



UNLOCKING LATINO CIVIC POTENTIAL: 2016 AND BEYOND

A Report of the Aspen Institute Latinos and Society
Unlocking Latino Civic Potential - A Collaborative Convening

Dave Grossman, Rapporteur



In partnership with



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*This report is written from the perspective of an informed observer at the
Aspen Institute 2015 Unlocking Latino Civic Potential convening.
None of the comments or ideas contained in this report should be taken as embodying
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In August 2015, the Aspen Institute Latinos and Society Program and the Aspen Institute Citizenship and American Identity Program convened a diverse group of distinguished scholars, organizers, and other experts and leaders to discuss the challenges and causes of low Latino civic participation and to develop recommendations for unlocking Latino civic potential in the United States.

This is a vital topic, as the U.S. Latino population is growing rapidly, is overwhelmingly young, and thus will see growing power and influence in American society and politics, *if* Latinos are able to more fully realize their civic potential. Increasing Latino civic and political participation rates today will pay dividends for generations to come; likewise, missing the opportunity to do so will have consequences to the health of our democracy for generations to come.

The goal of the Aspen convening was to develop actionable, innovative, creative, and collaborative strategies to boost Latino civic participation. The group identified key challenges to mobilizing the Latino community civically, including insufficient data collection, differences in citizenship status, as well as lack of sufficient or sustained investment in engaging the community. They also identified four priority areas to focus on: immigrant integration and naturalization, voter engagement, civic education, and leadership development. The following page lays out the key recommendations in each of these areas with the hope that others will consider, borrow, adapt, and develop them in ways that truly unlock Latino civic potential in 2016 and beyond.

Key Recommendations

Immigrant Integration & Naturalization

- Initiate a national call to action based around teaching English as a gateway to integration, citizenship, and financial literacy
- Create a non-partisan National Task Force for English-Learning
- Make naturalization a priority of the U.S. immigration system
- Highlight immigrants as business and job creators

Voter Engagement

- Implement automatic voter registration and remove onerous barriers to registration
- Target Latinas in registration and mobilization campaigns
- Sustain Latino mobilization efforts beyond Presidential elections
- Improve the quality and collection of Latino voter data

Civic Education

- Engage Latinos at an early age with civic participation opportunities, to instill a lifelong spirit of participation
- Create Civic “Dream” Zones to cultivate civic virtue and education in a community-based way
- Create a Resource Bank of age-appropriate civic education resources, including Apps
- Launch a national campaign about the importance of civic education and to help Latinos understand and engage the institutions that affect their lives

Leadership Development

- Direct young Latinos to leadership incubators such as Teach for America and the Peace Corps
- Create a Latino Leadership App for internship, leadership, and mentorship opportunities
- Further develop leaders of Community Based Organizations
- Boost the capacity of Latino Appointment Program
- Build a Latino Super PAC

INTRODUCTION

Civic participation is an important measure of the health of a democracy. Latino civic participation in the United States is lower than other groups across a number of indicators, not the least of which is voter turnout. With Latinos representing 17% of the population today and projected to reach 30% by 2060, ensuring that this group participates fully in all aspects of our society should be an imperative for the country as a whole.

To help address this challenge, the Aspen Institute Latinos and Society Program, in partnership with the Aspen Institute Citizenship and American Identity Program, convened a diverse group of distinguished scholars, organizers, and other sector experts and leaders in Aspen, Colorado to discuss the challenges and causes of low participation and to develop recommendations for boosting results in the United States.

While voter registration and turnout were an important focus of the gathering, particularly in light of the 2016 elections, participants also looked at a wider set of civic health indicators such as engaging with elected officials, organizing around community issues, rates of naturalization, running for office, participating in local schools or church-related activities, volunteering, and otherwise engaging with one's community.

Who Are U.S. Latinos?

As an initial matter, it is important to understand that “Latino” is a very American concept, encompassing people whose origins are from a wide range of Latin American countries. The term includes people that are foreign-born and American-born, citizens and non-citizens, and English speakers and non-English speakers. Latinos are represented in all sectors of society and are liberals, conservatives, small business owners, church-goers, teachers, CEOs, military veterans, and much more. Understanding the subsets of the Latino population will lead to better strategies for boosting civic participation than will implementing broad-brush efforts to engage Latinos as a whole.

Discussions on race in the United States have traditionally been dominated by a white-black dichotomy, but a significant portion of the population today consists of Latinos, Asians and Pacific Islanders, American Indians, and others. There are some 55 million Latinos living in the United States today. Of these, some 19 million are foreign born, and the remaining 35 million are U.S. born citizens.¹ Among immigrant Latinos, 6.2 million are naturalized U.S. citizens,² at least 5.1 million are legal permanent residents (“Green Card” holders who can work and travel in the U.S. legally but are not U.S. citizens),³ and approximately 8.1 million are undocumented (lacking legal permission to live or work in the U.S.).⁴

While the percentage of whites in the population has been declining since the 1980s, the U.S. Latino population is growing rapidly. The Latino population is also overwhelmingly young; the average age within the U.S. Latino population is 28 and the largest age group is 0-5 years (compared to an average age of 42.8 and the largest age group being 50-54 for the U.S. white population).⁵ Because the current Latino population skews so heavily towards the young, it is inevitable that the eligible Latino electorate will at least double in the next 20 years, just from people aging in.⁶

Given the size of the U.S. Latino population, their growing civic and economic importance, and their relatively low participation rates, it is vital to explore ways to unlock Latino civic potential in the United States.

How Have U.S. Latinos Been Engaging?

The Latino electorate is at a critical juncture. Since the 2000 elections, the rate of growth of registered Latino voters has not kept pace with the rate of growth of eligible Latino voters. In the 2014 midterm elections, there were almost as many unregistered eligible Latinos (12.2 million) as registered (12.9 million) and California and Texas, two states with the largest Latino populations, each actually has more unregistered eligible Latinos than registered.⁷ Restrictive and outdated state voting policies in many places – including lack of early voting, lack of same day registration, and onerous identification requirements – along with the lack of sustained outreach by the major U.S. political parties beyond key battleground states and critical elections, have further dampened Latino voter turnout. Political scientists have determined that the act of voting itself is reinforcing and that people who vote across three cycles are much more likely to be voters for life. Increasing Latino political participation rates today will pay dividends for generations to come; missing the opportunity to do so will also have consequences for generations to come.

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Just as voting rates are lower than one would expect given demographic growth, so too are naturalization rates among Latinos. The Pew Research Center estimates that, after 10 years, 78% of all immigrants, other than Mexicans, who are eligible have naturalized. The naturalization rate for Mexican immigrants is only 36%. An estimated 3 million Latinos are eligible to naturalize but have not done so.⁸

Beyond voting and naturalization, answers to U.S. Census surveys indicate that Latinos generally have lower rates of civic engagement than non-Latinos in terms of talking to public officials, volunteering, trust in public institutions, and other mainstream American indicators of how communities and individuals are participating in society. We recognize that there are limitations in the dataset, in terms of what it measures and how it is collected. Additionally, experiential and anecdotal evidence suggests that survey questions underrepresent what is occurring informally in churches, communities, family networks, and elsewhere. Even with these shortcomings there is general consensus that there is a need

for significant improvement in understanding and increasing participation rates among Latinos. Some social scientists argue that Latinos are participating at exactly the rates that their socioeconomic status and younger average age would suggest, particularly given the limited efforts and resources typically applied toward engaging them. The social science data is very clear: if people are actually asked, they tend to vote and participate.

There are several non-traditional areas of civic engagement where Latinos have shown great energy. One of these is the push for immigration reform. This has taken many forms, from the historic marches around the nation in 2006 to the activism of the undocumented “DREAMer” youth “coming out” as undocumented and engaging in civil rights activities despite the threat of deportation. Other areas of great civic vitality in the Latino community include high levels of church participation and charitable support, the creation of national networks of ethnic civic associations, the role played by ethnic and Spanish language media, and entrepreneurial business start-up rates.⁹

How Can U.S. Latino Civic Potential Be Unlocked?

Voter engagement is, in some ways, the most straightforward aspect of civic participation and receives a relatively large amount of attention. While undeniably important, voter engagement is not the only aspect of civic participation that matters. A more holistic approach is needed to address a range of issues, all of which are intertwined and are important to making democracy strong. Civic education, organizing, and advocacy, for example, can give Latinos meaningful involvement that may lead them to vote, pursue electoral politics, or seek other leadership opportunities within their communities. Naturalization is also an important precondition to facilitate such forms of participation.

The availability of financial resources can determine the success or failure of efforts to boost civic participation. Many funders look at their work in silos. Those who fund English-proficiency, for example, generally do not think of themselves as supporting civic participation, though it is often a precondition to such participation. Other funders look solely at voter participation, overlooking other forms of civic participation that reinforce voting, while political funders underestimate the importance of naturalization as an “on ramp” to voting. More needs to be done to help funders look at civic engagement more comprehensively and at the ways these different activities reinforce the overarching goal of active participation in civil society.

The availability of financial resources can determine the success or failure of efforts to boost civic participation.

Surveys indicate that English proficiency, overall education, and income are strong drivers of civic participation in the United States. All of these indicators look promising for the 19 and under Latino cohort, which is also the largest cohort.¹⁰ Ninety-three percent of all Latinos under 18 are U.S. born¹¹ and are more likely to graduate high school, enroll in college programs, be English-dominant, and use social media.¹² Surveys also indicate that Latinos have relatively strong confidence in the media, are more likely to get their news from broadcast media (radio and television), and index high on usage of mobile devices, which means these tools could be utilized for engaging Latinos in civic activities.

While funding is usually in short supply, there is no shortage of great ideas for ways to increase Latino civic participation. The group in Aspen developed a lengthy list of possible strategies to promote U.S. Latino civic potential, including (but by no means limited to) the following:

1. Invest in and carry out a culturally relevant engagement strategy geared toward Latinos
 - Help Latinos overcome their mistrust of institutions
2. Carry out sustained investment and engagement in the Latino community beyond election cycles
 - Mobilize and engage Latino voters, especially in key swing states, including targeted voter registration drives
 - Invest in and activate community-based organizations (CBOs)
 - Engage philanthropy in Latino civic participation and break down the siloed approach
 - Increase funding to support these efforts
3. Build coalitions, engage sympathetic groups
 - Engage the military and veterans, as well as other organizations that foster a sense of civic responsibility, such as Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Hispanic fraternities and sororities
 - Work with religious organizations to help promote issues such as naturalization, voter registration, and get-out-the-vote (GOTV)
 - Connect the Latino community with the Asian and Pacific Islander, African American, and LGBTQ communities around civic participation efforts
4. Restart a movement for teaching civic education
 - Reinstate civic education in schools
 - Engage CBOs in offering civic education
 - Develop educational games, apps, and books that teach politics, civics, and voting
5. Invest long-term in youth, from access to early childhood education to leadership development
6. Support Latino leadership
 - Identify and support potential Latino leaders and political candidates
 - Train and mentor them in governing once elected to ensure their success
7. Reform campaign regulations and financing

8. Promote electoral strategies that increase voter turnout and prevent impediments to voting
 - Promote compliance with the federal National Voter Registration Act of 1993 to expand voter registration opportunities and voting rights
 - Change state electoral rules that disenfranchise, including certain state voter ID requirements
 - Create a national ID card as part of a federally-sponsored voter registration system
 - Make the timing of local elections more conducive to participation
 - Make election day a national holiday so people can get to the polls
 - Modernize voting (e.g., automatic registration, multiple languages, multiple means)
 - Allow same-day voter registration
9. Promote integration and naturalization, which are preconditions for civic participation
 - Promote and invest in English-proficiency for all Americans
 - Encourage naturalization for legal permanent residents and immigrant integration
 - Pass comprehensive federal immigration reform
10. Improve data collection, research, and analysis to better understand the Latino community and engage with them more effectively
 - Develop a set of non-traditional indicators of civic engagement to better capture the ways that Latinos engage civically

Many of these ideas are closely related or interconnected and actions are already occurring on many of these fronts. The goal of the Aspen convening was to come up with actionable, innovative, creative, and collaborative strategies to strengthen the work that is already underway and to come up with new ideas for boosting Latino civic participation. The group identified four priority focus areas that combine many of the elements in the list above: **1) immigrant integration and naturalization, 2) voter engagement, 3) civic education, and 4) leadership development.** The remaining sections will elaborate on each of these four critical areas with an eye to big ideas, research needs, challenges to overcome, and opportunities to advance progress.

IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION AND NATURALIZATION

Goals:

- Continue and build on the American tradition of including newcomers in our democracy
- Strengthen our nation by creating active citizens
- Build on-ramps to the New Americans Highway for civic, economic, and social integration

Context:

Immigrant integration is a two-way process that requires hard work from immigrants and strategic investments of time, resources, and care from American institutions, government, and individuals. It is an effort that should engage many different types of institutions – immigrant organizations, community based organizations, libraries, corporations, philanthropy, churches, schools, government – in cooperative efforts to create on-ramps for immigrants (not just Latinos) to be able to integrate into our nation. We must combat backlash against Latinos, which makes integration and full participation challenging, by raising awareness of our shared American immigrant history as part of the American story – from the struggles of the Irish, Italians, and Chinese to gain acceptance to the contributions of the first Latino Medal of Honor winner in the Civil War.

Investments in language training and naturalization are essential, will help push back against some anti-immigrant narratives in society, and should find appeal across the political spectrum. Teaching English and becoming a citizen is a very traditional American way of thinking about immigrant integration – not to homogenize immigrants but to empower them. Immigrants want to learn English; survey data shows that the vast majority of foreign-born Latino respondents say it is extremely important to learn English. English proficiency is a key portal for integration overall; as people learn English they become better advocates for their children in schools and for improving their health issues, and they have better access to job opportunities. They also become more productive workers when they can communicate effectively and have more opportunities in the workplace. English proficiency is a prerequisite for naturalization, but there are long waiting lists for programs and little investment in helping people to learn English. Other countries invest many more hours in language instruction for their immigrants.¹³

Once people gain English language proficiency, they are more likely to pursue citizenship and once people become citizens or legal permanent residents, they are more likely to vote and engage civically. Naturalization is the most important step that an aspiring American can take to integrate more fully into our democracy. The process requires a commitment to

learn English, study our history and Constitution, pledge to defend our nation, and join the ranks of voters who guide our nation. It turns out that the best predictor of naturalization is the number of years someone has spent in the United States. For Latinos, naturalization spikes after 25 years; that figure is much lower for some other groups.¹⁴ In addition, a big challenge in naturalization is the price; as naturalization costs substantially more than renewing a green card, many will choose not to naturalize.

Big Ideas:

- **English Language Acquisition:** Create a national program through which every immigrant can get the ideal number of hours of English language instruction to allow them to integrate into American society and the workforce.¹⁵

This should include a national call to action – a broad messaging campaign to all of America about the desire of immigrants to learn English and the need for programs and support for new Americans to do so.

This should be a multi-sector approach with funding at the federal, state, and local levels, as well as contributions from corporations and businesses. A federal pool of money – \$200 million per year – could incentivize a “race to the top” competition for matching funds to support English instruction.

After the 2016 elections, invite former Presidents Bush and Clinton to co-chair a non-partisan English/Naturalization effort and ask CEOs to join a National Task Force for English-Learning to coordinate funding and ensure on-the-job support.

The effort should focus on contextualized learning, including vocational English at scale (industry by industry, with ties to the workplace) and a practical curriculum offered in practical places at practical times (e.g., at work during lunch hours, at churches, at CBOs). Technological aspects could include creating apps to find English-language partners and translators in an area (one-to-one community building), building online courses (in conjunction with community colleges), creating a Kahn Academy for English language learners, and creating a YouTube channel, public affairs channels, and on-demand TV channels for learning English.

The effort could also tap into the volunteerism of the nation (e.g., through AARP, AmeriCorps VISTA, United Way, Girl Scouts, student service hours) by urging people to serve as language partners and translators. Tax credits could be made available both for the immigrants, to support their English learning, and for the volunteer helpers.

Key opportunities:

- Initiate a national call to action to teach English as a gateway to integration, citizenship, and financial literacy
- Create a non-partisan National Task Force for English-learning
- Make naturalization a priority of the U.S. immigration system
- Highlight immigrants as business and job creators

- **Naturalization:** Make naturalization a goal of our immigration system as a matter of national policy, including creating a U.S. Department of Citizenship Services (as exists in Canada) and encouraging all levels of government to actively promote naturalization. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) should change its fee structure to remove the cost disincentive for naturalization and the National Task Force of CEOs should create a fund for naturalization assistance (microloans may also be an option).

English, as noted, is the gateway to naturalization and the national English instruction campaign should include “English to Naturalize” courses; the technology channels created to support English should include support for naturalization as well.

There should be a national campaign to encourage naturalization, including informing the general public about naturalized citizens in the United States and their contributions. Ethnic media must be fully engaged in this campaign. Volunteerism among the native born to help immigrants naturalize should be organized on both the national and local levels. Within the Latino community a messaging campaign should be created to communicate the availability of dual Mexican and U.S. nationality and other benefits of citizenship that make the case for Latinos to take steps toward naturalization.

- **Economic Integration:** Teach immigrants financial literacy, the path to home ownership, and the basics of business formation in the United States. All of these lead to an increased stake in society. This effort towards economic integration could include “how to” kits from government agencies, home ownership assistance, and a communications strategy to convey to the general public that immigrants are already starting large numbers of small businesses. Implementing such a communication strategy provides an opportunity to highlight immigrants as job creators and an engine of our economy.

Research needs:

How many hours of English language training are needed for Spanish speakers to become English proficient?

What are successful models in language training that we could learn from?

VOTER ENGAGEMENT

Goal:

- Make every eligible Latino an informed and engaged voter – one that knows how to vote, knows about the issues, and participates in elections

Context:

In the 2012 presidential election, there were several states where the combined non-white population provided the margin of victory, as well as a few states where Latinos alone provided the margin. Similarly, some of the expected swing states in the 2016 election are high Latino influence states. The 2016 elections offer a galvanizing moment for both parties to engage and mobilize the Latino community around issues.

Latino voter engagement and influence is increasing, but is still far below its potential. A key barrier to that potential is under-investment in year-round, at-scale, and long-term registration and mobilization initiatives. Not unlike other constituencies, Latino voter participation tends to drop significantly during mid-term or local elections and spikes during the presidential race. There are many structural barriers too, including language impediments and lack of awareness of voter rights and protections. In addition, after 2010, restrictive voter ID policies began proliferating in some states, as did restrictions on same-day registration and early voting. This limited immeasurable numbers of Latinos, African Americans, and working poor from exercising their right to vote.

The two major parties in the United States also have not traditionally worked to mobilize Latinos to the same extent as other voters and current voter databases do not do a good job of collecting and maintaining Latino voter data. A further, continual challenge has been finding the resources for Latinos to execute ideas and approaches that are known to improve voter turnout. A lot of what is effective is known, but has been under-resourced in the Latino community.

Latino communities generally tend to be more transient and lower-income with lower levels of education and home ownership (i.e., high percentage of renters). They are heavy users of cable and mobile devices, but have uneven access to the internet. All of these factors must be taken into consideration by those conducting outreach in order to develop appropriate strategies for mobilization and engagement.

Big Ideas:

- **Automatic Registration and Removal of Structural Barriers:** Implement automatic voter registration – registering every eligible person to vote, unless they opt out – at a wide variety of source institutions (e.g., DMVs, social services agencies, naturalization services, military agencies, public universities). This would need to be implemented with sensitivity to the needs of those with differing citizenship statuses.

Short of that, voter registration should be modernized to include measures such as creating or enhancing mobile-friendly online registration, enacting same-day registration, implementing pre-registration for 16- and 17-year-olds, and making registration portable so that a voter’s registration moves when the voter moves in-state.

Likewise, efforts should be made to ensure that state and federal governments comply with the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) to enhance voter opportunities for every American. Another high-impact reform would be to change existing laws in order to restore voting rights to Americans with past criminal convictions.

- **National Voter Registration Campaign:**

Assuming registration is not made automatic, execute a Latino-led national voter registration campaign in English and Spanish, specifically targeting Latinas and with a particular focus on mothers and wives due to their influence on the family. Young adults should be targeted as well.

This campaign should continue the existing partnerships and outreach strategies with Spanish-language media and should also build and maintain partnerships with English-language media outlets that have Latino consumers. In addition, the campaign should form and strengthen collaborations and arrangements with churches, community colleges, other educational institutions, citizenship ceremonies, and others to conduct voter registration. It should also explore new types of delivery mechanisms for voter registration forms (e.g., including them in rental packets and cable provider information).

The campaign should use calendar hooks, such as Mother’s Day and Hispanic Heritage Month, to link opportunities of community celebration with opportunities to reinforce the importance of voter registration.

- **Sustained Mobilization:** Make mobilization and engagement year-round efforts – not just tied to presidential elections – and ensure that there is, for the first time, adequate investment to support those efforts, which include identifying, expanding, and confirming funders willing to invest in Latino Get out the Vote (GOTV) efforts.

Key opportunities:

- Implement automatic voter registration and remove onerous barriers to registration
- Target Latinas in registration and mobilization campaigns
- Sustain Latino mobilization efforts beyond presidential elections
- Improve the quality and collection of Latino voter data

Strategies could include: moving local and state elections to coincide with federal elections; conducting mobilization drives targeting Latinas in English and Spanish; conducting large-scale grassroots canvasses among Latino voters; conducting public awareness campaigns around voter registration and voter turnout; identifying the hooks that will overcome attitudinal barriers (i.e., the view that voting is meaningless) and inspire Latinos to register and vote; arming Latino voters with facts and tools; and combatting existing voter suppression techniques.

Data is another essential need for effective mobilization and serious efforts should be made to create a Latino Voter File, collect and maintain individual-level information on unregistered eligible persons, and clean up and improve the functionality of existing statewide voter registration databases.

Research needs:

Which hooks and messages will inspire Latinos to register and vote?

Which voter turnout strategies that work in other communities also work in the Latino community and which do not?

CIVIC EDUCATION

Goals:

- Improve understanding by Latinos (and others) of the principles and practices of how people living and working in the United States can access, influence, and impact institutions of government and society
- Focus on the opportunity to educate the upcoming cohort of young Latinos
- Foster a narrative that is inclusive of different cultures, yet reflects a shared American identity

Context:

Civic education has been so de-emphasized in this country that it is now largely absent from school curricula. This has led generations of teenagers to lack understanding of the mechanisms for exercising power and influence and to feel disempowered as participants in political society. The scarcity of civic education in schools particularly hurts the children of immigrant parents who often have limited understanding of how U.S. civic processes work. Latino youth who do not get that education in school may not get it at all. Particularly given how young the U.S. Latino population is, it may be just as important to start educating and empowering 6 to 12 year-olds, as it is to get people of voting age to turn out.

Research suggests that political socialization happens at around age 12. Establishing a sense of civic and cultural agency and identity, inculcating civic habits, and conveying useful civic knowledge at an early age will lead students to become engaged, active, voting adults. In particular, giving those under 18 a taste of empowerment – by encouraging them to speak before their peers, offering them opportunities to share their opinions publicly about things to change in their community, or having them collectively voice opinions to institutional power (e.g., a Youth Voice Day) – can hook them for life. Helping young Latinos share their stories at churches and schools, with family members, with the media, and with public officials can help them develop shared narratives, shared identities, and a sense of community (while acknowledging the diversity within that community) and can empower them to take action together and engage in civic and political arenas. Even something as simple as mock elections in schools can be fortifying moments for youth participation, as can giving students opportunities to influence school administration. Instilling a sense of competition and accomplishment through badging and gamification initiatives (e.g., rewards, competitions) can further help get students involved and excited about civic participation.

Increasing civic engagement means ensuring that more people are more literate in the mechanisms for exercising power. While science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education has become a trend in education – in part because the business community came forward and said it needed people with a background in STEM – there appears to be a need for a similar model for boosting civic education. Having a constituency (such as Latinos) demand that schools provide more civic education could spur additional action.

It is also important to acknowledge institutions beyond the schools and the role they play in shaping civic values and habits. In the Latino community, churches are where people go not just for religion but also to learn; they are the town halls and the community centers where people can come to get information. The media, especially but not solely Spanish-language media, also plays a role in teaching people about power and how to navigate the system (whether the political, health, education, or some other system). CBOs have also been very successful in providing programs and services and are trusted partners in Latino communities, but they generally have not been financed to include civic engagement and advocacy as part of their scope (e.g., by organizing local turnout at public meetings, connecting youth with local government planning processes, or creating opportunities for dialogue on national issues).

In the longer term, there is a clear need to get civics back into educational institutions (and there may be near-term opportunities in some states). In the shorter term, there are approaches that can be pursued that do not rely on the current school structure.

Big Ideas:

- **Civic “Dream” Zones:** Select 1-2 pilot schools/neighborhoods (through a competitive process) to take on a comprehensive community civic education initiative, conduct research on how to best create a holistic community plan that supports engaged citizens, and cultivates civic virtue at key moments in situ in a community-based way. All community stakeholders should be incorporated, including students, families/parents, educators, veterans, CBOs, youth programs, civic education organizations and experts, local governments, churches, health and safety agencies, businesses, and the arts.

These stakeholders should have access to a set of resources and interventions aimed at helping young people start developing a sense of agency through age-appropriate interventions targeting youth according to age-related and social benchmarks to help them develop public or civic identities in tandem with their personal and cultural identities.

Key opportunities:

- Engage Latinos at an early age with civic participation opportunities, to instill a lifelong spirit of participation
- Create Civic “Dream” Zones to cultivate civic virtue and education in a community-based way
- Create a Resource Bank of age-appropriate civic education resources, including Apps.
- Launch a national campaign about the importance of civic education and to help Latinos understand and engage the institutions that affect their lives

The experiences in the pilots should be tracked, documented, and analyzed to understand the community dynamics for civic education and to create effective tools and resources for other communities to use. Information captured in a report should include changes in voting registration and rates, before and after surveys on civic efficacy and involvement, and effects on academic performance and later life skills.

- **Latino Action Civics Program and Resource Bank:** Create a public clearinghouse of toolkits, curriculum templates, assignments, and resources for any community to access and implement for developing an age-appropriate curriculum that cultivates a sense of neighborhood, family, and civic identity throughout a child's education and development, building on the Dream Zone pilot laboratories.

For grades K-6, the focus should be on developing a sense of family commitment, work ethic, community and extended family networks, and pride in and identity tied to heritage and culture. There potentially could be outreach to children's shows such as *Dora the Explorer* and *Sesame Street* to create programming that incorporates civic education and participation.

For grades 7-8, the goal should be to capture Latino children during a major developmental/socialization stage (i.e. related to gender roles, relationship to authority, and group identification). At this age, Latino youth should be educated about family, neighborhood, and democratic principles. This should be done in a way that helps them to feel respected and empowered as active citizens. It should also take into consideration an understanding of their own power and respect for the power of others.

For grades 9-12, the educational focus should be on neighborhoods, advocacy in the community, and voting (particularly for grades 11 and 12, right before students turn 18 and are eligible to register and vote). There could also be resources focused on young Latino adults (around ages 18-26), who tend to have lower levels of voting and civic participation.

Schools should not be mandated to do anything (at least in the short term), but grants could be provided to schools/communities to implement the resources and to collect the same kind of data collected in the Dream Zones, perhaps for compilation into a larger report. Those teaching and developing curricula and standards for political science and social studies could be potential allies in this effort.

Research needs:

Which outside influencer organizations most contribute to the political socialization of Latinos and how?

How well do traditional measures of civic engagement capture the distinct types of activities in which many Latinos engage?

What is the baseline of current civic knowledge among Latinos and where are there gaps?

How does civic education affect voting behavior, civic involvement, academic performance, life skills, and a sense of character, agency, family, and community?

- **National Civic Education Campaign:** Create PR campaigns for the Latino community focused on the importance of civic education, as well as a national PR campaign that has Latinos (e.g., celebrities, athletes, leaders, and others) taking the lead in promoting the message that civic education should be taken seriously. The campaign should issue a call to action about the need for civic education and engagement and about the opportunities to take advantage of the tools, resources, grants, and pilot programs from the Dream Zones and Resource Bank. In addition, the national campaign could help support Latinos in better understanding their neighborhoods, local social institutions (e.g., churches, health clinics, and service agencies), local governments, and elected officials at local, state, and national levels. This campaign could draw on some of the Resource Bank materials and could pursue a similar approach to targeting and segmentation. The overall purpose of the campaign would be to provide Latinos with greater personal knowledge of their position within the social and political institutions that directly affect their lives and to improve their engagement with these institutions.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Goal:

- To create a democracy that more accurately reflects society by engaging Latinos and supporting their leadership in a wide range of areas, but particularly by serving in public office

Context:

Latinos need access to leadership opportunities – whether political, corporate, community, volunteer, or otherwise – that allow them to participate in civic life and contribute to the broader society. One possible reason Latinos vote in low numbers may be because they generally do not see themselves reflected on the ballot. About 1% of elected officials are Latino,¹⁵ even though Latinos make up about 17% of the population. Major policy decisions will be made in positions of power, whether in a C-suite, the White House, a governor's mansion, a legislature, or elsewhere, and if Latinos are not at the table, their interests will not be adequately represented.

Additionally, there is a leak in the leadership pipeline after college when a combination of financial responsibilities and fewer leadership opportunities may limit the ability of Latinos to continue to participate in civic activities. While there are many routes to leadership in different sectors and a lot of great efforts already under way, the efforts need to be more audacious, bold, and aggressive. It is essential to build leaders and political power – and to have Latinos be seen not just as Latino leaders but as American leaders. Issues important to Latinos tend to be the same as for many Americans, such as education, jobs, and health care.

Leadership development is both an enabler and a product of civic engagement. When a strong Latino or Latina is running for office, the community may come out in greater numbers (though Latinos look to the issues as well as the backgrounds of candidates when voting). A virtuous cycle can take place when there is an increase in voter participation coupled with a corresponding increase in Latino candidates and elected officials. However, even when Latinos are on the ballot, they tend to have inadequate technical assistance and financial backing. Latino candidates often have strong ground games, but get outspent, especially during the final weeks of a campaign. Latinos may have among the highest levels of faith-based giving (often from lower-income people who traditionally give more as a percentage of income), but they have yet to be moved in a focused way to the next step: giving to advocacy efforts, organizing efforts, and candidates.

Big Ideas:

- **Pipeline Development:** Identify Latinos who want to be civically involved and provide them with access to leadership incubation opportunities, training, and guidance. This development should be non-partisan and involve both existing and new infrastructure.

Young adults who are still in college or just starting their professional careers could be directed towards existing incubators of civic engagement such as AmeriCorps, Peace Corps, Teach for America, and professional associations. Alumni of these programs could be good prospects for the leadership pipeline, as could Latinos with military service and DREAMers. The National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations (NALFO), which promotes the advancement of Latino fraternities and Latina sororities, could be cultivated further to become an incubator of Latino leadership.

A Latino Leadership App should be created to centralize information about organizations that could provide internship and leadership opportunities to people coming out of college so that youth and young adults could have easy access through their smartphones to a tool that can match them up with an organization. The app should also centralize information on mentorship opportunities, with professionals available to advise interested youth and young adults in the area.

Moving up the age range, the Latino leaders who are executives at community-based organizations should also be developed further, growing their responsibilities beyond services to advocacy. If given the right resources, CBO leaders could become more powerful voices in their communities.

- **Appointments to Boards and Commissions:** Increase the capacity, leadership, and organizing efforts of initiatives like the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda's Latino Appointment Program to enable better and broader screening of Latinos ready to take on appointments to boards and commissions.

Once people have been appointed, they should be provided with mentorship from other Latinos (and non-Latinos) who have been appointees and who can help them avoid pitfalls and guide their success.

- **Candidates and Donors:** Boost Latino presence within the political parties and develop a Latino donor base.

Key opportunities:

- Direct young Latinos to leadership incubators such as Teach for America and the Peace Corps
- Create a Latino Leadership App for internship, leadership, and mentorship opportunities
- Further develop leaders of CBOs
- Boost the capacity of the Latino Appointment Program
- Build a Latino Super PAC

When the Democratic and Republican National Committees are talking about who should run for open seats, Latinos and Latino donors should be part of that conversation.

Effort should also be directed at developing a strong grassroots donor base – targeting small dollar donations, mostly giving online, with a focus on Latinas who are often leaders in their community and families. Latino political funding infrastructure should be built or strengthened to a greater level as well. It should include developing a sophisticated, focused, and well-resourced Latino Super PAC that can support Latino candidates at the end of a race when raising funds is most difficult.

Research needs:

What are the barriers to entry for Latino leaders, and what are the factors that foster young Latinos' interest in civic participation?

Which strategies can build support for Latino candidates among communities of color or other allies?

How does leadership development influence civic engagement and policy?

CONCLUSION

The Latino community will see growing power and influence in American society and politics if for no other reason than its growing population. It will not, however, experience the commensurate share of power and influence unless it becomes more equipped and empowered to participate fully in our society and common future. Issues around immigration, voting, civics, and leadership will remain salient for years to come.

The Aspen Institute Latinos and Society convening produced a range of actionable, innovative, collaborative ideas. These ideas – which are not zero-sum, but rather support one another and are part of a cohesive ecosystem – focus on youth, veterans, communities, key states, neighborhoods, families, cross-cutting approaches, politics, funding, education, structures and institutions, data, technology, stories, culture, values, and much more. Participants particularly stressed the importance of promoting English proficiency, targeting Latinas, removing barriers to voting, cultivating civic virtue and education within communities, changing public narratives around Latinos and immigrants, fostering young Latino leaders, and building Latino political power.

New connections and partnerships among participants were an important outcome of the convening, and several participants have begun to initiate new collaborative projects to increase Latino civic participation going forward.

Through this report and by other means, the ideas generated by participants are now being put into the public domain with the hope that people will consider, borrow, adapt, and develop them in ways that truly unlock Latino civic potential in 2016 and beyond.

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of the conference.*



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aims to create broad awareness of the growth and importance of the Latino community to the future success of the United States. We do this by bringing together Latino and non-Latino influencers and decision-makers to find areas of common ground that advance issues and policies of importance to Latinos and the country as a whole. We also work to develop the leadership capacity of Latinos to participate fully in all levels of society.

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