



LCLAA®

LABOR COUNCIL FOR LATIN AMERICAN ADVANCEMENT



**UNIONS &
LATINOS:**

**A STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP
FOR AMERICA'S PROGRESS**

Unions and Latinos: a strategic partnership for America's progress

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FOREWORD

The Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA) is the leading national advocacy organization for Latino(a) workers. Founded over 40 years ago by a group of visionary Latino trade unionists, LCLAA has sought to protect and empower the Latino workforce by educating workers about their civil and labor rights while promoting unionization as a key to a better quality of life. Through organizing and collective bargaining, Latino workers are better leveraged to improve their working condition, see an increase in wages, and receive vital benefits.

While the labor movement has made important strides to integrate Latinos into its organizing strategies and has expanded the number of Latino workers in unions, much work remains to ensure Latinos can prosper and achieve parity in the workplace and our country. The future of the U.S. is undoubtedly tied with the Latino community. Latinos are one of the fastest growing populations in the United States. By 2050, Latinos will comprise nearly 30% of the total U.S. population and working age workforce.

In honor of our founders' vision and our roots in the labor movement, LCLAA is proud to present *Unions and Latinos: A Strategic Partnership for America's Progress*. This report sheds light on how Latinos are faring in the economy and what barriers they face in our workplaces and communities. Through LCLAA's continued commitment to the advancement of Latino working families and equal opportunities for all working people, we hope this report can reinforce the important partnership between the labor movement and Latino workers.

In Solidarity,



Milton Rosado
National President

OVERVIEW OF THE LATINO COMMUNITY

LATINOS IN THE US

Latinos are the fastest growing group in the country. The U.S. Latino population stands at over 54.1 million or roughly 17% of the country's population. With a median age of 27 years, Latinos are the youngest in the country--a full decade lower than the median age of 37 for the whole U.S. population¹.

LATINO CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Over 25 million Latinos are eligible to vote in 2014, a significant increase from 21.3 million in 2010². About 800,000 new Latinos become voting eligible every year underscoring the growing importance of the Latino electorate³. Three-quarters of Latino eligible voters live in the states of California, Texas, Florida, New York, Arizona, New Jersey, and Illinois⁴. The importance of elections in these states could change the balance of power on the federal, state, and local levels and change the roadmap to the White House.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF LATINOS

In 2013, about one in four (23.5%) Latino families lived below the poverty line⁵. This is nearly twice the national poverty rate of 14.5%⁶. 40% of Latino workers earn poverty level wages; about twice the share of white workers who earned low wages⁷.

UNEMPLOYMENT

In 2014, the Latino unemployment rate hovered at 8%, above the national average of 6.1%⁸.

EARNINGS

Over the past decade, Latinos have continuously been disproportionately represented in low wage jobs. In 2014, non-union Latinos earned \$547 a week⁹.

HOMEOWNERSHIP AND FORECLOSURE

Foreclosures due to job loss and risky mortgage loans disproportionately affected Latinos through the 2007 housing bubble. In 2006, 40% of Latinos financed their homes with risky loans in comparison to 17% of whites¹⁰.

RETIREMENT SECURITY

Despite being a vital part of the economy, Latinos who have been part of the workforce for many years are penalized in their retirement for their overall lower earnings. These lower earnings limit their available disposable income and therefore, a majority of Latinos (67%) lack retirement accounts¹¹.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Latinos have the highest high school dropout rate. In 2010, 41% of Latinos 20 and older did not have a high school diploma or equivalent compared with 23% of black students and 14% of white adults. In higher education, approximately 30% of Latinos have some college background and only 13% of Latinos 25 and older hold a bachelor's degree or higher¹².

HEALTH CARE ACCESS & COVERAGE

Latinos have the highest percentage of people without health insurance: nearly one in three Latinos (32.4%) lack health insurance. Although the implementation of the Affordable Care Act will curb this statistic, disparities will persist for the over 11 million undocumented immigrants who are largely Latino¹³.

LATINOS IN THE WORKFORCE

In 2013, over 23 million Latinos represented 15% of the labor force. By 2050 Latinos will constitute nearly 30% of the total U.S. population and one third of all working age Americans¹⁴.

WAGE VIOLATIONS & WAGE THEFT

Latino workers suffer more minimum wage and overtime pay violations than any other ethnic group. 77.6% of Latinos surveyed in various minimum wage industries did not receive overtime pay with higher incidences among Latino immigrants¹⁵.

LATINOS OVERREPRESENTED IN LOW WAGE JOBS

Latino workers are much more likely to work in America's growing low wage economy. Of the over 23 million Latino workers in the U.S. workforce, over 24% of them work in low wage jobs. If the federal minimum wage were to rise, about 7 million Latino workers would see a dramatic increase in their earnings¹⁶.

LATINOS SUFFER MORE JOB RELATED INJURIES AND FATALITIES

Latino workers suffer alarmingly high rates of job-related fatalities, disabling injuries, and chronic illnesses because they work in high-risk occupations. In 2013, 797 Latinos died in the workplace. The 797 reported Latino worker deaths constitute the highest total since 2008 and higher than any other working minority. Of those 797 Latinos, 527 were immigrants¹⁷.

MISCLASSIFICATION OF WORKERS

The misclassification of workers as independent contractors limits worker access to basic employee benefits. Up to 30% of companies misclassify their workers¹⁸. Occupations with misclassified workers include construction workers. Latinos represent a significant share of workers in this occupation posing detrimental implications for the health and safety of Latinos.

LATINAS IN THE WORKFORCE

Latinas are part of the largest and fastest growing minority group in the country. Over 24 million women in the U.S. identify as Latina and make up over 6% of the workforce. While Latinas are quickly changing the face of our country, they are often in industries that do not provide them with pathways to prosperous economic futures.

- Close to 3 million Latinas are employed in the service industry.
- Latinas earn only 60 cents for each dollar earned by a white man.
- Over the course of a year, the gender wage gap accounts for a \$16,416 loss for Latina workers.
- Latinas report experiencing minimum wage violations more often than men.
- More than one-third of Latinas in the U.S. report that they have been a victim of domestic violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime.
- 77% of Latinas in the southern U.S. report sexual assault to be a major issue at the workplace¹⁹.

LATINO CHILD LABOR IN AGRICULTURE

Agriculture has been an industry in which Latinos have played an integral role. Unless you grow your own food, a farmworker has played a role in ensuring that produce has reached your table. Among the hands that cultivate and harvest our food under sweltering and deplorable conditions, there are those of children who labor in fields across the country.

Under the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, when children reach 12 years of age, they can be hired to work on any sized farm. More than 500,000 children work in agriculture²⁰. Interviews conducted by Human Rights Watch of children farmworkers as young as 8 years old indicated that the majority reported making less than the federal minimum wage. Farmworker youth drop out of school at four times that national rate. Even worse, children are allowed to work with sharp tools, heavy machinery, and dangerous chemicals, and die four times the rate of other young workers²¹.

LATINOS AND THE LABOR MOVEMENT

THE LEGACY OF ORGANIZED LABOR AND ITS RELEVANCY TODAY

Organized labor's legacy exerts a deep humanizing influence in our places of work and on federal workplace policies. Establishing a mandatory minimum wage, paid sick leave, Social Security, Medicare and child labor laws are among the protections and benefits that workers in unions have helped secure for millions of Americans. The 40-hour workweek, which allows time for rest and leisure, did not materialize from one day to the next; it was the subject of a hard-fought battle spearheaded by unions. Another arduous fight led by hundreds of thousands of union members who marched, fasted, lost their jobs and even, in some cases, their lives, won US workers the now standard eight-hour work day. At the heart of labor unions is collective bargaining to give workers leverage to negotiate with employers for higher wages, job security, and improved working conditions.

Through collective bargaining, unions helped expand the middle class in America by raising wages and improving job security and quality for workers. A recent report by the Center for American Progress demonstrates an association between the financial share of the nation's income going to the middle class and the number of workers in unions. However, this share has declined significantly over the last forty years along with union membership.

During the Great Depression, a large majority of American people held favorable opinions of labor

unions and millions of workers formed them or joined them. Their work contributed to the nation's economic recovery. American workers can learn from that historic moment and join unions so that together they have a strong collective voice to demand better jobs with higher wages. Increases in wages lead to greater consumer spending which fuels our economy and in turn lead firms to produce more, hire more workers and invest more. This productive cycle continues promoting economic growth. Simply put, unions help economic recovery.

Labor unions strengthen our economy, our tax base and help build the middle class by helping workers secure higher incomes, critical benefits and workplace protections. Unions are part of our economic fabric and collective bargaining is a testament to America's democratic process.

Unions are at historically low levels of membership and urgently need Latino workers in order to grow. Latinos are currently the most vulnerable workers in the nation and urgently need the protections and benefits that unions can provide. Latino workers face the highest occupational fatality rate, highest numbers of wage theft, have the lowest levels of pension coverage, lowest levels of health insurance, and are also the group that earns the lowest wages.

The labor movement has been under serious attack in the last several decades. Corporate lobbying interests have managed to change the way labor laws are applied and administered. Employer militancy against workers, trade pressures and the erosion of bargaining power have all contributed to weaken unions and their unique structural ability to raise wages and improve working conditions.

With union membership hovering at around seven percent of the private sector, Latinos—by virtue of their enormous numbers in service-sector and construction jobs—will play a pivotal role in bringing unions' share of the workforce back up to healthier levels. Latinos' age relative to other populations and

their rapid growth as a group make them even more attractive as potential union members.

Because of this combination of factors, Latinos are perfectly poised to join unions in large numbers. Unionization will provide this widely exploited population with a bigger voice and enough protection to improve their working conditions and economic standing. Widespread unionization of Latino workers can reinvigorate the labor movement and at the same time improve Latinos' economic conditions through better jobs, higher wages, and benefits.

For unions to continue to be a source of power and protection for all workers, they must face the reality that an aging workforce and membership are causing their numbers to diminish.

OVERALL VIEW OF UNION MEMBERSHIP AND LATINOS IN UNIONS

If unions are to survive and rebuild in the near future, there is no doubt that Latinos and all minorities will have to participate. But we have much work to do to achieve this. There must be campaigns and strategies targeted at Latinos, in English and Spanish. There must be a rapid change in the leadership that also reflects inclusion of minorities. These will be just the first steps toward creating the possibility for rapid growth of these workers in the labor movement.

Unions have incorporated large shares of Latinos and recent immigrants, but these numbers have not matched their rate of growth in the economy.

According to the 2013 Bureau of Labor Statistics report on union membership:

- The number of workers who were union members or were represented by a union went from 16,290,000 in 2011 to 16,028,000 in 2013.
- By age, the union membership rate was highest among workers ages 45 to 64—14% for those ages 45 to 54 and 14.3% for those ages 55 to 64.
- The lowest union membership rate was among workers in the 16 to 24 age bracket at 4.2%.
- The U.S. workforce is getting older. In 2010 there were 40.2 million people who were 65 years and older. By 2030 that number will more than double and will reach 84.2 million.
- People 65 years and over comprise about 12.9% of the current population and are expected to comprise 19.3% of the population in 2030²².

Although unionization rates overall have gone down, the number of Latinos joining the labor movement has increased.

- In 2013, 9.4% of Latino workers were members of a union.
- In 2011, 2,015,000 Latinos were represented or members of a union. This number grew 6.25% to 2,141,000 in 2013.
- 1,186,000 Latino men were represented or members of a union in 2011. This number grew 6.74% to 1,218,000 in 2013.
- 829,000 Latina women were represented or members of a union in 2011. This number grew 12.3% to 923,000 in 2013²³.

THE UNION DIFFERENCE FOR LATINOS

The moment a Latino worker gets a union contract, s/he starts making better money and works in safer and healthier environments. Union membership boosts median weekly earnings for Latino workers and their overall conditions. Latino workers benefit the most of any other ethnic group with respect to median weekly earnings.

According to a 2013 Bureau of Labor Statistics report, Latino workers who belong to a union typically earn higher pay than non-union workers doing the same kind of job. Although it varies based on sector and occupation, the overall averages are striking. The median weekly earnings of Latino union workers were 52.10% higher than non-union Latino workers²⁴.

Latino Weekly Earnings

\$832 = Median weekly earnings in 2013 of Latino union members.

- Latino union members earned approximately **\$43,264** a year.

\$547 = Median weekly earnings in 2013 of non-union Latino workers.

- Non-union Latino workers earned approximately **\$28,444** a year.
- That's a yearly difference of **\$14,820** for Latino union members vs. non-union members.
- Latino union members on average earned approximately **\$7.13** more per hour than non-union Latino workers in 2013²⁵.

Latino Men and Weekly Earnings

In 2013, the median weekly earning for a Latino male worker represented by a union was 54.81% higher than non-union Latino men²⁶.

\$884= Median weekly earnings in 2013 of male Latino union members.

- Latino union men earned approximately **\$45,968** a year.

\$571= Median weekly earnings in 2013 of non-union Latino men.

- Non-union Latino men earned approximately **\$29,692** a year.
- That's a yearly difference of **\$16,276** for Latino men vs. non-unionized Latino men.
- Latino men in unions earned approximately **\$7.83** more per hour than non-union Latino men in 2013²⁷.

Low Wage Workers

- Unionization raises the wages of the typical low wage worker (one in the 10th percentile) by 20.6%.
- Among women workers in the 15 lowest-paying occupations, female union members earn 14% more than those workers who were not in unions²⁹.
- A recent AFL-CIO report found that if the current federal minimum wage (\$7.25 per hour) were raised, nearly 7 million Latinos that work in a low wage job would see a dramatic change in their take home pay³⁰.

Unionized Latinos were also more likely to have access to health insurance. Latino union members were 26% points more likely to have employer-provided health insurance and 27% points more likely to have a pension plan than similar non-union workers.

Since Latinos are overrepresented in low wage occupations, it is also important to analyze the benefits of unionization in this area and we find that the benefits are also high. Unionized Latino workers in low wage occupations earned 16.6% more than non-

union workers. These Latino union workers were also 41% points more likely than comparable non-union workers to have employer-provided health insurance and 18% points more likely to have a pension plan³¹.

As Latinos are almost 10 years younger than the national average, it is also important to note the benefits that unionization has for young workers. Unionization raises young workers' wages by over 12%, or \$1.75 per hour. They are also 17% points more likely to have health insurance and 24 % points more likely to be in a pension plan than their non-union counterparts³².

By looking at all the data we can conclude that protecting collective bargaining and the right of workers to organize will have an important impact on the benefits and wages of Latino workers.

TRABAJADORAS

As the song goes, “The rising of the women means the rising of us all.” Women represent a central segment of the union workforce. In 2013, 54% of unionized workers were women³³. At the current rate they are expected to comprise the majority of the labor movement. Latinas have a strong incentive to claim a powerful position within the labor movement since they face unique challenges and levels of vulnerability in the workplace. A surge in Latina union membership and leadership could help reverse some of these trends and stop the continuous violations of their rights.

Unionization can provide these vulnerable workers with a stronger voice as well as protections that will improve their working conditions and promote their prosperity. Latinas are less likely to be represented by a union than women in all other major racial and ethnic groups. Latina workers are overrepresented in low wage labor industries where unionization is needed the most. This paradox reflects the need for a surge in the unionization of Latinas in order to curtail the abuses and exploitations they face on the job.

LATINAS IN UNIONS

In 2013, the median weekly earning for Latina workers represented by a union was 47.86% higher than non-unionized Latina workers³⁴. Latinas made up only 4.9% of the unionized workforce in 1983, but in 2013 they comprised 14% of the unionized workforce³⁵.

\$763= Median weekly earnings in 2013 for Latina union members.

- Latina union members earned approximately **\$39,676** a year.

\$516= Median weekly earnings in 2013 for a non-unionized Latina.

- Non-union Latina workers earned approximately **\$26,832** a year.
- That's a yearly difference of **\$12,844** for Latinas in Unions vs. non-unionized Latinas.
- Latina women in unions earned approx. **\$6.98** more per hour than non-unionized Latinas³⁶.

In short, Latinas benefit tremendously by joining a union. By expanding collective bargaining and the right of workers to organize, Latinas can make strong inroads in achieving parity within the workforce.

UNDOCUMENTED LATINO WORKERS

Workers come to the U.S. in the pursuit of opportunities unavailable to them in their countries of origin. Many of them are poor and vulnerable. Once they get jobs in the U.S., the system here keeps them poor and exploits their vulnerability. Most undocumented immigrants are concentrated in low skilled jobs where working conditions are difficult and often dangerous. Once combined with the constant fear of being deported—then we have the perfect formula for a large pool of easily exploited people, afraid of raising their voice and unable to defend their human and labor rights. As a result of their vulnerability, undocumented immigrants have the lowest wage and the highest levels of deaths and injuries at work. Report after report show that

immigrants face higher levels of wage theft and overtime pay violations.

The labor movement can be one important source of protection for undocumented workers. A report by the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) found that unionized immigrant workers earned 17% more than their non-union counterparts. According to the report, immigrant workers in unions were also 50% more likely to have employer provided health insurance and almost twice as likely to have an employer provided pension plan than immigrant workers who were not in unions³⁷. These positive changes should be an incentive for undocumented Latinos to view the labor movement as a tool for social protection and economic advantage.

LATINOS AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Another element that is critical to shape the quality of life of Latinos is civic participation. The Latino community has been the target of political attacks and legislation that threaten to limit the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Exercising the right to vote is about more than increasing the representation of Latinos in U.S. elections. Voting gives our communities a voice to elect candidates who serve the best interests of Latinos.

There are more than 25 million Latinos who are eligible to vote, up from 21.3 million in 2010. This young and growing electorate can play a pivotal role in local, state, and national elections. 270 electoral votes are needed to win a presidential election and Latinos represent a significant share of the population in swing states that account for 151 electoral votes. Since 2000, states with ten or more electoral votes have experienced an astounding growth in their Latino population³⁸

Rate increase in Latino population growth:

- North Carolina (90.2%)
- Virginia (88.2%)
- Michigan (73.5%)

- Indiana (70%)
- Ohio (60%)
- Florida (57.5%)
- Arizona (48.4%)
- Texas (43.4)

While the electorate is expanding, Latino voter turnout is lagging when compared to the growth of the population, especially in midterm elections. In 2010, only 31.2% of eligible Latino voters voted compared with 48.6% of non-Latino whites who voted³⁹. It is crucial that Latinos not only register to vote in large numbers, but also vote accordingly. Through political power, Latinos can exert the pressure needed to pass important legislation in all levels of government.

While expanding the Latino electorate is important, electing Latinos to key elected positions will serve our community tremendously. Currently, Latinos are underrepresented at every level of elected or appointed office.

- There are only 3 Latino U.S. Senators out of 100.
- Of the 435 U.S. Representatives elected, only 28 are Latino.
- 3 Latinos serve in President Barack Obama's cabinet.
- 68 Latino state senators serve in state legislatures.
- 183 Latino state representatives serve in state legislatures⁴⁰.

These numbers are not representative when compared to the share of Latinos in the country. It is even worse when looking at the number of Latinas in elected office.

- 25,000,000 Latinas live in the United States.
- Of 8,236 seats in state and national political offices, only 109 are held by Latinas.
- Only 9 Latinas hold seats in the U.S. House of Representatives.
- Currently, there is no Latina serving in the U.S. Senate⁴¹.

If Latinos expand their share of the electorate, we can begin to elect more Latino candidates into office and change the face of not only the nation, but our leaders in government.

CONCLUSION

For Latinos, the road to social and economic prosperity is mired with hurdles. From wage theft to increased rates of deaths at the workplace, Latinos are becoming increasingly susceptible to a wide range of attacks on their labor, human and civil rights. While many advances have been made in the past decade, more work and advocacy need to be made in order for Latinos to achieve parity. Among the many efforts that are key for Latino advancement, gaining access to a union will be an essential step for Latino workers and their families. Through union representation, Latinos can achieve higher wages that will help them fight poverty and gain access to health and retirement benefits.

More importantly, Latinos must fully harness their political power in this country. Through the ballot box, Latinos can dramatically change the faces of elected officials and pass critical pieces of legislation that will: reform our federal labor laws to expand and strengthen protections; revamp our immigration laws; eliminate barriers to health care and promote the educational attainment of Latino and immigrant youth. These reforms will not only benefit the Latino community, but also the country and workforce as a whole.

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