

RAÍCES

2026



**ILLINOIS LEGISLATIVE
LATINO CAUCUS
FOUNDATION**



**Great Cities
Institute**

University of Illinois at Chicago

Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus Foundation

Great Cities Institute

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Executive Summary

The Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus Foundation convened its annual Raíces Conference on September 18, 2025, at the University of Illinois Chicago Forum. Nearly 1,000 stakeholders from across Illinois attended, despite a climate of fear and uncertainty created by The Department of Homeland Security's "Operation Midway Blitz" efforts to detain.

Instability as a Barrier to Civic Power

The 2025 Raíces Public Policy Conference underscored a central reality facing Latino communities in Illinois and across the United States: perpetual instability shapes daily life and constrains civic power. This instability is not incidental. It is produced by the intersection of labor precarity, immigration enforcement, economic insecurity, and uneven access to public protections. Together, these forces limit economic participation, weaken civic engagement, and erode political trust.

Labor precarity remains a primary driver. Latino workers are disproportionately concentrated in low-wage, temporary, and subcontracted jobs that offer little predictability, even during economic growth. Income volatility, childcare gaps, and limited healthcare access force families to prioritize survival over sustained civic involvement. Civic withdrawal under these conditions reflects structural barriers, not disengagement.

Immigration enforcement amplifies instability across entire communities. Enforcement affects undocumented individuals, U.S. citizens, and mixed-status households alike. Conference participants documented how fear reshapes daily behavior, which limits mobility, reduces interaction with public institutions, and shrinks participation in civic spaces. In this context, avoidance is a rational response to risk.

Economic and civic consequences follow. Latino workers and businesses anchor Illinois' economy and neighborhood corridors, yet enforcement escalation, or its perception, disrupts local economies, depresses commerce, and weakens community life. These disruptions reinforce household stress and further narrow opportunities for civic participation.

Persistent instability is reflected in voter participation trends. While Latino voter registration continues to grow, turnout has stagnated. Fixed election timelines collide with unstable living conditions, caregiving responsibilities, misinformation, and enforcement-related fear. The result is uneven participation and declining trust, particularly among younger voters.

Community-based organizations serve as essential civic infrastructure but are under strain. Nonprofits are facing rising demand alongside legal risk, administrative burden, and funding uncertainty. When their capacity erodes, the broader civic ecosystem weakens.

Opportunities

The conference findings point to a clear conclusion: increasing stability is essential to building civic power. Strong labor standards, enforcement safeguards, state-level protections, and sustained investment in community institutions are not only civil rights measures. Rather, they are foundational investments in democratic participation. Stabilizing daily life expands the space for engagement, strengthens public trust, and enables Latino communities to fully participate in shaping Illinois' future.

Conclusion

The Raíces 2026 Report serves as both documentation and direction. It captures the realities Latino communities faced during an extraordinary period. The findings point to urgent needs: economic development paired with worker protections; adequately resourced and equitably implemented civic education; safeguards for community-based organizations as essential civic infrastructure; and voter engagement strategies that build trust, representation, and long-term participation.

The 2025 Raíces Public Policy Conference and this report document a defining moment for Illinois. They show how federal immigration enforcement, economic instability, and uneven access to civic institutions shape daily life for Latino communities. At the same time, they demonstrate sustained organizing, participation, and leadership—even under conditions of uncertainty and fear.

The evidence is clear and measurable: Latinos are fundamental to Illinois' economy. Latino workers sustain critical industries, including logistics, construction, manufacturing, healthcare, and food service, while Latino families help sustain educational institutions and contribute labor, consumption, and long-term investment in communities across Illinois. These contributions are indispensable to economic vitality and community stability.

Meeting this moment requires recognizing and acting on this reality. Protecting and supporting Latino workers, families, and institutions strengthens Illinois economically, civically, and democratically. Illinois' future depends on policies that reflect this understanding and on leadership prepared to act with responsibility, purpose, and urgency.



Introduction

On September 18, 2025, the Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus Foundation convened its annual Raíces Public Policy Conference amid an extraordinary and volatile moment in Chicago. Just days earlier, at the onset of Latino Heritage Month, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security announced its “Operation Midway Blitz,” triggering widespread fear and urgency across Latino communities. What is typically a forum for policy dialogue became, instead, a critical space for collective response as communities braced for its response to civil rights violations and federal overreach. Indeed, this conference was unlike others where in this case, we needed to double our security and equip our volunteers with whistles and other training protocols. Despite all of this, we attracted over 1,000 attendees from across the state.

It was important for this conference, therefore, to highlight the essential and significant role of Latinos in the Chicago region’s economy, to discuss the legal strategies to protect our communities, illuminate our voting pattern, and most of all, reinforce the importance of governance and civic engagement. The annual Raíces gathering met the moment and once again, provided insight and guidance to the Legislative Latino Caucus. This report conveys highlights of this 2025 conference.

Raíces 2026 Report

This Raíces 2026 document is first and foremost, a report of the 2025 Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus Foundation Raíces Public Policy Conference, held at the University of Illinois Chicago Forum with nearly 1,000 attendees. The success of the 2025 Raíces Public Policy Conference came from having a diverse body of participants that included policy makers, students (primarily enrolled in community colleges across the state), and representatives from community organizations, businesses, government agencies, and public institutions of higher education, other community stakeholders, many of whom were personally affected by coming from mixed status households or being DACA recipients.

Emphasizing the importance of engagement in civil society through their role as legislators, the morning plenary was testimony to the importance of recognizing our significance to the State of Illinois and seeing ourselves as having roles, rights and responsibilities to be fully engaged in its civic activities. Three concurrent sessions with researchers and policy analysts, worker rights advocates, legal strategists, and legislators discussed our critical role in the state and region’s economy, the various legal strategies being employed to protect our organizations and communities, and the importance of voting. Sonja Diaz, a civil rights attorney and policy advisor from Los Angeles, provided (via Zoom) a keynote address titled, State Power, People Power: How Latino Leaders Can Defend Democracy & Defeat Authoritarianism. The conference concluded with an open session of comments from participants, reflecting not only on the day’s conversations, but on their reactions to the moment.

Second, this Raíces 2026 report is also intended to serve as a bridge between the work of the Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus Foundation (ILLCF) during 2025 and its work in 2026. As the ILLCF works with a full array of Latino leaders, its purpose is “to serve as the public policy arm for the Illinois Latino community.” Over its twenty-two year history, ILLCF has served as the public policy arm of the Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus and has also offered over \$1,000,000 in scholarships as part of its ¡Soy el Futuro! Scholarship and Leadership Program. Many of the attendees of its annual conference are students, preparing themselves

for leadership opportunities. The Foundation partners with universities and community colleges “to deliver a robust and data driven public policy platform” while simultaneously building “partnerships that cross sectors and institutions to address the needs of Latino communities in Illinois”.

The Co-Chairs and the Board of ILLCF is composed of Latino legislators whose constituents drive their focus and priorities, while they also shape Illinois laws and state policy. This Raíces 2026 Report is, therefore, also intended to deliver insights, data, and feedback to policy makers as they address the needs of their constituents and provide direction and stewardship of state policy.



Since the 2025 Raíces Public Policy Conference, the Illinois Latino Caucus has worked tirelessly to further advance statutes that protect our communities. Just one month after the conference, the Latino Caucus worked tirelessly to pass legislation that empowers all in Illinois. One of these efforts was signed into law as the Illinois Bivens Act, HB 1312, for example, protects immigrants and others from civil immigration enforcement while they engage in everyday civic and family activities such as attending court, accessing healthcare and education, and securing childcare. It also creates accountability by allowing remedies when law enforcement knowingly violates constitutional protections. **Illinois HB 1312 is a direct response to the needs raised by our community, many of which were discussed at the 2025 Raíces Public Policy Conference.**

As we continue to navigate uncertain times in which Latinos face increased discrimination by the federal government, the Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus Foundation will continue to promote and support our community and remain at the forefront of this work.

Civics & Governance: Purpose of the 2025 Raíces Conference

Morning Plenary: The State's Role & Impact on Civics & Governance

Moderator: Dr. Marisol Morales

Panelists:

- *Illinois State Senator, Celina Villanueva, 12th Senate District, ILLCF Co-Chair*
- *Illinois State Representative, Aarón Ortíz, 1st House District, ILLCF Co-Chair*
- *Illinois State Representative Dagmara Avelar, 85th House District*
- *Illinois State Representative Norma Hernández, 77th House District*

The Morning Plenary, titled The State's Role and Impact on Civics and Governance, set the tone for the Raíces Conference by grounding the day's conversations around the relationship between state government and civic life across Illinois.

ILLCF Co-Chairs, Illinois State Senator Celina Villanueva and Illinois State Representative Aarón Ortíz, opened the panel, which also featured previous ILLCF Co-Chairs, Illinois State Representatives Dagmara Avelar and Norma Hernández. The legislators explored how state government exercises its responsibilities through the protection of rights, the enforcement of laws, and the provision of essential public services. They emphasized that these functions are not neutral. State policies can either strengthen or weaken civic life, particularly in Latino communities that have historically faced barriers to participation and representation.

Moderated by Dr. Marisol Morales, Executive Director of the Carnegie Elective Classifications at the American Council on Education, the plenary examined how state-level decisions influence engagement, democratic participation, and trust in public institutions.

Framed around the Raíces 2025 Report's three core values - Equity, Justice, and Community Development - the plenary highlighted the ways civic engagement and public policy intersect. Panelists reflected on how legislative decisions shape access to civic education, influence public trust, and determine whether communities feel empowered or excluded from democratic processes. The conversation reinforced the idea that civic engagement is not limited to voting alone, but includes everyday interactions with public systems, schools, and community institutions.

"We are all equal stakeholders in this conference. The responsibility of what we take away today does not rest on any one group. It is shared by all of us." (Representative Ortíz, 2025)



The 2025 Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus Foundation Raíces Public Policy Conference was intentionally framed as a space for collective responsibility and shared vision. Illinois State Representative Aarón Ortíz set the purpose for the conference, describing it as "...a space for bold ideas, community voice, and collective vision," while also reminding attendees that, "We are all equal stakeholders in this conference. The responsibility of what we take away today does not rest on any one group. It is shared by all of us."

Illinois State Senator Celina Villanueva highlighted the importance of standing tall during turbulent times, continuing to honor heritage, and supporting one another. She emphasized, "What defines us is not what we face, but how we rise. We rise with purpose. We rise with compassion. We rise with the collective power that has shaped every chapter of our story. When new possibilities emerge, we build together. When our voices are needed, we speak with conviction. When someone reaches out for support, we respond with open hearts and steady hands. That is our legacy, and that is our strength."

The morning plenary also created space for panelists to reflect on their personal civic engagement journeys while addressing urgent policy issues confronting Latino communities in Illinois. Central to the discussion were the unjust immigration raids targeting Latino neighborhoods and workplaces, and the courage demonstrated by community members, community-based organizations, and Latina/o and allied elected officials standing against abuses of power by ICE. These realities grounded the conversation about civic awareness and agency—not simply as participation, but as the capacity to translate community knowledge into institutional change through leadership, advocacy, mentorship, and evidence-based action.

Panelists emphasized that civic development is an ongoing process requiring reflection, accountability, and sustained commitment to expanding access, voice, and dignity. Equitable and culturally relevant civic education emerged as a central theme, positioned as both a democratic imperative and an equity strategy. For Latino communities, this includes curricula that reflect lived histories, languages, labor contributions, immigration realities, and transnational identities—ensuring civic learning affirms belonging and prepares future generations for leadership.

The plenary also addressed the need to protect Latino civic participation during politically charged and hostile moments. State-sanctioned violence, intimidation, and fear-based enforcement suppress civic engagement, underscoring the state's responsibility to ensure accountability, safeguard

"...We rise with the collective power that has shaped every chapter of our story. When new possibilities emerge, we build together..." (Senator Villanueva, 2025)





civic spaces, and affirm participation as a protected right. Panelists discussed the importance of supporting Latino-majority neighborhoods facing displacement, strengthening inclusive governance structures with real authority, and the critical role of the Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus Foundation in closing gaps for undocumented and first-generation families by embedding Latino voices in decision-making processes that shape Illinois's future.

Key themes emerging from the Plenary discussion

Throughout the plenary, several themes surfaced that resonated across the broader conference discussions:

The State as a Civic Actor

The discussion underscored the role of state government as an active civic actor and arena for participation. Decisions related to education, public safety, housing, and economic policy were consistently framed as shaping whether civic engagement is accessible, inclusive, and sustainable.

Civic Engagement Beyond the Ballot

The plenary reinforced that civic participation extends beyond electoral processes to include schools, community organizations, neighborhood advocacy, and daily interactions with public institutions. Barriers in these spaces can limit meaningful participation even when formal rights exist.

Civic Education as a Foundation for Democratic Participation

Civic education emerged as foundational to long-term democratic participation, leadership development, informed engagement, and community empowerment—particularly when it is equitable, culturally relevant, and rooted in lived experience.

The morning plenary provided an essential framework for the sessions that followed. By centering the role of state government in civic life, the conversation reinforced the connection between policy decisions and lived realities in Latino communities across Illinois. The themes echoed throughout concurrent sessions, including discussions on economic contributions and community stability, legal protections, and voter engagement.

Economics of Immigration: Latino Economic Contributions

Moderator: Illinois State Senator Karina Villa, 25th Senate District

Panelists:

- *Dr. José Acosta-Córdova, Villa en L'Acosta Consultants LLC*
- *Marcos Cenicerros, Executive Director, Warehouse Workers for Justice*
- *Jennifer Aguilar, Executive Director, Little Village Chamber of Commerce*



Moderator
Sen. Karina Villa
Illinois State Senator, 25th District



Economics of Immigration: Latino Economic Contributions



What the Presentation Established

Dr. José Acosta-Córdova opened the session with a presentation in which he placed immigration and the presence of Latinos in Chicago and Illinois in a broader historical and economic context. He described a persistent cycle in federal policy in which Latino workers are recruited and incorporated into the economy when their labor is needed and then targeted for detention and deportation when political or economic conditions shift, thus keeping them in a perpetual state of precarity and instability.

Acosta-Córdova explained that this dynamic has shaped the experiences of Mexican and Latin American migrants for more than a century.¹ The Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s, the Bracero Program (1942-1964),

¹ Over the past century, for example, there are estimates that 30 million deportations of people of Latin American descent have occurred.

Operation Wetback in 1954, and the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) demonstrate how national policy has repeatedly accommodated the reliance on Latino workers while offering limited stability or protection, ultimately producing an economic sector based on incarceration and deportation. Moreover, Latino labor has been central to the stability of the national economy, the state of Illinois, and the Chicago region, even as the workers themselves have been systematically denied economic security, legal protection, and long-term stability.

*“Deportation is not new. What has changed is how profitable it has become.”
(Dr. Acosta - Córdova, 2025)*

Dr. Acosta-Córdova then connected this history to the current moment. He noted that although deportations have long been a feature of immigration policy, the modern scale of the detention industry represents a significant shift. As he stated, “deportation is not new. What has changed is how profitable it has become.” He then highlighted recent revenue figures from the two major private detention corporations to illustrate how federal enforcement has become intertwined with large-scale financial interests. CoreCivic reported \$538.2 million in revenue in the second quarter of 2025, and GEO group reported \$636.2 million in the same period. Annual projections for GEO group exceeded \$2.6 billion (**See Table 1**).

Table 1: Quarterly Total Revenue of Selected Private Detention Corporations, Q1–Q2 2025 (Millions of USD)

Company	Q1 2025 (\$-Millions)	Q2 2025 (\$-Millions)
CoreCivic	488.6	538.2
GEO Group	604.6	636.2

Data Source: CoreCivic Q1 and Q2 2025 Earnings Releases; GEO Group Q1 and Q2 2025 Earnings Releases.

Referring to the recent ICE sweeps, Acosta asserted, “This isn’t policy, it’s profit.” The result, unfortunately, is instability for Latino employees, small business owners, and consumers and concurrently, this importance of Latino residents to the economic foundation of Illinois, ICE raids also have negative impacts to the economic foundation of Illinois.

Nonetheless, Acosta-Córdova reminded us, the presence of Latinos in the Illinois and Chicago region has grown in recent decades and now comprises 18.5 percent of the state’s population and 29.6 percent of Chicago’s population (**See Table 2**). Simultaneously, Latino contributions to the state and region’s economy has been an important engine for its vitality. For example, Latino GDP contribution in Illinois exceeds \$100 billion each year and more than 15,000 Hispanic-owned businesses operate across the region (**See Table 3 and 4**).

Table 2: Hispanic or Latino Population in Chicago and Illinois, 2019–2023

Geography	Total Population	Hispanic or Latino Population	% Hispanic or Latino of Total Population
Chicago city, Illinois	2,707,648	801,852	29.6%
Illinois (State)	12,692,653	2,348,118	18.5%

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2019–2023 5-Year Estimates, Table B03002. Tabulations by Great Cities Institute. Retrieved from: *2025 Raíces Report*.

"Latinos are not a side economy. We are the engine." (Dr. Acosta - Córdova, 2025)

Table 3: Latino GDP and Personal Consumption Expenditure in Illinois, 2018

Sector	Latino Measure (\$-Billions)
Gross Domestic Product	100.1
Personal Consumption Expenditures	74.6

Data Source: 2024 Metro Latino GDP Report, www.LatinoGDP.us (CLU-CERF, Bank of America State and Metro Latino GDP Reports). Retrieved from: 2025 Raíces Report.

As part of his presentation, Dr. Acosta-Córdova provided data depicting the industries and occupations where Latinos are critical to their functioning of those industries. For example, Latino workers are concentrated in vital industries such as logistics, construction, manufacturing, food service, retail and healthcare (**See Table 5 and 6**). These contributions sustain neighborhood economies and the broader regional labor market.

Referring to the ICE sweeps, "This isn't policy, it's profit." (Dr. Acosta - Córdova, 2025)

Acosta-Córdova's key argument is that the rise of a profit-driven detention industry entrenches the very instability that has historically characterized the incorporation of Latino labor in national and regional economies. Enforcement itself generates billions, thereby making instability itself economically beneficial. This creates a system in which precarity is not simply a byproduct of immigration policy, but the essential condition that sustains an enforcement and carceral economy. Under this model, Latino workers remain essential to economic growth while simultaneously being subjected to detention, incarceration, and deportation.

Table 4: Share of Business Ownership (2021) and Population by Race/Ethnicity (2018-2022 ACS 5-year Estimates) in Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI Metro Area

Ownership	Without Employees	With Employees	Total Businesses
Hispanic	124,000	15,499	139,499
Not Hispanic	708,000	173,587	881,587
Owned equally by both groups	1,200	1,216	2,416
American Indian and Alaska Native (non-Hispanic)	3,000	441	3,441
Asian (non-Hispanic)	80,000	20,290	100,290
Black or African American (non-Hispanic)	146,000	5,541	151,541
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (non-Hispanic)	700	71	771
White (non-Hispanic)	488,000	147,353	635,353

Note: Counts include only businesses classifiable by owner demographic group. Data Sources: Annual Business Survey; Nonemployer Statistics by Demographics, 2021 (Census). Retrieved from *Fuerza Mexicana: The Past, Present & Power of Mexicans in Chicagoland*. Great Cities Institute, 2024.

Table 5: Employment by Industry and Percent Share of Industry Employment for Hispanic or Latinos in Illinois, 2019-2023

Industry Type	Total Employment	Total Hispanic or Latino Employment	% Share of Industry Employment
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting, and Mining	64,626	4,800	7.4%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation, and Accommodation and Food Services	516,123	144,602	28%
Construction	341,578	87,453	25.6%
Educational Services, and Health Care and Social Assistance	1,469,633	194,098	13.2%
Finance and Insurance, and Real Estate, and Rental and Leasing	459,849	55,851	12.1%
Information	100,232	10,342	10.3%
Manufacturing	728,689	186,859	25.6%
Other Services, Except Public Administration	285,235	55,078	19.3%
Professional, Scientific, and Management, and Administrative, and Waste Management Services	798,831	134,271	16.8%
Public administration	232,409	29,377	12.6%
Retail trade	622,076	124,078	19.9%
Transportation and Warehousing, and Utilities	437,899	81,844	18.7%
Wholesale trade	169,885	34,964	20.6%
TOTAL (All Industries)	6,227,065	1,143,617	18.4%

Data Source: American Community Survey 5-year Estimate (2019-2023). Tabulations by Great Cities Institute.

In his concluding comments, Dr. Acosta-Córdova emphasized that economic participation and civic life are closely linked. The same communities that contribute significantly to the state's prosperity are often the most affected by enforcement-related disruptions. This tension between economic dependency and civic stability framed the discussion that followed, as panelists examined how enforcement practices affect workers, businesses and community participation across Illinois.

Table 6: Employment by Occupation and Percent Share of Occupation Employment for Hispanic or Latinos in Illinois, 2019-2023

Occupation Type	Total Employment	Total Hispanic or Latino Employment	% Share of Occupation Employment
Management, business, science, and arts	2,660,678	288,723	10.9%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance	443,661	117,633	26.5%
Production, transportation, and material moving	916,861	275,332	30.0%
Sales and office occupations	1,235,237	215,164	17.4%
Service occupations	996,806	247,584	24.8%
TOTAL (All Occupations)	6,253,243	1,144,436	18.3%

Data Source: American Community Survey 5-year Estimate (2019-2023). Tabulations by Great Cities Institute.

What Panelists Highlighted

Following the presentation, Illinois State Senator Karina Villa of the 12th Senate District moderated a conversation among panelists who offered their perspectives on how immigration enforcement influences labor conditions, local economies, and daily life in immigrant communities. Their reflections illustrated how federal enforcement interacts with local economic structures in ways that reshape community behavior and civic participation.

Marcos Cenicerros, Executive Director of Warehouse Workers for Justice, emphasized the Chicago region's warehousing and logistics sector, reiterating Acosta's point that the Chicago region is one of the largest inland hubs in the country and depends extensively on Latino and immigrant labor. He described the experiences of immigrant workers in the warehousing and logistics sector noting that increased immigration enforcement activity is associated with higher worker turnover, reduced workforce stability, and added pressure on workers already facing demanding conditions. These disruptions extend beyond individual workers, affecting entire neighborhoods where warehouse employment serves as a major economic anchor.

Cenicerros described how the industry often operates through low wages, widespread use of temporary staffing agencies, and limited accountability structures, which can shift responsibility away from core employers and contribute to workforce instability. He further noted that enforcement-related fear may exacerbate worker vulnerability, particularly in workplaces reliant on temporary labor arrangements, where the risk of retaliation or replacement is heightened. Cenicerros also referenced recent federal labor protections, including deferred action tied to labor enforcement, which are intended to allow workers that are engaged in labor disputes to come forward without immediate immigration consequences and may help improve workplace safety and stability.



Cenicerros raised concern about the growing likelihood of heightened immigration enforcement and the far-reaching consequences this would have for local economies, the logistics workforce, and immigrant families. He emphasized that immigrant workers are not peripheral to the warehousing and logistics sector, but rather are essential to its functioning and to the economic stability of the communities where these facilities operate. While temporary work permits and limited forms of immigration relief can offer short-term protection for some workers and employers, Cenicerros stressed that such measures are insufficient and leave families and workplaces in a constant state of uncertainty. He argued that addressing this decades-old problem requires a stable and permanent solution, including a clear and accessible pathway to citizenship for immigrant workers who have long sustained the industry, strengthened regional supply chains, and contributed to local economies.



Jennifer Aguilar, Executive Director of the Little Village Chamber of Commerce, described the economic effects of enforcement on small businesses. She noted that businesses along 26th Street and in other Latino commercial corridors have experienced revenue declines ranging from 20-50 percent during periods of heightened enforcement. Residents avoid public spaces, reduce non-essential spending, and cancel community events, which decreases customer traffic. Aguilar explained that the slowdown is not the result of weak business performance but rather the cumulative impact of community-wide fear.

Panelists also highlighted the cultural costs of enforcement. Community celebrations, including quinceañeras and family gatherings, are often postponed or canceled when immigration enforcement becomes more visible. These celebrations support local economies through dressmaking, catering, photography, restaurants, florists, and entertainment services. Their absence weakens both cultural life and economic activity. Throughout the discussion, panelists reiterated that enforcement shapes far more than individual cases. It influences community confidence, business viability, neighborhood cohesion, and the extent to which residents feel safe participating in civic and public life.

Senator Villa summarized the remarks from panelists, noting that “our economy is built and sustained by our communities, from local entrepreneurs and employees to customers and families, making our well-being inseparable from the success of our local businesses and economy.” Further emphasizing points made by panelists, she states, “heightened enforcement creates a destabilizing ripple effect, as neighbors are unable or fearful to go to work and access services, leading to declining tax revenues, shrinking public resources, and direct harm to workers and families through lost wages and barriers to essential services.” Villa agreed that “these losses limit communities’ ability to reinvest in residents and compound existing challenges such as housing instability, job insecurity, mental health concerns and economic inequalities.” Senator Villa concludes,

To protect our neighbors and strengthen our economy, we must work in partnership with local state and federal stakeholders to mitigate the harms of discriminatory immigration enforcement, pursue long-term solutions that provide individuals with lawful documentation and secure meaningful and sustained investment in our communities.

What Community Participants Shared

Responses raised at the Raíces Public Policy Conference supported the themes raised by the panelists. Community participants described a range of ways in which enforcement influences their daily routines, economic choices, and engagement with public institutions.

Many community participants reported avoiding certain corridors, retail areas, or community gatherings because of concerns about immigration enforcement. Businesses in these areas described noticeable declines in customer visits on days when enforcement activity was rumored or confirmed. Several respondents stated that they delayed purchases, canceled events, or limited travel within their neighborhoods to avoid unnecessary risks.

Others also expressed concerns about the impact of enforcement on civic engagement. Some stated they are less willing to attend community meetings, public forums, or events involving government representatives. Others described hesitation about interacting with institutions that require identification or personal information. These concerns reduced participation in programs intended to support families and strengthen civic life.

Despite these challenges, respondents also articulated a strong interest in policy solutions that promote stability, safety, and economic opportunity. Many emphasized the importance of state-level protections, culturally informed communication, and investments in community-based organizations that residents trust.

What Emerged Across Perspectives

Across the presentation, panel discussion, and survey data, several consistent themes emerge. Together, they provide a clear picture of how immigration enforcement affects both economic conditions and civic participation in Latino communities.

- The *first theme* establishes Latino workers as disproportionately concentrated in low-wage, temporary, and subcontracted jobs that lack stability, even during economic growth. Income volatility, insecure schedules, limited healthcare, and childcare gaps force families to prioritize survival over civic engagement. It is not apathy that reduces participation, but rather structural economic barriers that limit time, resources, and capacity for sustained involvement in democratic life.
- The *second theme* highlights the extent to which enforcement disrupts economic and civic life. Both panelists and survey respondents described how fear influences consumer behavior, workplace participation, and engagement with public institutions. The economic slowdown observed in several commercial corridors aligns closely with these accounts. When customers avoid local businesses or when workers hesitate to travel to job sites, entire sectors experience instability.
- The *third theme* concerns the relationship between economic participation and civic trust. Communities that experience economic disruption often report declining engagement in civic spaces. This pattern reflects a broader challenge. When residents do not feel secure, they withdraw from the public sphere. The resulting reduction in civic participation affects community representation and reduces access to the supports that strengthen neighborhoods.
- The *final theme* is the shared understanding across stakeholders that enforcement affects community well-being in ways that extend far beyond individual incidents. The combination of historical context, economic data, and lived experience reveals a structural relationship between and the civic health of Illinois communities.

Why It Matters

The insights presented in this session have clear implications for the state's economic future and the civic participation of Latino communities. Illinois relies on the contributions of Latino workers, business owners, and families. Their labor powers key industries, and their businesses anchor commercial corridors across the state. Yet these same communities face disproportionate instability when enforcement practices intensify.

Economic instability weakens local economies and reduces community investment. Civic participation declines when residents do not feel safe engaging with public institutions or participating in community forums. These trends have long-term consequences for democratic processes, economic development, and the overall well-being of neighborhoods.

Ensuring that Latino residents can participate fully in both the economy and civic life is essential for Illinois' long-term stability. Policies that promote safety, transparency, and economic opportunity can help mitigate the effects of enforcement and support the vitality of communities across the state.

Legislative Accomplishments

Illinois has taken meaningful steps to protect the rights and stability of immigrant communities. The legislative frameworks already in place provide a strong foundation for continued progress. Insights from this session highlight the importance of strengthening implementation and aligning legislative initiatives with the needs identified by community members, small business owners, and workers.

- **Illinois TRUST Act, 5 ILCS 805/ (2017)**² limits cooperation between local law enforcement and federal immigration authorities. Ensuring consistent implementation helps build trust and encourages residents to engage with public institutions.
- **Illinois Way Forward Act, 5 ILCS 805/5, 10, 15, 25, 30 (2021)**³ reinforces the State's commitment to immigrant protections by prohibiting contracts between local facilities and federal immigration authorities. Effective monitoring is essential for maintaining community confidence.
- **Private Detention Facility Moratorium Act, 730 ILCS 141/ (2019)**⁴ bans private civil detention facilities within the state. Continued enforcement of this policy remains important given the financial scale of the national detention industry.
- **Language Equity and Access Act, 15 ILCS 56/ (2024)**⁵ requires state services to be linguistically and culturally accessible. Full implementation can reduce barriers to information and help residents understand their rights.
- **Illinois Community Reinvestment Act, 205 ILCS 735/ (2022)**⁶ supports equitable lending practices in underserved areas. Applying its tools to immigrant-majority commercial corridors can strengthen small business resilience.
- **Entrepreneurship Assistance Centers Act, 20 ILCS 605/605-503 (2022)**⁷ provides workforce and business development resources through culturally informed service centers. Aligning these centers with the needs expressed by communities during the Raíces Conference can expand access to economic opportunity.
- **Illinois Privacy Rights Act 30 ILCS 105/5.1030 (2025)**⁸ determines responsibilities of businesses that collected personal and sensitive information and the parameters to contain as private. Further protecting the rights of consumers in the everchanging digital age.
- **Illinois Workplace Extreme Temperature Safety Act HB3762 (2025)**⁹ requires establishments of excessive heat and cold standards in the workplace. Such provisions further support workers rights as their exposure to extreme temperatures increases the risk of serious injuries or death.

Together, these legislative accomplishments offer a comprehensive framework for supporting immigrant communities in Illinois. Strengthening implementation and expanding awareness of these policies can help ensure that economic participation and civic engagement remain strong across Latino communities throughout the state.

2 Public Act 100-463 <https://www.ilga.gov/Legislation/ILCS/Articles?ActID=3818&ChapterID=2&Print=True>
3 Public Act 102-0234 <https://www.ilga.gov/documents/legislation/publicacts/102/PDF/102-0234.pdf>
4 Public Act 101-20 <https://www.ilga.gov/Legislation/ILCS/Articles?ActID=3990&ChapterID=55&Print=True>
5 Public Act 103-723 <https://www.ilga.gov/Legislation/ILCS/Articles?ActID=4526&ChapterID=4&Print=True>
6 Public Act 101-657 <https://www.ilga.gov/Legislation/ILCS/Articles?ChapterID=20&ActID=4086&Print=True>
7 Public Act 102-0272 <https://www.ilga.gov/Documents/Legislation/PublicActs/102/PDF/102-0272.pdf>
8 SB0052 <https://www.ilga.gov/documents/legislation/104/SB/PDF/10400SB0052.pdf>
9 HB3762 <https://www.ilga.gov/documents/legislation/104/HB/PDF/10400HB3762.pdf>

Legal Strategies for Safeguarding Community Organizations

Moderator: Illinois State Representative Dagmara Avelar, 85th House District

Panelists:

- *Lauren Wright, Executive Director, Illinois Partners for Human Service*
- *Illinois State Representative Lilian Jiménez, 4th House District*
- *Cynthia P. Irani, Partner, Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath, LLP*



Moderator
Rep. Dagmara Avelar
Illinois State Representative, 85th District



Legal Strategies for Safeguarding Community Organizations



Lauren Wright



Rep. Lilian Jimenez



Cynthia P. Irani

What the Presentation Established

The session on Legal Strategies for Safeguarding Community Organizations opened with a presentation from Lauren Wright, Executive Director of Illinois Partners for Human Service, who provided an overview of the operational challenges facing nonprofits across the state of Illinois. Drawing on findings from the organization's report Quarter 1: Bracing for Impact, Wright described rising overhead costs, reduced federal funding, and increased administrative burden, further documenting how federal policy shifts are affecting community-based health and human service providers across Illinois.¹⁰ Drawing on survey data collected from 74 organizations statewide between January and June of 2025, Wright describes how legal uncertainty is intersecting with mounting operational strain.

¹⁰ From ["Federal Changes, Community Consequences: The State of Human Services in Illinois,"](#) by Illinois Partners for Human Services, 2025.

Among surveyed providers, 82 percent of respondents received federal funds, with federal dollars comprising an average of 35 percent of organizational operating budgets. While many organizations have not yet experienced catastrophic funding losses, 19 percent reported experiences in reductions in direct federal funding since January 2025 and others have described delayed, frozen or canceled funds that have disrupted planning and service delivery. Wright emphasized that financial pressures extend beyond funding cuts alone, with 73 percent of surveyed community-based organizations reporting rising overhead expenses, 65 percent reporting greater administrative strain, and 58 percent of organizations reporting increases in service demand for services since January 2025. Providers linked these trends to proposed cuts to SNAP and Medicaid benefits, new executive actions, and broader federal instability. Highlighting new concerns related to food insecurity, health access, and fear associated with federal enforcement, many respondents noted that fear of enforcement and confusion about eligibility rules have made clients less likely to seek services, thus simultaneously increasing the complexity and intensity of case management.



Following Wright's presentation, Attorney Cynthia P. Irani, a partner at Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP, outlined the rapidly changing legal environment surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), federal funding, contracting and organizational compliance. Irani's presentation highlighted how recent federal actions have generated widespread uncertainty for community-based organizations that depend on federal grants or contracts to sustain programs serving diverse populations. She attributed this uncertainty to a series of legal and policy developments beginning with the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in SFFA v. Harvard/UNC affirmative action decision, followed by competing interpretations from state attorney generals and evolving guidance from federal agencies. Together, these shifts have introduced new compliance mandates and increased the level of federal oversight related to DEI-based policies and practices.



Irani emphasized that these shifts are not abstract legal debates but concrete operational risks. She discussed the effects of Executive Order 14173, issued in January 2025, which encourages federal agencies to deter the use of DEI frameworks and authorizes criminal or civil investigations into alleged violations. She emphasized that this increases vulnerability for community-based organizations that receive federal funding or maintain federal contracts. DEI limitations in several states have begun to influence hiring, training, and program structures. Community-based organizations now face overlapping legal considerations under Title VI, Title VII, the Equal Protection Clause, and 42 U.S.C. 1981.

Together, the presentations emphasized that legal uncertainty, federal instability, and rising community needs have converged to create significant challenges for the nonprofit sector in Illinois. Community-based organizations are being asked to do more with fewer resources, under conditions of heightened scrutiny and uncertainty that strain leadership capacity, staff morale, and community trust.

What Panelists Highlighted

Following the presentations, Illinois State Representative Dagmara Avelar of the 85th House District facilitated a conversation among panelists who focused on practical strategies for navigating the current legal and funding environments. State Representative Avelar stressed the importance of positive relationships among legislators, policymakers, and community-based organizations. She stated, "There is a need for consistent engagement of community-based organizations, so they may work collaboratively to educate decision-makers on the real-world implications of policy while also holding elected officials accountable." Panelists reflected on how community-based organizations can protect their missions, operations, and the people they serve amid overlapping legal, financial, and political pressures. Across the discussion, panelists emphasized the importance of proactive legal review, clear internal communication and collective advocacy, noting that organizations must balance compliance obligations while resisting the chilling effects of fear and uncertainty on service delivery and community trust.

"Accessible digital resources can strengthen organizational readiness, reduce legal risk, and empower frontline organizations to better serve immigrant and working-class communities." (Rep Jiménez, 2025)



"There is a need for consistent engagement of community-based organizations, so they may work collaboratively to educate decision-makers on the real-world implications of policy while also holding elected officials accountable." (Rep. Avelar, 2025)

Illinois State Representative Lilian Jiménez of the 4th House District highlighted the importance of leveraging credible online resources to help nonprofits navigate a rapidly shifting policy environment, such as tools available through the National Immigration Law Center (NILC). State House Representative Jiménez walked attendees through how to effectively navigate NILC's website to access timely guidance on immigration policy updates, compliance tools, and community protections, emphasizing that, "accessible digital resources can strengthen organizational readiness, reduce legal risk, and empower frontline organizations to better serve immigrant and working-class communities."

"At a time when far too much resilience is being required of them, I deeply appreciated the chance to share space, exchange best practices, and learn alongside peers navigating these challenges every day." (Wright, 2025)

Lauren Wright underscored the importance of shared learning and collective resilience, describing the session as "truly energizing"

and expressing gratitude for the opportunity to engage with the “thoughtful and committed participants” who attended the Raíces conference. Wright highlighted that while community-based organizations demonstrate a level of extraordinary resilience, “far too much resilience is being required of them,” reinforcing the urgency of building stronger systems of support. She emphasized the value of exchanging best practices and learning alongside peers who are also navigating these challenges every day. Wright recognized the leadership role that our legislators play in ensuring that organizations have the resources and policy support that they need to keep serving their communities. She thanked her fellow panelist, Representative Lilian Jiménez and moderator, Representative Dagmara Avelar, for their continued advocacy for and partnership with community-based organizations.

“Resilience is built through collaboration - by forming alliances with like-minded organizations, investing in leadership development, prioritizing staff well-being, and working closely with supportive elected representatives.” (Irani, 2025)

Echoing these themes, Cynthia P. Irani emphasized that the severity of the unprecedented challenges that community-based organizations are facing today, makes collaboration and coordinated support even more critical than ever. Irani noted that in order to thrive in this rapidly changing environment, community-based organizations need “robust legal support, protections for frontline staff, sustained funding, and policies that uphold the rights of those they serve.” She stressed that the backing of government officials is essential to the advancement of these priorities and that resilience is built through intentional collaboration. Through these collective efforts, community-based organizations can not only withstand adversity, but emerge stronger, more unified, and better positioned to serve their communities.

What Community Participants Shared

Community participants echoed many of the concerns raised by presenters and panelists, describing widespread concern about the vulnerability of community-based organizations in the current legal and financial environment. Community participants emphasized the unstable federal policy, fear of enforcement, and rising administrative burdens have created uncertainty for community-based organizations, workers, and the communities they serve. Many stressed the need for strong state level protections that safeguard community-based organizations from retaliation or politically motivated investigations.

Throughout the feedback, community participants emphasized the need for stronger state-level protections for nonprofit community-based organizations, including clearer legal safeguards, protections against arbitrary or unjust investigations, and assurances that community-based organizations will not be penalized for advocacy, organizing, or the provision of essential services. At the same time, respondents underscored the importance of meaningful oversight and accountability in enforcement and regulatory actions, calling for nonpartisan structures to ensure investigations are fair, transparent, and insulated from political influence.

Community participants emphasized that meaningful oversight and accountability require the direct inclusions of community-based organizations in decision-making processes. Community-based organizations with on-the-ground experience should be included in oversight panels, advisory groups, or policy discussions so that these policies can be informed by lived realities. Without such inclusions,



enforcement decisions further risk eroding the trust between government institutions and the communities they serve.

This concern about exclusion is closely tied to a broader climate of fear of retaliation that continues to emerge repeatedly across responses, as many community-based organizations are facing concerns about funding, heightened scrutiny, or enforcement actions in response to advocacy, organizing, or public engagement efforts. This climate of fear weakens both service delivery and civic participation, particularly in communities that are already facing systemic barriers.

Despite these challenges, community participants recognize that community-based organizations are an essential civic infrastructure, as they play a critical role in civic education, voter engagement, language access and providing trusted information to communities, especially in communities where trust in government institutions is already fragile.

Finally, community participants pointed to a pressing need for clearer guidance and coordination from the State. There is confusion around enforcement authority, compliance expectations, and inter-agency roles. The increased uncertainty and administrative burden prompts calls for standardized processes, improved communication, and more coordinated implementation. These organizational challenges were echoed by broader community impacts, including fear-driven challenges in daily routines and reduced activity in Latino-owned businesses following the immigration enforcement sightings. These concerns reflected economic disruptions reminiscent of the 2020 pandemic conditions. Together, these observations reinforced findings from the Quarter 1: Bracing for Impact report and underscored the importance of continued collaboration between policymakers and community-based organizations to continue building protections rooted in the lived experiences of the communities they serve.

What Emerged Across Perspectives

Across presentations, panel discussions, and community reflections, several themes emerged that further support the need for safeguarding community-based organizations.

- The *first theme* is community-based organizations that rely heavily on federal funding are particularly sensitive to policy changes. Reductions in federal dollars, combined with increased compliance requirements, place added pressure on both leadership and frontline staff. The survey data, provided by Lauren Wright, confirms that many providers face rising costs and expanding administrative responsibilities while the demand for services continues to grow.
- The *second theme* of legal action directed toward DEI has consequences that extend beyond internal training or employment practices. They influence community perceptions, willingness to seek help, and trust in public systems. The legal environment described by Cynthia P. Irani supports this interpretation and clarifies how federal and state interpretations of DEI policies shape organizational exposure.
- The *third theme* highlights that the emotional and economic effects of federal policies are intertwined as families experience fear and uncertainty and organizations face increased turnover, higher support needs, and more complex case management. This dynamic mirrors broader disruptions described by



service providers in the Illinois Partners Quarter 1: Bracing for Impact report referenced by Wright in her presentation.

- The *final theme* is the shared understanding across the panelists and community voices that resilience requires coordinated action. Legal expertise, policy advocacy, and community centered strategies must reinforce one another. Community-based organizations cannot shield themselves through legal preparation alone. They must also work collectively to build trust, protect communities, and advocate for stable and equitable policies at all levels of government.

Community-based organizations are facing mounting pressure from shifting federal funding, expanding compliance requirements, and legal actions affecting DEI, which strain staff capacity, increase costs, influence community trust, and heighten fear and uncertainty for both families and service providers.

Why It Matters

The findings from this session demonstrate that legal risk, organizational stability, and civic participation are deeply intertwined when community-based organizations operate under the constant threat of investigation or retaliation their capacity to serve is reduced. This has direct consequences when it comes to food access, health services, worker protections, and civic engagement.

Administrative burden and legal uncertainty divert resources away from the critical work community organizations do in accordance with their mission. Furthermore, fear of enforcement discourages community members from seeking assistance and weakens the trust in institutions.

There is a need to review how eligibility, data collection, and compliance requirements that are structured for state-funded programs. Participants underscored that existing systems often rely on outdated notions of the “deserving poor” and require extensive personal data collection that can expose clients to risk. In the current enforcement climate, these practices deter individuals from seeking help and place community-based organizations in the untenable position of choosing between compliance and client safety.

Attendees identified the need for state agencies work with community-based organizations to minimize data collection to what is strictly necessary for program eligibility and grant compliance. This includes eliminating requests for unnecessary personal information. Limiting data sharing to the bare minimum required, and strengthening safeguards to ensure that sensitive client information cannot be repurposed for enforcement or investigative actions. By adopting a data-minimization and privacy-centered approach, the State of Illinois can protect individual dignity, reduce fear, and enable



community-based organizations to fulfill their missions without compromising the safety of the people they serve.

Safeguarding community-based organizations is therefore essential to maintaining the social and civic infrastructure of Illinois to move beyond crisis response toward structural legal and policy fixes. Through strong legal protections and transparent oversight, community-based organizations can continue to meet rising needs while upholding public trust. Next steps identified during this session include:

- Advance fair contracting legislation at the state level that codifies clear timelines for issuing contracts, paying invoices, and resolving Court of Claims, so organizations can plan, comply, and deliver services without financial precarity.
- Expand and clarify advance payment eligibility to ensure community-based providers have the upfront resources needed to operate lawfully and sustainably, particularly those serving high-need communities.
- Strengthen enforcement and transparency under GATA and the Prompt Payment Act, including education so organizations understand their rights and remedies when payments are delayed.
- Center equity in implementation, recognizing that organizations with the smallest budgets and those serving Communities of Color are disproportionately harmed by current contracting failures.
- Continue cross-sector collaboration among legislators, advocates, legal experts, and providers to monitor implementation, surface ongoing barriers, and ensure accountability once reforms are enacted.

Legislative Accomplishments

Illinois has taken meaningful steps to protect the community-based organizations and residents they serve. There are legislative frameworks already in place to provide a foundation for strengthening organizational resilience and safeguarding civic participation. The insights from this session highlight the importance of strengthening implementation and aligning legislative initiatives with the needs identified by community members, nonprofit organizations, and legal experts.

- **Illinois Bivens Act 740 ILCS 174/5, 740 ILCS 174/15 (2025)**¹¹ strengthens protections for individuals and organizations by creating a private right of action against unlawful civil immigration enforcement, prohibiting civil arrests in courthouses and hospitals, and expanding protections under the Illinois Whistleblower Act, 740 ILCS/174 et seq.
- **Illinois Whistleblower Act, 740 ILCS/174 (2004)**¹² expanded protections for employees reporting misconduct or legal violations by shifting to a good faith standard and strengthening protections for disclosures related to civil rights concerns.
- **Illinois Workplace Transparency Act, 820 ILCS 96/ (2020)**¹³ strengthens retaliation protections for workers participating in collective action, reporting legal violations, or supporting transparency efforts.

Together, these legislative accomplishments offer a framework for supporting community-based organizations in Illinois. Strengthening implementation and expanding awareness of these policies can help ensure that organizational stability and public participation remain strong across communities throughout the state. Building durable protections for nonprofit reinforces democratic institutions and collective capacity of Illinois residents to shape their future with confidence and security.

¹¹ Public Act 104-0440 <https://www.ilga.gov/documents/legislation/PublicActs/104/104-0440.htm>

¹² Public Act 093-0544 <https://www.ilga.gov/Legislation/publicacts/view/093-0544>

¹³ Public Act 101-0221 <https://www.ilga.gov/documents/legislation/publicacts/101/101-0221.htm>

Latino Voter Trends

Moderator: Illinois State Representative Norma Hernández, 77th House District

Panelists:

- *Juan González, Senior Fellow, UIC Great Cities Institute and Co-Host of Democracy Now!, Author of Harvest of Empire*
- *Jocelyn Bravo, Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR)*
- *Dr. Susana Rivera-Mills, Aurora University President*
- *Illinois State Senator Javier Loera Cervantes, 1st Senate District*



Moderator
Rep. Norma Hernandez
Illinois State Representative, 77th District



Latino Voter Trends and the Issues That Move Them



What the Presentation Established

To start this session, Juan González, Senior Fellow at the Great Cities Institute and co-host of Democracy Now!, explored three keys to answering the question, “What really happened among Latino voters in the 2024 election?” Specifically, he provided three sets of analyses: (1) quantifying the change in Latino voter turnout this time around, (2) determining the extent of the partisan shift among Latinos, and (3) exploring the possible reasons for both. These three aspects, González asserted, would get us closer to understanding the Latino voter and enable us to direct massive voting potential into being the difference between the directions this country will take.

González presented the following: 155,238,302 votes were cast for the presidential election. According

to exit polls, 11 percent of the votes were Hispanic/Latino voters. Going off of that percentile, González extracted that approximately 17,076,000 ballots were cast by Hispanic/Latinos (**See Table 7**). Reminding the attendees to keep this number in mind, González presented the percent growth of Latino ballots cast since 1992, demonstrating that the Latino voter percent citizens had nearly quadrupled over three decades.

Table 7: Estimated Latino Share of Votes Cast in the 2024 U.S. General Election

Total Votes Cast	Latino Share of Voters	Estimated Latino Votes
155,238,302	11%	17.1 million

Data Source: AP VoteCast 2024. Latino share reflects estimated proportion of voters. Tabulations by Great Cities Institute.

However, González noted that from the 2020 election to 2024, this tremendous growth in the number of Latino voters had virtually stopped. Since 1992, there were approximately 4.2 million Latino voters, and in 2020 we see that number jump to 16.4 million. González followed this assertion by demonstrating that in 2024, the number stayed virtually unchanged (**See Table 8**). He emphasized the significance of this stagnation by pointing to the previous years leading up to the past election, demonstrating that in each year after 1996, the number of Latino voters would climb by at least 1 million and as much as 4 million. He posed the question: Why the sudden halt in growth?

González continued his description of the abruptness of this halt in the growth of the Latino vote. He demonstrated that the general population of 18-and-older in the U.S. had increased by 4.5 million since 2020; the Latino citizens 18-and-older had gone up by 2.1 million; and the number of registered Latino voters increased by 1.4 million. Despite this tremendous growth, the total votes that were actually cast by Latinos had increased by just 114,000 (**See Table 8**). He continued and presented the statistic on the drops in ballots cast by young Latinos (ages 18-29) of both genders during the 2024 election, demonstrating that the Latina Women ballot count decreased by 19 percent (56 percent → 37 percent) since the previous election in 2020, while Latino Men saw a decrease of 12 percent (39 percent → 27 percent).¹⁴

“After three decades of phenomenal growth in the Latino vote in national elections, turnout for the 2024 presidential race stagnated. Even though 1.4 million more Latinos registered to vote last year than in 2020, total Latino turnout barely increased by about 114,000.” (González, 2025)

Looking at Illinois, González examined the state of the Latino voting population now that we understand the context on a national scale. Unfortunately, the findings for the Latino voter turnout in Illinois indicated that it’s among the lowest rates in the nation; less than 3 out of 10 Latinos voted last year (**See Table 9**).

“Less than three of ten Latinos in Illinois over age-18 voted last year, among the lowest rates of any state in the nation.” (González, 2025)

González then posed a question: Was the shift by Latino voters to Republicans truly unprecedented? He answered: “yes and no.” Historically, González contextualized, Latinos have been split in their presidential voting around 66-33 percent between Democrats and Republicans. However, in 2024, Trump had received the

¹⁴ Medina, A., & Hilton, K. (2025, April 14). New Data: Nearly Half of Youth Voted in 2024. Tufts.edu. <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/new-data-nearly-half-youth-voted-2024>

highest percentage of Latino support for a Republican ever. There are various different counts for the exact distribution of votes from the Latino voter base that demonstrate this (**See Table 10**). However, amongst the various sources it was found that Hispanic men did swing toward Trump more than Hispanic women, but the exact percentage is also in question, from 55 percent of men in the NBC poll, to 50 percent in the National Election Pool (NEP) and Pew polls, to just 43 percent in the American Electoral Voter Poll (AEVP).

Table 8: Latino Votes Cast and Turnout Rates in U.S. Presidential Elections, 1992–2024

Year	Number of Latino Votes	% of Latino Citizens (18+) Who Voted	% of All Latinos (18+) Who Voted
2024	16,573,000	50.6%	35.2%
2020	16,459,000	53.7%	38.8%
2016	12,682,000	47.6%	32.5%
2012	11,188,000	48.0%	31.8%
2008	9,745,000	49.9%	31.6%
2004	7,587,000	47.2%	28.0%
2000	5,934,000	45.1%	27.5%
1996	4,928,000	44.0%	26.7%
1992	4,238,000	51.6%	28.9%

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Voting and Registration Supplement (1992–2024). Tabulations by Great Cities Institute.

What we can take away from these data, González continued, is that (1) after three decades of phenomenal growth, Latino turnout stagnated for the first time ever in the 2024 presidential race, (2) Latino young voters registered the biggest drop in turnout of all young voters across the board, (3) Illinois was among the worst states for Latino turnout out of those with large Hispanic populations, and (4) the share of Latinos who voted for Republican candidate Trump was the largest in history, but only slightly better than for George W. Bush in 2004.

Table 9: Latino Voter Turnout in the United States and Illinois, 2024

Geography	Number of Latino Votes	% of Latino Citizens (18+) Who Voted	% of All Latinos (18+) Who Voted
United States	16,573,000	50.6%	35.2%
Illinois	486,000	41.5%	28.2%

Data Source: CPS Voting and Registration Supplement, 2024. Tabulations by Great Cities Institute.

González then decided to explore some of the issues that may have prompted Latino voters to shift and/or not vote. He found one of the major issues that influenced Latino voters was the inflation that had occurred under Biden. Citing the Pew Research Center, 85 percent of Latino voters had the economy as a priority issue, and according to NEP, 81 percent of Hispanics that had faced severe hardship in 2024 due to inflation had voted for Trump¹⁵ (**See Table 11**). Additionally, only 16 percent of Latinos favored

15 Vega Hübner, B., Instituto Cervantes at FAS - Harvard University, Instituto Cervantes at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences of Harvard University, & Potter, A. (2025). The Hispanic vote in the 2024 U.S. presidential elections [Journal-article]. Estudios Del Observatorio/Observatorio Studies, 3–4. <https://doi.org/10.15427/OR095-03/2025EN>

more U.S. military aid to Israel in a March 2024 Axios/IPSOS Telemundo poll on the war in Gaza¹⁶ (See **Table 12**). González posited that the strong support by Biden and Harris for Israel no doubt reduced the enthusiasm among young Latinos for the Democratic ticket.

Table 10: Estimated Latino Vote Choice in the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election, Selected National Polls Election

Source	Harris	Trump
Pew Hispanic Center	51.0%	48.0%
National Exit Poll (Edison)	51.0%	46.0%
NBC News Exit Poll	53.0%	45.0%
AP VoteCast	56.0%	42.0%
AEVP (Election Eve Poll)	62.0%	37.0%

Data Source: Pew Hispanic Center; National Exit Poll (Edison Research); NBC News Exit Poll; AP VoteCast; Latino Election Eve Poll (AEVP), 2024. Note: Figures reflect pollbased estimates.

“The share of Latinos nationwide who voted for Republican candidate Donald Trump was the largest in history, but only slightly better than for George W. Bush in 2004.”

(González, 2025)

Table 11: Top Issues Rated ‘Very Important’ by Latino Registered Voters in the United States, 2024

Issue	Percent of Latino Voters Saying Issue Is ‘Very Important’
Economy	85.0%
Health care	71.0%
Violent crime	62.0%
Gun policy	62.0%
Immigration	59.0%
Supreme Court appointments	58.0%

Data Source: Pew Research Center, National Survey of Latino Registered Voters, August 26–September 2, 2024.



Table 12: Latino Public Opinion on U.S. Policy Toward the Israel Hamas War, United States, 2024

Policy Position	Percent of Hispanic or Latino Adults
U.S. should push for an immediate ceasefire	40.0%
U.S. should continue supporting Israel with arms and funds	16.0%
U.S. should not be involved in the conflict	39.0%

Data Source: Axios-Ipsos Latino Poll, March 22–28, 2024, in partnership with Noticias Telemundo. Sample: 1,012 Hispanic or Latino adults nationwide. Margin of error ± 3.6 percentage points.



¹⁶ Galván, A. (2024, April 9). 40% of Latinos support ceasefire in Israel-Hamas war, poll finds. Axios. <https://www.axios.com/2024/04/09/ceasefire-israel-hamas-support-latinos>

Despite these findings, González asserted that the Democratic Party made the mistake of assuming the Hispanic/Latino voter base wouldn't sway its vote to the opposing party, and that if addressed none of the most essential needs of working-class Latino voters. This oversight coupled with the lived realities of the Latino voter base demonstrated just how real and pressing this particular issue was for the Latino/Hispanic voter base. For example, inflation has gone up in several core household expense categories facing working-class Latino families in the Chicago metropolitan area. Between 2023 and 2024, shelter costs increased by 5.5 percent, rent of primary residence rose by 5.4 percent, and food prices increased by 2.4 percent, even as gasoline prices declined by 3.6 percent. These cost increases occurred alongside continued increases in overall transportation costs, underscoring that the most unavoidable, day-to-day expenses – housing and food in particular – continued to rise (**See Table 13**).

Table 13: Year-over-Year Percent Change in the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (Annual Average), Chicago–Naperville–Elgin, IL–IN–WI area, 2015–2024

Category	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Food	0.6%	0.3%	1.6%	2.0%	3.6%	5.4%	9.6%	4.4%	2.4%
Energy (Total)	-9.4%	8.5%	5.4%	-1.2%	-8.4%	24.9%	28.1%	-11.8%	-0.6%
Gasoline (All Types)	-13.8%	12.4%	10.7%	-1.7%	-16.7%	37.8%	35.4%	-12.1%	-3.6%
Shelter	2.9%	2.2%	3.2%	2.9%	2.3%	2.6%	4.8%	6.4%	5.5%
Rent of Primary Residence	2.4%	2.7%	2.9%	3.0%	2.6%	2.5%	4.6%	7.3%	5.4%
Medical Care	3.1%	3.8%	1.3%	1.3%	4.8%	-0.6%	1.7%	0.4%	3.5%
Transportation (Total)	-3.1%	2.4%	2.5%	0.1%	-4.8%	12.9%	17.0%	0.4%	3.6%

Data Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), CPI-U annual averages for the Chicago–Naperville–Elgin area. Values shown are year-over-year percent changes computed from adjacent annual averages.

González noted that the Democratic party neglected their Latino voter base by not elevating any more Latino candidates for local, statewide, or national office and failing to devote more resources to effective mass messaging to Latinos, especially through social media.

Table 14: Share of U.S. Adults Who Use Selected Social Media Platforms, by Race and Ethnicity, 2024

Platform	Hispanic	Asian	Black	White
WhatsApp	54.0%	51.0%	31.0%	20.0%
Instagram	58.0%	57.0%	46.0%	43.0%
TikTok	49.0%	29.0%	39.0%	28.0%

Data Source: Pew Research Center, Social Media Use Among U.S. Adults, January 2024.

González expanded on his remark over the failure of the Democratic Party to effectively source and expand their messaging efforts on social media platforms to the Latino voter base and cites Pew Research Center's findings that 54 percent of Hispanic adults and 51 percent of Asian adults reported using WhatsApp.¹⁷ This compares with just 31 percent of Black adults and even smaller shares of those who are White (20 percent). Roughly six out of ten Hispanic (58 percent) and Asian (57 percent) adults report using Instagram, somewhat higher than the shares among Black (46 percent) and White (43 percent) adults. Additionally, Hispanic adults are particularly likely to use TikTok, with 49 percent saying they use it, higher than

17 Gottfried, J. (2024, January 31). Americans' Social Media Use. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2024/01/31/americans-social-media-use/>

Black adults (39 percent). Even smaller shares of Asian (29 percent) and White (28 percent) adults say the same (**See Table 14**). The Digital Democracy Institute of America tracked and documented the spread of over 3,200 false or misleading unique messages during 2024. This content, González continued, was shared across more than 1,400 public WhatsApp groups led by Latinos in the U.S., with more than 3.4 million Spanish and Portuguese-speaking app users.¹⁸

To close, González reminded attendees: “the US Latino population, now numbering 68 million, has never been homogenous. It is constantly changing in ethnic, racial, and class composition”. But how? For starters, Mexicans are still the majority ethnic group but less than in the past. South Americans, especially Colombians, Venezuelans, Brazilians, and Ecuadorians, have grown rapidly in number in recent decades in the United States and Illinois (**See Table 15**). Latino migration has become more middle class, educated, and conservative in contrast to the historic unskilled, less educated migrants from Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Central America that formed the bulk of prior migrant/refugee waves. Lastly, the decline of U.S. manufacturing and of labor unions has forced more Latinos to join the informal or underground economy, and work as individual contractors or start their own businesses, which itself increases the likelihood of being disconnected from systems of support as well as civic engagement.

What Panelists Highlighted

Following Juan González’ presentation, Jocelyn Bravo of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant Rights and Refugees declared in a powerful presentation on the topic of Latino voter trust in government:

The 2024 presidential election results left many feeling disappointed and uncertain, but above all, determined to face whatever the new year would bring. While Latino voter support did shift, it’s also important to note that overall voter turnout dropped that year when compared to 2020. This tells us that the bigger story is that overall trust in our electoral system has declined. It’s far more meaningful to inspire voters with the possibility of real change than to try to appease what we perceive as their political affiliation. Rebuilding that trust requires leaders who are bold visionaries – leaders who focus on unifying priorities like affordability while remaining committed to social issues that affirm every person’s humanity. But our work shouldn’t stop at the ballot box. True progress happens when we stay engaged year-round – showing up in our communities, building trust, and empowering everyone to participate in the political process beyond just Election Day.

We then transitioned into a panel moderated by State Representative Norma Hernández in which the panelists, Aurora University President, Dr. Susana Rivera-Mills, and Illinois State Senator, Javier Loera Cervantes were joined by both Jocelyn Bravo, and Juan González. The panelists engaged with the data that had been presented on Latino voter trends and agreed on the perceived faults of the Democratic party asserted by González. A recurring talking point was the growth of the Latino population in the U.S., with the panelists envisioning the potential political power of such a population. The panelists all shared similar optimism for the prospect of a politically activated group of Latino voters, specifically banking on the activation of the younger generation.

A question posed by the moderator asked the panelists about their experiences with having difficult conversations with both



18 DDIA. (2024, December 9). Q4 2024 Snapshot: Latinos and WhatsApp. Ddia.org; DDIA. <https://ddia.org/en/q4-2024-snapshot-latinos-and-whatsapp>

Table 15: Hispanic or Latino Population by Origin Group as a Share of the Total Hispanic or Latino Population, United States and Illinois, 2000, 2008–2012, and 2019–2023

	2000		2008–2012		2019–2023		Change from 2000 to 2019–2023	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent Change
Illinois								
Mexican	2,283,766	74.6%	3,318,123	79.8%	3,623,183	76.8%	1,339,417	58.6%
Puerto Rican	337,308	11.0%	393,687	9.5%	423,580	9.0%	86,272	25.6%
Guatemalan	39,305	1.3%	79,565	1.9%	92,840	2.0%	53,535	136.2%
Ecuadorian	26,400	0.9%	61,026	1.5%	70,207	1.5%	43,807	165.9%
Colombian	29,324	1.0%	54,632	1.3%	69,494	1.5%	40,171	137.0%
Cuban	42,621	1.4%	48,954	1.2%	64,310	1.4%	21,689	50.9%
Salvadoran	12,910	0.4%	30,441	0.7%	47,847	1.0%	34,937	270.6%
Honduran	13,123	0.4%	29,326	0.7%	44,649	0.9%	31,526	240.2%
Venezuelan	—	—	7,310	0.2%	31,623	0.7%	—	—
Peruvian	—	—	21,042	0.5%	30,542	0.6%	—	—
Dominican	—	—	13,738	0.3%	19,584	0.4%	—	—
Argentinean	—	—	13,959	0.3%	15,304	0.3%	—	—
Chilean	—	—	7,784	0.2%	12,200	0.3%	—	—
Nicaraguan	—	—	5,704	0.1%	10,694	0.2%	—	—
Panamanian	—	—	6,184	0.1%	9,499	0.2%	—	—
Costa Rican	—	—	—	—	8,187	0.2%	—	—
Bolivian	—	—	6,954	0.2%	7,299	0.2%	—	—
Uruguayan	—	—	—	—	3,514	0.1%	—	—
Paraguayan	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total Hispanic or Latino	3,062,082	100.0%	4,160,078	100.0%	4,718,847	100.0%	1,656,765	54.1%
United States								
Mexican	41,679,663	59.3%	67,006,243	64.5%	74,838,056	59.2%	33,158,393	79.6%
Puerto Rican	6,835,653	9.7%	9,738,160	9.4%	11,839,334	9.4%	5,003,682	73.2%
Salvadoran	1,386,149	2.0%	3,853,846	3.7%	5,005,337	4.0%	3,619,189	261.1%
Cuban	2,464,698	3.5%	3,847,936	3.7%	4,925,881	3.9%	2,461,184	99.9%
Dominican	1,580,678	2.2%	3,145,821	3.0%	4,672,119	3.7%	3,091,441	195.6%
Guatemalan	826,758	1.2%	2,413,393	2.3%	3,671,851	2.9%	2,845,092	344.1%
Colombian	1,012,932	1.4%	2,044,015	2.0%	2,907,611	2.3%	1,894,679	187.0%
Honduran	489,798	0.7%	1,486,571	1.4%	2,383,101	1.9%	1,893,303	386.5%
Ecuadorian	564,122	0.8%	1,330,725	1.3%	1,713,425	1.4%	1,149,303	203.7%
Peruvian	504,545	0.7%	1,178,049	1.1%	1,492,181	1.2%	987,635	195.7%
Venezuelan	169,117	0.2%	512,769	0.5%	1,410,748	1.1%	1,241,632	734.2%
Nicaraguan	428,154	0.6%	797,642	0.8%	970,144	0.8%	541,990	126.6%
Argentinean	209,169	0.3%	490,166	0.5%	624,359	0.5%	415,191	198.5%
Panamanian	194,132	0.3%	363,682	0.4%	469,113	0.4%	274,981	141.6%
Chilean	146,514	0.2%	282,484	0.3%	392,275	0.3%	245,761	167.7%
Costa Rican	152,015	0.2%	265,876	0.3%	365,685	0.3%	213,670	140.6%
Bolivian	97,722	0.1%	220,718	0.2%	279,720	0.2%	181,998	186.2%
Uruguayan	37,231	0.1%	129,355	0.1%	157,889	0.1%	120,658	324.1%
Paraguayan	—	—	44,829	0.0%	63,277	0.1%	—	—
Total Hispanic or Latino	70,310,340	100.0%	103,810,762	100.0%	126,369,208	100.0%	56,058,869	79.7%

Data Source: IPUMS USA microdata (2000; 2008–2012 pooled ACS; 2019–2023 pooled ACS). Percentages are shares of the total Latino population in each geography/period. Estimates suppressed where unweighted N<50. Percent Change reflects growth in population counts from 2000 to 2019–2023. Tabulations by Great Cities Institute.

constituents and loved ones surrounding the aforementioned issues at the forefront of Latino voters. The panelists recounted feeling a level of difficulty in the early stages of their careers when having these conversations. However, all of the panelists arrived at the same conclusion: these conversations are necessary, constructive, and must occur if there is any chance at redirecting the sway of the Latino voter base. Not only that, but that these conversations must be spearheaded by the youth of our community.

Representative Norma Hernández, reacting to the panel, expressed her sense that “this discussion on Latino voter trends was deeply important,” and that she was grateful for the informative presentation by Juan González. She noted,

Hearing the data on Latino voter turnout in the 2024 presidential election, particularly that it was among the lowest in history, was both sobering and instructive. This reality underscores just how critical sustained investment in civic education, political education, and trusted, community-based engagement truly is.

The conversation also challenged us to confront a difficult truth: many Latinos voted against their own material interests, including supporting Donald Trump. This is not about assigning blame, but about recognizing how disinformation, disengagement, and the absence of consistent outreach cause real harm and how those forces thrive when we are not present.

As a state legislator, I take this responsibility personally. Leadership cannot be limited to election seasons. It requires intentional, ongoing engagement, especially with our youth, first-time voters, and communities that have too often been excluded or taken for granted. This moment calls for deeper relationships, stronger civic pipelines, and policies that make real investments in education, organizing, and long-term community power-building.

Dr. Susana Rivera-Mills posed a question about which forms of education have the greatest impact on civic engagement and voter participation in Latino communities. She also asked whether Latino students are falling through the cracks in their educational journeys and, if so, at what points along that path the collective system is failing to meet their needs.

As Latino voters in Illinois continued to grow in number and influence, while still facing persistent challenges in registration and turnout, State Senator Javier Loera Cervantes centered Latino community priorities, emphasizing advocacy for immigrant families, equitable investments, and increased representation that reflect the needs and voices of this expanding electorate.

What Community Participants Shared

After the presentation and panel led by State Representative Norma Hernández, the attendees had a chance to engage with the panelists and respond to the presented information. Attendees expressed different themes pertaining to both motivators and barriers to voting engagement. These themes overwhelmingly centered around Economic Opportunity and Jobs as motivators, and Information and Civic Education Gaps as barriers. Other themes found in their responses identified Immigration and Family Stability, Education and Youth Opportunity, and Public Safety as motivators; while Influence of Lived Experience, and Barriers to Voting (language, accessibility, and distrust) were identified as additional barriers.

When describing Economic Opportunity and Jobs as being motivators, attendees referenced stagnant wages, the rising cost of living, and other extraneous economic conditions as factors influencing their decision to participate in elections. Unsurprisingly, this theme was often followed by immigration-related issues. These responses seemed to align with the research conducted by Pew Research in which 85 percent of Latino voters had the economy as a priority issue (see Table 11). As for Immigration and Family Stability being a motivator, attendees expressed their concerns over immigration enforcement, the safety of their families and neighbors, and policies affecting mixed-status households.

Regarding the barriers identified by the attendees, Information and Civic Education Gaps had caused feelings of uncertainty about how elections work, what would appear on the ballot, or how policies could affect them personally. This barrier being identified by our attendees furthers the urgency in González's point on the rampant spread of misinformation on the most used social media app by Latinos, WhatsApp.¹⁹

What Emerged Across Perspectives

When looking at the data collected during the live pollings, surveys, and engagement sessions, the responses surrounding Latino voter trends prompted the attendees to reflect on the ways in which they find themselves, and their broader communities, motivated to participate in elections. Here are themes found within their responses:



What issues do you believe most motivate Latino community members in Illinois to participate in elections?

- The theme in their responses, based on the results from their participation, was economic opportunity. An overwhelming majority of their responses indicated this as the most pressing issues that motivate Latino community members into participating in elections. This is further supported by the survey results from Pew Research cited by Juan González in which they found that 85 percent of all Latino voters believed the economy is the most important issue as to why they were voting in the 2024 election. Interestingly, the same study found that only 59 percent of all Latino voters believed immigration to be their most important issue – placing this reason as the fifth most important among all Latino voters; above foreign policy (50 percent) but surpassed by gun policy (62%), violent crime (62 percent), health care (71percent), and the economy (85 percent).²⁰

19 DDIA. (2024, December 9). Q4 2024 Snapshot: Latinos and WhatsApp. Ddia.org; DDIA. <https://ddia.org/en/q4-2024-snapshot-latinos-and-whatsapp>

20 Lopez, M. H., & Noe-Bustamante, L. (2024, September 24). In Tight U.S. Presidential Race, Latino Voters' Preferences Mirror 2020. Pew Research Center; Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/race-and-ethnicity/2024/09/24/in-tight-u-s-presidential-race-latinos-voters-preferences-mirror-2020/>

What is the single most crucial issue that motivates you to turn out on Election Day?

- The most recurring theme among the myriad of reasons submitted was immigration. A close second to this theme was education. Both immigration and education being the most prevalent themes goes against what has been reported by both the Pew Research Center, and UnidosUS. According to a survey on the 2024 election season from UnidosUS, it was found that the four most pressing issues for the 3,750 Latino voters surveyed were focused on the economy: Cost of living/inflation, jobs and the economy, housing costs and affordability, and health care costs.²¹ These differences are potentially reflected by the perspective of those who attend Raíce's conferences or may reflect a fuller engagement in the state's economy. It may also be a reflection of the immediate threat of recent ICE raids. Further thought/study might reveal why these differences may exist.

How can leaders build on the strengths of these motivators, and inspire further Latino civic and political engagement?

- Lastly, the most prevalent theme found in their responses was fearless leadership. Specifically, the attendees indicated in their responses that feeling supported by their leaders is something that they believe impacts their political engagement, and their leaders should re-center their efforts to bolster this relationship. According to their responses, this could look like having their officials proactively respond to ongoing ICE raids, having their officials look like them, and overall improve their messaging so that they highlight to their constituents their successes and uplift their communities. To them, a fearless leader is someone who responds to intimidation tactics without losing ground; someone who keeps their promises; someone who strategizes their policies around the Latino community.

Why It Matters

The analysis of the 2024 Latino voter trends by Juan González revealed not merely a shifting electoral snapshot, but a critical inflection point that demands a reassessment of political and civic engagement strategies. The stagnation of the Latino voter turnout signals a dangerous disconnect between major political institutions and the largest minority voting bloc in the nation. The implications are clear: the assumption of across-the-board support from Latino voters by the Democratic Party is obsolete. The consequence of this inaction is a continued erosion of democratic participation and the loss of a decisive voice that has the potential to shape the nation's future.

For meaningful change, González's presentation, and the panel discussion that followed, pointed to three concrete avenues for action. **First**, engagement must move into year-round relationship-building, especially on the digital platforms where Latinos are disproportionately active. The documented spread of misinformation on WhatsApp and the high use of Instagram and TikTok by Latino voters necessitate sophisticated, culturally competent, and persistent messaging in these spaces to counter falsehoods and rebuild trust. **Second**, political parties and community organizations must prioritize the economic concerns that data shows are paramount to Latino voters. **Finally**, a dedicated investment in activating young Latino voters is imperative. Their drop in turnout is a warning siren; recapturing their engagement demands addressing their specific



²¹ Vergara, J., & UnidosUS. (2024, December 18). Understanding Hispanic Voters' Immigration Priorities in the 2024 Election. UnidosUS. <https://unidosus.org/blog/2024/12/18/understanding-hispanic-voters-immigration-priorities-in-the-2024-election/>

concerns, such as foreign policy and educational opportunity, and empowering them as leaders in political conversations.

Ultimately, the conversation coupled with González's data converged into a single, powerful assertion: the era of taking the Latino vote for granted is over. The community's diversity in origin, class, and political ideology defies their simple categorization of the Latino vote. As the panelists emphasized, progress hinges on difficult, honest conversations spearheaded within the community itself, particularly by its youth. Building political power to work alongside the growing population size will depend on transforming the current disillusionment into sustained civic energy. This means moving from political appeasement to inspiration, ensuring that Latino voters are not just targeted as a demographic, but respected as a dynamic and essential force in determining the direction of the country.

Legislative Accomplishments

Illinois has a foundation of equity-focused legislation that can be harnessed to address the critical gaps in Latino voter engagement and political representation addressed in this session. The insights highlight the urgent need to leverage and expand these legislative frameworks to build trust, remove participation barriers, and ensure the state's growing Latino community can fully exercise its political power.

- **Election Code 10 ILCS 5/19-2.3 (2020)**²² is a transformative amendment that expanded voting access for eligible individuals who are incarcerated in county jails. Additionally, detainees that are being released during election season are provided with voter registration applications and information about their voting rights. Notably, this act led to the establishment of a temporary polling place in Cook County Jail.²³
- **The Illinois Voting Rights Act of 2025**²⁴, would amend the Election **Code 10 ILCS 5/19-2.3 (2020)** to expand a language access requirement for voters with limited English proficiency to be able to cast their ballots.²⁵
- **The Uniform Faithful Presidential Electors Act, 10 ILCS 22/ (2024)**²⁶ although not centered around the general voter base, holds electors accountable and enforces their signature to a pledge for the presidential and vice-presidential candidates of the respective party they were nominated for. This bill includes a section in which a Faithless Elector, someone who voted for another candidate outside of whom they pledged, is immediately ousted from their position and replaced by an alternate elector.²⁷

Together, these legislative accomplishments offer a framework for transforming insight into action. Strengthening the implementation and community awareness of these policies can directly address the disillusionment and disconnection documented in the 2024 election. Building durable systems for genuine political inclusion and representation isn't just an electoral strategy, but how Illinois reinforces its democratic institutions and ensures all residents can shape their future with confidence and civic power.

22 Public Act 101-0442 <https://www.ilga.gov/Legislation/publicacts/view/101-0442>

23 SB 2090: Voting in Jails & Voting Rights Resource Provided Upon Release from Prison or Jail. (2019, March 22). ACLU of Illinois. <https://www.aclu-il.org/en/legislation/sb-2090-voting-jails-voting-rights-resource-provided-upon-release-prison-or-jail>

24 Illinois HB3047 <https://www.ilga.gov/Legislation/BillStatus/FullText?GAID=18&DocNum=3047&DocTypeID=HB&LegId=0&SessionID=114>

25 Illinois Voting Rights Act — Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights. (n.d.). Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights. <https://www.clccrul.org/illinois-vra>

26 Public Act 103-600 <https://www.ilga.gov/Legislation/ILCS/Articles?ActID=4517&ChapterID=3&Print=True>

27 Illinois SB0314 | 2023-2024 | 103rd General Assembly. (2023). LegiScan. <https://legiscan.com/IL/text/SB0314/id/2677803/Illinois-2023-SB0314-Introduced.html>

Consciousness and Civic Mobilization

Literature on Illinois Civic Education Legislation

The Raíces research team compiled a comprehensive annotated summary of existing literature, evaluations and policy studies related to civic education mandates, implementation, and outcomes. The dataset, presented in **Appendix C: Existing Literature on Civic Education Legislation**, brings together research spanning multiple states and institutional context, with a focus on legislation, implementation structures, and equity outcomes.

The literature review includes evaluations of state-level civic education laws such as Illinois' high school civics mandate (PA 99-0434) and middle school civics requirements (PA 101-0254), along with related analyses of instructional practices and implementation supports. Researchers and institutions represented in the data include The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning Engagement (CIRCLE), CivXNow, Northern Illinois University, and collaborative policy briefs synthesizing multi-year policy outcomes.

Key findings from the literature highlight that legislation alone is not sufficient to ensure high quality civic education. Effective implementations depend on the supporting structures such as professional development for teachers, regional training networks, aligned standards, instructional resources, and partnerships across education agencies and community organizations. For example, multi-year evaluations in Illinois' civic education mandate found that structured discussions, service learning, simulations of democratic processes, and teacher mentorship networks significantly increase teacher confidence and student engagement in civic learning activities. However, gaps persist in access to diverse instructional strategies, particularly in low-income, rural, racially monitored school districts.

The dataset also includes studies that examine classroom approaches and community-engaged models of civic learning, showing that when civic education connects students to real-world issues and community partnerships, students demonstrate higher levels of civic knowledge, skills and agency. These findings mirror broader research on civic engagement that emphasizes the importance of active learning opportunities, community service integration and participatory practices as pathways to strengthening democratic participation over time.

By compiling this evidence base, the Raíces 2026 Report situated community priorities within a broader policy and research context. Policymakers can refer to the full annotated summaries in the appendix to understand where civic education policies have succeeded, where gaps remain, and how implementation structures influence long-term civic outcomes. This resource reinforces the argument that strengthening civic education, through both legislation and sustained implementation support, is essential for fostering informed, engaged and empowered communities across Illinois.

Civic Education and Civic Mobilization: Cross-State Insights

A review of civic education policies and civic engagement initiatives across California, Massachusetts, New York, Florida, Texas, and Arizona reveals several consistent patterns relevant to strengthening civic



consciousness and civic mobilization, particularly within communities experiencing economic and social instability. **Appendix D: Civics Education across Multiple States** provides an extensive outline for further research.

First, civic education is most effective when it is structured as a developmental pathway rather than a single course requirement. All six states reviewed introduce civic content in middle school and require some form of civics or government instruction in high school. States that emphasize continuity across grade levels, including middle school exposure, high school coursework, and optional or required capstone experiences, create more durable foundations for civic learning. Where civics is treated as a one-time requirement, opportunities for skill-building, identity formation, and sustained engagement are more limited.

Second, applied and student-led civic learning strengthens civic identity and participation. Massachusetts' required student-led civics projects, New York's civic point system linked to the Seal of Civic Readiness, and Arizona's Civic Ambassador initiatives emphasize inquiry, local problem-solving, and real-world participation. These approaches extend civic education beyond knowledge acquisition and toward agency, confidence, and practice. Across states, applied learning models are consistently associated with higher levels of engagement and a clearer sense of civic role among students.

Third, access to meaningful civic opportunities is shaped by district-level inequities in every state reviewed. Wealthier districts consistently offer more robust civic programming, including debate teams, mock government, service-learning projects, and leadership opportunities. Under-resourced districts report less instructional time for civics, fewer educators trained in discussion-based or inquiry-driven instruction, and limited opportunities for applied learning. When civic engagement depends heavily on extracurricular participation, these disparities widen, particularly for low-income students who face time, transportation, or caregiving constraints outside the school day.

Fourth, statewide civic initiatives can mitigate local disparities, but only when paired with sustained support and oversight. Programs such as California's Power of Democracy initiative, New York City's Civics for All, Florida's Civics Literacy Excellence Initiative, and Arizona's Civics Matters demonstrate how statewide coordination can expand access and signal the importance of civic learning. However, cross-state evidence shows that without consistent funding, professional development, and implementation guidance, these initiatives vary widely in reach and effectiveness.

Fifth, recognition-based incentives elevate civic learning but do not ensure equitable participation. Civic seals and distinctions help legitimize civic education and reward engagement, yet they are typically optional and more accessible to students in well-resourced schools. These incentives are most effective when paired with embedded instructional supports that make participation feasible for all students, rather than reinforcing existing inequalities through selective attainment.

Finally, civic education is most likely to translate into voter engagement when learning is directly connected to participation. States that integrate voter registration, youth poll-worker programs, civic action projects, and partnerships with community organizations create clearer pathways from classroom learning to civic behavior. Where these connections are absent, civic education is more likely to remain abstract, particularly for students whose communities face barriers rooted in economic precarity, fear, or institutional distrust.

Taken together, the cross-state evidence indicates that building civic consciousness and mobilization requires more than formal coursework. Effective civic education is continuous, applied, and equitably resourced, embedded within the school day, supported by trained educators, and connected to real opportunities for participation. These findings reinforce a core theme of the Raíces 2026 Report: civic engagement cannot be separated from the broader conditions of daily life. Where instability shapes family, work, and community experience, participation depends on intentional design and institutional support that translate civic learning into action.

Connecting the Threads: Perpetual Instability, Economic Life, and Civic Power

Across the 2025 Raíces Public Policy Conference, a consistent reality emerged: many Latinos in the United States live in a perpetual state of instability. This condition is not incidental, nor is it the result of individual circumstance alone. It is produced by the intersection of labor precarity, immigration enforcement, economic insecurity, and uneven access to public protections. Together, these forces shape daily life in ways that directly affect economic participation, civic engagement, and political power.

Labor precarity is a central source of this instability. Latino workers are disproportionately concentrated in industries that rely on low wages, irregular schedules, subcontracting, and temporary staffing arrangements. Even during periods of economic growth, these job structures limit predictability and security. Households may remain employed while still facing constant risk tied to income volatility, childcare gaps, and healthcare access. Under these conditions, civic participation competes with immediate survival needs. Engagement in school governance, neighborhood organizations, or public forums often becomes difficult to sustain, not because of disengagement, but because stability is never assured.



Immigration enforcement compounds this instability and extends it across entire families and communities. Enforcement actions affect not only undocumented individuals, but also U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, DACA recipients, and mixed-status households. The conference documented how heightened enforcement reshapes daily behavior. Families limit movement, avoid public spaces, and hesitate to interact with institutions that require documentation or personal information. In this environment, withdrawal from civic spaces is a rational response to risk, not an expression of political apathy.

Economic insecurity and enforcement fear reinforce one another, producing broader disruptions to community life. As highlighted in the Economics of Immigration session, Latino workers and businesses sustain key sectors of the Illinois economy and anchor neighborhood commercial corridors. Yet enforcement

escalation, or even the perception of it, can quickly slow local economies. Businesses experience reduced customer traffic, workers avoid job sites, and cultural and family events are postponed. These disruptions intensify household stress and further narrow opportunities for civic participation, creating a feedback loop in which instability weakens both economic activity and community voice.

This persistent instability is reflected in patterns of civic and voter participation. The Latino voter trends session demonstrated that stagnation in turnout is not simply an electoral anomaly. It reflects structural conditions that make consistent engagement difficult. While Latino voter registration has continued to grow, participation has not kept pace. Families managing wage volatility, caregiving responsibilities, misinformation, and enforcement-related fear often face barriers that extend beyond motivation or awareness. Elections operate on fixed timelines, but instability does not. The result is uneven participation and declining trust in political institutions, particularly among younger voters.



Community-based organizations play a critical role in buffering this instability, yet they are increasingly funded by public grants/contracts that drive them to become more bureaucratic as they screen who can even walk through the door. As emphasized in the legal strategies session, nonprofits and community organizations are facing rising service demand alongside increased legal risk, administrative burden, and funding uncertainty. These organizations function as essential civic infrastructure. They provide trusted information, legal support, leadership development, and pathways into civic life. When their capacity is weakened, the effects extend far beyond service delivery, undermining the civic ecosystem that supports participation and representation.

Taken together, the conference findings point to a central conclusion: perpetual instability is itself a barrier to civic power. Illinois depends on Latino workers, families, businesses, and organizations for its economic vitality and democratic health. Yet when daily life is defined by volatility and fear, participation in civic and political life becomes fragile. State-level protections, strong labor standards, enforcement safeguards, and support for community institutions are therefore not only civil rights measures. They are foundational investments in civic stability. **Reducing instability expands the space for participation, strengthens public trust, and enables Latino communities to engage fully in shaping the future of Illinois.**

Conclusion

The Raíces 2026 Report serves both as documentation and direction. It reflects the realities communities faced during an extraordinary period and validated lived experiences through grounded data, and shared priorities. The findings point to clear needs: economic development paired with worker protections; civic education that is adequately resourced and equitably implemented; safeguards for community-based organizations as essential civic infrastructure; and voter engagement strategies that build trust, representation, and long-term participation.

The 2025 Raíces Public Policy Conference and the analysis in this report capture a defining moment for Illinois. They document how federal immigration enforcement, economic instability, and uneven access to civic institutions shape daily life for Latino communities. At the same time they demonstrate how these communities continue to organize, participate, and lead, even under conditions of uncertainty and fear.

Across this report, the evidence is clear: **Latinos are not simply participants in the economy, they are fundamental to its operation.** Latino workers sustain and grow critical industries (both blue and white-collar), including logistics, construction, manufacturing, healthcare and food service, and higher education. Latino families contribute to labor, consumption and long-term investment in neighborhoods across Illinois. These contributions are not speculative or theoretical; they are established, measurable and indispensable.

Recognizing this reality is central to meeting the moment, when Latino workers, families and institutions are protected and supported, Illinois is stronger economically, civically and democratically. The future of the state depends on policies that reflect this understanding on leadership prepared to act with responsibility and purpose.



Appendix A: Methodology

The analysis in this report draws on multiple federal datasets to examine demographic, economic, and political trends affecting Latino communities. Population, employment, industry, income, and demographic characteristics are derived from the American Community Survey (ACS), including the 2019–2023 ACS 5-year estimates, 2008–2012 ACS 5-year public use microdata, and 2000 Census / ACS-compatible public use microdata, which are used to create custom tabulations that allow for consistent comparisons over time; consistent with Census Bureau guidance, ACS data are cited using the full 5-year period, as estimates represent conditions over a span of years rather than a single point in time. Employment patterns are further analyzed using the Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) Origin–Destination Employment Statistics (LODES) for 2009 and 2022, which measure job counts and jobs held by Hispanic or Latino workers by Chicago community area and reflect job location rather than worker residence. Cost-of-living pressures are assessed using the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U) from the Bureau of Labor Statistics for the Chicago–Naperville–Elgin metropolitan area, focusing on year-over-year changes between November 2024 and November 2025. Latino voter turnout, vote choice, and shifts between the 2020 and 2024 elections are analyzed using national exit polls and voter data from sources including NEP, NBC, Pew, and AP VoteCast, with additional survey and polling data from the Pew Research Center, Axios/Ipsos Telemundo, and UnidosUS used to contextualize voter priorities, policy preferences, and social media usage patterns among Latino voters.



Appendix B: Political Climate in Illinois on September 2025

The analysis in this report draws on multiple federal datasets to examine demographic, economic, and social conditions. On September 18, 2025, the Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus Foundation (ILLCF) convened its annual Raíces Public Policy Conference. It was no ordinary time, however, in Chicago. On September 8, The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), announced “Operation Midway Blitz” with the stated goal to “... target the criminal illegal aliens who flocked to Chicago and Illinois because they knew Governor Pritzker and his sanctuary policies would protect them and allow them to roam free on American streets.”²⁸ The timing was no coincidence. September is Hispanic Heritage Month, a time when Latino excellence is celebrated and remembered throughout the nation. Instead of planning celebratory events, our community was faced with developing measures to protect ourselves from the overreach and violation of civil rights that were about to occur as a result of DHS actions.

The September 8th DHS announcement was followed by the swarming of hundreds of ICE and other Department of Homeland Security agents conducting raids and arrests in Chicago’s Latino neighborhoods and suburbs. Emboldened by the September 8, 2025 Supreme Court decision allowing indiscriminate stops,²⁹ enforcement actions went far beyond targeted arrests, but included traffic stops and late night invasions and typically did not include judicial warrants. Latinos appearing for their immigration court cases with no priors were being detained with no warrants or apparent reason other than being Latino. These were unprecedented actions as the rule of law eroded. These agents, often in masks and without identification, asserted their presence with visible high powered guns and rifles, while also attacking residents who protested the abductions with tear gas, smoke bombs, and other shows of force.

Beginning in mid- to late-September 2025, federal agencies expanded Operation Midway Blitz to workers and workplaces, moving beyond home arrests and traffic stops to job sites and worker gathering places. The stated federal rationale was to identify “unauthorized employment,” but the pattern of sites and tactics indicated a sweeping approach that disrupted day-to-day economic life in immigrant neighborhoods. Tactics commonly reported included:

- Pre-dawn or early-morning deployments timed to worker arrival
- Agents in tactical gear positioning around entrances/exits
- Questioning and document checks outside, rather than inside, businesses to avoid formal worksite warrant requirements
- Vehicle stops immediately after workers left job sites
- Rapid detentions followed by transfers to out-of-state facilities

Civil rights attorneys noted that many arrests occurred without clear, individualized warrants, raising due process concerns and questions about compliance with long-standing consent decrees governing federal practices in the region.

28 Department of Homeland Security Press Release, “[ICE Launches Operation Midway Blitz in Honor of Katie Abraham to Target Criminal Illegal Aliens Terrorizing Americans in Sanctuary Illinois](#),” Release date, September 8, 2025

29 Groppe, Maureen and Michael Loria, “[Supreme Court lifts restrictions on immigration stops in LA](#),” USA Today. September 8, 2025.

These raids sparked downtown protests and community resistance, which grew as the raids continued. Neighborhoods, workplaces, and the holding facility run by Core-Civic in Broadview, were all sites of push back. Political leaders, including Governor J.B. Pritzker, U.S. Congressmen, Mayor Brandon Johnson, select city alderman and our Latino legislators, and civil rights advocates not only spoke out against the raids, but also invoked, to the extent they could, assertions of their legal and legislative authority over this federal overreach.

The resistance that came from Chicagoans, particularly, within Latino communities, was particularly noteworthy. Massive rallies, whistle networks, mapping projects, and grassroots legal support emerged as sustained responses to federal enforcement. Chicago neighborhoods, particularly Latino and immigrant communities, organized efforts like “walking school buses,” legal support networks, and protests in response to enforcement actions. Restaurants, community organizations, and neighbors hosted evenings to create whistle kits. Others volunteered to shop for their neighbors and take their children to school. Rapid Response Teams were on the ground assessing the presence of ICE in real time, and others protested at the Bridgeview Detention Center, where they were tear gassed, shoved, and mocked by ICE agents.



As our neighbors, family, and friends were disappearing for being Latino, many of whom had no warrants for their arrest, our community continued to fight back by sharing and training our community with “Know Your Rights.” Though not always successful, it became one of the tools that served as a catalyst for future initiatives to further protect our community. With the uncertainty and turmoil our community was facing, the 2025 Raíces Public Policy Conference became more important than ever. Though we put in place the same safety and alert measures, such as posting the conference as a private event and hiring additional security to remain alert to ICE presence, we were prepared for decreased participation. However, the Conference quickly reached capacity, as our community understood the importance of being present and continuing our work to collectively discuss how to further protect ourselves from ongoing attacks on our community. The success of the 2025 Raíces Public Policy Conference came from having a diverse body of participants that included policy makers, students, and representatives from community organizations, businesses, government agencies, and public institutions of higher education, other community stakeholders, many of whom were personally affected by coming from mixed status households or being DACA recipients.

Appendix C: Existing Literature on Illinois Civic Education

Law/Mandate	Study Title & Link	Authors / Institution	Year	Study Type	Longitudinal	Summary	Highlights
PA 99-0434 (HS Civics)	Building for Better Democracy: Final Report on the Illinois Civics Is Back Civic Education Initiative	Hayat & Kawashima-Ginsberg / CIRCLE	2020	3-year evaluation	Yes	Multi-year statewide evaluation of HS civics law implementation, teacher professional development, and instructional practices	<p>Major Points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluates the three-year implementation of the 2015 high school civics mandate. Examines the role of professional development, civic mentorship, and alignment with the Illinois Social Science Standards in supporting implementation. Assesses teacher preparedness, instructional practice, and district-level implementation supports. <p>Key Findings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant growth in use of research-based civics practices, especially: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structured discussions Service learning Simulations of democratic processes Teacher confidence increased over the three years due to statewide professional development. Mentor model highly effective: schools with trained civic mentors showed measurably higher implementation. Equity gaps persisted: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low-income and rural schools used simulations and service-learning less frequently. The statewide coalition (ISBE, ICMC, McCormick Foundation) was essential in scaling implementation.
PA 99-0434 (HS Civics)	What States Can Learn from How Illinois Implemented its 2015 Civic Education Law	CivXNow / McCormick Foundation	2021	Policy + Evaluation	Partial	Uses early & multi-year data from the Civics Teacher Survey and implementation indicators	<p>Major Points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Synthesizes multi-year Illinois implementation data for national policymakers. Highlights Illinois' public-private partnership model. Examines the supportive infrastructure built around the law. <p>Key Findings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Illinois' success is attributed to its ecosystem, not only the mandate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statewide teacher training networks Regional professional development Resource hubs Civic mentor programs Early evaluations showed strong educator buy-in, unusual for a curriculum mandate. The law improved classroom climate for engagement with controversial issues. Identifies Illinois as a national model for sustaining civics policy beyond initial legislation.
PA 99-0434 (MS Civics)	Citizenship Starts Here: A Community Engaged Approach to Civic Education	Northern (Illinois State University)	2023	Graduate Thesis	No - cross sectional	Uses CIRCLE Illinois data to study civic learning and school-community engagement	<p>Major Points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mixed-methods qualitative and quantitative study grounded in the context of Illinois civic education reforms under PA 99-0434. Explores the relationships between civic instruction, community engagement in the classroom, student civic identity, and school-community partnerships. <p>Key Findings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students exposed to classroom contexts that included community engagement and personal efficacy opportunities reported stronger connections to local civic issues. Community engagement in the classroom was positively associated with measures of civic engagement, even when purely instructional variables did not predict engagement outcomes. Instructional variables alone (e.g., specific classroom practices) did not significantly predict civic engagement in regression models when community engagement was considered. Study highlights barriers to quality implementation, including limited time and challenges aligning community engagement with standard classroom practice. Teachers reported that mandates helped legitimize time spent on civic engagement, though practical constraints remained."

Continued - Appendix C: Existing Literature on Illinois Civic Education

Law/Mandate	Study Title & Link	Authors / Institution	Year	Study Type	Longitudinal	Summary	Highlights
PA 101-0254 (MS Civics)	An Evaluation of Illinois Middle School Civics Implementation Progress	Kawashima-Ginsberg & Siegel-Stechler / CIRCLE	2023	2-year evaluation summary	Yes	Synthesizes early implementation results of the middle school civics mandate	<p>Major Points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Provides an early implementation evaluation of Illinois' middle school civics requirement (PA 101-0254) across grades 6-8. •Examines teacher capacity, instructional practices, and equity in access to high-quality civic learning. •Uses a mixed-methods, multi-year evaluation drawing on teacher, administrator, and student surveys, as well as interviews. •Assesses the quality of civic learning experiences associated with the law, not just course availability. <p>Key Findings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Most districts demonstrated early compliance by offering a civics course in at least one middle school grade. •Students who reported exposure to civics instruction also reported higher civic knowledge, increased interest in community issues, and greater confidence discussing societal topics. •Significant equity gaps emerged early: Black, Latino, and rural students were less likely to experience simulations and structured issue discussions. •Simulations were the instructional practice most strongly associated with higher levels of student civic agency. •Teacher comfort with discussing political and controversial issues was a key factor influencing implementation quality. •Schools with strong administrative leadership were more likely to implement all four required instructional components: government institutions, issue discussions, service learning, and simulations. •Pandemic-related disruptions slowed or constrained implementation in some districts.
Both (HS + MS)	Preparing Students for Informed, Active Citizenship: Lessons from Illinois	NASBE	2022	Policy Brief	No - synthesis	Synthesizes findings from multi-year evaluations across both mandates	<p>Major Points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Examines Illinois as a state-level model for civics policy and systemic implementation. •Describes how the high school civics requirement (2015) and subsequent middle school requirement (2020) were implemented through a coordinated network infrastructure that includes professional learning and communities of practice. <p>Key Findings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Illinois demonstrates that policy mandates paired with deliberate implementation supports can result in broad and consistent adoption of high-quality civics learning. •Professional learning networks, mentoring programs, and statewide supports (e.g., Illinois Civics Hub and Illinois Democracy Schools) were central to building capacity and sustaining implementation. •The article highlights increased implementation interest among school leaders and educators following the mandate, indicating momentum and buy-in as an early outcome. •The Illinois model exemplifies how external collaborations among state agencies, nonprofits, and educators can support implementation infrastructure that other states might adapt.

Appendix D: Civics Education Across Multiple States

California

- **Middle School Civics Education:** California integrates civics into its 8th-grade U.S. history curriculum under the History–Social Science standards. Students learn about democracy’s foundations (e.g. Declaration of Independence, Constitution principles) as part of social studies.
- **High School Civics Education:** California high schools require a semester of American government (“Principles of American Democracy”) and a semester of economics. Students may also pursue the State Seal of Civic Engagement by meeting criteria for civic knowledge and participation, a distinction adopted in 2020.
- **District-Level Variation:** Civic learning varies widely by district wealth. Studies show wealthier California schools offer more extracurricular civic activities (e.g. student newspapers, councils) than under-resourced schools, leaving disadvantaged students with fewer built-in civic opportunities. Lower-income students also have less time for after-school activities, so experts urge integrating civics into the regular school day for equity.
- **Civic Engagement Initiatives:** California’s Department of Education sponsors several programs: the Judges in the Classroom series brings judges into K–12 classes (~300 visits in 2023–24); a statewide Civics Learning Award honors schools for civic projects (300+ schools awarded since 2014); and the Power of Democracy Civic Learning Initiative promotes civic action. These run alongside local efforts (e.g. student mock elections, service projects) to connect learning with real-world participation.

Sources

- California History–Social Science Standards (K–12) California Department of Education, History–Social Science Framework <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/hs/cf/>
- State Seal of Civic Engagement (official overview) <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/pl/hssstateaseal.asp> California Department of Education
- State Seal of Civic Engagement — FAQ (official CDE FAQ page) <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/pl/sscefaq.asp> California Department of Education
- SSCE Implementation Guidance (how it works locally) <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/pl/ssceguidance.asp> California Department of Education
- Civics Education Initiative & Power of Democracy (California K–12 civic learning effort) <https://www.cde.ca.gov/eo/in/civicedinitiative.asp> California Department of Education
- History–Social Science Framework, civics content (Standards) <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/hs/cf/documents/hssappendix.pdf> California Department

Massachusetts

- **Middle School Civics Education:** Massachusetts requires every 8th grader to complete a student-led civics project as part of social studies. To support this, educators use rich curricula like Civic Engagement in Our Democracy – a yearlong, open-access 8th-grade civics program aligned with the state framework. These projects train students in inquiry and local action.
- **High School Civics Education:** Massachusetts also mandates a similar student-led civics project in high school. In addition, students take U.S. history and government courses (often a half-year in 11th grade) as graduation requirements. Civic education is grounded in the state’s 2018 History/Social Studies framework, which emphasizes inquiry, applied learning, and civic identity.
- **District-Level Variation:** Disparities exist by district resources. A CIRCLE/Tufts study found teachers in high-poverty districts reported less time for social studies and civic teaching; districts with higher per-pupil spending showed stronger civic instruction competency. Richer districts generally offer

more support (e.g. project resources, dedicated civics teachers) than low-income areas, so equitable funding and professional development are ongoing needs.

- **Civic Engagement Initiatives:** The state’s Civics Project Showcases (in partnership with Generation Citizen and the Dept. of Education) celebrate student projects each spring. In 2025, four regional showcases drew students from 117 schools to present action projects on issues from the environment to mental health. Other initiatives include the Massachusetts Civic Learning Coalition and League of Women Voters events, which provide volunteer advisors and local competitions to deepen youth civic involvement.

Sources

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- Student-Led Civics Projects Quick Reference Guide (DESE PDF)
<https://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/hss/civics-qrg.pdf> Massachusetts DESE
- Massachusetts Civics Project Showcases (DESE)
<https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/hss/civics/showcase.html> Massachusetts DESE

New York

- **Middle School Civics Education:** New York embeds civic content in its K–8 social studies standards; for example, by Grade 8 students learn about government structure alongside history. In New York City, the DOE’s “Civics for All” initiative provides K–12 resources and teacher training to bring civics alive in all schools. Students practice democratic skills (debate, project work) even in middle school, often through social studies projects and activities.
- **High School Civics Education:** State law allows high schoolers to earn a New York State Seal of Civic Readiness on their diploma by completing a combination of social studies credits and civic projects or exams. The Seal requires six “civic points” (at least two from knowledge and two from participation); options include advanced social studies courses, a civics research or service project, or a passing Regents exam. Notably, a Middle School Capstone project (grades 7–8) can even count toward points for the Seal. All schools must teach U.S. history and government content, typically via state Regents courses. But the seal is optional, not a graduation requirement.
- **District-Level Variation:** There are sharp urban–rural differences. New York City schools, for instance, have citywide programs (like Civics for All) and extracurricular councils that many upstate districts lack. Wealth and local priorities affect offerings: some schools run robust mock government and debate teams, while others have minimal civic extracurriculars. The NYC initiative seeks to level the field by providing toolkits and funding for every school to support civic skills.
- **Civic Engagement Initiatives:** New York runs several student-engagement programs. For example, NYC celebrates Civics Week each spring (K–12) to promote youth voice and registers 16–18-year-olds to vote. The Student Voter Registration Drive during Civics Week actively signs up eligible students. Other efforts include city youth councils, statewide service-day campaigns, and clubs like the Student Advisory Councils, all aiming to translate classroom civics into action.

Sources

- NYSED — Seal of Civic Readiness Overview
<https://www.nysed.gov/standards-instruction/seal-civic-readiness-information> New York State Education Department
- NYSED — Seal of Civic Readiness Handbook (PDF)
https://www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/programs/standards-instruction/new-york-state-seal-of-civic-readiness-manual-updated-march-2025_5.pdf New York State Education Department
- NYSED — Civic Knowledge Components for the Seal
<https://www.nysed.gov/standards-instruction/civic-knowledge-components> New York State Education Department
- NYC DOE — Civics for All (resources & programming)
<https://infohub.nyced.org/in-our-schools/programs/civics-for-all> InfoHub
- NYSED — K-12 Social Studies Framework (includes civics)
<https://www.nysed.gov/standards-instruction/social-studies> New York State Education Department

Florida

- **Middle School Civics Education:** Florida’s social studies standards incorporate civic themes at each grade. Middle schools cover U.S. history and government basics (e.g. Constitution, branches of government, citizen rights) alongside state history. In recent years Florida updated its Civics & Government benchmarks (with full implementation in 2023–24) to emphasize civic dispositions and literacy.
- **High School Civics Education:** Florida requires high school students to earn a civics credit. Under the State’s Civics Literacy Excellence Initiative (CLEI), all students take a Civics course aligned to revised standards. Historically, Florida also instituted a mandatory “Civics Exam” for graduation (covering constitution and state government); schools now offer coaches and materials statewide to ensure teachers are prepared. Additionally, organizations like the Lou Frey Institute support teachers with civics competitions (e.g. We the People) and a state Civics & Debate Initiative launched in 2020 to promote student debate. But, passing the Florida’s CLEI is not a state graduation requirement.
- **District-Level Variation:** Florida’s centralized standards aim for consistency, but local implementation varies. Wealthy districts often offer more extracurricular civics (moot court, model UN, etc.) compared to underfunded rural schools. Surveys suggest students in diverse districts may experience different emphases (some parents and communities clash over curriculum content). Florida provides resources (videos, coaching, teacher training) to mitigate gaps, but disparities in materials and teacher expertise remain a challenge.
- **Civic Engagement Initiatives:** Many Florida programs encourage student engagement. The Lou Frey Institute and Florida Center for Civic Education host statewide Civics and Debate tournaments (middle/high school). Project Citizen (Civic Action Project) offers free PBL civics curriculum for middle and high schools, where students research and advocate on issues they choose. Nonprofits like Generation Citizen partner in some schools. Youth voter initiatives are growing: for example, Florida now allows 16-17-year-olds to pre-register and even serve as poll workers, and organizations like Youth Do Vote run registration drives and festivals to involve teen voters.

Sources

- Florida Civics Literacy Excellence Initiative (CLEI) — Florida Department of Education overview of required civics instruction (middle & high school) and civic literacy assessment
<https://www.fldoe.org/academics/standards/subject-areas/social-studies/civics-lei.shtml> Florida Department of Education
- Florida Civic Literacy Exam (FCLE) — Official description of the high school civic literacy assessment
<https://www.fldoe.org/accountability/assessments/k-12-student-assessment/fcle.shtml> Florida Department of Education
- Florida Joint Center for Citizenship (FJCC) — Civic education resources and curriculum support from the Lou Frey Institute and the Bob Graham Center
<https://www.civics360.org/about-the-florida-joint-center-for-citizenship/> Civics360
- Middle School Civics Resources (FJCC) — Free middle school civics & government materials aligned to Florida benchmarks
<https://floridacitizen.org/middle-school/> Florida Citizen
- Lou Frey Institute of Politics & Government — Host of the Florida Joint Center for Citizenship with teacher professional development and civic engagement resources
<https://loufreyinstitute.org/> loufreyinstitute.org

Texas

- **Middle School Civics Education:** Texas teaches civics concepts through its state TEKS social studies standards. By grade 8 students study topics like the colonial origins of representative government and practice civic skills. The revised 2022–2023 standards explicitly added tasks such as formulating evidence-based arguments and practicing civil discourse on social issues. In practice, 8th graders cover U.S. history from pre-Revolution through Reconstruction, emphasizing how democracy and citizen action developed.
- **High School Civics Education:** Texas requires high school students to complete courses in U.S. history, U.S. government, and economics as part of graduation. A semester of American government

(often paired with economics) ensures all students learn about the Constitution, state and federal institutions, and citizens' rights. Beyond courses, districts increasingly adopt capstone projects or service components, but there is no statewide student project mandate. Instead, civic mastery is typically assessed via coursework and state exams in social studies.

- **District-Level Variation:** Texas has pronounced urban–rural divides. Large metro districts (Houston, Dallas, Austin) often have dedicated civics programs and clubs (e.g. student councils, civics academies), whereas some rural districts struggle to allocate time for social studies amid other priorities. A nonprofit study notes that enforcement of civics requirements has been uneven across the state. In recent years, TEA and advocacy groups have pushed for more uniform civic teaching, but local wealth and political context still influence how robustly districts teach civics.
- **Civic Engagement Initiatives:** A number of groups promote youth civic action in Texas. Youth Do Vote works to implement the long-standing high-school voter registration law (which requires schools to offer registration twice a year) and to recruit 16-year-olds as election clerks. The Texas Youth Voter Project and Children's Defense Fund's Youth Civic Education & Engagement program similarly run registration drives and lobbying campaigns. Schools and universities host "Youth Vote Fests" and Citizenship Days. Locally, many districts have civics fairs and student government events that encourage real-world participation.

Sources

- Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) — Social Studies Standards (including civics content)
<https://tea.texas.gov/academics/curriculum-standards/teks-review/texas-essential-knowledge-and-skills> (tea.texas.gov)
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<https://tea.texas.gov/academics/subject-areas/social-studies> (tea.texas.gov) Texas Education Agency
- TEKS Citizenship Standards (Sample middle school civic expectations)
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- MOVE Texas — Youth Civic Engagement Organization
<https://movetexas.org/>
- Texas Voter Project — Youth Voter Education & Participation
<https://www.texasvoterproject.org/>
- Texas Youth Power Alliance — Youth Civic Engagement Network
<https://www.texasyouthpower.org/>
- Texas Youth Voter Project "Bee the Change" School Program
<https://texasyouthvoterproject.org/programs/>

Arizona

- **Middle School Civics Education:** Arizona's social studies standards include civic concepts in middle grades. Students in grades 6–8 learn about local government, the U.S. political system, and civic virtues. For example, they might study state and national government structures and participate in classroom debates or service projects. (There is no separate mandatory civics course at middle school, but civics content is woven into history and social studies classes.)
- **High School Civics Education:** High school students in Arizona typically take a half-credit in U.S. and Arizona history and another half-credit in government/economics as graduation requirements. In addition, Arizona offers an optional Seal of Civics Literacy that districts can award to juniors and seniors who demonstrate high proficiency in civics. This seal (placed on diplomas) recognizes students who meet criteria in civic knowledge and engagement (e.g. coursework, exams, service). Many schools encourage students to pursue the seal by integrating its requirements into capstone projects and service hours
- **District-Level Variation:** Civic education in Arizona varies by region. Urban districts (like Phoenix and Tucson) often run active programs (e.g. model governments, debate teams), while some rural and reservation schools have limited resources for such activities. To address this, groups like Arizona Native Vote work on outreach: they train community organizers on tribal lands and in small towns to boost Indigenous and rural youth's civic participation. Statewide, wealth disparities mean wealthier

districts can offer more extracurricular civic learning than poorer ones, echoing national patterns.

- **Civic Engagement Initiatives:** Arizona has launched high-profile student civics programs. Notably, Civics Matters Arizona (a collaboration of the governor’s office, the Arizona Cardinals, and civics educators) sponsors an annual essay contest and summer Washington, D.C. trip for selected 10th–11th graders. The program names hundreds of student “Civic Ambassadors” each year to lead local civic projects. These activities help participants fulfill many of the requirements for the Seal of Civics Literacy. Other initiatives include non-profit civics curricula (e.g. Close Up’s lesson plans), scholarship programs for civic leadership, and county youth commissions that engage teens in local government.

Sources

- Arizona Seal of Civics Literacy (official ADE page)
Recognizes students for high civic proficiency & places the seal on diplomas. [Arizona Department of Education](#)
- Arizona Seal of Civics Literacy (PDF fact sheet)
Overview of requirements (GPA, civics test, civic learning & engagement activities). [Arizona Department of Education](#)
- Arizona History and Social Science Standards (civics content included)
K–12 social studies standards with civic engagement and citizenship topics in grades 6–8 and high school. [Arizona Department of Education](#)
- Arizona Seal of Civics Literacy Diploma Seal details (district example)
Explains Seal criteria including GPA, civics exam, learning & reflection activities. [Gilbert Public Schools](#)
- Civics Matters Arizona (statewide civic engagement initiative)
Describes Civics Matters AZ program connecting students statewide with engagement opportunities and civic ambassador experiences. [closeup.org](#)

Appendix E: Sources Cited

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Appendix F: Raíces Conference 2025 Program

2025 ILLCF Raíces Public Policy Conference Education, Engagement & Empowerment

8:00 AM: Check-In & Registration

8:30 AM: Opening Remarks, ILLCF Co-Chairs & ILLCF Executive Director

- Co-Chairs:
 - Illinois State Senator, Celina Villanueva, 12th Senate District, ILLCF Co-Chair
 - Illinois State Representative, Aarón Ortíz, 1st House District, ILLCF Co-Chair
- Executive Director: Oswaldo Alvarez

8:45 AM- 9:45 AM: Morning Plenary: The State's Role & Impact on Civics & Governance

Moderator: Dr. Marisol Morales, Executive Director, Carnegie Elective Classifications at the American Council on Education

- Panelists:
 - Illinois State Senator, Celina Villanueva, 12th Senate District, ILLCF Co-Chair
 - Illinois State Representative, Aarón Ortíz, 1st House District, ILLCF Co-Chair
 - Illinois State Representative Dagmara Avelar, 85th House District
 - Illinois State Representative Norma Hernández, 77th House District

9:45- 10:00 AM: Break

10:00 AM - 11:30 AM: Concurrent Sessions

Session 1: Legal Strategies for Safeguarding Community Organizations

Moderator: Illinois State Representative Dagmara Avelar, 85th House District

- Panelists:
 - Lauren Wright, Executive Director, Illinois Partners for Human Service
 - Illinois State Representative Lilian Jiménez, 4th House District
 - Cynthia P. Irani, Partner, Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath, LLP

Session 2: Economics of Immigration, Latino Economic Contributions

Moderator: Illinois State Senator Karina Villa, 25th Senate District

- Panelists:

- Dr. José Acosta-Córdova, Villa en L'Acosta Consultants LLC
- Marcos Cenicerros, Executive Director, Warehouse Workers for Justice
- Jennifer Aguilar, Executive Director, Little Village Chamber of Commerce

Session 3: Latino Voter Trends and the Issues That Move Them

Moderator: Illinois State Representative Norma Hernández, 77th House District

- Panelists:

- Juan González, Senior Fellow, UIC Great Cities Institute and Co-Host of Democracy Now!, Author of Harvest of Empire
- Jocelyn Bravo, Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR)
- Dr. Susana Rivera-Mills, Aurora University President
- Illinois State Senator Javier Loera Cervantes, 1st Senate District

11:30 AM- 11:45 AM: Break

12:15 PM - 1:15 PM: Lunch & Keynote Address

- Sonja Diaz, Unseen, "State Power, People Power: How Latino Leaders Can Defend Democracy & Defeat Authoritarianism"

1:15 PM- 1:30 PM: Break

1:30 PM - 3:30 PM: Conference Reflections

- Facilitated by:
- Teresa Córdova, Director, UIC Great Cities Institute
- Thea Crum, Associate Director of Neighborhoods Initiative, UIC Great Cities Institute

3:30 PM - 4:30 PM: Beyond the Conference

Moderator: Illinois State Senator Celina Villanueva, 12th Senate District, ILLCF Co-Chair

- Panelists:

- Dr. José Acosta-Córdova, Villa en L'Acosta Consultants LLC
- Illinois State Representative Dagmara Avelar, 85th House District
- Illinois State Representative Norma Hernández, 77th House District

Closing Remarks

5:00 PM - 7:00 PM: Post-Conference Networking Event at Lalo's on Maxwell

Appendix F: Image Captions

- Image on Acknowledgements Page: Staff from Great Cities Institute that served as facilitators during the GCI Engagement Session, pictured from left to right – David Segovia, Thea Crum, Mari Villa, Matt Wilson, Elena Oliveira, Jay Campos, and Marissa G. Leal (ILLCF). Photo credit: Great Cities Institute.
- Image on Page 5: Conference Reflections Panelists & ILLCF Executive Director pictured from left to right – Dr. José Acosta-Córdova, State Senator Villanueva, State Representative Avelar, Oswaldo Alvarez, and State Representative N. Hernández. Photo credit: Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus Foundation.
- Image on Page 7: Illinois Governor Pritzker signs the Illinois Bivens Act into law, joined by Illinois Latino Caucus members and community leaders. Photo credit: Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus Foundation.
- Image on Page 8: ILLCF Co-Chair State Representative Ortíz speaking at the podium during our 2025 Raíces Conference. Photo credit: Altered Stag Productions.
- First Image on Page 9: ILLCF Co-Chair State Senator Villanueva speaking during our 2025 Raíces Conference. Photo credit: Altered Stag Productions.
- Second Image on Page 9: 2025 Raíces Conference participants in the main auditorium. Photo credit: Altered Stag Productions.
- Third Image on Page 9: 2025 Raíces Conference participants in the main auditorium. Photo credit: Altered Stag Productions.
- Image on Page 11: Graphic of our Economics of Immigration: Latino Economic Contributions Panel. Photo Credit: Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus Foundation.
- Image on Page 15: Economics of Immigration: Latino Economic Contributions panelists and moderator from left to right – Marcos Cenicerros, Jennifer Aguilar, Moderator State Senator Villa, and Dr. José Acosta-Córdova. Photo credit: Altered Stag Productions.
- Image on Page 19: Graphic of our Legal Strategies for Safeguarding Community Organizations panel. Photo Credit: Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus Foundation.
- First Image on Page 20: State Representative Jiménez speaking during our Legal Strategies for Safeguarding Community Organizations Panel. Photo credit: Altered Stag Productions.
- Second Image on Page 20: Lauren Wright speaking during our Legal Strategies for Safeguarding Community Organizations panel. Photo Credit: Altered Stag Productions.
- Image on Page 21: Legal Strategies for Safeguarding Community Organizations panelists and moderator from left to right – State Representative Jiménez, Moderator State Representative Avelar, Lauren Wright, and Cynthia P. Irani. Photo credit: Altered Stag Productions.
- Image on Page 22: 2025 Raíces Conference participant speaking in the Legal Strategies for Safeguarding Community Organizations session. Photo credit: Altered Stag Productions.
- Image on Page 23: State Representative Avelar facilitating our Legal Strategies for Safeguarding Community Organizations session. Photo credit: Altered Stag Productions.
- First Image on Page 24: Tanya Cabrera at the podium, urging attendees to begin heading to our concurrent sessions for dynamic panel conversations. Photo credit: Altered Stag Productions.

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- Second Image on Page 24: 2025 Raíces Conference participant speaking in the Economics of Immigration: Latino Economic Contributions session. Photo credit: Altered Stag Productions.
 - Image on Page 26: Graphic of our Latino Voter Trends and Issues That Move Them panel. Photo Credit: Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus Foundation.
 - First Image on Page 29: Juan González speaking during the Latino Voter Trends and Issues That Move Them panel. Photo credit: Altered Stag Productions.
 - Second Image on Page 29: State Senator Loera-Cervantes speaking during the Latino Voter Trends and Issues That Move Them panel. Photo credit: Altered Stag Productions.
 - Image on Page 31: State Representative N. Hernández speaking during our 2025 Raíces Conference. Photo credit: Altered Stag Productions.
 - Image on Page 34: Latino Voter Trends and Issues That Move Them panelists and moderator from left to right – Juan González , Jocelyn Bravo, Dr. Susana Rivera-Mills, Moderator State Representative N. Hernández and State Senator Javier Loera Cervantes. Photo credit: Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus Foundation.
 - Image on Page 35: 2025 Raíces Conference participant speaking in the main auditorium. Photo credit: Altered Stag Productions.
 - Image on Page 39: Conference Reflections Panelists from left to right – Dr. José Acosta-Córdova, State Representative Avelar, State Representative N. Hernández and Moderated by State Senator Villanueva. Photo credit: Altered Stag Productions.
 - Image on Page 40: 2025 Raíces Conference participants engaging by raising their hands in the main auditorium. Photo credit: Altered Stag Productions.
 - Image on Page 41: ILLCF Team Picture from left to right – Margarita “Maggie” Olmos, Elizabeth “Liz” Gutierrez, Marissa G. Leal, Angelynn Jimenez, Juan Carlos Arenas, Alberto Castelan, and Executive Director Oswaldo Alvarez. Photo credit: Altered Stag Productions.
 - First Image on Page 42: 2025 Raíces Conference participant speaking in the main auditorium. Photo credit: Altered Stag Productions.
 - Second Image on Page 42: 2025 Raíces Conference participants in the main auditorium. Photo credit: Altered Stag Productions.
 - Image on Page 44: 2025 Raíces Conference participants during the Morning Plenary on The State’s Role & Impact on Civics & Governance. Photo credit: Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus Foundation.



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