-year-old female non-voter in North Carolina also supported this notion, stating:

"I think politics is a little...targeted for one general population. They ignore minorities and how certain things can affect minorities. This makes me less inclined to vote. I feel like they won't listen regardless of what we might vote for. They won't change anything."

A 19-year-old male non-voter in Alabama expressed that more members of his community may be likely to vote if they could tangibly understand how their votes would impact policy changes they care about. This individual stated:

“A lot of us don’t understand...how to make a difference. If you told us we could get this amount of votes [and things would change], we could do something with that. But a lot of us don’t have a lot of motivation because we haven’t seen change, and if we have, it’s been for the worse.”

This lack of trust goes beyond an inability to question the motives of individual politicians, and rather, suggests a deeper mistrust in the institutions and government themselves. As stated by a non-voting 19-year-old college student from North Carolina:

“Politics has become a system that robbed people of a lot of things we need. It’s become a system that has robbed people of their trust and what this nation has to promise and what this nation can do for its people...I grew up in a community where everyone was an immigrant...I feel like American politics is just inciting fear...It’s not something that’s equitable for everyone...I think [politics and the government] is just unfair.”

This lack of faith in American politicians’ willingness to fight for the needs and desires of Latinx youth in the South appears to stem from negative experiences with the political system. In Alabama, multiple interviewees referenced that they initially trusted Doug Jones to represent them in the Senate. These interviewees were excited to vote for Doug Jones and felt empowered by advocating for the change they sought. Some of these interviewees even had an opportunity to meet Doug Jones at a political event aimed at a Latinx audience. However, these same interviewees referenced how they’ve, since, felt exploited by Senator Jones. They questioned whether he simply said what he needed to say in order to receive their vote. As stated by a 26-year-old infrequent voter in Alabama:

“We felt that Doug Jones truly cared. He came to ¡HICA! and he was very open. He kind of...painted a beautiful picture for us, so he got our hopes up. But then he...disappointed us, because he needed the Latinx vote. It’s very disappointing that he hasn’t been able to do any of the stuff he promised...It changes how I think of the election of future candidates because it makes us think they’re doing it just to get our vote, and they’re not following through.”

A 24-year-old Alabaman frequent voter reflected this feeling by stating:

“Something that’s missing is people that are in the fight for the cause, not just for the title...I’ve been in conference rooms with Doug Jones, but...I guess the position he’s in, he can’t give too much rope to any cause or issue because he’s tied up. I’ve spoken to him about issues...Maybe that’s a skill that politicians have. They make sure everyone feels like they’re listened to...but they really don’t care. It’s just about getting elected or votes...and [Doug Jones] is the best option, so I have to go with [him] regardless.”

This same politically active individual reflected on the one meeting Senator Jones held with the Alabama Coalition for Immigrant Justice, an organization she is involved with, since he’s been in office. This interviewee recalled feeling like Senator Jones had pitted her immigrant justice organization against a group that represented Black Women in this meeting. She explained:

“It’s like [politicians] make [the immigrant community] fight against other minority groups. We had a meeting four months ago at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute with Doug Jones. There was Black Women for Reproductive Rights and us, the Alabama Coalition for Immigrant Justice...Time was running out and...our director started talking and she got interrupted by [Black Women for Reproductive Right]’s director...and Doug Jones’ staff...turned us against each other. We need to build an alliance with [Black Women For Reproductive Rights], not fight them. We should not have been placed in that spot.”

While these individuals were still encouraged to vote in the future, they had legitimate reasons to feel ignored and exploited by politicians. These interviewees expressed frustration that the only politicians they’ve seen say positive things about their community still seem unwilling to fight to make their lives better.

In Georgia, we witnessed a related feeling regarding the 2018 midterm election between Stacey Abrams and Brian Kemp. While each of the 9 interviewees from Georgia who voted in the 2018 gubernatorial election supported Stacey Abrams, there were concerns regarding whether their votes would literally be counted. Additionally, there were concerns regarding whether Stacey Abrams explicitly cared about the Latinx community. While Abrams was much more aligned to their values than Brian Kemp, a 20-year-old first-time Georgia voter stated:

“There’s not a lot of candidates or people that look like me that I would trust to represent me...I’d say [I trust] Stacey Abrams, but even that’s to an extent.

Because she cares about everyone, you know, but not about specific issues that affect Latinos.”

The Abrams-Kemp election—rife with allegations of voter suppression—led multiple interviewees to question whether or not their votes would ever be counted. A 24-year-old non-voting Georgia female explained:

“My friend said she registered but her vote [in 2018] didn’t count. Seeing how upset she was, it was her first time voting, and seeing how disappointed she was, she had just gotten her citizenship, and having the privilege to live here in the United States and have the right to vote and not being heard, it’s just concerning...I’ve heard from many others that their vote doesn’t count...I’m not entirely sure how the system works...It was a year ago and they were voting for the governor, and...they were saying that one of the poll stations, I’m not entirely sure if it was minorities that weren’t accounted for, but I’ve heard that a lot. That I’ve voted and it didn’t count.”

Efforts to understand why Latinx youth in the South vote at lower rates than all other groups of the American electorate must consider the legitimate reasons these individuals have to feel like voting will not improve their lived social experiences. These voters do not have many concrete examples to point to of moments in which their lives were tangibly improved because of individual politicians. Rather, they have examples of feeling exploited, alienated, or like their voices literally and figuratively do not count.

B. There is a broad spectrum of civic engagement that goes beyond voting

Civic engagement includes more activities than voting, and an individual’s decision not to vote does not seem to suggest that they are not civically engaged. Of the 27 interviewees we talked to, 26—regardless of their voting history—demonstrated a clear history of being civically engaged. In addition to voting, our interviewees believe civic engagement includes attending rallies, protests, Latinx-focused meetings, and town halls; as well as writing to representatives, sharing information via social media, and working to ensure friends and family are aware of changes in their greater community. By this definition, we would consider 8 of the 9 non-voters that we interviewed “civically engaged.”

While voting is one component of civic engagement, voting by itself is not indicative of how engaged an individual may be. For instance, a non-voting 19-year-old from North Carolina entered college to study technology as a way to alleviate poverty in his family’s home country of Ecuador. In his free time, this individual had registered members of his

community to vote. Though he had never voted, he ensured that he and his friends were appropriately registered. Another non-voting 19-year-old college student in North Carolina stated:

“[Since Trump’s election] I’ve made a more conscious effort to understand how my community sees things and that means getting involved in Latinx organizations and organizations that help immigrants. I feel this way [about Trump] and I’m a legal American citizen and I was born here and they can’t kick me out. How is this person who came here 5 months ago feeling? Do they even know? Do they even know what’s going on?”

This same non-voter volunteers at hospitals serving predominantly Spanish-speaking patients so that he can ensure that members of his community have access to the healthcare they need. While this individual has never voted, he has volunteered his time and effort to help serve members of his community and has joined social advocacy groups to amplify Latinx voices at the University of North Carolina. To us, this demonstrates active civic engagement.

A non-voting 19-year-old female in North Carolina displayed civic engagement by joining a Latinx advocacy organization, using her social media to promote political information, attending multiple rallies, and writing to state and local representatives. This individual organized her friends to attend protests to resist HB-370, a North Carolina bill that would have compelled local sheriffs to cooperate with ICE.¹¹ While a non-voter, this individual expressed that:

“The younger demographic is more into politics than the older people were. I feel like we’re seeing the effects [of policy], and because of social media and everything is all open to us, we’re able to see the effects of everything that happens in D.C. [and] are able to see what we can change.”

The never-voting Latinx youth we interviewed have worked to expand health access to immigrant communities; led fundraisers for detained migrants; directed youth groups for younger members of their churches and schools; moved back home to help their parents navigate daily life given their citizenship status; and have helped their friends exercise their right to vote. This suggests that there is a broad spectrum of civic engagement, in which voting is merely one activity. This behavior could possibly be explained by research rooted in *status quo* bias. According to the Principles Index published by

¹¹ “House Bill 370 (2019-2020 Session) - North Carolina General Assembly.” *Ncleg.gov*, North Carolina Legislature, www.ncleg.gov/BillLookup/2019/H370.

ideas42, “beyond the physical space, we often unconsciously consider other things ‘home’ too, such as beliefs, previous choices, and set routines. These things form an individual’s *status quo*, which we tend to prefer to stick to. As a result, we often ‘choose’ pre-set options even when many other options are available.”¹² In the context of Latinx youth, they may see volunteerism and other forms of community-based civic engagement as a more comfortable and familiar option—and subsequently stay within their set *status quo*, rather than experiment with an unfamiliar way of civically engaging, like voting.

C. Even among Latinx non-voters, young people are both informed and involved

There is a common belief that young Latinx turnout rates are low because they are generally an uninformed and disengaged population. To assess this belief, we analyzed data from the 2016 Collaborative Multiracial Post-election Survey (CMPS), which had more than 3,000 Latinx respondents. According to this data, in 2016, 57% of non-voting Latinx individuals under the age of 39 did not vote due to a lack of interest, and 28% of young Latinx non-voting individuals did not vote because they did not know how to. However, we hypothesized that Latinx youth may have deeper reasons for not voting that they outwardly express as either a lack of interest, or a lack of understanding, about the voting process.

The notion that Latinx youth are not voting because they are uninformed or unmotivated was not supported by any of our interviews. Every person we spoke with was involved in a wide array of civic engagement activities, regardless of whether or not they had voted in the past. Multiple interviewees referenced specific policies that affected their lives, including changes to state bills in North Carolina and Alabama. Nearly every interviewee made intentional efforts to receive news and/or political information, primarily through social media and the internet. Even if our interviewees did not actively seek out political information, they expressed how frequently they received it via social media.

While we recognize the limits of drawing conclusions from a qualitative study with our sample size, we strongly caution against describing Latinx youth as broadly uninformed and disengaged. Priming negative stereotypes can have pernicious effects on the behavior of a population—if Latinx youth are broadly painted as being politically disengaged and uninformed, this could negatively inform this community’s beliefs about themselves and ultimately lead to higher rates of nonvoting. According to research on the phenomenon of stereotype threat, “when we are primed to consider a specific

¹² ideas42 Principles Index. “Status Quo Bias.” *ideas42*, <https://www.ideas42.org/blog/principle/status-quo-bias/>.

identity, we often behave in ways that fit with its associated stereotypes—even if the priming is completely inadvertent and even if we do not believe the stereotype.”¹³ Alternatively, we would suggest that priming positive identities around civic engagement and the young Latinx community could be more beneficial—for example, priming a young Latinx individual’s identity as a “citizen” or “community member” may increase the likelihood that she registers to vote or votes in an upcoming election.¹⁴

We also believe that deeper psychological reasons exist for not voting beyond the stated answers of why Latinx people do not vote as expressed in CMPS data, thus we want to emphasize the importance of viewing these results with appropriate nuance. For example, non-voting Latinx individuals could have said they did not vote “due to a lack of interest” instead of self-analyzing deeper held beliefs that American politicians do not care about Latinx communities; that the identity of American political participants does not include Latinx individuals; or that voting is an inherently fearful process for people from mixed-status families.

While we did find that some of our interviewees felt underprepared to vote due to a lack of education about the voting process (and believe Latinx-focused voter education campaigns may, indeed, be important ways to enhance turnout across the broader community) our interviewees suggest it is an oversimplification to describe Latinx youth as categorically uninformed about American politics. However, the belief that Latinx youth hold that they do not know how to vote may support our findings on the unique implications of being a first-generation voter, which is outlined in Section 2 of our findings.

The belief that some Latinx youth carry that they do not know enough about the voting process may be directly related to the phenomenon regarding depressed social effects of voting that we outline in Section 3 of our findings. In that section, we outline how Latinx youth may be resistant to discussing voting with other Latinx individuals, as one’s ability to vote indicates one’s citizenship status. It’s possible this lack of discussion about voting makes Latinx youth feel like they don’t know enough about the voting process. However, our interviewees expressed a deep knowledge about the national political landscape, particularly in regards to immigration policy. While we believe voter education is a consideration to enhance turnout, our study suggests Latinx youth are far more informed than conventional wisdom suggests.

¹³ ideas42 Principles Index. “Identity.” *ideas42*, <https://www.ideas42.org/blog/principle/identity/>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

When asked about whether people in his community pays attention to politics, one first-generation college student in Georgia responded:

“The community does pay attention to politics, but it’s more out survival because they need to know what’s going on—especially if they’re undocumented.”

A 19-year-old student in North Carolina had a similar response:

“Since 2016, it’s really been [scary] in the sense that my community lost all their trust in American politics. So there’s been a lot more talk [about politics], since there’s been a lot more fear. My family and I discuss the things that are of immediate danger to us...ever since I remember politics, everything has been charged by what immigration policy is, and what this candidate can do for immigration, and it’s always at the national level. It’s never been about the state or local level.”

Interestingly, one young woman we spoke with said that her community doesn’t pay attention to politics at the local level—but then went on to describe a specific state policy that is affecting her family. There seems to be a dissonance between paying attention to “politics” and “policies” that could warrant further exploration. Additionally, it’s possible that Latinx youth underestimate the extent of their political knowledge. This is represented in the following quote:

“Sadly, I don’t think people in my community pay attention to politics. A lot of Latinos really think voting is just presidential elections and they don’t know how important municipal elections are. But I try to explain to them that those are the people that are literally going to impact your life, you know? [For example], I know how the state doesn’t give drivers licenses to undocumented people—that’s one thing that plays into our family. My mom, she’s undocumented, but she has to go to work everyday so she knows that she is driving with the risk of getting pulled over, and maybe facing...more trouble. So that’s one [policy] that really impacts us. I think everybody should have the right to drive.”

In sum, our interviewees expressed clear awareness of the political environment in which they live—with a particular focus on immigration policy. Based on our findings, we do not believe low Latinx voter turnout rates are indicative of how much these individuals know, nor how motivated they are to advocate for themselves.

D. Immigration policies dramatically affect the lives of Latinx youth

As written in a report titled, “Latinx and Black Young Adults’ Pathways to Civic/Political Engagement”:

Today, Latinx and Black people’s participation in the political system remains constrained, as racist immigration policy (e.g., AZ Senate Bill 1070 ‘Show me your papers’) and voting practices (e.g., gerrymandering) infringe on their political agency. For example, the ‘Show me your papers bill’ allows police officers to ask for citizenship documentation under any suspicion that an individual has come to the state illegally. Such intimidation tactics impact Latinx young adults’ engagement in traditional political activity (e.g., voting) as the threat of deportation remains salient on a daily basis.¹⁵

In line with this analysis, every interviewee we spoke with named immigration as the issue that affects them most in their day-to-day lives. Of the 27 interviews we conducted, each person referenced negative experiences with the immigration system—whether as DACA recipients, having families of mixed citizenship status, experiencing the deportation of a family member, or knowing the exact name and number of a local bill that would determine coordination between ICE and their local police department—each interviewee had a relevant anecdote. When asked whether feeling personally affected by those policies was associated with higher rates of voting, 19 of the 27 answered affirmatively.

A motivation to vote stemming from the impact of President Trump’s harsh immigration laws could be explained in the same *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* study that engages with the following question: “in a political system that limits the political engagement of people of color, how do Latinx and Black young adults participate in the political process and what psychological factors facilitate participation?”

¹⁶ The authors find that “critical consciousness” theory is employed to participate in the political process:

Critical consciousness theory describes how marginalized people come to recognize, feel empowered to negotiate, and challenge social inequality...[it’s] a multidimensional phenomenon, consisting of the ability to engage in critical reflection, a sense of political efficacy, and participation in critical action. The model suggests that increases in critical reflection may foster gains in political efficacy, and that this enhanced efficacy, in turn, is associated with more critical

¹⁵ Bañales, Josefina, et al. “Latinx and Black Young Adults’ Pathways to Civic/Political Engagement.” *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2020, pp. 176–188.

¹⁶ Ibid.

action behaviors. Further, people's increased engagement in critical action could further stimulate their reflection on sociopolitical injustice and perceived capacity to institute change.¹⁷

The quotes below highlight some of these negative effects of immigrant policies, and how changes in politicians affected the interviewee or their family:

- *"My brother was actually a DACA recipient so Donald Trump affected him. He was undocumented and they ended up deporting him anyways because he was going down the wrong path...I felt like it was my turn to step up and avoid this happening to any of my other family members...because having a family member in a cage...it was just a lot."*
- *"The most obvious" change in political office that affected me and my family was "the change of office between Obama and Trump. The Muslim ban that occurred right when he went into office, here he did this one thing, what's going to stop him from hurting my community? That was the greatest impact I've ever felt...I have people in my immediate family that don't have legal status to be in this country, what's going to happen to them? I'm just as American as anyone else who's born here. If anything I grew up thinking I was more American than I actually am...I grew up being the only Hispanic boy in honors and AP classes...The whole feeling of guilt...feeling like you just don't belong, like you're not welcome...that's the feeling I have. And I can trace that back to the change of power to Trump being elected in this country."*
- *"After the recent presidential election, when Trump was mentioning deporting drug dealers from MS13...a gang that originated in my parents' country, El Salvador, our neighbors started talking to us differently...Trump tore down what my culture was, tore down how my family is perceived. Now I just say I'm from the U.S. instead of saying I'm from El Salvador."*

Efforts to engage Latinx youth in the political process must understand—and be acutely sensitive to—how deeply this population is affected by U.S. immigration policy. Luckily, however, critical consciousness theory might help to explain why the negative effects of immigration policies could be inadvertently creating a pathway to civic engagement and voting for Latinx youth.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Section 2 | Who gets to be an “American Voter”?

A. Latinx youth in the South are disproportionately first-generation voters

Our sample reflects that Latinx youth in the South disproportionately represent “first-generation voters.” In North Carolina, more than 9 out of 10 Latinx individuals under 18 are citizens.¹⁸ However, roughly 30% of North Carolina’s greater Latinx community is undocumented, which suggests many Latinx youth in the state may be the first of their family eligible to vote.¹⁹ In Georgia, roughly 28% of the state’s Latinx community is undocumented, a rate that is higher for older Latinx individuals and lower for younger ones.²⁰ This also suggests that many Latinx youth in the region may be the first of their family eligible to vote. Data suggests that similar trends exist in Alabama.²¹

Because many Latinx youth may be the first in their family to be eligible to vote, many may also lack older family members who can provide guidance on what the process of voting entails. This places a large burden on Latinx youth to learn about the process on their own. This reality—coupled with negative social effects of voting, which will be expanded on in Section 3—may create psychological barriers that ultimately reduce voter turnout amongst eligible Latinx youth.

While all young people face psychological barriers to becoming active voters due to the hassle factors associated with the voting process, our interviews suggest that these hassle factors may feel intensified for first-generation voters. This suggests that stakeholders interested in increasing voter turnout should invest in programming specifically designed for Latinx youth to learn concrete steps of the voting process.

While informational barriers are one aspect of the first-generation experience which may create psychological obstacles to participation, a 23-year-old Georgian voter who recently became a U.S. citizen made an important point about why families of first-generation voters may not always emphasize—and may sometimes even actively discourage—political participation:

¹⁸ Frothingham, Sunny. “Emerging Electorate: Latinx Voters in North Carolina.” *Democracy North Carolina*, Sept. 2019, <https://democracync.org/research/emerging-electorate-latinx-voters-in-north-carolina/>.

¹⁹ “Profile of the Unauthorized Population - North Carolina.” *Migration Policy Institute*, www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/state/NC.

²⁰ “Profile of the Unauthorized Population - Georgia.” *Migration Policy Institute*, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/state/GA>.

²¹ “Profile of the Unauthorized Population - Alabama.” *Migration Policy Institute*, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/AL>.

“[M]y generation is the first generation that’s born here...and actually obtained a high school education and is going to college. So we’re more informed, we’re more inclined to vote. [But] when nonprofits or organizations try to work with the Latino community, sometimes they don’t understand that for a lot of people who come from Latin America, there’s a distrust of the government. Because that’s the kind of government they grew up with—a corrupt government—so there’s this negative view of being involved, or civically engaged. So when they come here to the United States, even if you’re trying to assimilate to American culture, you still don’t want to participate in government. You don’t want to be seen. So for us, the children of immigrants, our parents don’t instill in us the importance of voting or being civically engaged. You come here to the United States to work and make a good living, you don’t come here to be civically engaged.”

In 2016, Julian Castro, then secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), noted that since many Latinx voters are often the first ones in their families who can vote, it will take work and time for younger generations to appreciate the value of political participation.²² The psychological insight that might be derived from this suggests that first-generation voters may be influenced by the mental models of their parents or older family members. Significantly, these mental models that carried over from a different cultural context may signal that political participation is in fact “risky” behavior—or otherwise stated, something engaged in at one’s own peril. Whether or not this particular mental model or others have an influence on the psychological barriers to voting, one thing is certain: to better understand the voting behavior of Latinx youth, more robust efforts must be made to assess the unique experience of being a Latinx first-generation voter.

B. GOTV must become more inclusive

While numerous studies have shown that traditional “Get Out The Vote” tactics can help a certain segment of the rarely-voting population participate in democracy,²³ our interviews suggest that deeper work needs to be done to ensure Latinx youth feel fully included and valued in American democracy. As stated by the Institute for Southern Studies, “the influx of young Latinos into the South’s electorate...presents an opportunity for the Latino community to amplify its voice and have greater sway in Southern politics,” and yet, “the electoral impact of these new young voters hinges on whether they can be

²² Cave, Damien, “Yes, Latinos Are Rising, but So Are Latino Nonvoters,” *New York Times*, 19 Jan. 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/20/upshot/yes-latinos-are-rising-but-so-are-latino-nonvoters.html>.

²³ See, e.g. Green, Donald P., and Alan S. Gerber, *Get out the Vote: How to Increase Voter Turnout*. 2nd ed., Brookings Institution Press, 2008.

mobilized to show up at the polls on Election Day.”²⁴ While there’s clearly an enormous opportunity for impact, our interviews have suggested that first-generation voter identity may have profound implications for how Latinx youth perceive who a voter is and whether they see themselves as part of a community of individuals who vote. Our interviewees felt that GOTV tactics had not yet responded to their unique identities.

When prompted to describe what kind of person came to mind when they heard the term “voter”, multiple interviewees explained that they envisioned someone who looked different than themselves. As expressed by an 19-year-old college student in North Carolina:

“When I hear ‘voter’ to be honest I just see white male, and not even a young one, an older one. Those were the only people who seemed like they’d care, or know, about politics. So that’s what I see.”

This conception of what a voter looks like is connected to many of the voting experiences our interviewees had and may influence the self-perception of Latinx youth. In the 2019 book *Youth Civic and Political Engagement*, the authors list a number of social and psychological factors that influence political participation, including identity. They write that “a central aspect of identity development during [the] period [of youth] is reflecting on and considering one’s role as a citizen within the wider social, civic and political communities in which one lives.”²⁵ These identities, once developed, can then influence individual behavior. As authors Chip and Dan Heath state in their book *Switch*, “In the identity model of decision making, we essentially ask ourselves three questions when we have a decision to make: *Who am I? What kind of situation is this? What would someone like me do in this situation?*”²⁶

These two theories, taken together, demonstrate how a process of social identity development which associates the practice of voting with older white people may create psychological barriers that make it less likely for some Latinx youth to see themselves as “voters.” This, in turn, may discourage Latinx youth from voting, even if they are contacted through traditional GOTV work. As expressed by former 2020 Democratic Presidential Candidate Julian Castro, “The approach [to GOTV] has not evolved that

²⁴ Yee, Allie. “The Future of Young Latino Voters in The South: How today’s Latino youth could unlock Latino electoral power in Southern states”. *Institute for Southern Studies*. Jan. 2016, https://www.facingsouth.org/sites/default/files/Latino%20voters%20report_final.pdf.

²⁵ Barrett, Martyn, and Pachi Dimitra. *Youth Civic And Political Engagement*. 1st ed., Routledge, 2019. Barrett and Pachi use an expansive definition of youth, defining it as “the period of life that starts with early adolescence and extends through early adulthood.” Ibid at p.2.

²⁶ Heath, Chip, and Dan Heath. *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard*. 1st ed. Broadway Books, 2010, p.143.

much... It's generally just been, 'Say a few words in Spanish, with a message about family.'²⁷ GOTV strategies must consider what the actual experience of voting is like for Latinx youth in the South, and plan their efforts from an understanding of this perspective.

Guidance from ideas42 can be instructive for designing such efforts. In describing core behavioral science principles, the organization explains how it's possible to "prime positive identities to encourage socially beneficial actions."²⁸ To this end, GOTV efforts should consider priming the positive identity of Latinx individuals as politically active community members in order to encourage more consistent voting behaviors.

C. Latinx communities in the South feel particularly ignored

While "the rapid growth of the Latino population has had a profound impact on Southern communities," multiple interviewees expressed their belief that Latinx voters in their states are often ignored.²⁹ Some interviewees expressed feeling like the political discourse in their regions focus on Black and White voters and issues, but not Latinx voters and issues. Multiple interviewees referenced feeling left out even on conversations regarding discrimination and inequality, as they've heard discussions on these issues specifically regarding Black and African-American lived social experiences, but very few on lived experiences within Latinx communities. A 19-year-old Alabaman non-voter summarized this point by stating:

"I feel like I'm a minority amongst minorities...I talk to a lot of my friends, friends who are either White or Black, and try to ask them what their opinions on certain matters are...and a lot of them don't seem to be very informed on certain topics. And as a Hispanic I could be more upset that people in this country don't know what's going on, but I've come to terms with the fact that if people aren't Hispanic...it doesn't pertain to them, so they're not going to pay attention...They're not involved with Hispanics in a personal matter so it doesn't affect them, and if I weren't Hispanic it wouldn't affect me either."

Further, a 24-year-old frequent voter in Alabama expressed feeling like communities of color were pitted against each other to scramble for limited resources and attention. In

²⁷ Cave, Damien, "Yes, Latinos Are Rising, but So Are Latino Nonvoters," *New York Times*, 19 Jan. 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/20/upshot/yes-latinos-are-rising-but-so-are-latino-nonvoters.html>.

²⁸ ideas42 Principles Index. "Identity." *ideas42*, <https://www.ideas42.org/blog/principle/identity/>.

²⁹ Yee, Allie. "The Future of Young Latino Voters in The South: How today's Latino youth could unlock Latino electoral power in Southern states". *Institute for Southern Studies*. Jan. 2016, https://www.facingsouth.org/sites/default/files/Latino%20voters%20report_final.pdf.

explaining this tension between Black civil rights groups and immigrant rights groups, she explains:

“Something that’s talked [about] a lot here is who deserves more room here or who deserves more time, and they make us fight for time and attention when that shouldn’t even be a thing.”

This belief that Latinx individuals are completely left out of the political discourse left many of our interviewees feeling like no one outside of their communities cared about what they do nor how they experience life in their local environment. Because of this, the majority of our interviewees expressed deep appreciation simply for the opportunity to speak about their civic engagement experiences, since it demonstrated that somebody cared to hear their stories and to better understand Latinx communities in the Southeast. A 23-year-old newly voting Georgia female summarized this sentiment:

“I really do appreciate that there’s a focus being done on the South, and Latinos in the South, because voter engagement amongst Latinos on the West Coast versus the South is a whole different story. On the West [Coast] you have Latinos where maybe their great grandparents immigrated so they’re second- or third-generation...versus the South you have a lot of recent arrivals. There’s a lot of us that are immigrants or first-generation voters.”

This quote also demonstrates the belief that the Latinx identity and lived social experience in the South is unique. This belief further supports the fact that the Latinx community is not a monolith. Not only is there a rich diversity within Latinx individuals regarding their families’ countries of origin and political ideologies, but there are regional variations across the United States that must be considered when trying to assess broader Latinx political participation trends. A 24-year-old Alabaman stated:

“The identity of Latino people in the South it’s just, like, different... I was having this conversation with a lot of people [where] I just asked ‘do you identify as ‘Chicano’?’... And most of the people were like ‘not really’ because... ‘Chicano’ is a movement that came especially in California, Texas... [those] areas... But here in the South, Latinos haven’t even had a movement yet... so it’s a different identity.”

The accounts we collected of feeling like the Latinx communities in the South are often ignored may lead to Latinx communities in the South underestimating the potential influence that can come as a result of their individual action. A *New York Times* article corroborates the potential for these sentiments to depress voting, explaining that “[A] large number of Latinos, especially in states that are not up for grabs, say they are not

convinced their participation matters, or is worth the time and effort... Even in communities where they complained about discrimination, as in Farmers Branch, Tex., there was little faith in the system and their ability to have an impact through voting.”³⁰ In other words, the experience of holding an intersectional identity of being overlooked as a Latinx individual—and being overlooked for holding this identity in a region that has historically had smaller Latinx populations—might lead to a sense of disenchantment with the voting process that amplifies already existing behavioral barriers to participation.

D. Enabling Latinx youth to vote in Spanish would not necessarily increase turnout

Prior to our interviews, we hypothesized that if Latinx youth were able to vote in Spanish, this could increase voter turnout amongst the broader community. However, our interviews did not suggest that having the ability to vote in Spanish would have significantly enhanced voter participation within our sample. The vast majority of our respondents who primarily spoke Spanish (or an even mixture of English and Spanish) at home said that they would not be any more likely to vote if they could do so in Spanish. Our interviewees emphasized that since most first-generation Latinx youth are primarily educated in English, they would rather vote in English than in Spanish. This finding makes sense in the context of the first-generation Latinx experience we described above.

This finding also suggests that an intervention that merely results in the translation of the voting process into Spanish—without doing more to cultivate a more inclusive cultural experience—would likely be insufficient to enhance voter turnout amongst Latinx youth. This may be because mere language translation is probably insufficient for signaling willingness to include Latinx populations in the broader collective identity of “American voters.” We do believe the question of linguistic representation is something worth researching in more detail, which we will expand upon in our recommendations section. It is worth noting, however, that any efforts to diversify language options would have to be implemented in a way that does not make the Latinx community’s “otherness” salient, or might have similar effects of alienation rather than of inclusion.

E. Having more Latinx names on the ballot could increase turnout

Our interviews suggested that having more Latinx names on the ballot could be a positive experience for the Latinx community that may increase political discussion, and voter turnout, amongst Latinx individuals. Out of the 27 interviewees we talked to, 23

³⁰ Cave, Damien, “Yes, Latinos Are Rising, but So Are Latino Nonvoters,” *New York Times*, 19 Jan. 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/20/upshot/yes-latinos-are-rising-but-so-are-latino-nonvoters.html>.

believed that having more Latinx candidates for political office would increase Latinx voter turnout. This sentiment is expressed in the following statement made by a 25-year-old female in Alabama:

“I think [seeing more Latinx names on the ballot] would show that... especially in my community, that the Hispanic population can have leaders. [When a candidate is Hispanic] I feel like there’s some people who [think] ‘is this person even credible?’ You know just because they’re Hispanic there’s kind of this notion [that] they don’t belong in the United States.... So I think seeing that there are these [Hispanic] candidates... would [provoke the thought] that maybe our president doesn’t have to be just caucasian and male.”

In sum, many of our interviews suggest that investing in programs that increased the prevalence of identifiable Latinx candidates in elections could lead to greater turnout amongst Latinx individuals. A 2007 study by Matt Barreto indicates that under the right conditions, Latinx candidates *can* increase Latinx voter turnout (see Appendix E), however, this alone will not guarantee increased turnout amongst the broader community.³¹ Similarly, a 2003 study designed to test whether Latino canvassers are more effective than non-Latino canvassers at increasing voter turnout among young Latinos, the researchers ultimately concluded that “the importance of using Latino canvassers to get out the Latino vote is confirmed, but should not be overemphasized.”³² This suggests that increasing Latinx names on the ballot may positively impact turnout, yet the increase of representation, alone, is unlikely to be a silver bullet.

³¹ Barreto, Matt. “The Role of Latino Candidates in Mobilizing Latino Voters: Revisiting Latino Vote Choice.” *Latino Politics: Identity, Mobilization, and Representation*, edited by Rodolfo Espino, David L. Leal, and Kenneth J. Meier, University of Virginia Press, 2007, http://mattbarreto.com/papers/espino_volume.pdf.

³² Michelson, Melissa. “Mobilizing the Latino Youth Vote.” CIRCLE Working Papers, no. 10, 2003, pp. 1–16.

Section 3 | Fear, Anxiety, & Strong Feelings about the Government

A. Fear and anxiety may create behavioral barriers that diminish Latinx voter turnout

There is a pervasive sense of fear, paranoia, and anxiety across the Latinx community in the South which has increased under President Trump's administration. Anti-immigrant rhetoric and increases in local law enforcement coordination with ICE has created widespread anxiety that affects the wellbeing, and voting behaviors, of many Latinx youth. Despite having citizenship status and voting eligibility themselves, all 27 interviewees expressed significant fear over the Trump administration's immigration policies.

This increased fear and anxiety might create behavioral barriers to voting that depress turnout rates amongst Latinx youth. Many Latinx individuals refrain from discussing voting with their friends and families, as one's voting eligibility indicates their citizenship status. Our interviews suggest that the fear of outing one's immigration status—or forcing someone to disclose that they cannot vote—may prevent many Latinx youth from talking about voting. Even if a Latinx individual is, themselves, eligible to vote, there is resistance to discussing voting with other Latinx individuals to avoid creating discomfort. This was highlighted by one of our interviewees in North Carolina who stated:

"I can see that Latinx people fear [talking about] voting because we don't know who has the right to vote and who doesn't because of uncertainty about immigration status in the community...we don't want to be mean to the people who don't have the right to vote... even with friends you don't know their immigration status, [so] you don't know who is comfortable talking about it."

This hesitation to discuss voting due to uncertainty regarding other Latinx individuals' citizenship status may depress voter turnout across the broader Latinx community. Research suggests that discussing voting with friends and families is correlated with an individual's voting behavior and recent field experiments have found that social pressures have powerful effects on voter turnout.³³ This indicates that an unwillingness to discuss voting within the Latinx community may depress turnout amongst Latinx youth,

³³ Davenport, Tiffany, et al. "The Enduring Effects of Social Pressure: Tracking Campaign Experiments Over a Series of Elections." *Political Behavior*, vol. 32, no. 3, 2010, pp. 423–430.

since Latinx youth may not feel the same social pressures to vote as their non-Latinx counterparts.³⁴

The importance of social effects on voting is explored in a 2015 study by Keane & Nickerson on descriptive social norms and voting motivations. In a GOTV experiment, the authors found that messages sent to young Latinx voters during the 2008 Presidential election that emphasized low expected turnout were less effective at motivating voters than messages that emphasized high expected turnout.³⁵ This finding suggests that Latinx youth may be less likely to vote if they believe other members of their community are also not voting. Just as the lack of dialogue about voting within Latinx communities due to fear and an unwillingness to out someone's immigration status may decrease voter turnout, a lack of discussion about voting could cause Latinx youth to believe that their peers are unlikely to vote. Given how frequently our interviewees referenced fear, anxiety, and an unwillingness to discuss voting with other Latinx individuals, this behavioral barrier may significantly decrease turnout across the broader Latinx community.

In addition to the depressed social effects of voting that this fear and anxiety causes, research on the role emotions play in an individual's voting behavior suggests that fear and anxiety can decrease voter turnout by themselves.³⁶ Fear and anxiety not only influence how people make decisions, but can directly influence the decisions individuals make.³⁷ Research suggests that anxiety makes individuals less likely to participate politically, as anxiety commonly causes people to become passive and withdrawn.³⁸ In a study analyzing how dispositional anxiety interacts with psychological effects of power, researchers found that individuals with high levels of anxiety demonstrate a lower willingness to take risks.³⁹ This indicates that Latinx individuals who experience anxiety and believe there are risks associated with voting may be less likely to vote due to this anxiety being demobilizing.

One interviewee in North Carolina explained how this anxiety altered his life decisions:

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Keane, Lauren Deschamps, and David W Nickerson. "When Reports Depress Rather Than Inspire: A Field Experiment Using Age Cohorts as Reference Groups." *Journal of Political Marketing: Field Experimentation and Voter Mobilization: Innovations and Advances*, vol. 14, no. 4, 2015, pp. 381–390.

³⁶ Weber, Christopher. "Emotions, Campaigns, and Political Participation." *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 66, no. 2, 2013, pp. 414–428.

³⁷ Wagner, Markus, and Davide Morisi. "Anxiety, Fear, and Political Decision Making." *Oxford University Press: Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. 22 Nov. 2019.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Maner, Jon K, et al. "Dispositional Anxiety Blocks the Psychological Effects of Power." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 38, no. 11, 2012, pp. 1383–1395.

“When Trump won it became hard for me to focus on my studies and everything I was hoping for kind of halted because I had to worry about my parents. They have TPS, and it was really uncertain what their future was going to be like. TPS has to continually be extended...my parents got extended until 2021, so we will have to wait again. It’s kind of weird, you forget about it, then all that anxiety comes back. I was taking the hit of that, just because I was thinking I was being selfish in pursuing my studies. That’s part of the reason I didn’t choose [to go to] a 4-year university. I stayed here at community college, just to stay close to [my parents] and drive them around.”

The anxiety this individual endured as a result of Trump’s election and anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies altered this individual’s decisions, pushed him to become withdrawn, and more than anything, made voting seem less important than the immediate threats of having his parents deported. Fear and anxiety are demobilizing emotions that may contribute to low rates of young Latinx voter turnout in the South.

Another individual expressed how this fear has altered his decisions and priorities in recent months. While this individual maintains a degree of political participation, he expressed:

“We had a lot of ICE raids recently in my community, so I’m constantly telling people to drive carefully, to do this, do that...I try to wake people up to the fact that they do have rights, they can do things...but to be more careful about what they’re doing...which is sad that you have to be extra careful, but at the end of the day you have to think about the long run. When there are ICE raids you have to take that very seriously. There’s a lot of fear—everyone is aware that they’re the ones being targeted. You see a shift, people stay in more, stuff like that.”

Such widespread threats of ICE raids may decrease voter turnout even amongst Latinx individuals with citizenship status. Because voter turnout is partially based on the social setting in which a person lives, a heightened threat of deportation and community loss may alter the social settings surrounding eligible young Latinx voters, thus negatively affecting voter turnout rates.⁴⁰ All of our interviewees believed there is widespread anxiety and persistent fear across Latinx communities in the South because of the realities facing mixed-immigration status families and social groups. These beliefs threaten to depress voter turnout amongst young Latinx eligible voters.

⁴⁰ Harder, Joshua, and Jon A. Krosnick. “Why Do People Vote? A Psychological Analysis of the Causes of Voter Turnout.” *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 64, no. 3, 2008, pp. 525–549, <https://pprg.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2008-Turnout-Lit-Review.pdf>.

B. Latinx youth that overcome this fear can then face intimidation at the polls

Despite the presence of these demobilizing feelings of fear and anxiety, 18 of the 27 Latinx youth in our sample had previously exercised their right to vote. In doing so, they overcame these behavioral barriers to voting. However, half of these individuals explicitly referenced feeling intimidated and like they had entered non-inclusive environments once arriving at their polling place. Feeling intimidated and unwelcomed while voting could create additional behavioral barriers that may discourage Latinx youth from voting.

Multiple aspects of our interviewees' voting experiences created feelings of exclusivity that could diminish turnout in future elections. A number of interviewees explicitly referenced walking into a polling place as the only Latinx individual and person of color in the room. This lack of representation at the polling place led these individuals to feel out of place, unwelcomed, and even explicitly intimidated. This was particularly true for our interviews with Alabama residents. When one 28-year-old Alabaman was asked if she'd ever had a voting experience where people looked like her, she admitted, "No, not when I've gone." A 26-year-old female infrequent voter also observed:

"I went to a church [and] felt very out of place, especially being in the South... it was mostly older men...it wasn't a good experience."

Given the behavioral barriers stemming from fear and anxiety across the young Latinx community, it is particularly important to foster positive in-person voting experiences for these individuals, so that people who overcome initial behavioral barriers are encouraged to vote again in the future. Negative in-person voting experiences may create additional behavioral barriers that further diminish young Latinx voter turnout. If these individuals feel like the act of voting is uncomfortable, scary, and something they do not want to repeat, they may be less likely to vote again in the future.

Additional interviewees in Alabama recalled voting within quasi-exposed settings, in which other voters could see their ballots. As one respondent from Alabama described:

"[T]he first time I voted, back in my hometown, there was no privacy, it was all open tables, I could tell that everyone was voting for Trump and that was pretty awkward because I was not voting for Trump...I had no idea what to expect [voting] to be like, so I just got there...they gave me the papers, and it was all open just like we are now, and there were a bunch of older, caucasian people....It was a little intimidating because I was like 'what if they see how I voted and they

start telling me something'... and that didn't happen but it was just like not what I expected."

In addition to non-inclusive voting environments produced by a lack of privacy and lack of visible diversity, multiple interviewees in Alabama specifically referenced receiving stares from other voters on election day. A 24-year-old female in Alabama described this experience in a way that yielded insights into potential behavioral barriers to voting:

"[W]hen I go back to my hometown... it's weird because it's a very rural area, and it is kind of scary... I would be scared to vote in my hometown. You drive through and there's confederate flags, and there's Trump signs. And I would be one of the few people of color to go and vote and there would be people staring at me."

These feelings of alienation and intimidation while voting may compound previously articulated feelings of fear and anxiety in a way that further depresses turnout rates amongst Latinx youth across the South. Those that are able to overcome the fear and anxiety that accompany holding a marginalized identity in the South should feel celebrated and encouraged, rather than intimidated, for voting.

In sum, our interviewees highlighted that merely exercising one's right to participate in democracy often felt intimidating, unwelcoming, and alienating. If these experiences reflect how exclusionary the actual voting experience can feel for Latinx youth across the South, it is not difficult to imagine how this intimidation can create additional behavioral barriers to voting.

C. Latinx youth are nonetheless angry, and potentially ready to act

The election of Donald Trump in 2016 was a defining moment for many Latinx youth in the South. This election and its resulting policy changes and anti-immigrant rhetoric has threatened the well-being of Latinx individuals, even if they are U.S. citizens. However, this election also sparked a deep motivation for Latinx youth to fight for a better future in a way that could encourage them to vote. Despite the behavioral barriers to voting that these individuals face, the broken promises they've seen from politicians, a legitimate mistrust of the American political system, and the negative experiences they've had resulting from adverse policy changes, 24 of our 27 interviewees felt more motivated to vote now than they ever have. It seems that the demobilizing emotions of fear, paranoia, and anxiety experienced by these same individuals may be counteracted by the mobilizing emotion of anger in response to the Trump administration in a way that inspires Latinx youth to become *more*, rather than less, engaged.

Anger and anxiety are highly correlated emotions that yield different behavioral responses.⁴¹ Unlike anxiety, anger tends to cause determination rather than passive withdrawal.⁴² It's possible that Latinx youth feel at least as angry as they do anxious, which could create opportunities to overcome behavioral barriers to voting that would otherwise threaten to depress their turnout rates.

Part of the motivation towards greater political engagement stems from Latinx youth who see the effects of Trump's policies on their communities. This motivation is demonstrated by the following quote from a 24-year-old in Alabama:

"[A]fter the 2016 election, it was like 'okay things can't be that bad'...but a year passed, and [then] two years, and you start to see the ripple effects in the community and it's like, 'okay no more,' and then it gets worse... [So two months ago...] we get a group of people together and start organizing...I'm on the board of some local organizations [and realized] we need more energy down here: we need to move... we need to organize, we need to see what we can do..."

A 19-year-old non-voter from North Carolina reflected this motivation in stating:

"The most obvious change in political office that affected me and my family was the change of office between Obama and Trump. The [Muslim] ban that occurred right when [Trump] went into office [made me think], here he did this one thing, [so] what's going to stop him from hurting my community? That was the greatest impact I've ever felt...I have people in my immediate family that don't have legal status to be in this country... what's going to happen to them?"

Other respondents elaborated on feeling targeted by the current administration. A 21-year-old North Carolinian stated:

"Back [before Trump] we didn't really feel the threat of ICE raids or us being really scared of police...I remember when I was in middle or high school my mom would be more cautious when she'd drive, and when the state changed to being Republican controlled, that really impacted our family."

A 19-year-old male in North Carolina also indicated this feeling in stating:

⁴¹Weber, Christopher. "Emotions, Campaigns, and Political Participation." *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 66, no. 2, 2013, pp. 414–428.

⁴² Ibid.

“To know that you have somebody in office who’s purposefully targeting you...and is always going to have [an eye] on you for the moment you slip up...[If] we had someone different in the White House, I think a lot of people would feel more comfortable just living on a daily basis...I’m talking about people like me, people who are Latinx.”

These shifting experiences resulting from the change in administration has led some to feel less of a sense of belonging in the United States. Another 19-year-old student from North Carolina, who has not yet voted, describes this sentiment:

“The whole feeling of guilt, and feeling not necessarily threatened, but feeling like you just don’t belong, like you’re not welcome...that’s the feeling I have. I can trace that back to the change of power to Trump in this country.”

However, the strong feelings our interviewees have regarding the current presidential administration suggest that Latinx youth in the South may be more motivated than ever to engage with and defend the greater Latinx community. The same student as above adds:

“[Since Trump], I made a more conscious effort to understand how my community sees things and that means getting involved in Latinx organizations—organizations that help immigrants...I feel this way and I’m a legal American citizen and I was born here and they can’t kick me out. How is this person who came here 5 months ago feeling?”

A 21-year-old North Carolinian frequent voter explains:

“I knew that I always had to vote...but the thing that really motivated me was when Trump was running. I didn’t like the way he was talking about my family and those that I know. I was annoyed that I couldn’t vote [in 2016] because I was 6 days too young. Ever since then I’ve been voting because I know that I don’t want another candidate like him to talk bad about people like me or those that I know. I want the United States to be better than it is right now.”

The interaction between anxiety and anger amongst this population may lead to increased voter turnouts in upcoming elections, particularly if these feelings are considered, understood, and valued by those seeking to improve voting rates amongst the greater population. Despite feeling targeted, put down, unwelcome, and at-risk, our interviewees expressed a strong desire to ensure that no candidate with a similar agenda and anti-Latinx rhetoric could ever win again.

D. “The AOC Effect” shows how much Latinx youth are motivated by Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez

Our interviewees expressed deep motivation and gratitude for Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Nearly half of our interviews explicitly mentioned Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez as a source of inspiration, while others alluded to her without referencing her name. No other politician was referenced as frequently as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, which may indicate the types of politicians and policies that Latinx youth seek to support. The vast majority of these references were less about ideology, and more about Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez’s ability to passionately advocate for their community. Additionally, Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez’s ability to connect with young people over social media made her seem approachable, authentic, and relatable.

The following quote represents the excitement and inspiration our interviewees had for “AOC”, and may suggest how well the Congresswoman connects with the broader Latinx community. Efforts to understand young Latinx voters and non-voters should consider why Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez appeals to so many individuals in states far from her own. Additional quotes articulating what we’ve come to describe as “the AOC effect” are outlined in Appendix E. As a 19-year-old non-voting North Carolinian states:

“AOC winning...was something that was very impactful. For her to be one of the youngest people to become part of the House of Representatives...that’s an amazing story and it sparks motivation for other people to study law and...social reform. And also, for the Latinx community to see someone like them climbing up the ladder...and having positions in politics...We have someone who understands our values, and now I want someone to represent me who has my values. That will incline people to vote more.”

Latinx youth in the South are balancing demobilizing feelings of fear, intimidation, and anxiety with mobilizing feelings of anger and responsibility. They have strong feelings about the Trump administration and expressed desires to vote for politicians that will better care for their communities. These feelings—coupled with the inspiration they’ve gathered from Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez—could inspire them to vote in future electoral cycles. However, this outcome is far from certain. Thus more investments should be made into researching the balance of the anxiety and fear that these individuals carry, and into understanding what exactly makes them feel so strongly about AOC.

Conclusions & Recommendations



To improve voter turnout amongst Latinx youth in the South, we recommend interventions that address beliefs these individuals have that are likely 1) correlated with their decisions to vote and 2) malleable. While our research cannot empirically determine whether the behavioral barriers to voting we've identified satisfy these two conditions, we believe that the recommendations outlined in this section could be used to test the theories derived from our study.

Specifically, further research efforts should address:

1. Beliefs that voting will not improve the lived experiences of Latinx youth
2. Beliefs that the American political system is untrustworthy
3. Beliefs that Latinx youth do not reflect the identity of “American voters”
4. Beliefs regarding the fear and anxiety of participating in democracy and voting

Recommendation 1 | *Invest in organizations providing direct services to Latinx people*

Our research suggests that enhancing trust in the American political process will be critical to overcoming the belief that American politicians will not improve the lived experiences of Latinx youth. As reflected in our first finding, individuals in our sample did not see the purpose in voting, as they felt politicians were unlikely to truly fight for their needs, and questioned whether their votes would literally and figuratively be counted. These individuals had experienced few tangible moments in which they felt their voting had actually improved their lives, and felt a deep distrust of the entire American political system.

To rebuild this trust and change the belief that the American political system, and its actors, are untrustworthy and uninterested in the issues facing Latinx youth in the South, efforts should be made to aid organizations that are already trusted in Latinx communities. Direct service organizations that are not oriented solely around political advocacy, but that serve Latinx communities, should expand their efforts to include voter registration and voter education services. Organizations that are known for helping Latinx people navigate life in the South are uniquely situated to address a central belief that individuals in our sample expressed: that the American political system as a whole is untrustworthy. These individuals expressed a clear belief that they do not trust American political institutions, the candidates that run for office, nor the people who ask them to

vote. To address this belief, we believe organizations that serve the needs of Latinx communities can help guide eligible Latinx voters to enter the political process in a safe, trusting, and supportive capacity. These trusted organizations would also be well-suited to help individuals register to vote, learn about the voting process, and ultimately cast their ballots.

The organizations that partnered with us to conduct interviews for this study—including El Pueblo in Raleigh and ¡HICA! in Birmingham—show the importance that Latinx community organizations could play in enhancing voter turnout. These organizations helped Latinx youth with a wide variety of services, including but not limited to enrolling in social benefit programs; receiving help with immigration-related needs; registering to vote; and becoming politically active. These organizations were so trusted by the individuals they served, that they were capable of helping previously apolitical, non-voting individuals realize their potential voting power. This demonstrates the need to invest in, and partner with, Latinx-serving community organizations.

We believe trusted organizations that provide social services to Latinx individuals could also help address the fear and anxiety that exists across Latinx communities. An organization that is already trusted amongst Latinx youth could help those that are eligible to vote realize there will not be retribution for exercising their right, and is situated to help young Latinxs feel more comfortable discussing voting with their friends and families. In doing so, Latinx service organizations could help change the pervasive belief that Latinx individuals are not “American voters.”

Recommendation 2 | *Invest in culturally-responsive education about the safety of voting*

The individuals we interviewed believed that simply engaging in politics—whether through voting, direct action, or simply discussing political affairs—is not entirely safe. Given the sensitivity that comes from living in a mixed-immigration status family, or growing up in a mixed-status community, there are legitimate fears regarding sharing information with federal and local governments. Registering to vote, voting, and talking about voting all raise safety concerns amongst members of the Latinx community. We believe a culturally responsive voter education campaign is needed to help Latinx youth address these beliefs.

Additionally, we believe that first-generation voters could benefit from an education campaign that helps them feel better equipped to vote. While the interviewees in our sample were aware of specific policy changes, particularly in the context of immigration,

multiple interviewees believed they did not know enough about voting as they should. We believe widespread efforts to help Latinx youth feel that they better understand the voting process could overcome these behavioral barriers and, thus, enhance voter turnout.

A voter education and messaging campaign that seeks to enhance Latinx voter turnout must consider the fears these individuals hold, accept that they are valid, and work to help Latinx youth who are eligible to vote understand they have the safety to do so. Our interviewees believed that education campaigns would be most successful if they were centered around themes of safety and security, rather than themes of the importance of voting.

We also believe it would be important to help Latinx youth realize that, if they vote, they can help change the current political realities that create the fearful conditions they find themselves in. Education and messaging campaigns should therefore highlight the safety in discussing voting and voting itself; but also, how enhancing voter participation can yield more humane immigration laws that would reduce anxiety across Latinx communities.

Given how the Latinx youth we spoke to receive their information, an effective voter education campaign stressing safety would need to specifically target the communications mediums that Latinx communities engage with. From our sample, this would include: Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, Spanish media networks (such as Univision & Telemundo), and to a lesser extent, Facebook. However, further research needs to be done on the most effective ways to specifically target younger Latinx individuals.

Recommendation 3 | *Increase Latinx representation at polling places*

The individuals in our sample held beliefs that people like them do not vote. These beliefs were reinforced by societal notions of who is involved in the political process, as well as their individual experiences at the polls. Our interviewees also believed that voting can be intimidating and that their friends and family members are not likely to vote. Given how many interviewees referenced these beliefs, we believe they may be causally related to low voter turnout amongst the young Latinx community.

To overcome beliefs that Latinx youth are not included in the identity of American voters, and that voting is intimidating for Latinx youth, we believe it is important to enhance Latinx representation at polling places. If Latinx political and advocacy organizations could recruit and mobilize Latinx individuals to vote together in large numbers, this

could yield spillover effects that could enhance voter turnout across the greater community. Given how distant voting seemed from many of our interviewees' daily lives, we believe efforts that allow Latinx individuals to vote together *en masse* would be most successful if they were conducted in fun, culturally-competent social settings that reflected activities that Latinx individuals regularly engage in in other apolitical contexts. If Latinx-focused organizations could make the experience and day of voting feel fun and well-integrated with cultural norms, we believe this could have significantly positive impacts on young Latinx turnout.

We also believe increasing Latinx representation at polling places could help alleviate the feelings of fear and anxiety that many of our interviewees expressed. If polling places in the South had a clear presence of Latinx voters, Latinx youth may be less likely to feel intimidated or experience negative in-person voting experiences. This could, in turn, cause young Latinx voters to be more likely to vote again in future elections.

Recommendation 4 | Focus efforts on what happens after voting

Latinx youth in our study believe that even if they do vote, their vote will not lead to a tangible improvement in their lives. They were not convinced that voting activity would change their lived social experience, nor that their decision to vote would ensure that a politician would care about their community and their needs. This conviction instilled a deep-seated belief that there is no point in voting. It also reflects a belief that the American political systems, and politicians across all political parties, are untrustworthy.

To overcome this belief, efforts that strive to improve Latinx youth turnout must also strive to improve the accountability these individuals have over their elected officials. Because many of our interviewees felt exploited by politicians they had previously supported, we believe that efforts that try to enhance Latinx voter turnout should also focus on holding elected officials accountable for the promises they've made.

We do not believe that asking Latinx youth to vote without offering them a plan of action to, then, hold politicians accountable for enacting their promises will ultimately be effective in changing their beliefs regarding the political system. We therefore recommend that organizations seeking to enhance turnout amongst this population develop clear and tangible plans to also engage Latinx youth in the process of holding politicians accountable for their campaign promises.

The decades of negative experiences Latinx youth have had with the American political system present significant challenges to changing this belief. However, encouragingly,

our interviewees believed that if the political process became more transparent, enabling communities to understand how to hold elected officials accountable, there would be a greater willingness to participate in the political process. Thus, we believe it is important to offer the Latinx community not just an opportunity to vote, but also an opportunity to exercise accountability.

Recommendation 5 | *Recruit, train, and invest in Latinx people to run for office*

The individuals in our sample held beliefs regarding the identity of American voters that we believe may be highly correlated with their voting decisions. We believe efforts to expand Latinx representation in all stages of the political process could encourage Latinx youth to overcome feelings of exclusion and become more likely to vote. Therefore, we recommend that organizations concerned with Latinx youth voter turnout work to recruit, train, and invest in Latinx people to run for office.

Our interviewees overwhelmingly articulated the belief that, if more Latinx individuals ran for office, their community would vote more frequently. While this may oversimplify a more complicated reality in which Latinx individuals decide to vote for candidates for many reasons beyond identity, the enthusiasm our interviewees expressed for Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez supports the theory that Latinx youth would be excited to vote for young Latinx politicians who share their values and fight for their communities.

We believe organizations should therefore recruit, train, and invest in Latinx youth to run for all levels of political office across the South. However, we believe it is critically important to assess exactly why AOC was so popular amongst our sample. Not only is she Latinx, but as multiple interviewees stressed, she defied the odds, she does not fit the mold of prior politicians, she passionately advocates for her community, and she does not shy away from confrontation. Her unwillingness to compromise on her values has inspired individuals from rural Alabama to metro Atlanta. Organizations should strive to recruit Latinx individuals for office, not because of their prior credentials, but because of their willingness to fight for their community, and their ability to reflect what it means to be a young Latinx individual in America.

Recommendation 6 | *Research the impact of being able to vote in one's primary language*

To overcome the behavioral barriers associated with Latinx youth's conception of the identity of American voters, we believe it is important to research the impact of being

able to vote in one's primary language. While our interviewees who primarily spoke Spanish at home indicated that they would not prefer to vote in Spanish, they also believed that members of their community, particularly older individuals, would be more likely to vote if they could do so in Spanish. Additionally, while we feel that translating voter information into more languages would not significantly affect the individuals in our sample, we speculate that it could have positive psychological effects that ultimately make Latinx individuals feel more included in the political process. This sense of inclusion, in turn, could encourage higher voter turnout rates across the greater population. Additional research should determine whether or not translating voter information, and having the opportunity to vote in languages beyond English, could positively impact voter turnout.

Recommendation 7 | *Getting Beyond GOTV*

Research suggests that elite mobilization efforts through well-organized Get Out The Vote campaigns can increase voter turnout.⁴³ Prior research also suggests that an individual's turnout behavior is related to their social location, his or her psychological dispositions, the procedures involved in voting, and events that occur near the time of an individual election.⁴⁴ Our interviews suggest that GOTV efforts alone cannot account for these factors and must coexist with other ways to enhance voter participation.

Similar to traditional GOTV work, electorally motivated campaigns can help rarely-voting individuals cast a ballot, yet should not be the sole force working to help Latinx youth exercise their rights to vote. The transactional nature of electoral campaigns may not be sufficient to overcome the pervasive fear, anxiety, and isolation previously articulated in this report. Additionally, the lack of trust in American politicians we observed in our sample suggests limits to the ability of electorally motivated campaigns to enhance voter turnout amongst Latinx youth.

GOTV efforts in the South can still work to better engage Latinx youth. For instance, a 23-year-old immigrant from Mexico who recently gained her citizenship and is now an active Georgian voter stated:

"[E]ven though I've been a registered voter for two years—and an engaged voter—I've yet to have someone running for office...post something on my door

⁴³ Gerber, Alan, et al. "One in a Million: Field Experiments on Perceived Closeness of the Election and Voter Turnout." *National Bureau of Economic Research*, 2017, <https://www.nber.org/papers/w23071>.

⁴⁴ Harder, Joshua, and Jon A. Krosnick. "Why Do People Vote? A Psychological Analysis of the Causes of Voter Turnout." *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 64, no. 3, 2008, pp. 525–549, <https://pprg.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2008-Turnout-Lit-Review.pdf>.

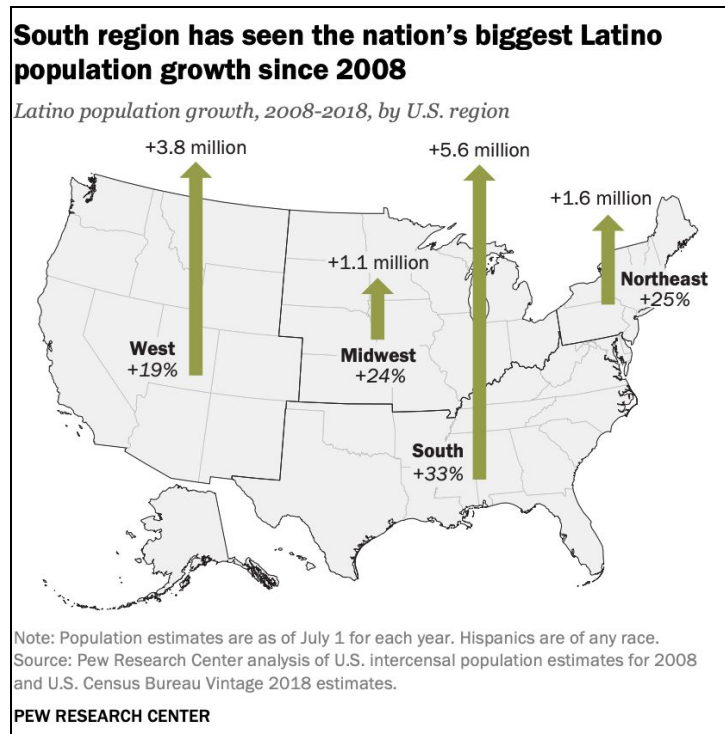
or... have a campaign reach out to me. Whether it's flyers, or whether it's something in Spanish, or even someone [to] knock on my door... You would figure that whatever campaign is going on... if they see an engaged voter they would start knocking on doors and reaching out to them."

The Institute of Southern Studies corroborates this interviewee's experience with data that links the turnout gap with ineffective outreach and engagement efforts, explaining how "[i]n 2012, a Latino Decisions/impreMedia poll found that only 31 percent of Latinos across the country were contacted before the election regarding voting or registering to vote."⁴⁵ This suggests that GOTV campaigns can better target Latinx youth to ensure they are voting and working to encourage their friends to vote.

In sum, our research suggests that political campaigns and traditional GOTV canvassing efforts are insufficient to address the psychological reasons that Latinx youth are not voting at high rights. Therefore, without attention paid to engagement efforts beyond GOTV, these actors may be unable to meaningfully enhance democratic participation amongst Latinx youth.

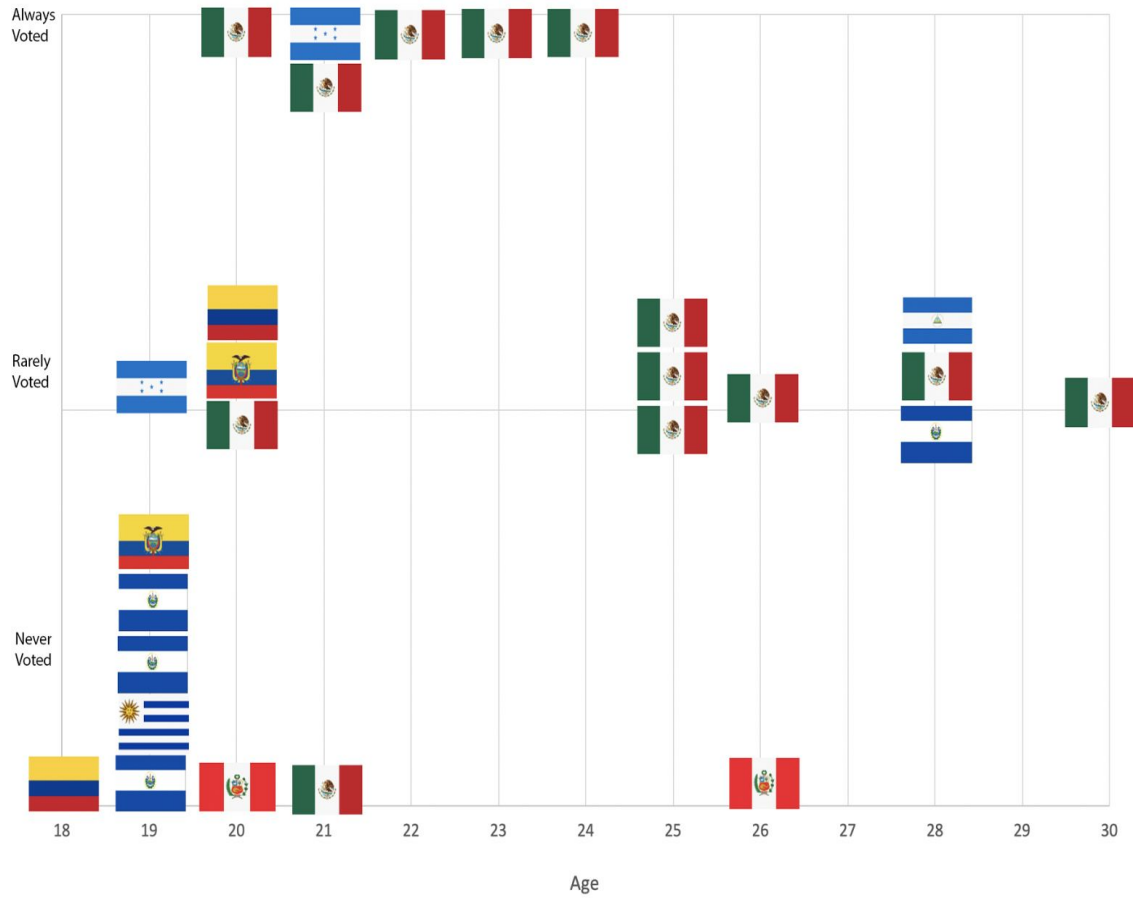
⁴⁵ Yee, Allie. "The Future of Young Latino Voters in The South: How today's Latino youth could unlock Latino electoral power in Southern states". *Institute for Southern Studies*. Jan. 2016, https://www.facingsouth.org/sites/default/files/Latino%20voters%20report_final.pdf.

Appendix A | Latinx Population Growth 2008-2018



Source: Flores, Antonio, et al. "U.S. Hispanic Population Reached New High in 2018, but Growth Has Slowed." *Pew Research Center*, 8 July 2019, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/08/u-s-hispanic-population-reached-new-high-in-2018-but-growth-has-slowed/.

Appendix B | Interviewee Demographic Breakdown



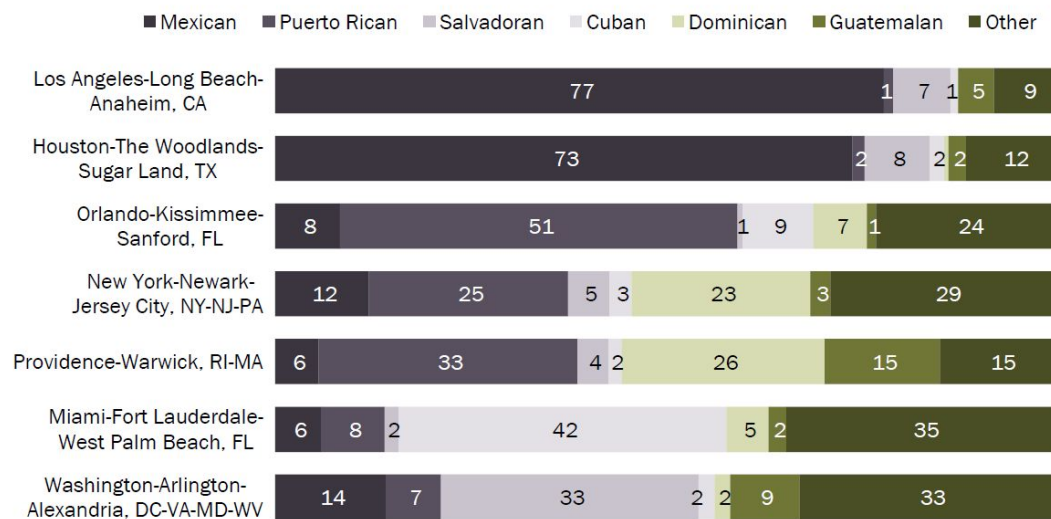
**Each flag in the above chart represents one of our interviewees and their family's country of origin, plotted on a matrix of age (x-axis) and voting status (y-axis). Additional demographics are included below:*

Male-identifying interviewees	11
Female-identifying interviewees	16
North Carolina residents	11
Alabama residents	9
Georgia residents	7

Appendix C | Latinx Heritage by East Coast Metro Areas

Latino populations in U.S. metro areas are more diverse along the East Coast

% of Hispanics who are of ____ origin, 2017



Note: Hispanics are of any race. Hispanics of Dominican origin make up less than 1% of the Hispanic population in the Los Angeles and Houston metropolitan areas.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of 2017 American Community Surveys (1% IPUMS).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: Noe-Bustamante, Luis. “Key Facts about U.S. Hispanics and Their Diverse Heritage.” *Pew Research Center*, 16 Sept. 2019, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/09/16/key-facts-about-u-s-hispanics/.

Appendix D | Procedural Barriers to Voting

While our study focuses on behavioral barriers to voting, we also recognize how behavioral barriers interact with procedural barriers that diminish turnout. The more onerous voter registration and voting processes are, the more individuals believe that voting is hard, and the more difficult it is to turnout voters.⁴⁶ Of the 21 interviewees that had experienced procedural barriers with voting, 15 supported the hypothesis that facing increased procedural barriers to voting and registering to vote reduces voter turnout. A non-voting college student explained:

“I signed up on paper to vote and I requested an absentee ballot but I never got it...I’m not sure if I did it right. I [registered to vote through] a student organization on campus, but separately, I saw something online and I was just like, I’m not sure if I actually registered because I never received my ballot. So I re-registered. I received a notification email and everything but I wasn’t sure if my registration actually went through. It’s been more confusing than anything.”

Another non-voting college student originally from a different a state explained that he hadn’t voted because:

“It’s complicated with my out of state status. I want to vote...but it’s difficult when you don’t claim North Carolina as your place of residency, although technically I could...But I just don’t want to get into the problems of documentation.”

In a more positive light, four individuals referenced originally pre-registering to vote in high school, which helped them navigate the political process. Additionally, three interviewees registered to vote while getting a license, and three others successfully registered to vote on a college campus. However, reducing procedural barriers to registering to vote, alone, will not necessarily make the process of voting easier. An infrequent North Carolina voter who pre-registered to vote in high school explained:

“The hardest part of [voting] was actually voting, because I didn’t think I was that informed about the actual voting process...We had to vote on things that weren’t candidates, like laws or amendments...and it was really confusing...the wording of

⁴⁶ Harder, Joshua, and Jon A. Krosnick. “Why Do People Vote? A Psychological Analysis of the Causes of Voter Turnout.” *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 64, no. 3, 2008, pp. 525–549, <https://pprg.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2008-Turnout-Lit-Review.pdf>.

everything was kind of weird...We want to vote, but most people don't know" who or what to vote for, "especially for smaller elections. It's confusing."

Our interviews suggest that efforts to overcome procedural barriers to registering to vote and voting itself could reduce behavioral barriers to vote that spawn from the belief that voting is hard. While we don't believe addressing the procedural barriers to voting address the root behavioral barriers to voting that we've previously articulated, we acknowledge the interaction between voting structures and behavioral barriers.

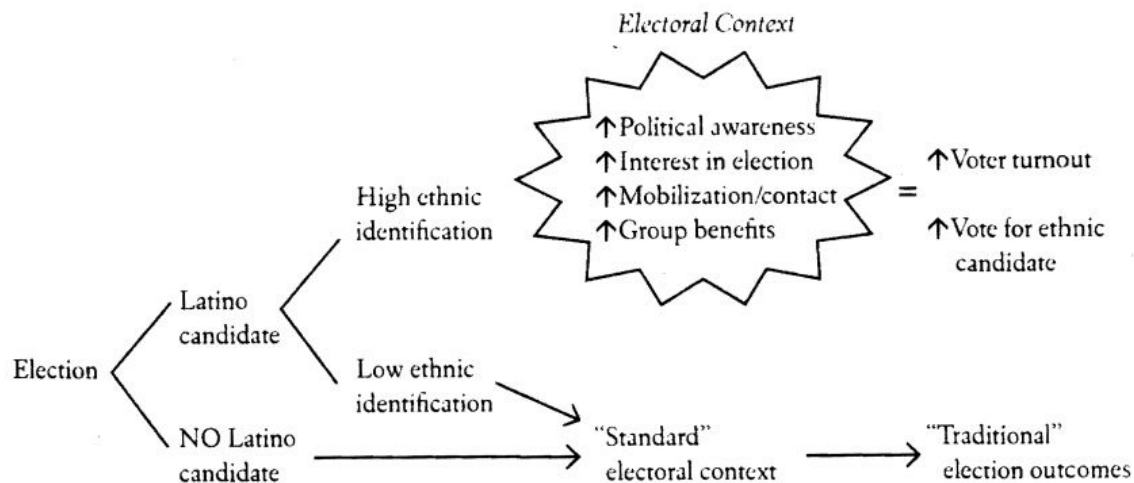
Our interviewees expressed a potentially malleable belief that voting is hard. That belief stemmed from experiences with registering to vote, attempting to receive absentee ballots, and trying to vote on confusingly worded amendments and initiatives. Additionally, in Alabama, multiple interviewees recalled voting without adequate conditions for privacy, where they felt certain that other people could see their ballots. To overcome this belief, we believe the voting process could be easier if all Latinx youth could: register to vote in high school, register to vote on college campuses, register while getting licenses, and receive understandable information about what's on the ballot.

However, efforts to expand pre-voter registration to high school students must do so in a sensitive capacity. Forcing an individual to register to vote could reveal their citizenship status, which could threaten their well-being. There are ways to enhance the voter registration process, and ways to make voting itself easier, but all efforts to do so must consider the sensitive nature of citizenship status, and the spectrum of immigration statuses (e.g. TPS, DACA, etc.) that exist across the United States.

Appendix E | Latinx Candidate Influence on Turnout

FIGURE 4.1

Shared ethnicity model of Latino political behavior



Source: Barreto, Matt. "The Role of Latino Candidates in Mobilizing Latino Voters: Revisiting Latino Vote Choice." *Latino Politics: Identity, Mobilization, and Representation*, edited by Rodolfo Espino, David L. Leal, and Kenneth J. Meier, University of Virginia Press, 2007, http://mattbarreto.com/papers/espino_volume.pdf.

Appendix F | Additional Quotes Capturing “The AOC Effect”

“I did really appreciate AOC’s campaign because I’ve never actually seen a working class person like her...I just don’t think something like that would happen in Georgia and someone from that age group, that background...It’s definitely inspiring. I definitely look up to the way she talks about things, [and] clearly talks about issues that really affect people. She does a good job cutting through the political noise and getting at the issues actually affecting people.”

- A 25-year-old regularly voting male in Georgia

“AOC [and the] young minority women who are just causing a spark of fire in our political system right now are inspiring. They’re causing people to have this dialogue, [to] see everything different. They’re people who don’t fit the mold...They’re causing uproar, which I think is needed. Our demographic is changing and to see how much our opinions are changing...growing up in a generation that has such an emphasis on who you are, seeing these people who have actually worked, who have beaten the stigma of what being a congresswoman is...seeing all that is really so inspiring.”

- A 19-year-old non-voting male in North Carolina

“Someone that we talk about a lot is Ocasio-Cortez...She doesn’t just talk about Trump, she talks about the general lack of stable laws that are in effect. We like her a lot...She stands out because she’s Latina and she’s so young.”

- A 19-year-old regularly voting male in North Carolina

“AOC really resonates with me. I feel like she’s really passionate about what she’s involved in. There was this one [moment when] she was interviewing this woman whose daughter died at the border, and I felt like that was really personal. She cares.”

- A 19-year-old non-voting female in North Carolina

“I think [AOC’s] really just amazing. She’s someone who I would want to represent our community. She’s really passionate and she understands a lot of the issues that affect our community because she’s part of our community! I want to be like her.”

- A 20-year-old infrequently voting female in North Carolina

“I mean AOC, what she did in New York, was crazy...She just blew up. Like, if you organize and people are in the same boat things can happen.”

- A 24-year-old regularly voting female in Alabama

“AOC! She’s amazing! Anytime she claps back to someone on Twitter it’s amazing. I’m like woah, because I was a server too, I get that, I get what she’s fighting for.”

- A 20-year-old newly voting female in Georgia

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Note: Cover artwork is a photograph of part of a painted mural hung in the offices of El Pueblo in Raleigh, North Carolina.