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# The Role of Citizenship Status and its Impact on Latinos' Civic Engagement in the United States

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## PHI BETA KAPPA LIBERAL ARTS SCHOLAR AWARD APPLICATION

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Below please provide a paragraph overview / abstract of the project you are submitting and a paragraph that explains the interdisciplinary nature of the project and/or how it crosses traditional academic boundaries. Please type your description and limit it to 1 page.

This paper discusses the way in which U.S. citizenship status and legal permanent resident status impacts the likelihood of involvement in civic engagement activities among Latinos in the United States. Past research has looked into various variables such as group consciousness, Spanish-media language, and importance of issues; however, specific research on citizenship status is limited. This paper analyzes data from the Pew Research Center and data obtained from individual interviews in the Midwest. The results show that citizens are more likely than residents to be involved in the community and politics. These findings have important implications in how policies are created and how organizations and government approach the Latino population.

My research on Latinos' political attitudes demonstrates an interdisciplinary nature through different means. The Latino population is a complex group due to the diversity among them. It is important to look at this population through various lenses. In order to conduct my senior seminar research, I had to use my personal background and understanding of United States and Latin American societies (i.e. systematic racism, struggles, culture) and political culture in order to conduct meaningful interviews and execute a well-informed research paper. More specifically, I was able to use my Latino background to connect with people and provide a safe space for them. I also recalled several of my experiences in Chile to inform myself about the different cultures within Latin America. Furthermore, as a Political Science major, I had the background necessary to develop an original question that addresses a major discrepancy in research. I found my overall liberal arts education to be quite helpful due to the various points of view I was able to introduce at various points while analyzing previous datasets and my own interviews. Overall, my senior seminar research paper on Latinos' political attitudes demonstrates a wide array of different perspectives used to address a major issue in U.S. society.

**THE ROLE OF CITIZENSHIP STATUS AND ITS IMPACT ON  
LATINOS' CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper discusses the way in which U.S. citizenship status and legal permanent resident status impacts the likelihood of involvement in civic engagement activities among Latinos in the United States. Past research has looked into various variables such as group consciousness, Spanish-media language, and importance of issues; however, specific research on citizenship status is limited. This paper analyzes data from the Pew Research Center and data obtained from individual interviews in the Midwest. The results show that citizens are more likely than residents to be involved in the community and politics. These findings have important implications in how policies are created and how organizations and government approach the Latino population.

## **INTRODUCTION**

There are many factors that need to be considered when studying the Latino population in the United States. Latinos are a complex group of people that come from different backgrounds and have characteristics that make them distinct from other Americans. Latinos have strong family ties, identify strongly with their language of origin, and they are often referred to as those actively seeking the American Dream (Bada et al. 2010; Kerevel 2011). However, when residing in the United States, they face discrimination that can lead to feelings of not belonging which ultimately prevent them from fully being incorporated into society (Tucker and Santiago 2013). By not being incorporated into society, Latinos are thus underrepresented in government despite their population increasing (Casellas and Ibarra 2012).

Previous research has focused on the role of Spanish-language media, Latino group consciousness, and religion, among other factors (Kerevel 2011; Bada et al. 2010). However, research specifically focusing on the role of citizenship status on civic engagement has been limited. To address this discrepancy, this paper focuses on analyzing the role that citizenship status plays when Latinos make the decision of whether to participate in civic engagement activities or not. More specifically, the question is: How does citizenship status impact Latinos' civic engagement? This is a relevant question because many

Latinos hold different citizenship statuses and those statuses might empower or disempower them from engaging in their communities. So to clarify this theory, I conducted research on civic engagement. Data from the *2004 National Survey of Latinos: Politics and Civic Participation* from the Pew Hispanic Research Center was obtained to have a representative sample that would provide a strong background about the attitudes of Latinos towards different civic engagement and political activities. To further develop this issue, individual interviews were conducted to gather current data from a small sample of the Latino population. Findings show that Latino citizens are more involved than Latino residents, time is a main obstacle for engagement, Latinos prefer engaging in the community rather than through politics, and that a generation gap exists among Latinos.

Section one identifies past and current research on the different factors that contribute to the overall Latino experience in the United States. Section two analyzes data from two studies from the Pew Research Center. The dataset from the *2015 Survey of Multiracial Americans* suggest that Hispanics, in contrast to non-Hispanics, believe that race is more essential to their identity, receive worse treatment in public places, believe immigrants strengthen the country, and tend to have a liberal ideology. The dataset from the *2004 National Survey of Latinos: Politics and Civic Participation* suggests that citizens are more likely than residents to engage civically in a variety of places. Section three analyzes data

from the individual in-depth interviews which suggest that citizenship status only affects those that are immigrants and not the children of immigrants. Section four provides an overall discussion of all results presented. Section five discusses limitations to the study and suggestions for future research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the Census of 2010, there were 50.5 million Latinos living in the United States (Casellas and Ibarra 2012). The projection for the year of 2050 is 102.6 million Latinos; this is a considerable amount when taking into consideration that in 1970, Latinos only composed 5% of the United States population (Casellas and Ibarra 2012). Latinos' median age is 27, in contrast to the median age of Whites, which is 41. These numbers are important when one looks at the political efficacy of Latinos in the U.S. Most Latinos are young, have less education than most other groups, and have low socioeconomic status; this is the category of people that tend not to vote (Casellas and Ibarra 2012). Furthermore, for most of U.S. history, Latinos have not been able to participate in the political arena due to institutional constraints (Casellas and Ibarra 2012). Moreover, it has to be taken into consideration that some Latinos face obstacles to civic engagement, such as not being able to vote due to citizenship status (Casellas and Ibarra 2012). However, with the outstanding numbers, Latinos can have a great influence on United States politics and their level of civic engagement will shape the country's decisions.

In regards to civic engagement, it is important to first define the concept. Cristina Michele Tucker and Anna Maria Santiago (2013) say that civic engagement is the involvement of the individual and community in activities that



are social or political and that connect people to the community and guide policies. These activities and changes happen through “community groups, schools, trade and labor unions, sports teams, religious organizations, workplace organizations, philanthropic organizations, civic groups, government agencies, businesses, recreational organizations, and social service organizations” (Tucker and Santiago 2013, 180). Moreover, Fernando Fernández-Llebrez González (2012) describes civic participation as a spontaneous and autonomous process, especially when it derives directly from the citizens, that tends to influence political power (46). Based on this, we can define civic engagement as the action of taking part in the community through nonpolitical and political activities that can lead to policy changes.

Immigrants in the United States have generally been framed “as strivers who work hard for the dream of a better life for their children, or as victims deserving of humanitarian concern, but not as civic and political actors in their own right” (Bada et al. 2010, 7). It is important to recognize the power that Latinos can have on the direction the country takes, especially after taking into consideration their proportion of the population. However, there are many factors that prevent Latinos from engaging civically, one such factor being their level of acculturation and socioeconomic status.

Latinos have been treated unfavorably for a long time. This “dislike and poor treatment... makes their incorporation into American society difficult and their resistance to become involved in civic affairs understandable” (Tucker and Santiago 2013,179). This treatment causes Latinos to feel unwelcome in a country that promised them opportunities for a better life. Furthermore, this lack of action can be attributed to “discrimination, citizenship, [and] anti-immigrant sentiment” (Tucker and Santiago 2013,180). It can be argued then that as long as Latino immigrants do not feel accepted, they will not gain the tools necessary to engage in their community through a variety of activities. Moreover, education is important for Latinos and to some extent, it can be argued that it provides a measure for success. In most immigrant communities, schools play the role of socializing community members; this is especially important for Latinos (Bedolla and Fraga 2012). Latinos tend to have a low socioeconomic status and recent political behavior studies have found that SES is “the best predictor of voting” (Bedolla and Fraga 2012, 25). Furthermore, Garcia-Rios and Barreto (2016) argue that “because of lower levels of education, income, English-language skills, and exposure to American political institutions, immigrant voters have consistently demonstrated low levels of political participation” (80). To conclude, Latinos experience discrimination that makes them feel out of place and not integrated in their communities.

Religion is also generally cited as a significant aspect of the Latino community. People believe that Latinos are devoted Catholics that go to church on Saturday evenings or Sunday mornings. Research has shown that this is true. Bada et al. (2010) says that there is a strong religious attachment that can be seen through church attendance and volunteerism from Latinos. To explain the need for religion, we can rely on the existential security hypothesis which states that “feelings of physical and/or psychological insecurity lead individuals to turn to religion to cope with this precarious existence” (Gershon et al. 2016, 87). This strengthens the correlation between the Latino population and religion because Latinos face discrimination and lack of resources both in their household and community, so this leads them to rely on religion to make them feel safe. From this perspective, Latinos, in fact, have high levels of civic engagement. The *2004 National Survey of Latinos: Politics and Civic Engagement* found that churches were the institution that received the largest amount of volunteer hours (Bada et al. 2010). Two years later, a phone survey from the Pew Research Center found that “foreign-born Catholic Latinos were almost twice as likely to say they participated in a protest or demonstration, compared with their native-born counterparts (31 percent versus 16 percent respectively),” thus further providing evidence for the relationship between church attendance and engagement in the community and through politics (Bada et al. 2010, 30). Nevertheless, another

study found that church attendance decreases in second and third generation Latinos and that these Latinos have higher political and community engagement than their first generation counterparts (Gershon et al. 2016). The decrease in church attendance can be attributed to the modernization hypothesis which states that “as societies industrialize, there is a premium on scientific rationalism, public education, as well as a growth in the state providing services that were once filled by religious institutions” (Gershon et al. 2016, 87). In the United States, which is considered a developed and industrialized country, people might not have the same need to rely on religion the way Latino immigrants do. So when studying civic engagement among Latinos, it is important to keep in mind the important role that religion plays in their lives.

Another factor that needs to be considered is the importance of the Spanish language. Research has been done specifically analyzing Spanish-language media. Medina Vidal (2018) analyzes the transnational political behavior of Latinos and finds that they are connected to the politics of their home country through news media and that this connection strengthens political participation in the United States, thus creating a significant assimilation to the adoptive country. Additionally, Spanish-language media, specifically, includes news from Latin American countries which creates a meaningful relation to the country of origin (Kerevel 2011). On this same note, the importance of this is that

this meaningful relation, in return, creates a strong “Latino group consciousness” among Latinos in the United States (Kerevel 2011, 511). This is vital because this consciousness can be a factor in the decision of whether or not to participate in political life. The role that media takes is that of distributing information while socializing Latinos, specifically those that are not politically active (Eshbaugh-Soha and Balarezo 2014). However, Panagopoulos and Green (2011) state that Hispanic voters are not likely to engage politically. Nonetheless, Medina Vidal found that Latinos are willing to participate in protests and to sign petitions. There is a clear example of this which took place in 2006. Spanish-language media framed mobilization as an important factor to confront anti-immigrant legislation. This framing of the issue resulted in three and a half to five million citizens, legal residents, and undocumented migrants to go out into the streets of the largest cities in the United States (Bada et al. 2010; Medina Vidal 2018). Furthermore, in 2007, California, New York, and Texas “were more likely to introduce legislation to expand immigrants right” (Bada et al. 2010, 19). So, this is a clear example of how media can have an enormous leverage on political attitudes of Latinos (Kerevel 2011). Garcia-Rios and Barreto (2016) agree that exposure to Spanish-language media results in political participation and civic engagement. More research needs to be done in regards to the role of the

Spanish-language in social settings and activities in the community and how that affects the level of engagement among Latinos.

The validity of the importance of Latinos in the United States can be seen through all the research discussed above. There is a need for further research in regards to Latino group consciousness and the impact that it has on civic engagement. Furthermore, it is vital to study the role that Latinos who are not eligible to vote play in campaigns and other political and nonpolitical activities. Latinos are a powerful group that need to be taken into consideration and need to be studied more in order to establish trends among this group and to better reach out to them. In order to better understand the situation and the factors that influence their engagement in society, my research seeks to contribute another factor to the literature: citizenship status. This factor has not been as popular as language but it is an important one to consider.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

To answer the question of the impact that citizenship status has on the civic engagement of Latinos, data from the *2015 Survey of Multiracial Americans* and the *2004 National Survey of Latinos: Politics and Civic Participation* and data collected from individual interviews were analyzed. Latinos are described as those born or those with ties to Latin America and that speak Spanish, but are not from Spain. Furthermore, the words Latino and Hispanic are used interchangeably. There are three hypotheses: 1) if Latinos hold U.S. citizenship, then they will be more involved than Latinos without citizenship; 2) if Latinos are legal permanent residents, then they will be less involved than Latinos with citizenship; 3) if Latinos are well informed, then citizenship status will not be an obstacle to participate in civic engagement activities. Civic engagement is defined in the following ways: voting, volunteering for campaigns or public offices, participating in protests, activism in school and community, and reaching out to public officials.

The independent variable is the level of citizenship status of the participant: legal permanent resident or citizen. A legal permanent resident is an individual that holds a green card or other form of legal document that allows the individual to live in the United States legally. A citizen is anyone that was born on U.S. soil or that became a U.S. citizen after undergoing the naturalization process.

This study only considers citizens born in the 50 states, thus excluding those born in other U.S. territories, except for Puerto Rico.

The dependent variable is the level of participation in civic engagement activities. This was operationalized as follows: first, on a questionnaire given at the beginning of the interview based on a self-assessed level of engagement that asked participants to rate their engagement on a 1 to 5 scale, 1 being not engaged and 5 being very engaged. Second, a content analysis was utilized when analyzing the 20 interviews and participants were considered very engaged if they had voted, participated in protests/rallies, contacted elected officials, and volunteered at least once.



### ***2015 Survey of Multiracial Americans***

The *2015 Survey of Multiracial Americans* includes responses from a random, representative sample of 22,719 (2,555 Hispanics and 20,130 Non-Hispanics) adult respondents including multiracial subgroups from the United States. Participants were at least 18 years old. The survey was conducted over the internet between February 6 and April 6, 2015. A total of 43 questions were asked with yes/no/refused and ranking answers. Question topics ranged from racial background to political affiliation to discrimination. Through the use of SPSS, differences of means were developed; the level of data was ordinal. This method was chosen because it allowed for a comparison between Hispanics and non-Hispanics. The idea behind this is to provide a background explaining that there is a difference between both groups and therefore, special attention should be given when approaching those of Hispanic/Latino descent.

On the topics of race, Hispanics reported that they experienced some to a lot of discrimination while non-Hispanics reported that Hispanics only experienced some. Race and ancestry or country of origin were reported to be more essential to Hispanics' identity than to non-Hispanics' identity. Non-Hispanics experienced threats or were physically attacked more than Hispanics, but not in the past 12 months. Hispanics had been unfairly stopped by police more often than non-Hispanics, but not in the past 12 months. Furthermore,

Hispanics receive poor service in restaurants, hotels, or other places of business more frequently than non-Hispanics, in the past 12 months. Hispanics reported that immigrants strengthen the country more often than non-Hispanics. Also, Hispanics tended to be more moderate to liberal while non-Hispanics tended to be more conservative.

### ***2004 National Survey of Latinos: Politics and Civic Participation***

The *2004 National Survey of Latinos: Politics and Civic Participation* includes responses from a random, representative sample of 2,288 Latino respondents (including 1,166 registered voters) from the United States. Participants were born in the United States or in a Latin American country. Participants were at least 18 years old and were organized into four categories: total Latinos, registered Latinos, Latinos who are citizens of the U.S., but not registered to vote, and Latinos who are not citizens.

The survey was conducted over the phone between April 21 through June 9, 2004 either in Spanish or English depending on the participant's preference. There was a total of 79 questions with a wide range of topics; these ranged from volunteering to jobs to church attendance. The questions were answered with a yes or no answer or by ranking the likelihood of having participated in the activities asked.

Through the use of SPSS, differences of means were developed with independent sample t-tests for significance testing; the level of data was ordinal. This method was chosen because it allowed for a variety of comparisons. First, comparisons between citizens vs. residents and citizens vs. non-citizens were made. Second, the comparisons were made on a range of topics including but not limited to politics, volunteering, and society.

## RESULTS

Differences of means performed on the data show that citizens pay attention to politics, contact elected officials, donate money to political candidates, and attend political party meetings more often than residents. It is also important to note that in the comparison of means for citizens vs. non-citizens, deciding to volunteer for a candidate that is Latino, non-Latino, or for both Latino and non-Latino was significant, meaning that non-citizens were more likely to volunteer for a Latino candidate than residents and citizens ( $n=4$ , mean: 1.00,  $P < .01$ ). Furthermore, citizens volunteered with a religious group and neighborhood, business, or community group more often than residents. On the other hand, it was more important for residents than for citizens that the organization they volunteered for address Latino concerns. Two places where citizenship status made no statistical differences on responses were schools and organizations with a focus on ethnicity. Conversely, the differences of means developed for citizens vs. non-citizens showed that for all five activities, citizens were more likely than non-citizens to volunteer (data not shown). Moreover, those who speak English are more engaged through politics and volunteer activities.

## Individual In-Depth Interviews

### METHODS

#### *Participants*

Latino participants were recruited through informal conversations in a small metropolitan city in central Illinois. The age of participants ranged from 19 to 65 years old. Only citizens (i.e. U.S. born or naturalized) and legal permanent residents (i.e. green card holders) were allowed to participate in the study. The individual interviews happened after the 2018 midterm elections. This is important to note since civic engagement behavior might be more salient for the individuals during this time and might have contributed to their perceived level of engagement at the time of the study.

#### *Materials*

A questionnaire was given to the participants asking where they obtain their news information from; if they participate in community activities; how they define their identity; and other questions relevant to matters of civic engagement. The interview consisted of semi-structured questions asking about participants' attitudes towards civic engagement and how, when, and why they engage in such activities. Follow-up questions were asked to clarify any statements said during the interview. Both the questionnaire and interview were offered in either Spanish

or English. Interviews took 40 minutes to an hour including time allotted for filling out the questionnaire.

### *Procedure*

The interview started with the question of whether the participant wanted the rest of the session to continue in English or Spanish or both. Then, participants were given a short questionnaire to fill out; the interviewer stayed in the room to answer possible questions. Once the participant finished filling out the questionnaire, the interviewer started the interview. Semi-structured questions were asked and the interview took a conversation style. Debriefing followed the interview. The participant was thanked for participating in the study, told how they had helped in the study, and was given a chance to ask further questions.

## **RESULTS**

The questionnaire participants were given at the beginning of the interview provided the following information: 14 identified as American, 2 did not identify as American, and 4 said sometimes they identify as American; all participants identified as Latinos. In terms of language, 6 participants speak Spanish at home, 3 speak English at home, and 11 speak both Spanish and English at home. Furthermore, 3 participants said they trust their local government all the time, 15 said sometimes, and 2 said rarely. Of the 20 participants, 2 said they had contacted their city government, 17 said no, and 1 said they were not sure. When it comes to where they obtain their news (participants could check all that applied), 3 said newspapers, 4 said podcasts, 18 said social media, and 8 said other. In a self-assessed engagement ranking question (1 being not engaged and 5 being very engaged), 5% of participants reported 1, 25% reported 2, 40% reported 3, 30% reported 4, and 0 participants reported 5.

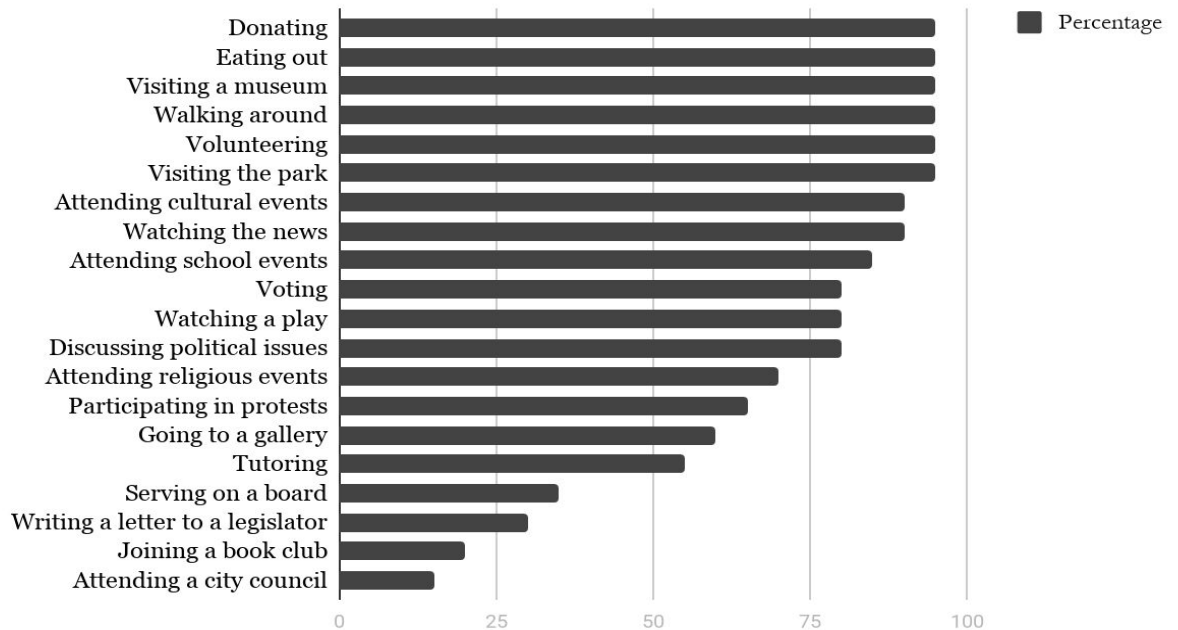
**Figure 1. Political and Community Engagement, N=20**

Figure 1 displays the activities and the amount of times the activity was reported as being done by the participants. As it can be seen, school events, voting, donations, eating at restaurants, visiting museums, walking around the neighborhood, volunteering, watching a play, attending cultural events, discussing political issues, and watching the news were reported more than 75% of the time. This means that most of the participants did these activities sometime in their lifetime. On the other hand, attending religious services, tutoring, protesting, and going to galleries were reported only 50% of the time. Furthermore, attending a city council meeting and joining a book club were reported less than 25% of the



time. This means that participants were skeptical of participating in activities that require more time and that tended to lean to the political aspect of engagement.

**Table 5. Education and Engagement**

		<b>&lt; High school</b> (N=1)	<b>High school diploma</b> (N=17)	<b>College diploma</b> (N=1)	<b>Graduate school</b> (N=1)
<b>Attended a cultural event*</b>	No	100%	5.9%	0%	0%
	Yes	0%	94.1%	100%	100%
<b>Joined a book club*</b>	No	0%	88.2%	0%	100%
	Yes	100%	11.8%	100%	0%
<b>Volunteered**</b>	No	100%	0%	0%	0%
	Yes	0%	100%	100%	100%
<b>Has voted*</b>	No	100%	11.8%	0%	100%
	Yes	0%	88.2%	100%	0%

\*p<0.05

\*\*p<0.01

Table 5 shows that there is a relationship between education and likelihood of engagement. Participants with a high school diploma, college diploma, or graduate school experience were more likely to attend cultural events and join a book club than those with less than a high school education. Furthermore, the strongest relationship is between education and volunteering. Those with a high school or college diploma or graduate school experience

volunteered more than those with no education. Another correlation shown in the table is that of education and voting behavior; those with education voted more often than those with no education, which supports previous findings by other researchers. More correlations, with chi square as significance tests, were developed in relation to the rest of the activities listed in the bar graph; however, the rest of the activities proved to not be significant when correlated with the variables: citizenship status, age, and language. These results might be due to the small N or the lack of enough representation from all three variables. In this case, hypothesis 1 (if Latinos hold U.S. citizenship, then they will be more involved than Latinos without citizenship) and hypothesis 2 (if Latinos are legal permanent residents, then they will be less involved than Latinos with citizenship) are not supported. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that an education provides information that leads to people's involvement; based on this logic, hypothesis 3 (if Latinos are well informed, then citizenship status will not be an obstacle to participate in civic engagement activities) is supported.

### **Content analysis**

*Citizenship status* -- Participants provided a variety of insights as to what it means to be part of society for each level of citizenship status: citizens, residents, and undocumented. First, the general consensus is that citizens do not often think about the privilege they have by being citizens. These people tend to

feel safe, however, they might experience discrimination just like those who are residents and undocumented. Second, participants described residents as being in the middle. Residents feel safer, but they are still restricted due to their green card and visa limitations, which prevent them from engaging. Third, participants offer two perspectives in regards to undocumented people. On one hand, some said that those who are undocumented do not feel safe, on the contrary, they feel vulnerable because they risk everything if they get involved or make a wrong move. On the other hand, participants also said that people who are undocumented pay more attention because they are directly affected by everything that is going on around them. Furthermore, participants reported that both residents and those who are undocumented often times feel like they do not belong. One participant shared the story of her aunt who is a resident. She talked about how her aunt came to the United States from Mexico, where she used to be involved in the community; however, when she arrived to the U.S., she stopped being involved because it no longer felt like home. Citizens are in a more favorable situation in terms of involvement, but residents and those who are undocumented still struggle with feelings of belonging. Moreover, another aspect that was brought up during two interviews was that of length of time living in the United States. A woman who has been living in the U.S. since 1977 became a citizen about 20 years ago. However, she is not involved in the community,

except for going to church every Sunday. When asked why that is, she replied that it was never like that in her home in Mexico. She recalls how she would always stay at home helping her mother with chores around the house. On the other hand, a woman who has been living in the U.S. since 1993 and has been a citizen for five years is involved in the community. She assists at a local organization providing translation services at Sunday school classes and organizes and participates in a domestic violence group for Latinas. She contributes her involvement in the community to her parents' influence. This woman tells about how her father was an elected official back in her town in Mexico and how her mother would always volunteer at church. These two stories provide an insight into how length of time living in the United States and citizenship status might not be the only factors to contribute to one's engagement, but rather parents' influence can also be a vital factor.

*Role of Latinos in the community* -- When asked about the role of Latinos in the community, participants pointed to two main ideas: work and promoting culture. More specifically, participants say that Latinos are in this country to work and provide opportunities for their families. They want to make sure that all their needs are met and that they establish themselves in this country. Also, other participants said that Latinos are the backbone of the country and their communities. They often said that Latinos do the dirty work because no one else

wants to do it. One participant said that if Latinos were not in the United States, then the country would not function. Furthermore, participants also said that the role of Latinos is that of promoting culture and traditions. Many of them said that Latinos bring a close-knit community feeling to the place they live in and with that, they also continue their values, such as being family oriented and open. When asked about whether Latinos have a political role, the majority of the participants said no. Some of them went on to explain that this is due to the fact that politics is not part of the everyday life because Latinos are not socialized to pay attention to politics. Nevertheless, some believe that political power among Latinos is starting to grow. However, many still believe that Latinos are not taken seriously and that as much as they protest, their voice is still small.

*Engagement, obstacles, and hope* -- One of the questions asked if the participants had contacted their city government to which most of the participants replied with a no. They said that they had never thought about it; there is no need to contact them; and that they would only reach out if they were being personally affected. Nevertheless, a couple of participants did recall reaching out to local and federal elected officials. One example is that of a young participant who reached out to the alderman with an idea for an environmental project for her community; however, the alderman replied with a rejection. This rejection leads to the question of what this could mean for a young Latina who is not socialized to

contact elected officials -- could this discourage her from future outreach to elected officials? Furthermore, there is a trend among the participants that resembles the bystander effect. Many examples were given about traffic lights not working or stop signs missing and all of these times, participants said that they had not contacted their local government because someone else would do it. In terms of obstacles, participants cited lack of information and time as two of the main constraints. Participants said that they were not informed enough to provide an opinion and that there was a lack of consciousness and motivation among Latinos. Furthermore, among the younger participants, political jargon was one of the obstacles as well. They said how it was difficult to understand what everything meant in the political aspect of issues and how when translating to their parents, they would struggle to find the right words. On this same line, language was perceived as an obstacle by some but not by others, because they believe there are many resources and translators available so that Latinos can no longer use this as an excuse. In the midst of all this, there is still hope for engagement through schools. Younger participants talked about how in school, they were required to write a letter to a legislator about an issue they felt needed attention. Many of them now think that this was a priming effect to try to get them engaged later on in life. Older participants talked about how they are engaged at their children's schools. One resident, in particular, said that she is not engaged

because she does not have children and believes that if she did, she would be involved at school events and programs because she sees the school as an institution that provides resources and events and therefore is an easy way of participating.

*The generation gap* -- A common theme throughout all 20 interviews was that of a generation gap. Older participants talked about their experiences and younger participants talked about the experiences of their parents in regards to when they came to the United States and what it was like for their parents. These responses depicted the life of an immigrant and how they have to learn the language and establish themselves and families in their adoptive country; their main goal is that of providing opportunities for their children. As one participant said, these immigrants are not involved because they work two jobs and by the time they arrive home they are tired, which prevents them from going out into the community. This lack of involvement has the possibility of vanishing through the involvement of the children of those immigrants who called themselves Americanized Latinos. These young citizens are involved to improve themselves and families and because they know others cannot do the same. One participant noted that these young citizens are involved because the issues their parents face become a family problem that children attempt to solve; one example of this was told by a young participant. She recalls how her mother, who is undocumented,

had been working for the same company for 10 years and was let go recently because of her undocumented status in the country. So, this young lady wrote a letter to her U.S. representative to ask if this action was legal and if the representative could help in any way. Another example that better portrays this generation gap is that of another young lady who talked about how her paternal grandparents, of Mexican origin, entered the United States through the Bracero Program. They did not know any English but would vote in every election. More importantly, her grandparents would also always promote education. Now, her parents are doctors and have a clinic that helps the Latino community. The result of these two generations is a young lady that is involved in the community and politics.



## CONCLUSION

The *2015 Survey of Multiracial Americans* situated Latinos in a broader context in the United States and established differences between Hispanics and non-Hispanics. It was found that Hispanics, in contrast to non-Hispanics, view their race and country of origin as an essential part of their identity. Hispanics also tend to receive worse treatment in public spaces and tend to be unfairly stopped by the police as well. Hispanics, more than non-Hispanics have a positive view of immigrants and also have a more liberal ideology. This places Latinos as a different population that needs to be approached by elected officials and community organizations in a different manner. Furthermore, the discrimination they face leads to feelings of not belonging that can later translate to a lack of participation in the broader society (Berry 2001; Seaton 2009). Moreover, their sense of belonging can contribute to their group consciousness, which can either result in engagement or lack of engagement (Kerevel 2011).

Differences among Latinos themselves were established through the use of the *2004 National Survey of Latinos: Politics and Civic Participation*. The results from the differences of means show that in fact, Latino citizens tend to be more involved than Latino residents, thus supporting hypotheses 1 and 2. This difference is due to citizens having a level of acculturation that is higher than that of residents and Table 4 provides more evidence of this, since English speakers

are more likely than Spanish speakers to engage in politics and the community (Berry 2005). High levels of acculturation entail feelings of comfortability with society and being born in the United States or being naturalized citizens can provide an extra level of comfortability that encourages citizens to voice their opinions and thoughts through political or community engagement. Moreover, results also show that it is important for residents that the organization where they volunteered address Latino concerns. This further supports the idea that citizens are more assimilated to American culture while residents are still more concerned about their racial group. This goes back to the idea of group consciousness, which in this case, holds to have a positive outcome because residents' identification with their racial group encourages them to be involved.

The individual interviews provide significant perspectives to the existing literature. Even though crosstabs did not show any statistical significance in regards to citizenship and involvement, participants expressed the idea that citizens do feel safer and like they belong in contrast to residents, who find themselves in the middle, and non-citizens, who are the most affected and most fearful. So, having a citizenship certificate can provide freedom and security to participate in society. Furthermore, most of the participants cited time as a constraint that prevents them from engaging. The participants or the participants' parents have two jobs or work the night shift to make ends meet. Due to their low

SES, Latinos have to work more in order to provide for themselves and families. This leaves them with little or no time to go out into the community; and if they do have the time, they would rather spend it resting. Even though Table 4 provides statistical significance that proves that English speakers are more likely to engage than Spanish speakers, during several interviews, participants said that language is no longer an obstacle due to the many resources and translators available. This provides a new perspective in regards to the changing attitudes towards language from a Latino perspective. Additionally, results show that there is a positive relation between education and engagement. However, because of the small sample, these results might not be generalizable to the entire Latino population, thus more research needs to be done on this matter. Moreover, most participants said they have not contacted their city government. Most participants made a clear distinction between community engagement and political engagement; they prefer the latter. Participants talked about how through community engagement, they see a direct impact whereas casting a vote or calling elected officials does not show any immediate change. Moreover, the thought of not having a reason to contact city government can be due to lack of information and motivation to voice one's opinion. As it was stated by many participants, Latinos do not understand the impact they can make if they participated more. Young participants also recalled letters they wrote to elected officials during their

elementary school years and regarded that as a priming effect to encourage engagement in the future. So, schools can be gateways to civic engagement among Latinos. As some participants and previous literature has said, parents are also involved in schools because this institution organizes events to reach out to the community (Terriquez 2012). Another finding that needs to be discussed is the role of Latinos. Most of them gave answers that resemble the ideals of the American Dream: working to have more opportunities for a better life. When Latinos are portrayed in this manner and when they, themselves, portray each other that way, this idea of only being in the United States to work hard rejects all other purposes and goals. Participants mentioned how politics is not part of the everyday life of Latinos, therefore, no affirmation of their political role is ever talked about. So, when this mindset prevails, Latinos fail to recognize the power they have in their adoptive country (Bada et al. 2010). Be that as it may, participants provided insight into a generation gap that exists between immigrants and the children of immigrants. Immigrants have to start from the very beginning to build a life in a new country whereas their children do not have to do that. These children are born into the culture or if they arrived at a young age, they are more likely to assimilate into the culture of the new country. This observation provides new insights as to the many differences that constitute the Latino community. Different approaches can be created in regards to how they are

contacted by elected officials or community organizations because they have different experiences and goals and therefore applying the same strategy when contacting Latinos might not be efficient.

The main findings are that citizens are more likely than residents to be involved in politics and the community; time is a main obstacle for engagement; Latinos prefer engaging in the community than in politics; and a generation gap among Latinos exists. The overall results supported all three hypotheses: 1) if Latinos hold U.S. citizenship, then they will be more involved than Latinos without citizenship; 2) if Latinos are legal permanent residents, then they will be less involved than Latinos with citizenship; 3) if Latinos are well informed, then citizenship status will not be an obstacle to participate in civic engagement activities. Through the many findings, this study adds to the literature regarding Latinos in the United States by providing an insight as to how citizenship status affects Latinos' level of engagement in politics and the community.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There are several limitations to this study. First, due to the small sample, the participants in the individual interviews might not be representative of the overall Latino population in the United States. The sample consisted of mainly college students and citizens and therefore the results provide a limited perspective. Second, the individual interviews and *2004 National Survey of Latinos: Politics and Civic Participation* analyzes civic engagement among Latinos and does not include Hispanics. This excluded more representation in the overall sample and results that might be more representative of the Spanish speaking population of the United States.

Future research should focus on obtaining a more representative sample to do individual interviews and include people that are undocumented. Furthermore, a more recent dataset should be used to analyze Latinos' civic engagement, since Latino attitudes have probably changed since 2004. Moreover, the generation gap needs to be further investigated to analyze the implications that it can have on Latinos' civic engagement.

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## APPENDIX

### Questionnaire

1. Where do you get your news from? (Check all that apply)
  - a. Newspapers
  - b. Podcasts
  - c. Social Media
  - d. Other:  

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2. Have you ever participated in a protest?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I don't know
3. Did you vote in the last 5 years?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I don't know
4. How engaged are you in the community? (*1 = Not engaged | 5 = Very engaged*)  
1      2      3      4      5

*For the next two questions, feel free to answer yes to both:*

5. Do you identify as Latino?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Sometimes
6. Do you identify as American?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Sometimes
7. Do you trust your local government?
  - a. All the time
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Rarely

- d. Never
- 8. Have you ever contacted your city government?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Not sure
- 9. Which one do you speak at home?
  - a. Spanish
  - b. English
  - c. Both
- 10. Have you ever participated in any of the activities below? Check all that apply.

Attended a school event		Volunteered	
Voting		Attended church service	
Attended city council meeting		Watched a play	
Donating food/clothing		Tutored someone in the community	
Served on a board		Attended a cultural event	
Ate at a restaurant		Visited the park	
Visited a museum		Participated in a protest/rally	
Joined a book club		Went to a gallery	
Wrote a letter to a legislator		Discussed political issues	
Walked around the neighborhood		Watched the news	

- 11. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
- 12. Level of education completed:
  - a. Less than high school
  - b. High school diploma
  - c. Some college

- d. College diploma
- e. Graduate school

### Cuestionario

1. ¿De dónde obtienes tus noticias? (Marca todas las que aplican)
  - a. Periódicos
  - b. Podcasts
  - c. Redes sociales
  - d. Otra:

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2. ¿Alguna vez has participado en una protesta?
  - a. Si
  - b. No
  - c. No sé
3. ¿Votaste en los últimos 5 años?
  - a. Si
  - b. No
  - c. No sé
4. ¿Qué tan involucrado (a) estas en la comunidad? (1 = No lo estoy | 5 = Muy involucrado)  
1      2      3      4      5

*Para las próximas 2 preguntas, puede contestar sí a las dos:*

5. ¿Te identificas como latino?
  - a. Si
  - b. No
  - c. Algunas veces
6. ¿Te identificas como estadounidense?
  - a. Si
  - b. No
  - c. Algunas veces
7. ¿Confías en tu gobierno local?
  - a. Siempre
  - b. A veces

- c. Raramente
  - d. Nunca
8. ¿Alguna vez has contactado al gobierno de la ciudad?
- a. Si
  - b. No
  - c. No estoy seguro (a)
9. ¿Qué idioma hablas en casa?
- a. Español
  - b. Inglés
  - c. Ambos
10. ¿Has participado en algunas de estas actividades? Marca todas las que aplican.

Asistió un evento escolar		Fue voluntario	
Vote		Asistió a un servicio religioso	
Asistió a una junta del concejo municipal		Vio una obra de teatro	
Dono comida/ropa		Instruyó a alguien de la comunidad	
Participó en una junta ejecutiva		Asistió un evento cultural	
Comió en un restaurante		Visitó el parque	
Visitó un museo		Participó en una protesta/manifestación	
Se unió a un club de lectura		Fue a una galería	
Escribió una carta a un legislador		Discute temas políticos	
Camino alrededor del vecindario		Vio las noticias	

11. Edad: \_\_\_\_\_
12. Nivel de educación completado:
- a. Menos que secundaria
  - b. Diploma de la secundaria
  - c. Algo de colegio
  - d. Diploma del colegio

e. Escuela de posgrado

### **Interview Questions**

#### *English Version*

1. How do you define civic engagement?
2. Do you engage in civic acts in your community?
3. How is being Latino important to you?
4. What do you think is the role that Latinos play in the community?
5. Why do you think Latinos do or do not engage in the community?
6. What motivates to participate in civic engagement activities?
7. Do your parents/guardians participate (have participated) in civic engagement?
8. Have you participated in protests? Have you voted before? Have you volunteered for campaigns? Would you do it again?
9. What do you think are some obstacles when trying to participate in civic engagement activities?
10. If you have contacted your city government, how satisfied were you with their response? If not, why have you not contacted your city government?

### **Preguntas para la entrevista**

#### *Spanish Version*

1. ¿Cómo defines el término compromiso civil?
2. ¿Participas en actos cívicos en tu comunidad?
3. ¿Por qué es importante ser Latino para ti?
4. ¿Cuál es el rol de los Latinos en tu comunidad?
5. ¿Por qué piensas que los Latinos no o si se involucran con su compromiso civil?
6. ¿Qué te motiva a participar en actos cívicos?
7. ¿Tus padres participan en actos cívicos?
8. ¿Has participado en protestas, votaciones, campañas políticas? ¿Lo harías otra vez?
9. ¿Cuáles son algunos obstáculos cuando tratas de participar en actos cívicos?

10. ¿Si has contactado a tu gobierno municipal, que tan satisfecho (a) estabas con su respuesta?