



Understanding Latino Voter Engagement in San Diego County

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1. INTRODUCTION

“In California, there are 8 million Latino voters that are eligible to cast a ballot, that's enormous political power, right? I believe only 5 million are registered or registered to vote... this is also a community where more young people become eligible to vote every single year. In the future, California will and must be shaped by the diverse voices that represent our state and that includes the Latino community” (Eduardo Garcia, Latino Community Foundation Policy Director)

Across the nation, the Latino population continues to grow as the fastest and largest ethnic minority, and by the year 2050, Latinos will be the largest ethnic group in California (Pew Research Center, 2008). Despite the large percentage of Latinos in the state, minimal research has been conducted on current modes of civic behavior and participation for registered voters in San Diego. As of March 2024, approximately 23.65% of the registered voters in San Diego County are Latino/ Hispanic (San Diego Registrar of Voters, 2024)¹. The importance of studying Latino political engagement can help uncover systemic injustices, and ultimately foster a more inclusive and equitable political participation system for historically marginalized communities.

Using qualitative research techniques, this research aims to delve deeper into the individual and contextual factors that explain the political attitudes and engagement of Latinos in the region of San Diego, as this specific demographic of voters plays a transformative role in shaping public policy in this southernmost region of the State of California (California Calls, 2024). Namely, I seek to address the following research question, “In California, why is the gap between county-wide and Latino turnout rates highest in San Diego County?”² In San Diego,

¹ This percentage was calculated from the total number of registered voters, divided by the number of Latino/ Hispanic voters registered each provided by the San Diego Registrar of Voters

² UCLA Policy and Politics Initiative, 2023

such gaps are shown in the 2020 primary election, as 81.2% of registered voters turned out in the election, 71.7% being Latino and 85.7% being White, holding a 9.5 percentage gap between the Latino and White constituency (UCLA LPPI, 2019).

In this thesis, I hypothesize that both individual-level factors and contextual-level factors play a role in impacting the voter registration of the Latino electorate, and their voting behavior. My hypotheses are strongly influenced by previous academic literature related to this topic, and this project tests specific factors such as one's individual or familial immigration status, racial and educational background, along with one's environmental factors such as surrounding political participation, the economy, and the laws/ policies that impact the region. I argue that these factors play an integral role in shaping the perspectives and impacts of the Latino constituency in San Diego. The hypotheses of the specific individual and contextual factors are outlined more precisely in Sections 2-4 of this research, along with the research methodology to test my hypotheses.

To test my hypotheses, I conducted 11 in-depth interviews with community-based nonprofits, politicians, and political experts. Through these interviews, I listened to the stories and experiences of those who have direct positionality and expertise on the issue. This project includes non-profit organizations because they play a crucial role in understanding the efforts and strategies to help on issues such as voter registration, bridging educational barriers, and helping the Latino community on an intimate level (Garcia Bedolla, 2005). The inclusion of politicians and individuals who work in the policy space is crucial as they are the direct playmakers that shape the landscape laws and regulations for the communities; additionally, the interviews provide information on how politicians perceive and respond to changes in the demographics of the Latino electorate in the region, offering insights into evolving political dynamics. With the

Latino constituency continuing to grow in San Diego and across the United States, there must be immediate attention towards understanding why there are turnout gaps for Latinos, and how individual and contextual factors impact their voting behavior from a community and political perspective.

1.1 Background

In the United States, the act of voting is an imperative component of American democracy and civic participation among citizens. Voting in elections plays a crucial role in determining who is elected to political offices on a local, statewide, and federal basis, in which those who are elected influence and propose policies that directly impact the communities of their constituencies. The right to vote, known as suffrage, is integral to American democracy and the history of our country as it enables individuals to participate and address individual concerns and ideas in government. Throughout history, marginalized groups have fought for voting rights and to protect the rights and liberties of all individuals, regardless of racial, ethnic, and gender identity. Notable legislations towards mobilizing against discriminatory practices of voting suffrage include the establishment of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 during the Civil Rights Movement, which provided individuals the right to vote regardless of race. Though this act is monumental toward a pathway to safeguard the rights of Americans, inequities across the United States still exist such as redistricting, poll location changes and closures, and limited access to convenient early voting to name a few (NAACP, 2024).

Specific to California, the has state embedded laws towards further voter equity. In 1993, the state implemented the federal National Voter Registration Act of 1993, which is also known as the “Motor Voter” law which aimed to simplify the registration process for citizens as they would be registered when they had renewed their driver's license. The California Voting Rights Act, also known as the CVRA, addressed the specific issues in the state that related to the at-large

elections systems for local government entities such as school board and city council elections. This act intended to influence the minority populations in local government elections, emphasizing that with the growing Latino population, the representation in local government did not seem to “keep the pace” (California Latino Legislative Caucus, 2015).

The state of California holds a population of around 39 million people, with approximately 22 million people registered to vote (Pew Research, 2023). Specifically for the Latino population in 2020, California holds the highest number of voter registration of 5.01 million, ranking #1 in the United States; following California is Texas with 3.538 million registered voters and Florida with 1.9992 million registered voters (UCLA Latino Data Hub, 2024). In the year 2020, the breakdown of registered voters in the United States was a total of 168.38 million individuals; Latino voters comprise 18.719 million (11.11%), white voters at 118.389 million (70.31%), Black voters at 20.844 million (12.38%), and Asian voters at 7.358 million (4.36%) (UCLA Latino Data Hub, 2024). As of 2021, the percentage of non-Latino eligible voters in California is approximately 68.89%, while the percentage of Latino eligible voters is 31.1% (UCLA Latino Data Hub, 2023). As for those who voted in the 2020 election, the percentage of Latino voter turnout in California was approximately 37.21%, while the percentage of white voter turnout was approximately 51.56% (UCLA Latino Data Hub, 2023).

Although a representative democracy is a primary way that citizens can acquire political power, researchers have found that there is relatively low voter turnout for the Latino population (Alvarez, 1999). Based on six surveys conducted in 2022, 36% of the participants were Latino adults and 57% of these adults were not registered to vote, 25% being likely voters (Pew Research, 2024). In terms of the political behavior of Latinos, statistics show that the ideology of Latino likely voters, nearly thirty-seven percent identify themselves as politically liberal (Pew

Research, 2020). While Latinos are at an inflection point, Latino representation in California is absent in registration, turnout, and across all three branches of government (UCLA LPPI, 2019).

Why Study Latino Political Participation in San Diego?

San Diego County, a region that is the southernmost area in the State of California and the closest to the United States-Mexico border, serves as an interesting microcosm for studying the intricate patterns and behaviors of Latino voters in the modern day. San Diego County is the second most populous of California's 58 counties and is the fifth largest county in the United States (County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, 2024). In terms of geography, the region is a mix of urban and suburban areas with coastal and inland communities beginning in the North County of Oceanside, CA to the South County of Chula Vista, CA. In 2021, the population of San Diego County was approximately 3.3 million, with a 2021 median household income of \$88,240 and 1.57 million employed (Data USA, 2021). In the County of San Diego, the cities with the largest Latino population based on the United States census records of 2020 include San Diego (411,286), Chula Vista (164,698), Escondido (78,226), Oceanside (63,316), and Vista (49,744) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). As San Diego becomes more Democratic in its politics, the gap between the rich and the poor continues to grow and communities in the South Bay area between San Diego and Tijuana, such as Chula Vista, National City, Bonita, San Ysidro, and Imperial Beach, have become largely working and middle-class Mexican American (Davis, 2005).

In San Diego County across a 20 year time span, the political dynamics for the total population has shifted as a 49.63% majority voted for the Republican nominee in 2000, to a

constituency where a 60.1% majority voted for the Democratic nominee in the 2020 election.³

This political realignment also reflects broader trends observed across the nation, with Latinos increasingly aligning with the Democratic Party, which can be attributed to various factors, including the party's stance on immigration reform, healthcare access, and social welfare programs, which resonate strongly with many Latino voters. Additionally, the Republican Party's perceived hostility towards immigrant communities and xenophobic rhetoric has further alienated many Latinos, prompting them to seek political representation elsewhere (Pew Research Center, 2022).

An important aspect of this research is distinguishing the words “Latino” and “Hispanic”, which will be used interchangeably as it has been done in previous research and current data. The term “Latino” identifies those who have ancestral roots or connections to Latin America, which encompasses a wide range of cultures and ethnicities as the term “Hispanic”, refers to those who are from or have ties to Spanish-speaking countries (Pew Research, 2023). Terms such as “Latine” and “Latinx” are gender-neutral terms of the word “Latino”; though these terms are not used throughout this specific research, it is important to mention as future research may apply (Lopez, 2022). The terms “Latino” and “Hispanic” in the context of United States Political Science refer to the racial categories to describe races, such as Black, Asian, and White (Cole, 2021).

In San Diego County, the classification of voter records for the Latino/ Hispanic electorate are classified through the following: (1) the voter has requested their voting material be provided in Filipino, Spanish, or Vietnamese; (2) Voter’s birthplace matches a country designated

³ The election turnout percentages for the 2000 and 2020 general elections were both used from the San Diego County Registrar of Voters election archives

as primarily speaking the respective language; (3) Voter's last name (surname) matches a surname list provided by the Department of Justice, Note: Due to overlap in surnames between the Filipino and Spanish lists, a voter may be counted on both the Spanish and Filipino voter count report (San Diego Registrar of Voters, 2024). A crucial point to mention with the terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" is that those who identify in these descriptors of ethnicity are not monolithic and come from various countries, backgrounds, and cultures.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The bodies of literature that this project focuses on include an academic introduction to the historical implications of the topic and the preconceived notions of the Latino constituency. The following bodies of literature explore the individual and contextual level factors of my hypotheses.

In the existing social science literature, the constitution of the "Latino Vote" has derived from historical implications and colonial barriers for Latinos to interact in United States society and politics (Hero, 2023). This specific category of the "Latino Vote" emerged in the 1960s as there was a rise in policy conversation and national political analysis for this specific ethnic group (Francis-Fallon, 2019). It was not that Mexican Americans at the dawn of the 1960s did not wish to transform their people's place in society, at a time of great national prosperity, ethnic Mexicans suffered the effects of widespread and generational economic discrimination and for decades this bigotry had restricted Mexican-American and Mexican immigrant alike to the lowest-paid and dirtiest jobs (Francis-Fallon, 2019). The "Spanish-speaking Americans" were categorized into a single US minority group and political constituency that had defined this

pan-ethnic group's public identity on the middle ground between traditional assimilation and the race and class-conscious nationalisms of Chicano, Puerto Rican, and Cuban movements (Francis-Fallon, 2019).

The notion of forging *Latinidad* (roughly, Latino-ness) summons the idea to help the official existence of the Latino or Hispanic community in a community and identity context, which is appealing to powerful interests and party leaders who may take this opportunity to use content subject to ideological redefinition and its representative institutions and political leaders attentive towards this opportunity for Latinos to be susceptible to manipulation (Jackson, 2011). Latinos' reputation as the "sleeping giant" in American politics has garnered the attention of both major political parties, with Democrats appealing to issues such as immigrant rights and economic security, and Republicans emphasizing social issues voters (Jackson, 2011).

In the book *New Faces, New Voices*, the impact of Latino behavior and the common assumptions are introduced with six points that include: 1) Hispanics are an ethnically, racially, and geographically diverse population, and their concentration in politically important states makes them attractive to politicians, 2) Hispanics are assimilating into American political life in the same manner as previous immigrants to the United States, 3) Hispanics are a monolithic bloc and overwhelmingly support the Democratic Party, 4) Hispanics participate in politics at lower rates than other racial and ethnic groups, and therefore continue to be the "Sleeping Giant" of American politics, 5) Hispanics are primarily concerned with issues that are "Hispanic specific", e.g. immigration, bilingual education, and, to a somewhat lesser extent, affirmative action, 6) Having elected officials who are co-ethnic (that is, Hispanic) are important to Hispanic voters. It is also important for representative democracy (Abrajano, Alvarez, 2010). The public and survey research reveals that Hispanics' policy and issue concerns differ from those of non-Hispanics in

ways that make them potentially subject to potential messages both from the left and the right, which means that political candidates from different sides of the political spectrum can attempt to influence Hispanic voters (Abrajano, Alvarez, Nagler, 2008). In summary, this literature has illustrated how the understudied area of the Latino electorate as there are preconceived notions that Hispanic voters are one homogenous group.

2.1 Individual Level Factors and Latino Political Participation

Latino political participation in the United States is influenced by individual-level factors that encompass diverse dimensions such as immigration status, race, and educational levels. Understanding how these factors intersect and shape political engagement among Latinos is essential for both developing strategies to enhance civic participation and to increase representation for the electorate. This section of the literature review synthesizes existing research on the role of immigration status, race, and education in shaping Latino political participation, shedding light on the complexities of individual-level dynamics in the political landscape. It is crucial to note that members of the “Latino” group do not all have the same interests or concerns but rather must be similarly situated in U.S. society, which is often overlooked and strongly affects how Latinos interact with the political system on the individual level (Garcia Bedolla, 2005).

Immigration status emerges as a pivotal individual-level factor shaping Latino political participation. Research indicates that citizenship status significantly affects political engagement, with naturalized citizens exhibiting higher rates of participation compared to non-citizens (DeSipio, 2011). Citizenship status not only determines eligibility for voting but also influences

individuals' sense of belonging and investment in the political process. Moreover, undocumented immigrants and individuals with temporary legal status face unique barriers to political participation, including fear of deportation and limited access to civic resources (Abrajano and Alvarez, 2018). Thus, immigration status plays a critical role in shaping the political agency and opportunities available to Latinos in the United States.

Race intersects with Latino political participation, shaping perceptions, experiences, and opportunities in the political arena. While Latinos comprise a diverse ethnic group with varying racial identities, they often confront racialized barriers that influence their political engagement. Research suggests that racial discrimination and prejudice can deter Latinos from participating in politics, contributing to feelings of marginalization and disenfranchisement (Hero & Tolbert, 2010). Moreover, racial identity and consciousness among Latinos influence political attitudes and behavior, with experiences of discrimination motivating collective action and advocacy (Sanchez, 2006). A component of mobilization also comes into consideration, as common identity, especially for underrepresented ethnic groups, plays a key role in the forming of diversity efforts and coalitions that play a salient role in alliances across ethnicities or races (Barvosa-Carter 2001). Therefore, understanding the racial dynamics in the Latino community is essential for comprehensively addressing barriers to political participation and fostering inclusive political environments.

Education emerges as a critical factor in Latino political participation, shaping individuals' political knowledge, skills, and efficacy. Studies consistently find a positive correlation between education levels and political engagement among Latinos, with higher levels of education associated with increased participation in electoral and non-electoral activities

(Jones-Correa, 2015). Education equips individuals with the cognitive resources and critical thinking skills necessary for effective political engagement, empowering them to navigate complex political landscapes and advocate for their interests (Ramirez, 2018). Moreover, education serves as a pathway to civic empowerment, enabling Latinos to access leadership positions, engage in policy advocacy, and contribute to community development efforts (Barreto et al., 2009).

Individual-level factors, including immigration status, race, and education, play critical factors in influencing Latino political participation and ultimately shaping the opportunities, barriers, and motivations in the political sphere. This section of literature demonstrates the importance of individual factors to develop equitable solutions for voter engagement to increase participation and representation among Latinos.

2.2 How Contextual Factors Influence Latino Political Engagement

The Latino electorate is also influenced by contextual factors which include political representation, economic conditions, and laws/policies, to name a few. Understanding these factors is crucial for comprehensively addressing the environmental influences that impact Latino participation representation and engagement in the political process. To echo once more, it is crucial to note that members of the “Latino” group do not all have the same contextual factors that may influence their rate of participation or voter behavior.

The factor of political representation is integral for Latino political engagement, as it impacts both the motivation of one to participate based on the representation of their officials and the staff who work in community organizations and government public service offices. Research

indicates that the presence of Latino political candidates and elected officials can mobilize Latino voters, foster a sense of political efficacy, and enhance trust in the political system (Sanchez, 2006). Additionally, descriptive representation, in which elected officials mirror the demographic composition of their constituents, has been linked to increased political engagement and satisfaction among Latino communities (Barreto et al., 2014). The impact of underrepresentation and marginalization of Latinos in political institutions can lead to feelings of disenfranchisement and disengagement (Hero and Tolbert, 2010).

The factor of the economy plays a pivotal role in shaping Latino political engagement and turnout, as socio-economic status and economic accessibility hold a direct role in one's ability to participate along with their behavior. Economic disparities, such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to affordable healthcare and education, can play a role in hindering political participation among Latinos (Jones-Correa, 2015). Additionally, economic stability and upward mobility can facilitate greater engagement by providing resources and opportunities for political involvement (Ramirez, 2018). Economic issues, such as healthcare reform, minimum wage legislation, and immigration policy, often motivate Latino voters and shape their political priorities (Abrajano and Alvarez, 2018).

Laws and policies, including electoral regulations, immigration laws, and social welfare programs, exert a profound influence on Latino political engagement by shaping the opportunities and constraints for participation. Electoral laws that facilitate voter registration and turnout, such as same-day registration and early voting, have been shown to increase Latino political participation (Leal & DeSipio, 2017). Conversely, voter suppression tactics, such as

voter ID laws and purges of voter rolls, disproportionately affect minority communities, including Latinos, and undermine their electoral influence (Barreto et al., 2014). Additionally, immigration policies, such as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and pathways to citizenship, can mobilize Latino voters and influence their political attitudes and behavior (Garcia-Rios and Michelson, 2018).

Latino political engagement is shaped by a complex interplay of contextual factors, including political representation, economic conditions, and laws/policies. This literature review underscores the importance of understanding contextual factors to develop effective strategies for promoting Latino participation and empowerment.

3. THEORY AND ARGUMENT

The issue of voter registration and turnout for the Latino electorate continues to play a role in determining how our democracy is shaped. Based on the existing literature, I hypothesize the following based on individual factors (H1-H3) and contextual factors (H4-H6) which shed light on understanding what enhances or prevents the political participation and representation in the Latino community in San Diego County.

3.1 Individual Level Hypotheses:

Below are the three hypotheses that are based on individual-level factors.

H1: One's immigration status can affect their levels of political participation and their voting behavior

H2: One's individual race or ethnic background plays a role in their level of turnout or political ideology

H3: Latino voter turnout in Greater San Diego County is correlated to the level of understanding, education, and civic engagement one is exposed to.

My first hypothesis (H1) implies that individuals' legal status in a country can influence their engagement in political processes and their voting behavior. This suggests that immigrants may have different levels of political participation compared to citizens, possibly due to legal barriers, fear of repercussions, or lack of access to information. Based on one's immigration status, undocumented immigrants, for example, face obstacles in participating in formal political processes due to fear of deportation or lack of eligibility to vote. On the other hand, naturalized citizens may still face challenges such as language barriers or lack of familiarity with the political system. Consideration for this hypothesis also centers on an individual's familial connection to immigration or being undocumented, as an individual may refrain from voting or having a political belief in the protection of themselves and their family. If this hypothesis is correct, it underscores the importance of addressing barriers to political participation among immigrant communities and families.

My second hypothesis (H2) suggests that demographic changes, particularly the increasing Latino population in San Diego County, can influence voter turnout and behavior among Latinos. This hypothesis implies that demographic shifts may lead to cultural and political changes in communities that may potentially alter the ideologies and priorities of a region or district. These changes may be driven by factors like the mobilization of minority communities, increased representation in local politics, or shifts in political discourse. Additionally, this hypothesis considers the relations and mobilization of the Latino community with or amongst

various ethnic communities, as San Diego County is racially diverse. If this hypothesis is supported, it highlights the dynamic nature of political landscapes in response to demographic changes.

My third hypothesis (H3) suggests that voter turnout among Latinos in San Diego County is influenced by the factor of one's educational attainment, which plays a role in civic engagement and an individual's understanding of political processes. This hypothesis tests whether one's level of education plays a role in his/her engagement in civic activities such as voting and if education impacts their political behavior when casting a ballot or their political outlooks. If supported, this hypothesis will demonstrate the importance of education, and its impact on one's understanding of civic initiatives and to promote the representation of Latinos in voting processes.

3.2 Contextual Level Hypotheses:

Below, are the three hypotheses that are based on contextual-level factors:

H4: Latino voter turnout is positively influenced by the presence of strong community organizations and mobilization efforts in Latino neighborhoods, including the availability and accessibility of bilingual voting materials and polling stations.

H5: Latino voter turnout is correlated with economic conditions

H6: Local, state, and federal policies can have an impact on Latino voter turnout, depending on the perceived impact on the Latino community.

My fourth hypothesis (H4) tests whether political participation, specifically in the role of community organizations and the efforts in Latino neighborhoods, impacts voter turnout amongst Latinos. If supported, this hypothesis will demonstrate the significance of community empowerment and organizing toward promoting political engagement among the Latino electorate in San Diego County.

My fifth hypothesis (H5) tests if economic conditions can influence Latino voter turnout. This hypothesis has the potential to reveal how economic stability may impact political engagement, particularly during periods of prosperity. The factor of economic policies and priorities may shape the perceptions and interests of Latino voters, influencing their turnout behavior and their sense of security. If supported, this hypothesis will reveal how the economy directly plays a pivotal role in shaping political participation among Latinos.

My sixth hypothesis (H6) tests whether laws and policies influence Latino voter turnout and their trust in government, particularly based on how these policies are perceived to affect the Latino community. If this hypothesis is supported, it will show how policy and legal representation hold value toward political engagement among Latino voters.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN

To test these hypotheses, the research design uses a qualitative study that aims to answer if the voter turnout and behavior of the Latino constituency in San Diego County is influenced by the individual factors of immigration, race, and education, along with the contextual factors of political participation, the economy, and laws/policies.

4.1 Interviews

The method used for this study consists of structured interviews with individuals from non-profit organizations and politicians in San Diego to gather data that focus on human-centered exchanges. Through this approach, the qualitative data will either support or reject my hypotheses. The structure of this research was designated in the following manner: 1) Compilation of potential interviewees including political offices in San Diego County, and community organizations, 2) Email Outreach to the interviewee list, and 3) Interviews with participants. For selecting interviewees, I created a list of political offices across the County of San Diego from the local to the state level, and I created a list of non-profit organizations in San Diego that focus on voting mobilization and civic engagement efforts, with an emphasis on the Latino community. With the creation of these lists, I had collected the respective contact information for requesting to speak with a representative of the office or the members themselves.⁴ Each email contained the same email description, a Calendly link to schedule an interview time, and a copy of the interview questions. Upon all of the emails sent out, 11 individuals committed to the interviews which were conducted from December of 2023 to February of 2024. The names of the interviewees with their respective titles and affiliations are included in Table 1 located below:

⁴ Before outreach, these lists were approved by my faculty advisor along with the advisors of the seminar.

Table 1. Interview List and Timeline

Date	Time	Meeting Format	Name	Affiliation	Title
12/4/2023	2:00 PM	Virtual (Zoom)	Eduardo Garcia	Latino Community Foundation	Policy Director
12/08/2023	9:00 AM	Virtual (Zoom)	Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher	California Labor Federation	Chief Officer and Secretary-Treasurer
12/12/2023	2:00 PM	Virtual (Zoom)	Megan House	San Diego County Board of Supervisors, Office of Jim Desmond	Policy Advisor
12/15/2023	1:00 PM	Virtual (Zoom)	Cipriano Vargas	Vista Unified School District San Diego County Board of Supervisors, Office of Terra Lawson-Remer	School Board Member Manager of Community Engagement
12/15/2023	2:30 PM	Virtual (Zoom)	Consuelo Martinez	City of Escondido	City Council Member
12/18/2023	12:00 PM	Virtual (Zoom)	Lauren Salaiz	Hispanas Organized for Political Equality (HOPE)	Youth Programs Manager
12/18/2023	3:00 PM	In-Person, Vista City Hall Complex	Corinna Contreras	City of Vista	City Council Member
1/04/2024	2:00 PM	Virtual (Zoom)	Adam Berkowitz	Mike Levin for Congress	Campaign Manager
1/10/2024	10:00 AM	In-Person, National City Hall Complex	Ditas Yamane	National City	City Council Member
1/29/2024	4:30 PM	Virtual (Zoom)	Kim Desmond	City of San Diego	Chief Officer of the Department of Race & Equity
3/2/2024	4:00 PM	Virtual (Zoom)	Itzel Maganda Chavez	Alliance San Diego	Civic Engagement Director

As for the interviews, each meeting (which was held via Zoom or in person), held the same protocols and formality. Ten minutes after the start time of the interview, all technology checks and materials were prepared to ensure time efficiency for the interviewee. Once the meeting commenced, I introduced myself, explained a very general description of the project, and guided them on what to expect. Each interview was allocated a thirty-minute time block and was told that no dialogue would be exchanged back and forth between questions to ensure minimal bias and to respect the time of the interviewee. Upon completion of the interview, the interviewee was thanked for their time and reminded to be encouraged to complete the written release.

4.2 Measuring Contextual and Individual Factors

Using the software Dedoose⁵All of the eleven transcripts and excerpts of the interviews were evaluated into “Individual” and “Contextual” factors, with the specific factors listed reflected in Tables 2, 2.1, 3, and 3.1. ⁶ Table 2 of “Individual Factors” and Table 3 of “Contextual Factors” further define the codes that were selected based on the existing literature and are used to test my hypothesis. I am testing my hypotheses by calculating the frequency with which these factors were mentioned.

To test H1-H3, I coded the following individual factors (see Table 2) that demonstrate the influence of one’s personalized experiences that ultimately influence their choices, behavior, and development.

⁵ <https://www.dedoose.com/>

⁶ Each interview transcript was thoroughly read, and the factors were recorded based upon specific phrases and words that associated with the individual and contextual factors.

TABLE 2. Individual Factors and their Code Descriptions

FACTOR	CODE DESCRIPTION
Political Efficacy	Citizens' faith and trust in government and their belief that they can understand and influence political affairs; power or capacity to produce a desired effect (Define.org, 2011)
Trust in Government	An individual's confidence in political institutions and government
SES (Social Economic Status)	Involves the income, education, and overall financial security of an individual. Factors incorporated can also include resources, living conditions, and opportunities afforded to people in society. (ACS, 2024)
Political Interest	The interest of the public to engage in events about political or electoral democracy. Examples may include elections, political events, public meetings, etc.
Familial Background	The family history of an individual often describes the social, and cultural context of one's familial upbringing
Immigration/ Immigration Status	Categorized into four types which include: citizens, residents, non-immigrants, and undocumented immigrants
Race	The concept of dividing people into groups based on various sets of physical characteristics and the process of ascribing social meaning to those groups.
Ethnicity	Describes the culture of people in a given geographic region, including their language, heritage, religion, and customs.
Age	The length of time that a person has lived or a thing has existed, is used in the research to show patterns or times in one's life when they experienced or encountered a certain event
Youth	The period between childhood and adult age. In the context of this research, there is an emphasis on those who are between high school to college age.
Language	A system of communication used by a particular country or community. This research primarily speaks on the Spanish language which is commonly spoken by individuals of Latin origin or Hispanic background
Education	Process of learning, teaching, and training to develop one's knowledge and skills; especially in the realms of schools and college & university systems

To test H4-H6, I coded for the following contextual factors (see Table 3) that speak to the environmental conditions or aspects that may have an impact on a voter's rate of turnout or behavior in elections i.

TABLE 3. Contextual Factors and Their Code Descriptions

FACTOR	CODE DESCRIPTION
Political Culture	Attitudes, ideologies, values, beliefs, customs, traditions of a nation, region or community
Political Participation	The involvement of an individual and their participation in their community to influence divisions or be civically engaged
Economy	Influence the access to resources, living conditions, and social inequity of an individual based on the economic process or structure of a nation, region, city, or community
Laws / Policies	The legal frameworks, precedents, regulations, or rules that impact the way an individual may navigate in society ultimately shape the livelihood and functions of institutional entities
Social Institutions	Can describe a system (educational, religious, health, etc.) structure that guides the human behavior and society
Region / City	The geographical location of an individual can significantly influence the cultural, economic, and social experience

5. FINDINGS

Based on the frequency calculations of the interview data, which I present in Tables 1 and Table 2, the most frequently mentioned themes for the individual factors were the following: “Immigration Status” (N=57), “Race” (N=69), and “Education” (N=88). As for the contextual factors, the highest frequency among the interviews included: “Political Representation” (N=150), “Economy” (N=108), and “Laws/ Policies” (N=152).⁷

⁷ While I used Dedoose for identifying the visual excerpts, the frequency of counts is manually calculated.

Table 2.1. Frequency of Individual Factors Mentioned from All Interviews

Factor	Frequency (All Interviews)	Percent of Frequency Amongst Individual Factors
Political Efficacy	19	3.57%
Trust in Government	29	5.45%
SES (Social Economic Status)	2	0.37%
Political Interest	48	9.02%
Familial Background	19	3.57%
Immigration/ Immigration Status	57	10.71%
Race	69	12.59%
Ethnicity	56	10.52%
Age	53	9.96%
Youth	52	9.77%
Language	40	7.51%
Education	88	16.54%
TOTAL (Denominator)	532	100%

To display a visual insight into the context of all of the 11 interviews combined, Figure 1 represents a word cloud that references the collective data of the most popular words and phrases.⁸ A word cloud, which is also known as a tag cloud or text cluster, displays information in a more simple way to display and digest the textual data of the project (Better Evaluation, 2022). When identifying the figure, all of the words hold high frequency value, however the words in larger font and most central positioning in the figure reflect the phrases of higher frequency across the interviewees.

To delineate a more accurate representation of the phrases and sentiments shared in the interviews, each transcript was coded by individual factors and contextual factors, as described and displayed in figures 2, 2.1, 3, and 3.1. Among the 11 interviews conducted, a total of 532 individual factors were identified; the top three factors included “Immigration/ Immigration Status” (10.71%), “Race” (12.59%), and “Education” (16.54%). Honorable factors that had also received high frequency counts include “Political Interest” (9.02%), “Ethnicity” (10.52%), “Age” (9.96%), and “Youth” (9.77%).

As for the contextual factors, 579 factors were identified in the 11 interviews conducted; the top factors with the highest frequency included “Political Participation” (25.90%), “Economy” (18.65%), and “Laws/Policies” (26.25%). Honorable factors that had also received high frequency counts include the “Region/City” factor (17.44%).

⁸ This figure was created by Word Cloud Generator, and displays a visualization of all of the transcripts combined

5.1 Immigration (H1)

The hypothesis H1 tests how one's immigration status can affect their levels of political participation and behavior for themselves or their family. The individual factor of "Immigration/ Immigration Status " was discussed 57 times, and holds a frequency percentage of approximately 10.71% amongst the individual level factors recorded in all of the interviews. Many of the interviewees across the interviews had described the code word of "Immigration" in the context of their personal experiences as a citizen, a person from a mixed status family, or things that they have encountered in relation to immigration and voting. The following analysis reveals the perspective of the interviewees, as central themes revolved around "trusted messengers" and instances of intimidation tactics impact the voting turnout and behavior of the Latino constituency in San Diego.

The concept of "trusted messengers" is mentioned across multiple interviews, as the development of trusted information and people play a pivotal role in engaging immigrant communities in the political process. Among the non-profit organizations and campaign managers, interviewees had expressed how crucial building trust is for families and individuals regarding their immigration status. Adam Berkowitz, who is the Campaign Manager for Mike Levin for Congress, talks about the reactions for immigrant households in North County San Diego:

"The folks who could vote or register if they wanted to...they're just like...you know what, we don't want to go near anything like that. You know, a lot of folks are worried that if they register their name goes in the system and that somehow, you know, there is an easier way of locating them if they get involved. You know, and it just breaks my heart into pieces like that this is even an issue that is

unfortunately still going on in this country” (Adam Berkowitz, Campaign Manager of Mike Levin for Congress)

In addition to this quote, Lauren Salaiz, who is the Youth Programs Manager for the Hispanas Organized for Political Equality (HOPE), relays a similar sentiment on how the immigration status of an individual holds an impact to voting, and how the actions of participating in elections creates a potential risk of exposure for their families.

“A lot of people may have mixed status or their families may be mixed status as well, there can be some fear among registering to vote and the potential of having their information that they don't want out in the open, it's very intimidating to feel like your vote put you or your family at risk” (Lauren Salaiz, Youth Programs Manager of HOPE Latinas)

Specifically in San Diego County, the factor of immigration status is relevant, as 21.5% of the population are immigrants (San Diego County, 2024). Of the total immigrant population in the region, specific to the Latino/Hispanic demographic, 74% of the population is from Mexico and Central America (Migration Policy Institute, 2024). The collection of these two findings directly impacts the individual factor of immigration status, and how a voter's influence on turnout in an election may be affected.

The concept of political rhetoric in relation to the individual factor of “Immigration” is a topic of concern among many interviews. The impact of political rhetoric, specifically from the previous administration of the United States, has specifically targeted immigrant communities through the implementation of propaganda and policies (Civil & Human Rights Coalition, 2024). This impact of political rhetoric that attacks immigrant communities, makes it difficult for the Latino/ Hispanic electorate to trust the media, and want to turn out to the polls. Though

damaging political rhetoric against immigrant communities may be a deterrent for voter turnout, Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher, who is the Chief Officer and Secretary-Treasurer of the California Labor Federation, comments on how such rhetoric can motivate voters to the polls, and compel an influence for change:

“You know what we've seen in California. Post Prop 187 and again with Donald Trump is that here. In fear of our families being deported, being treated differently really does motivate us. Let you know turnout and so that kind of personal fear rather than voting for something. I feel like our population often votes go to the polls and is more motivated to go the polls when they're voting against something” (Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher, Chief Officer of the California Labor Federation)

This sentiment shows how voter turnout for Latinos who are individually impacted by immigration and the status of their families, will turnout to vote as a way to ensure protection for their families.

5.2 Racial Demographics and Community (H2)

The hypothesis H2 tests if one’s individual race or ethnic background plays a role in their level of turnout or political ideology. The individual factor of “Race” was discussed 69 times, and holds a frequency percentage of approximately 12.59% amongst the individual level factors recorded in all of the interviews. The following analysis reveals the perspective of the interviewees, as central themes revolve around the context of community impacts and ideological shifts with the growing Latino population in San Diego County.

The concept of ideological shifts was discussed amongst several of the interviews, mainly to describe the changing political climate in San Diego County as it has gradually shifted from a

predominantly Republican constituency to a more Democratic-leaning region. With regards to race and ideology, Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher talks about her own experience growing up in North County San Diego and how she has seen the shift firsthand in her community:

“So probably in middle school, I started volunteering to register voters, especially Latino voters in Vista, because it was so conservative and we had no power. Democrats had no power, but Latinos in particular had no power. And it was a very racist time. And so I started with voter registration. As soon as I turned 18, I was in college by the time I turned 18, but I registered to vote. I have never missed an election. I think that voting and registering people to vote is super important. And then when I was in the legislature, I did a series of bills to try to make it easier” (Lorena Gonzalez, Chief Officer of the California Labor Federation)

In regard to the Southern region of San Diego County, Ditas Yamane who is the Vice Chair of National City, provides insights on the diverse ethnic makeup of her constituency, highlighting the significant Latino population:

“National City, as per the census, has a population of about 59,000. But in reality, you see the city has at least 62,000 people that sleep in National City during the day. That doubles. But with the 60,000 population, it's 55% Latinos, about 32% Filipino Americans, and the rest are others. Those are the African American, the other Asian American community, and some small, a very small number of you know, minorities from other countries that had chosen National City to be their home.” (National City Vice Mayor Ditas Yamane)

With this increased diversity of San Diego, there has also been an apparent growth in the racial/ethnic composition of office staff and representation in government. Itzel Maganda Chavez, who is the Civic Engagement Director of Alliance San Diego, emphasizes the recent political transformations, including increased Latino representation in local government positions.

“Locally in San Diego, I would say in the last 15 years, the county has changed dramatically not only in the composition of who is in the San Diego County Board Supervisors and in our San Diego City Council but also in the staff that helps in those offices, right? Staffs those offices because I mean, if we were to think back 15 years, you know, that those seats looked a lot differently and a lot more white” (Itzel Maganda Chavez, Civic Engagement Director of Alliance San Diego)

These sentiments reveal how the rise of racial composition in a region can play a crucial role in impacting the ideological and racial composition of power.

5.3 Education and Civic Engagement (H3)

The hypothesis H3 tests if the Latino voter turnout in Greater San Diego County is correlated to the level of understanding, education, and civic engagement one is exposed to. The individual factor of “Education” was discussed 88 times, and holds a frequency percentage of approximately 16.54% amongst the individual level factors recorded in all of the interviews.

Across the interviews, with specific conversations centering on community impacts and language diversity. The following analysis reveals the perspective of the interviewees and one’s personal educational background plays a factor for the Latino electorate, and how voter registration and the need for voter education pathways are needed for the Latino constituency in San Diego County.

In the context of an individual’s personal level of educational attainment, Vista Unified School Board Member Cipriano Vargas explains that despite societal expectations, many Latino families who do not come from college-educated backgrounds have defied the odds, and have pursued higher education:

“When you look at data, most children of farm working families aren't supposed to go to college. They're not supposed to. Being elected to office or not supposed to work for the emphasis of power, but you know, even in those situations, you know, we have overcome and we have you know, make a dent, and with that, comes the responsibility of what we can do for the next generation... Especially here in North County, ten, twenty years ago, you wouldn't see the elementary schools taking field trips to the college, you wouldn't see college counselors talking to ELD students about the A through G and the FAFSA... to be politically engaged to be making the connection to education and unlocking that potential” (Cipriano Vargas, VUSD School Board)

In the State of California as of 2021, Latino students make up approximately 55% of K-12 students, while only 43% of public higher education students in the state are Latino (California School Boards Association, 2024). The sentiment shared by Cipriano Vargas highlights how transformative education has the power to open doors and dismantle barriers of education for Latino students, their families and communities in San Diego County and across the state.

With attaining a higher education, there also comes the economic realities faced by second and third-generation Latinos. While strides have been made in representation at the collegiate level, challenges such as student debt and limited job opportunities persist. Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher emphasizes the link between economic stability and civic empowerment, suggesting that though individuals may attain a college education, there must be improved economic conditions to enable individuals to make informed decisions and be civically engaged:

“There was a lot of first chance going to college where we were very small portion and a lot of that has been I don't wanna say fixed, but we're more represented, especially if the Cal State level community colleges, but there's also people now that are realizing in a lot of ways, and I say in particular the second and third

generation Latinos who kind of feel like they were cheated, right? Like our parents' generation, our grandparents' generation came to this country and believed that in the United States, if you worked hard and, you know, did your best, you could come out okay, but now we have kids who graduate from college who are embattled with debt. We have individuals who couldn't make it through college, right? Or it just wasn't the right time or how to work and so they couldn't get it all done and the level of good jobs available. Decreased over the last, you know, couple decades, we're trying to change that, you know, and I think when people are better off economically when they know that they can pay the rent or pay for a house, put a house over their head and put food on the table. They're in a better position to evaluate and empower themselves to make decisions” (Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher, Chief Officer of the California Labor Federation)

In terms of voter education, political activism, and advocacy, Consuelo Martinez, who is a City Councilmember of Escondido, echoes the concern of the diminishing sense of civic duty and engagement, which has been robustly instilled in previous generations. She highlights that there is a need for targeted efforts to inform and mobilize Latino communities, with emphasis on educating the youth on the structure of governance structures:

“I wish they taught civics how they did back in the day... I feel like that civic engagement and kind of patriotism and like your civic duty like jury duty like be proud to go to jury duty to be proud of, that was instilled in that generation (boomer generation) I feel like we've kind of lost that. I would love to see a robust civic engagement program at the schools, especially for young people. In my district, there's a majority in my city, but they're the majority that doesn't vote, so that can change the landscape of politics in their city. And I would just say it's so important for us to inform those of us who have the privilege to be able to vote. To be able to inform our family and kind of demystify” (Consuelo Martinez, Escondido City Councilmember)

Aligning with education, Adam Berkowitz underscores the significance of local engagement in shaping community outcomes. He describes how understanding politics is

important to participate in local politics, including the roles of council members, mayors, and other elected officials in governance. Berkowitz's perspective reinforces the notion that civic engagement is a fundamental mechanism for individuals to voice concerns, advocate for change, and shape the trajectory of their communities as the opportunity to vote and have your voice heard in elections:

“People need to realize that this is your opportunity. It comes once or twice every, you know, 2 years. And it is not just for national stuff, but local stuff is very important. Who your council members are, is very important. Who your mayor is, your county supervisor, your state assembly member... it is a heavy lift to explain to folks but the importance is weighing in and having a voice” (Adam Berkowitz, Campaign Manager)

5.4 Political Participation and Latino Voter Mobilization (H4)

The hypothesis H4 tests how the that Latino voter turnout is positively influenced by the presence of strong community organizations and mobilization efforts in Latino neighborhoods, including the availability and accessibility of bilingual voting materials and polling stations. The contextual factor of "Political Participation " was discussed 150 times, and holds a frequency percentage of approximately 25.90% amongst the contextual level factors recorded in all of the interviews. The following analysis reveals the perspective of the interviewees, as many spoke on the motivations that voters may have, the accessibility of voting, and the impact of mobilization efforts from community organizations

The interviewees discussed the challenges of mobilizing the Latino electorate, especially as it relates to language accessibility. Megan House, who serves as the San Diego County Board of Supervisors District 5 Policy Advisor, emphasizes the importance of language accessibility in

political campaigns, advocating for materials to be available in both English and Spanish. In addition, she mentions the misconception that language barriers indicate disinterest in political engagement, emphasizing the need to actively reach out to non-English speakers:

“To make a difference and to build that trust so I'd just say with you know coalition having materials in both languages like English and Spanish and more if you can is important the campaign I worked on previously we had our whole website translated. We also had literature that was in Spanish and we heard from the community how much that meant to them because It showed an actual effort to, build a relationship and to reach them and not just assume that they don't wanna get involved just because they don't speak English, and maybe they can speak, they do speaking with, but maybe not well enough to like read complicated political issues. which is hard. So I think just taking that actual step to show we are trying to reach you and we're not like you know, giving up just because you might not speak the language.” (Megan House, San Diego County Board of Supervisors District 5 Policy Advisor)

Adam Berkowitz also discusses strategies for reaching Latino households, identifying language barriers as a significant obstacle to voter participation. He highlights the issue of Spanish-speaking households not being aware of their right to request voting materials in Spanish, proposing simple solutions such as online switches or request cards:

“In my personal experience as a campaign manager, what I have found is there's a couple of different categories that Latino households fall into...So there are some households where they're Spanish only. And no one has ever explained and they're registered to vote but they don't vote. And no one has ever explained to them that you can request your voting materials to be sent to you in Spanish. And if you only speak Spanish and only read and write Spanish. You know, I understand why they're not gonna fill out a ballot that is sent to them in English...those are simple problems to fix because now we can switch it online or you can send in a card. You know, requesting your materials be sent to you in Spanish. So

that's, one of the easier things that I've experienced” (Adam Berkowitz, Campaign Manager)

In terms of political canvassing, Itzel Maganda Chavez underscores the importance of bilingual canvassers in engaging with diverse households. She emphasizes the complexity of linguistic diversity in households, with some members speaking only Spanish, others bilingual, and some only English. In her sentiments, she echoes the necessity of having canvassers who can effectively communicate with all members of such households to facilitate meaningful engagement:

“I will share that through our programs (Alliance San Diego), we do get a good number of bilingual canvassers. And I think that's super important, it is a skill that we need. Because in many households, right, we are mixed. Folks, where, you know, some folks are strictly Spanish speakers and there are bilingual folks and then there are just English speakers” (Itzel Maganda Chavez, Civic Engagement Director of Alliance San Diego)

These insights indicate that mobilizing Latino voters requires a multifaceted approach that addresses policy concerns, cultural influences, and structural barriers to participation.

5.5 Economic Impact (H5)

The hypothesis H5 tests if the Latino voter turnout is correlated upon the economic conditions. The contextual factor of “Economy” was discussed 108 times, and holds a frequency percentage of approximately 18.651% amongst the contextual level factors recorded in all of the interviews. The following analysis reveals the perspective of the interviewees, as central themes revolve around economic struggles faced by Latino communities and the way specific economic factors and initiatives can influence them to vote or raise their attention toward a specific policy in upcoming elections.

With the profound impact of economic circumstances on voting behavior, there was an emphasis across the interviews to address the economic issues that directly affect the Latino constituency. Eduardo Garcia, who is the Policy Director of the Latino Community Foundation, underscores the significance of policies such as tax credits, food assistance programs, and housing initiatives on the ballot which he explains are economic policy areas that directly impact Latino voters:

“So our families, our communities, low-income families rely on these programs, and we can connect voting to the real issues...there's going to be a ballot initiative on housing, right? Some families are leaving the state because they can no longer afford to live here, and some people are living in overcrowded housing because they can't afford to buy on their own or out on their own. People are facing eviction because they can't cover the cost of rent. And so you know, that's gonna be an opportunity to make your voice heard on the issue of housing, right? There's many ways to talk about voting and we have to include the issues that our communities are most impacted by” (Eduardo Garcia, Latino Community Foundation Policy Director)

Moreover, Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher emphasizes the importance of economic issues such as union jobs and healthcare, which directly affect the daily lives of Latinos. She advocates for prioritizing discussions on economic matters over issues like abortion, which may not align with the immediate concerns of the community:

“The economic issues are so important to the Latino community.. In California, Latinos are more pro-union, they want union jobs and we want to help create union jobs and allow people to organize into unions and be paid better. Health care is a paramount issue, but we often end up in situations in California where we're talking about things that aren't as daily important to some of the Latino population. For example, on the topic of abortion, it's good we have a good pro-choice state, but it probably shouldn't dominate our conversation for Latino communities when we're trying to

motivate people to come out to vote. You know, we can lose voters on that issue and when voters start to feel very conflicted between the two parties because of their their cultural or religious upbringing as opposed to their daily what's best for them in their life, you know, in what will affect them when it comes to discrimination and deportation immigration status and economics it creates a situation where we're not getting our best step our best put forward for our community and so we try hard to talk more about economic spread and bigger issues that it's clear at least for me when you talk about those with Latinos that they go to vote” (Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher, Chief Officer of the California Labor Federation)

Sentiments shared by Itzel Maganda Chavez acknowledge the challenges faced by Latino families in registering to vote amidst economic hardships such as high housing and gas costs. The potential correlation of voter turnout as Itzel shares may be associated with individuals’ stress to attain stable economic situations and sufficient resources:

“With housing and the cost of gas and the cost of living in San Diego, many Latino families are having to survive here” (Itzel Maganda Chavez, Civic Engagement Director of Alliance San Diego)

Economic disparities can affect individuals' access to information about the electoral process, candidates, and voting procedures. Affluent individuals may have greater access to educational resources, reliable transportation, and technology, enabling them to stay informed and engaged in politics. On the other hand, economically disadvantaged individuals, including many Latino families in San Diego, may face barriers to accessing relevant information and resources, such as voter registration materials, transportation to polling stations, or time off from work to vote. Ultimately, these barriers can contribute to lower voter turnout rates among economically marginalized communities including the Latino communities in San Diego County.

5.6 Trust in Government (H6)

The hypothesis H6 tests if local, state, and federal policies can have an impact on Latino voter turnout, depending on the perceived impact on the Latino community. The contextual factor of “Laws/Policies ” was discussed 152 times, and holds a frequency percentage of approximately 26.25% amongst the contextual level factors recorded in all of the interviews. The following analysis reveals the perspective of the interviewees, as central themes revolved around conversations of widespread mistrust and frustration with laws and government processes, stemming from the historical experiences and current perceptions of government inadequacy.

In regard to the rainstorms that occurred in the County of San Diego in January of 2024, massive flooding caused residents in the southern region of the county to lose their homes, many being communities of color and Latino families, Itzel Magana Chavez says:

“Locally, for example, right now we are in a primary election season and of course, we are talking to folks about getting out the vote for their livelihoods. Unfortunately, the city has not responded. Instead, the government was trying to charge people for example for getting their cars towed even though they were taken by the storm... and if there's no serious plan, we know that our communities have been ignored for decades, like no infrastructure fixed, then we're going to continue to see these issues in particular communities worse” (Itzel Maganda Chavez, Civic Engagement Director of Alliance San Diego)

This evidence reveals how personal voting approaches are intricately linked with real-life experiences and events. As constituents may feel marginalized or overlooked in the political landscape, this leads to a lack of trust in their government and the systems that are intended to benefit them.

Moreover, lack of responsiveness or inadequate support from the government can deepen existing disparities and impact voter perceptions. Though these issues exist, those working in government understand and see these issues of the lack of trust in government:

“The average person sometimes doesn’t understand what local governments are intended to do for you as an individual living in neighborhoods...we need to do a better job in government explaining to people what it is the government is intended to do... I think folks see us as one big whole, but I think they need to understand that there are 30 / 25 departments in the government. Each department may have a different mission and focusing goal around how they serve the public. I think the more that you provide more awareness about what your government is intended to do, the more that you inform the public about how the city budget operates. These are things I think will encourage folks to say I understand this more... I think that when I grew up, I can't recall conversations around like saying "You know your government is responsible for your drinking water, right?" So, I think just the more things that you know that people understand the role of government, it would encourage them to be involved in it...and I think you know there's a trust factor too as well. I think it's both ends both in a lot of different things that will help with turn out”
(Kim Desmond, Chief Officer of the Department of Race & Equity of the City of San Diego)

The conversation of trust in government and understanding how laws and policies work to benefit the public welcomes the conversation if or why public opinion is not represented in decision-making. A big issue specifically in San Diego County is the issue of housing, Cipriano Vargas emphasizes this issue and states:

“When the city council does a housing workshop, show up. Talking about development to give your 2 cents when the congress members are having a ‘coffee with the community’, you go ask questions which can be intimidating, but at the same time, these people are human beings and they work for us so they should be held accountable. That doesn’t mean that we are always going to agree, the fact that matters is that if we show up, you know, at least

we have our 2 cents as part of the discussion. The worst thing that happens is when people don't show up and so there is no public input there is no commentary for the general public. And then the elected official can do whatever they want because they didn't hear about, you know, how people feel about this specific issue”
(Cipriano Vargas, VUSD School Board)

6. CONCLUSION

As the Latino electorate in San Diego County continues to grow, it is important to understand the turnout gaps and behaviors that individuals may have towards political engagement. Based on the findings of this research, I can support that the turnout and behavior of Latino voters in the county are influenced by the combination of individual-level factors (immigration status, race, education) and contextual factors (political participation, economy, laws/policies).

Based on the individual factor of “Immigration/ Immigration Status”, the H1 hypothesis is supported, as this factor plays a crucial role in if an individual will show up to the polls, and how they will vote ideologically. When casting a ballot, many individuals may refrain from voting to avoid subjecting themselves or their families of any exposure of personal information such as names, or addresses, even if the ballot does not ask any question on the citizenship status of familial members. Additionally, negative rhetoric against the immigrant community, especially from those of high political influence, strengthens fear among individuals and communities. The factor “Immigration/ Immigration Status” of an individual or their family member can also play an influential role in motivation to cast a ballot, as individuals may feel a responsibility to participate in democratic processes and showcase their voice. Creating a safer, and more

inclusive environment for immigrants and immigrant communities in San Diego is crucial towards mitigating these barriers of inequity and fostering safe spaces for all.

Based on the individual factor of “Race”, the H2 hypothesis is supported, as this factor plays an imperative role in demonstrating how changing racial demographics of San Diego County have significant implications for local initiatives and community empowerment. As demographics shift, so do political priorities and policy agendas, reflecting the evolving needs and aspirations of diverse communities. The ideology reflects the diversity of not only the constituency but also the staff and officials who work in positions of political and governmental change. Political, governmental and advocacy seats and offices, as range of perspectives, lived experiences, and cultural backgrounds to the tables of life-changing decision making. As diversity rises in the San Diego County population among communities, including historically marginalized groups like Latinos, there becomes a broader trend toward inclusive governance and reflects the collective efforts of activists, organizers, and advocacy groups in shaping the political landscape.

The individual factor of “Education”, supports the H3 hypothesis as this factor plays a direct role towards accessibility and transparency for individuals to participate in democracy. Concepts that were discussed in support of this factor having a role in voter turnout and behavior include the need for investments in education, voter outreach programs, and community engagement efforts that could help enhance political empowerment and representation in election outcomes. Additionally, this factor highlights the role of information and awareness in facilitating informed decision-making and active citizenship. The relationship between Latino

voter turnout in Greater San Diego County and the level of one's education or knowledge of democratic and governmental structures plays a pivotal role in shaping civic engagement outcomes in the Latino community.

Based on the contextual factor of "Political Participation" the H4 hypothesis is supported as patterns specific to San Diego County such as language accessibility to bilingual voting materials and accessible polling stations, impact the voter turnout and behavior of individuals. The impact of this factor plays a role in enabling accessibility not only for Spanish speaking communities but for an individual's preferred language, ultimately developing trust and relationship-building with communities. By leveraging community organizations, engaging with local issues, and fostering inclusive dialogue, stakeholders can empower Latino voters to participate actively in the democratic process. To understand the complexities of political participation, it is imperative to center the voices and experiences of the Latino community in shaping our collective futures.

Based on the contextual factor of the "Economy", the H5 hypothesis is supported as many individuals had expressed economic concerns and direct impacts for voter turnout and their connection to ideological attitudes. The concept of economic stability, enables individuals with the time and flexibility to engage in civic activities, including voting. Individuals who may be facing financial insecurity, may prioritize economic survival over civic engagement, leading to lower voter turnout rates. This is particularly relevant for Latino families in San Diego, as this region holds a relatively high cost of living compared to other regions of California, and individuals are grappling with the high cost of living, housing expenses, and rising fuel prices.

Economic strains on families may limit their ability to allocate time and resources towards participating in the electoral process.

Based on the contextual factor of “Laws/Policies”, the H6 hypothesis is supported as this factor has demonstrated how the formulation and implementation of systems and regulations in San Diego have played a direct role in shaping the voter turnout and behavior for Latino communities. A direct correlation that many interviewees addressed for this factor was tied into the trust in government, as policymakers need to consider the diverse needs and concerns of communities who are marginalized, neglected and not equitably represented in decision making.

As for further research for this specific topic, an expansion may include a statistical analysis of the voter registration and turnout in the upcoming election of 2024, with emphasis on the region of San Diego County. A specific study may focus on the registration and turnout gaps amongst the various regions of San Diego, and how the individual and contextual factors play a role.

Though this research takes a qualitative approach, the contribution of this research reveals the modern impacts of how individual factors and contextual factors play a role in shaping the turnout levels and voting behaviors in the County of San Diego. Addressing barriers to participation, fostering educational initiatives, promoting community engagement, and enacting policies that prioritize the interests of Latino communities are essential steps toward enhancing political empowerment and representation in the region.

7. LIMITATIONS

As with all research, this project is subject to several limitations, several of which I discuss and that shall be expanded upon in further research.

First, time restraints serve as a limitation for this project, as I had to perform the outreach and secure the interviews in ample time frame to write the thesis for the Fall 2023 quarter to Winter 2024 quarter which is approximately a 6 month time period. Additionally, the timeframe in which I conducted the interviews occurred during peak vacation time for the Fall and Winter seasons, as many offices and organizations were available under a limited amount of time, limiting the number of interviewees for the project. Despite these constraints, I was able to interview a wide array of prominent individuals in San Diego County and relevant to the topic, all of whom have extensive experiences in working with the Latino community or the issue of voting.

Second, the resource constraints of this research are an important concern that I would like to acknowledge. In selecting subjects to interview, I focused on those from non-profit organizations and those who work in politics as opposed to Latino constituents or Latinos who are eligible to vote. As this project was conducted with no financial support, I would have been unable to financially compensate individuals for their interview time. Additionally, the non-profit organizations who work in political spaces have a higher inclination to interview for this project, as these issues directly address their constituency and the work of their organizations. Thus, selection bias may have played a role in who agreed to be interviewed. An extension of this project for future designs would be to conduct interviews with constituents and non-eligible voters to hear the direct issues. With this interview expansion, considerable compensation for each interviewee should be granted to express gratitude for their time and support.

Third, there may be an issue with the social desirability bias, as interviewees may have felt pressured or swayed to respond in a certain way when speaking about sensitive issues such as political behaviors and attitudes. As individuals are entitled to their own opinions, ideas, and political expressions, participants may have felt influenced or compelled to relay sentiments or testimonials that may not align with their true beliefs. Though I am confident that social desirability bias was not present among the various interviewees, the disclosure of such bias is important to outline potential factors of influence.

8. APPENDIX

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS, PURPOSE & POTENTIAL FACTORS

NUMBER	INTERVIEW QUESTION	PURPOSE OF QUESTION	POTENTIAL FACTORS:
Q1	<i>What is your name, your job affiliation, and your title?</i>	Allows the interviewee to briefly introduce themselves and for the researcher to identify the interviewee with the correct title and affiliation	No intended factors
Q2	<i>What was your community like growing up?</i>	Provides context on where the interviewee grew up; opening the conversation to potentially mention economic, racial, or social variations which is crucial to understanding the positionality and background of the interviewee's upbringing	<p>(INDIVIDUAL):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SES - Familial Background - Immigration Status - Race - Ethnicity - Age - Youth - Language - Education <p>(CONTEXTUAL):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political Culture - Economy - Laws/Policies - Social Institutions - Region/City
Q3	<i>How do you identify yourself within or amongst the Latinx/Latino community?</i>	Provides context on the positionality within or amongst the community that is being focused on in the project.	<p>(INDIVIDUAL):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Familial Background - Immigration Status - Race - Ethnicity - Language <p>(CONTEXTUAL):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political Culture - Region/City
Q4	<i>Can you describe your personal and</i>	Allows the interviewee to speak about their own	<p>(INDIVIDUAL):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political Efficacy

	<i>familial relationship to politics or voting?</i>	relationship to the subject matter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trust in Government - SES - Familial Background - Immigration Status - Race - Ethnicity - Age - Youth - Language - Education <p>(CONTEXTUAL):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political Culture - Economy - Laws/Policies - Social Institutions - Region/City
Q5	<i>From your perspective, can you discuss the political culture and environment in [San Diego county OR California]? What role have Latinos played, if any, in shaping this political environment?</i>	This two-part question allows the interviewee to give their interpretation of the political San Diego. As the interviewees come from different job roles and backgrounds, this question tests if there is a variation in perspectives.	<p>(INDIVIDUAL):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political Efficacy - Trust in Government - SES - Political Interest - Immigration Status - Race - Ethnicity - Youth - Language - Education <p>(CONTEXTUAL):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political Culture - Economy - Laws/Policies - Social Institutions - Region/City
Q6	<i>At the national, state, and county levels, the largest gaps between Latino voters and others lie in registration. Once Latino voters are</i>	Offers an opportunity to inform the interviewee of the turnout gap in San Diego, and offer their stance, experience or opinion on why this gap exists. Also invites the	<p>(INDIVIDUAL):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political Efficacy - Trust in Government - SES - Political Interest

	<i>registered, a turnout gap between them and others exists, but it is much smaller than the registration gap. Specifically in the County of San Diego, this region holds the largest gap in the state. In your opinion, why do you think that this registration gap exists and how is this key to increasing the overall participation rate of Latino voters at all levels?</i>	interviewee to potentially speak on their impact or concern to this question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Immigration Status - Youth - Language - Education (CONTEXTUAL): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political Culture - Economy - Laws/Policies - Social Institutions - Region/City
Q7	<i>Do you believe that having sustained, and direct face-to-face voter engagement with Latino voters is imperative to get them to the polls?</i>	Intended to reveal the stance of the interviewee and potentially guide them to speak on their experience and encounters with face-to-face voter engagement as a mode of outreach	(INDIVIDUAL): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political Efficacy - Trust in Government - SES - Political Interest - Familial Background - Immigration Status - Youth - Language - Education (CONTEXTUAL): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political Culture
Q8	<i>Do you believe that there are certain indicators or forms of political participation that influence Latino voter turnout, if so what are those influences?</i>	Offers the opportunity for the interviewee to attest their own opinion or recollection of influences for turnout of Latinos, which tests the research hypothesis.	(INDIVIDUAL): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SES - Political Interest - Youth - Language - Education (CONTEXTUAL): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political Culture - Political Participation - Economy

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Laws/Policies - Social Institutions - Region/City
Q9	<i>How does your (office/organization / your work) aim to mobilize the untapped opportunity to grow the electorate through deeper engagement with Latino voters?</i>	As the interviewees come from various work and job affiliations, interviewees have the opportunity to discuss their contribution to this question. If an interviewee does not engage specifically with this type of work or wishes not to disclose an answer to this question, they are welcome to speak as an individual or not answer the question.	<p>(INDIVIDUAL):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political Efficacy - Political Interest - Education <p>(CONTEXTUAL):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political Culture - Laws/Policies - Social Institutions - Region/City
Q10	<i>Would you like to provide any additional questions, comments, or concerns?</i>	Offers the space for interviewees to provide further information that they may not have taken the chance to speak on in the interview or elaborate on existing answers.	No intended factors

INTERVIEW FORMALITY, INTEGRITY & COMMITMENT

Upon completion of each interview and when each individual has received a full copy of the paper, each individual will be encouraged to sign and return a written release which will allow me to use the information shared towards my honors thesis. The written release, modeled by the UC San Diego Ethnic Studies Race and Oral History course, has been approved by Professor Dr. Abrajano prior to sharing and incorporating into the project. The purpose of the written release is to ensure full transparency and information that the interviewee disclosed, as all quotes, video recordings, and records of the interviews will not be misconstrued in the writing of the thesis. Upon finalization of the thesis, each interviewee will receive a copy of their contribution to the honors thesis which will be submitted on April 1st, 2024.

In terms of the logistics, the interviews were conducted in thirty minutes to sixty minutes. All interviewees were asked the same questions in order, and the format anticipated a minimal exchange of dialogue to respect the time of the interviewee. The questions were aimed to be open-ended and up to the interpretation of the interviewee. All interviewees were told that the space was theirs to express their responses and if at any point or time in the interview they felt uncomfortable, wanted to take a pause, or pass on the question, they had the freedom to do so. Providing a safe and inviting environment was a top priority to ensure respect for the interviewee.



UC San Diego Political Science Honors Thesis Research Questions: Marysol Valdez

Interview Questions:

1. What is your name, your job affiliation, and your title?
2. What was your community like growing up?
3. How do you identify yourself within or amongst the Latinx/ Latino community?
4. Can you describe your personal and familial relationship to politics or voting?
5. From your perspective, can you discuss the political culture and environment in [San Diego county OR California]? What role have Latinos played, if any, in shaping this political environment?
6. At the national, state, and county levels, the largest gaps between Latino voters and others lie in registration. Once Latino voters are registered, a turnout gap between them and others exists, but it is much smaller than the registration gap. Specifically in the County of San Diego, this region holds the largest gap in the state. In your opinion, why do you think that this registration gap exists and how is this key to increasing the overall participation rate of Latino voters at all levels?
7. Do you believe that having sustained, and direct face-to-face voter engagement with Latino voters is imperative to get them to the polls?
8. Do you believe that there are certain indicators or forms of political participation that influence Latino voter turnout, if so what are those influences?
9. How does your (office/organization / your work) aim to mobilize the untapped opportunity to grow the electorate through deeper engagement with Latino voters?
10. Would you like to provide any additional questions, comments, or concerns?

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