How Race, Colorism, and Identity Shape Legal Needs in the Latino Community

"En Sus Propias Palabras"

Submitted to LatinoJustice PRLDEF[1]
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Background of the Project

LatinoJustice PRLDEF has a long history of advancing the rights and issues that are most critical to the Latino[2] community. As a result of this work, LatinoJustice recognizes the complex nature and intersectionality of race, gender, culture, national origin, language, and ethnicity in this community. Consequently, the organization decided to undertake this landscape analysis to: (1) inform its strategy and litigation efforts; (2) identify how communities across the U.S. vary in their opinions on these critical issues; and (3) better understand how discrimination creates barriers to full participation and inclusion of Latino populations. The landscape analysis and focus groups conducted by Impact Strategies, Inc. and V&N Consulting Services, LLC., yielded a number of findings to inform the five key pillars advanced by LatinoJustice: immigrant rights, economic justice (which includes education, employment and housing), criminal justice reform, voting rights, and issues affecting the people of Puerto Rico. This report is a collection of main summary points from the research conducted as part of the Latino landscape analysis.

Over the course of five months, researchers Dr. Linda Lopez and Maria Velasquez provided strategic counsel and conducted 11 focus groups in key jurisdictions. The researchers identified specific profiles of Latino individuals to interview in seven states across the U.S.—California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, and Texas—and Puerto Rico to obtain lived experiences and collect the stories of Latino families to inform the report. They selected the states and jurisdictions (e.g., cities) based on the proportion of the population that has a high density of Latino populations, especially Afro-Latino and Indigenous people, urban and rural settings, and a few new destination areas where Latino populations have migrated.

The goal of this project was to explore key questions around identity formation and race, and more specifically how Latino identity shapes and informs the legal needs of diverse racial groups, ethnicities, and nationalities that identify as Latino. The project focused on expanding our understanding through qualitative research and lived experiences of individuals with a focus on race and colorism in Latino communities. The landscape analysis uses the social determinants of health framework[3] to understand the challenges and barriers faced by Latino individuals and

[1] November 7, 2022
[2] Throughout the report we use the terms Latino, Latinx and Hispanic interchangeably.
[3] [The social determinants of health are the conditions in the environments where people live, learn, work (and so on) that affect a wide range of health and quality of life outcomes. Those conditions are economic stability, educational access and quality, healthcare access, neighborhood environment and social and

families in the U.S. The researchers developed an interview protocol based on key social determinants and thematic areas—Economic Justice and Education, Immigration Status and perceived Immigration Status, Criminal Justice, Voting and Civic Participation and Identification, and Racial and Ethnic Identity and Discrimination.

The research found that colorism within and external to the Latino community persists and limits opportunities, particularly for Afro or Black Latinos and Indigenous people. Economic insecurity, whether manifested as inequitable educational resources, immigration status limiting upward mobility, or dearth of access to healthcare, childcare and transportation, was a recurring theme and redressing it a high priority for research participants.

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This report covers five key areas:

I. Demographic highlights of Latinos in the U.S.
II. Historical role of racism in the Latino community and the importance of a racial justice framework
III. Methodological approach
IV. Findings and lived experiences of Latinos in the US
V. Recommendations for LatinoJustice

I. Demographics of the Latino Community in the United States

The Hispanic population has quadrupled in the past four decades. More than 62 million Americans—19% of the total population—identified as Hispanic or Latino in the 2020 census. Along with being the second largest racial/ethnic minority in the U.S. compared to non-Latino Whites, it is also the second fastest growing. By 2060, the Hispanic population is estimated to reach 111 million, or 28% of the U.S. population. The Hispanic population varies significantly by state, ranging from just over ten thousand to over fifteen million. The states with the highest Hispanic population are California (15.57 million), Texas (11.52 million), Florida (5.66 million), New York (3.75 million), and Arizona (2.31 million). While New Mexico falls just shy of the top five states, it has the highest Hispanic population as a percentage of its total population (49.26%), followed by Texas (39.75%) and California (39.42%).

Despite the Hispanic population's concentration in Southwest border states (roughly 50% of the population), the fastest growth for Hispanics/Latinos is happening in new areas across the country. The largest growth in Hispanic population from 1990-2000 has been in North Dakota and South Dakota. North Dakota saw its Hispanic population more than double (129% increase) in the past two decades, the fastest growth of any state. As of 2019, South Dakota's Hispanic/Latino population has increased 66%, followed by Montana (up 50%) and New

community context. U.S. Dept. of Heath & Human Services, *Social Determinants of Health*, https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health

Hampshire (up 48%). States that have surpassed 1 million Latinos since 2010 include Georgia, New Mexico, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania.

Hispanics are a young and steadfastly working population. The median age is 30 years old, and roughly 31% of Hispanic Americans are under 18 compared to 22% of the nation. Conversely, only 8% of the Hispanic population is over 65, compared to 17% of the total population. With this youth comes a high level of participation in American primary schools and workplaces. At 66%, Hispanics continue to have the highest labor force participation rate of any demographic group and are ahead of the overall U.S. labor force participation rate of 63%. Hispanics also make up 25% of all K-12 students. Despite this youth, Hispanics are behind their peers in terms of higher educational attainment. Only 18% of Hispanic Americans older than 25 have at least a bachelor's degree, far lower than the 33% of the U.S. population at large.

With the rapid growth of the Hispanic/Latino population comes an increasing diversity. In 2020, nearly half (42%) of the Latino population identified themselves as "some other race" on the U.S. census, demonstrating a disconnect between the Hispanic/Latino identifiers and racial identity. The second most common response, offered by one-third of the population, was to select multiple races. Among those who did identify with one of the racial categories offered, White was the most common selection (12.6 million or 20% of Hispanics), followed by similar numbers of people who chose American Indian or Black (1.5 million and 1.2 million, respectively, both around 2% of Hispanics).[4] In addition to this racial diversity, the national origins of Hispanics/Latinos are likewise changing rapidly, as Mexican and Puerto Ricans become smaller shares of the population compared to rapidly growing groups from other countries. Over the last decade, the fastest growing national origin groups within the Hispanic population were Venezuelans (up 126%), Guatemalans (up 49%), and Hondurans (up 47%).

Recognizing this increasing racial and ethnic diversity among Hispanics requires attention to the persistent impact of racism, colorism, and colonial relations within and between this complex population.

II. Historical Context for Colorism and Racism in Latino Community

Conquest and Extractive Economies: The Foundations of Colonial Latin America

The colonization of what would come to be known as Latin America and the Caribbean by Spanish and other European powers began in 1492 and intensified throughout the 16th century. Conquistadors relied on internal divisions within existing Indigenous empires to enlist Native collaborators in a "divide and conquer" strategy to topple the political ruling class. The arrival of

[4] This figure does not represent the entire Indigenous or Black Latino population, but rather the portion of these populations that selected either American Indian or Black as their sole racial identity in the 2020 census. Many Indigenous and/or Black Latinos likely selected "Two or more races" or "Some other race" in their responses. See Mark Hugo Lopez, Jens Manuel Krogstad and Jeffrey S. Passel, "Who is Hispanic?" Pew Research Center, (September 15, 2022).

the Spanish colonial empire and its cooptation of existing hierarchical structure set the groundwork for a complicated racial caste system whose legacies persist even today.

Once in power, the Spanish used their new positions to reorient the empire toward mining and other extractive industries that constituted the mercantilist colonial economy. Mass extraction across the colonies required labor, which in turn prompted the enslavement of large numbers of Indigenous people across the empire. Between the ongoing violence of conquest, death in the mines and sugarcanes of the colonies, and, most significantly, the spread of diseases like smallpox, the Indigenous population across the region plummeted. The population collapse across the Spanish and budding Portuguese empire incentivized an increase in the importation of enslaved Africans to the Americans. This shift—combined with the 1537 Sublimis Deus decree by the Catholic Church asserting the Indigenous People had souls while Africans did not—set the building blocks for the racial caste system propagated across the Americas.

Legacies of Colonialism Shape Racial Identity Across Latin America and Latino People

The racial caste system in Spanish America must be understood as a means of preserving white supremacy amidst widespread intermarriage and (often non-consensual) sexual relations between European (White) colonists and the Native and African people they ruled. Beginning with the political marriages between colonists and their indigenous collaborators, those with White parentage were afforded a privileged social status above those with Indigenous or African ancestry. Conversely, those with African (Black) parentage were pushed to the bottom of the social caste system below Indigenous people (a reflection of the previously mentioned Sublimis Deus decree). While multiple scholars have debated the existence of a fixed, immutable caste system in Spanish America, owing to lax enforcement by authorities and the tendency of individuals to "pass" as other castes based on their immediate interests,[5] the existence of a racially stratified society is undeniable. Situated between the poles of White supremacy and anti-Blackness, the caste system of the colonial Americas provided a framework that allocated privileges, rights, and even humanity by ancestry and phenotype in accordance with the racist imaginaries held by European colonists.[6]

Racism and Colorism Persist Within the Latino Community Across the Americas

This informal caste system, though formally abolished by several newly formed nations following their independence from Spain and repudiated frequently since, persists in subtle and overt ways to this day. Scholars have found that concepts such as "mestizaje", which attempt to reject if not deny persistent racism, are used to both erase the existence of Indigenous and African descendent communities in Latin America and conceal policies of exclusion and exploitation of

[5] See Pilar Gonzalbo (2013); Joanne Rappaport (2014); Berta Ares (2015); and Ben Vinson III (2018).
[6] Hector Y Adames and Kurt Organista. "Skin-Color Prejudice and Within-Group Racial Discrimination: Historical and Current Impact on Latino/a Populations" Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences. January 2014.

these communities.[7] Surveys of indigenous communities in Mexico and other countries find discrimination against indigenous people, including because of their clothing, languages, and customs, to be regular practices in these countries.[8] Likewise, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights found that Afro-descendent people across the Americas are negatively stereotyped, suffer from lower socioeconomic status, and are often subject to abuse and excessive force by police.[9]

Discrimination against Afro-descendent people, often known as "Afro-Latinos", is complex and dynamic among Latino communities in the United States as well as in Latin America. Many Afro-Latinos report experiences of having their Latin American heritage questioned if not outright denied, reflecting a commonly held belief that Blackness and Latinidad are incompatible or mutually exclusive.[10] Physical features of Afro-Latinos and other dark-skinned Latinos are often expressly seen as less beautiful/attractive, such as curly/kinky haired being frequently described as "pelo malo" [bad hair]. Conversely, having light skin and blonde hair are typically markers of beauty and attractiveness. This is also reflected in the near total absence of darker-skinned actors and hosts in media across Latin America.[11] In the United States too, Afro-Latinos are often excluded from conversations about Latino representation in film and television.[12] Media narratives around the success of Afro-Latino actors, like Jharrel Jerome and Gina Torres, often pit Black and Latino representation against one another, rather than celebrating the overlap and intersection of these communities.

Afro-descendent and other Latinos experience racial discrimination not only within their communities but more generally as well. Research from the Pew Research Center has captured how darker-skinned Latinos report racial discrimination at a rate 14% higher than light-skinned Latinos.[13] Likewise, darker-skinned Latinos report being treated as if they were unintelligent or suspicious, subject to slurs or racialized jokes, and fearing for their personal safety at significantly higher rates than lighter-skinned Latinos. While darker-skinned Latinos report these experiences at lower rates than (non-Latino) Black Americans, the fact that lighter-skinned Latinos have similar reporting rates to non-Hispanic Whites demonstrate that these experiences are concentrated within sub-groups more likely to be racialized by their skin color.

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[7] Sandra Soler Castillo a Neyla Graciela Pardo Abril. "Discourse and racism in Colombia: Five centuries of invisibility and exclusion". Chapter 5 in *Racism and Discourse in Latin America*. Lexington Books. 2009.
[8] Y Ademas and Organista (2014)
[9] Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos. *La situación de las personas Afrodescendientes en Las Americas*. 2011.
[10] Amir Vera and Alexander Pineda. "Blackness and Latinidad are not mutually exclusive. Here's what it means to be Afro-Latino in America" CNN. September 26, 2021.
[11] Moisés González. "Actores de telenovelas denuncian discriminación racial en la televisión mexicana" Yahoo.com. April 27, 2021.
[12] Andrew R. Chow. "These Afro-Latino Actors Are Pushing Back Against Erasure in Hollywood" TIME Magazine. September 17, 2020
[13] Ana Gonzalez-Barrera. "Hispanics with darker skin are more likely to experience discrimination than those with lighter skin" Pew Research Center. July 2, 2019

III. Methodological Approach

Interview Sample

The focus groups conducted were based on a sampling from family resource centers and community-based organizations that provide resources and services to families and youth across a variety of states and cities. The researchers engaged organizations to find individuals who would be interested in participating in the focus groups and compensated each interviewee and organization for their time.

A total of 54 participants were interviewed through 11 focus groups in Spanish and English. The lead researchers on the project were culturally and linguistically fluent and have extensive experience in conducting interviews. The profiles of interviewees included the following: mixed immigration status, Indigenous, intergenerational, migrant communities, Afro-Latino, Black Latino, asylum seekers, and Latino professionals. The researchers made a significant effort to interview individuals who identify as Afro-Latino and/or Black Latino to understand the barriers that exist along race and ethnicity dimensions and to understand any variation in lived experiences. The researchers interviewed youth in university systems and DACA recipients who are currently studying. The diversity of these profiles provided authentic, rich information on an array of issues that impact Latino families and youth and their successes while living in the US. Of the interviewees, about a third reflect Afro Puertorriqueno, Garifuna, Black or Afro-Latino identity, 7% chose Indigenous identity, while country of origin was the second most popular identification category. 81.50% of participants identified as female (*n* = 44) and 18.50% as male (*n*= 10).

The question around how participants identified sparked complex and informative conversations about the disapproval of being categorized. Participants' sense of identity varied widely, and many identified with more than one race/ethnicity/category. Below are the categories used by participants to describe their own identity and the number of times they were used across focus groups. (*n* will vary given that some participants used more than one category).

1. Hispanic (3)
2. Afro Puertorriqueño (2)
3. Garifuna (2)
4. Latinx (0)
5. Latino/a (14)
6. Black Latin@ (1)
7. Afro Latin@ (2)
8. African American (3)
9. Black (7)
10. Country of Origin (9)
11. Not sure how to define (12)
12. Indigen@ (2)
13. Mixteco (2)
14. White Latino (3)
15. Multi racial (3)
16. Hispanic American (1)
17. Chican@ (2)
18. Mexican American (2)

Research Partners

The researchers worked directly with family resource centers[14] and/or community-based organizations that provide direct services to Latino families and children in these diverse settings. Typically, they provide direct services for Latino families and children, low-income populations, and immigrant families. The researchers hypothesized that these local organizations are trusted actors in the community and could engage individuals to be a part of our interview cohort. In other jurisdictions by comparison, such as North Carolina, the researchers relied on sourcing from community-based organizations in rural areas and agricultural farming areas to understand the perspectives of farmworkers and their families and workers living in smaller, rural areas.

Family Resource Centers and Community Based Organizations

1. Mixteco Indigena Community Organizing Project https://mixteco.org/
2. Hope Works https://hopeworks.org/
3. Garifuna Coalition http://www.garifunacoalition.org/
4. Border Action network https://borderaction.org/
5. National Hispanic Institute https://www.nationalhispanicinstitute.org
6. Resurrection Project https://resurrectionproject.org/
7. El Pueblo https://elpueblo.org/
8. Barrio Action http://www.barrioaction.org/
9. Liga de Ciudades de Puerto Rico https://www.ligadeciudadespr.com/
10. Hispanic Unity of Florida https://www.hispanicunity.org/

Interview Protocol and Limitations

The researchers developed the interview protocol and utilized human subject protocols to ensure confidentiality of the respondent. The questions covered a number of thematic areas by utilizing key social determinants of health and access to social safety net programs.

The focus group protocol and questions were developed based on these thematic areas in mind:

1. **Economic Justice and Education.** COVID-19 impacts on economic security, family wellbeing, accessing job opportunities and educational access; homeownership/rent and affordable housing; wealth gaps and economic pathways; jobs, and employment access; access to high quality education and educational pathways; workforce opportunities and limits of workplace laws based on occupation or sector; and wage theft.
2. **Immigration Status and Perceived Immigration Status.** Language access, discrimination in accessing services and basic needs based on immigration status; the role that immigration status plays vis-a-vis safety in community/police interactions; access to benefits and services by federal government on major social safety net programs (e.g., SNAP, Medicare, and WIC) and local and state access to social services; the role that immigration status plays on psychology of family unit especially

[14] The family resource centers are a network of community-based organizations that operate in several cities across the U.S.

with mixed status families; impacts of the social determinants of health broadly defined on immigrant families (e.g., mixed-status, undocumented, Dreamers).

3. **Criminal Justice.** Crime/immigration nexus; reducing incarceration; service provision by community-based organizations; violence; community policing and police interactions; perspectives on safety; perspectives on criminalization of Latino community.
4. **Voting and Civic Participation.** Language access; civic participation; barriers to voting; volunteerism; eligibility.
5. **Identification, racial and ethnic identity, discrimination** (perceived or direct).

There are limits in the sampling and the breadth of states that were not included in this research. However, these focus groups, which lasted approximately 1 hour to 1 and one-half hours, provided the researchers with specific thematic information; common themes emerged from the interviews and conversations with multiple households across different locations in the U.S.

IV. Summary Themes and Key Findings Across the 7 States and Puerto Rico

Primary themes that emerged from this research:

1. COVID-19 and the subsequent recession have had severe impacts on the overall wellbeing of Latino families and youth. These impacts include loss of jobs, disproportionate impacts on mental health and psychological well-being, and in the most extreme situations death of family members and friends. Economic insecurity points to the fragile nature of their current and future economic situation. Existing inequities are exacerbated as schools have unequal access to funding. The "digital divide" immediately hindered access to education as families noted lack of internet connection and limited technology knowledge.
2. Racial discrimination is present based on skin color and tone of color. The impact of colorism in the Latino community and the impact of discrimination coming from within the Latino community and outside plays out in a myriad of ways in daily experiences for both ethnic inter-group and across racial groups.
    a. Anti-blackness in Puerto Rico shapes self-identity and makes it difficult and costly to acknowledge African ancestry. People who are more visibly Black in Puerto Rico are treated worse socially and are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system.
    b. Indigenous communities face discrimination by other Latinos (internal racism towards indigenous people) and prefer not to use indigenous language for fear of discrimination. Oaxacans working as farm workers noted that there is discrimination from other Mexicans who are non-indigenous in the fields.
3. Immigration status (and/or perceived immigration status) and migration impact families differently. Across those interviewed, however, immigration status limits the ability of these families to increase their economic and social mobility. In addition, undocumented heads of households navigate large, complex social safety net systems, often with very little information on what services or programs they can enroll in for their children. Lived experiences and positive outlook vary widely based on country of origin, current city/state, and race and ethnicity. The simple act of using immigration status as a way of extending or withholding rights has an alienating effect on Latino immigrants, regardless of their

current immigration status. This feeling of alienation, across immigration status, impacts access to social services, self-perception, and views of their future possibilities across generations.

4. Youth currently studying consistently share concerns about employment opportunities during school to alleviate burden on families and post-graduation in the midst of hard economic times. Young adults pursuing alternative opportunities outside of academia cite financial burden, frustration with the lack of opportunities for creatives, and parents' inexperience navigating the educational system as reasons for not pursuing college degrees. Additionally, youth who are children of immigrants share a complex relationship with money and high concern for saving in connection to parents' economic challenges while they were growing up.
5. Safety in neighborhoods and in schools is a top concern for heads of households and parents. Access to guns and recent mass shootings in schools were quoted a number of times as a top concern for parents who no longer feel safe when sending their children to school. For victims of crimes and those living in insecure areas, race and immigration status play a major role in the level of comfort with engaging law enforcement.
6. Parents place high value on ensuring that their children succeed in education and invest time to participate in local school activities and support their children's education as was observed in many families interviewed.
7. Puerto Rico Interview Primary Themes:
    a. Lack of access to mainstream or supportive services, including healthcare, childcare and transportation, among others.
    b. Pathways out of poverty are shrinking and becoming less stable. Challenges associated with belonging to the informal economy, plus the inability to produce income during illness of oneself or of children and the need to work constantly.
    c. Without economic autonomy, Puerto Rico has been unable to pursue the development it requires. Development efforts often treat Puerto Ricans themselves as passive subjects to be saved and/or acted upon, not partners or drivers of development.
    d. Despite ostensibly being part of the United States, Puerto Ricans described living as second class citizens without the same rights or benefits as mainlanders. The impact of colonialism, including a documented lack of parity in the federal funds assigned to Puerto Rico translates to a marked difference in access to welfare services for families in Puerto Rico versus the United States.
    e. Participants expressed their view that Puerto Rico is a distinct country from the U.S. with its own culture and a diverse set of needs across the island.
    f. Health systems in Puerto Rico have been damaged by climate change and neglect. They are often reactionary to diseases and poor health outcomes without an adequate focus on prevention and wellbeing.

A summary of what participants shared based on thematic areas:

Economic Justice and Education

- When asked about main issues of concern to interviewees and their families, almost all participants mentioned economic insecurity, at various levels of severity.
- Youth interviewed not only shared concerns about current economic stability, but also intergenerational wealth, future economic security, and lack of access to financial literacy.
- Many carried a heavy burden and concern due to the increase in cost of living and unmatched salaries.
- Participants placed high value and importance on education and access to financial support. Immigrant parents shared frustration and impotence due to limited experience and knowledge of American academic systems.
- COVID-19 and the pandemic had a significant impact on children, youth, and families. Parents were concerned about mental health, isolation, and technology accessibility for their children. Youth were concerned about the lack of socialization, inability to concentrate, and academic performance.

"Being undocumented in this country means 2x or 3x the work. We work and we are not paid what is earned. They are taking money away from our paycheck that we are really never going to see again – dependents, insurance, etc."

"Venimos de una herida grandísima y estamos muy golpeados... cuando llegamos acá es un alivio"
(We are coming from a huge injury (back home) and we are very beat up... when we get here, it's a relief)

"No somos ciudadanos americanos y lo que tenemos es una ciudadanía impuesta y de segunda categoría"
(We are not US citizens and what we have is an imposed second-class citizenship")

"Bank of America is my most used app, I love checking in to make sure I have money to pay rent"

"La universidad me permitió de salir de una situación de violencia"
(The university allotted me the opportunity to get out of a violent situation)

"With the fares of metro cards going up, one woman told me I have to decide if I want to get my daughters diapers or get a metro card."

"Se trabaja para la renta"
(You work to make rent)

"Politicians don't talk about the price of the rent. They talk about other politics and programs, but the rent is the biggest issue"

Immigration Status and Perceived Immigration Status

- Immigrants find it challenging to navigate complex U.S. systems, especially due to lack of language appropriate support.
- A number of DACA recipients described a sense of uncertainty and constant concern over possible policy changes and missed re-enrollment windows. Alternatively, undocumented students who are not DACA recipients noted deep inequities compared

to DACA recipients such as lack of support in navigating the academic process and lack of financial aid for education related costs.
- Immigrants and children of immigrant families share a mutual frustration with the lack of services and benefits offered for equal hard work. Access to health insurance, financial aid, equal job opportunities, and immigration pathways were the most common needs.
- The "public charge" rule in place has also impacted their ability to seek social safety net programs for fear of deportation.

Criminal justice

- A common theme amongst parents is major concern for safety within school systems, especially given school shootings in their communities and affecting their community.
- Individuals expressed concern and worry about safety in their communities and increased criminal activity due to economic situation and cost of living.
- Apart from fearing for their safety, families constantly share concern and anxiety around ICE and possible deportation.
- Fear of law enforcement, especially for undocumented participants, led to a widespread hesitancy to engaging with police and other institutions that serve as primary (and often sole) resources for safety and restitution for crimes.

Voting and Civic participation

- Conversations about civic participation varied based on participant's age and documentation status, gender, and location of residence.
- Youth participants expressed a strong sense of responsibility to be involved civically through any means. DACA recipients shared their efforts in spreading awareness and volunteering. Voters shared their responsibility to not only vote but also educate and encourage those around them to vote.
- Latinas share a community oriented and participatory mindset to engage in improving their communities and family well-being. We found that they engage in their local parent school groups to ensure their children receive a quality education, provide pro bono services for community-based organizations as promotoras, serve as leaders in their community to educate Latino families as census campaign workers, and mentor other parents on how to navigate resources and services to support families in local communities.

> *"Mi hijo me dijo ayer 'mamá voy a comprar un arma.' Le dije que no y me dijo 'Mama es Texas todos necesitamos un arma'*
> *(My son told me yesterday 'mom, I am going to buy a gun.' I told him no and he said 'Mom, its Texas everyone needs a gun')*
>
> *"Mis padres no me dejaban salir afuera, casi ni a poner mi cabeza por de la ventana por miedo a ICE. Ellos crecieron con le miedo que los iban a deportar y no querían eso para mi"*
> *("My parents wouldn't let me go outside, hardly even put my head out the window for fear of ICE. They grew up with the fear that they were going to be deported and they did not want that for me")*

"Le decimos a nuestros niños negros que pueden ser todo menos abogados, doctores, etc."
(We tell our black kids that they can be anything except attorneys, doctors, etc)

"En mi país era y sigue siendo pecado decir que soy negra"
(In my country it was and continues to be a sin to say that I am black)

"Yo digo que el color de mi piel (porque soy más blanca) ha ayudado a que no me discriminen tanto. He visto otras personas que son discriminadas por el color de su piel."
(I think the color of my skin has helped me to not get so discriminated against. I have seen other people who are discriminated against because of the color of their skin)

"Hay mexicanos aquí que son discriminado por los gringos, pero siguen siendo racistas hacia otras personas de su propio país"
(There are Mexicans here who are discriminated against by White people, but they are still racist against other people from their own country.)

"If I don't have time, I MAKE time to be civically active. Growing up I always felt I NEEDED to be very vocal about issues that are important to my family and to me."

"Since I can't vote, I always try to make time to advocate and get others to vote"

"[El gobierno] me contactó para completar el censo, pero no me han contactado ninguna campaña o organización similar."
(The government] contacted me to complete the census, but I have not been contacted by any [political] campaign or similar organization)

- Recent immigrants in Florida reported that they have never been contacted by a political campaign or civil society group, despite having spent over a year in the country and it being an election year.

Identification, racial and ethnic identity, discrimination

- Most participants identified as Latino and/or country of origin. Afro Latinos who self-identify clearly articulated the challenges associated with identifying as Afro Latino and some shared the resolution to just identify as African American to avoid questions.
- Participants quoted the impact of discrimination within the Latino community and not just outside of it. All quoted the strong impact of colorism on the community.
- Mixteco (Indigenous) community members shared a lack of connection with the Latino category as they feel it is more connected to Latin American countries. The interplay of indigenous features and language has substantive impacts on discriminatory practices within and outside of the Latino community.
- While pride and acceptance of African ancestry are important, participants also acknowledged privilege associated with some of their phenotypic features and noted that one's physical appearance directly informs their experiences regardless of ancestry.
- Within the Mexican (American) population in border areas, several participants described feeling "different" and looked down upon for living across the border and speaking Spanish.

Recommendations

1. **LatinoJustice should utilize a racial justice framework to understand racial identity and racism as a prism to who gets what, when and how.** Colorism impacts social, economic and personal identity in a way that is often dependent on the context, situation, and place (including the historical legacy of colonialism on inner group dynamics and life experiences of how Latinos identify racially, ethnically, and linguistically). Latino communities are not homogeneous, and the role of race, ethnicity, language, and culture have significant relevance in how individuals access resources, inter-group perceived discrimination, and how they benefit or not from large systems and distribution of resources which often is unequal based on race. Racial discrimination and experiences with it both implicit and explicit can have psychological impacts on limiting one's ability to navigate daily lives and deep harms in creating unequal power and access to resources including, feelings of "hope" in large systems to take care of basic needs (e.g., healthcare, education, housing).
2. **Incorporate findings and framework into internal workstreams, strategy, and organizational capacity building (e.g., staff trainings, workplace education series, diversity, equity, and inclusion policies).** LatinoJustice should use a racial framework to understand the consequences of racism and colorism in a suite of thematic areas or issues impacting these communities. This will allow the organization to delve deeper into how racism shows up at an individual level to shape what projects are advanced to ensure Latinos have equal opportunity to access resources, programs, and employment.
3. **Target a set of thematic areas and issues that are priorities for the community especially around economic security.** Economic opportunity was a number one priority especially given the impacts of COVID-19 on Latino families. Workplace discrimination, immigration status and language access are relevant areas to explore as issue areas to pursue in supporting Latinos to be economically secure. For example, policies impacting workers and low-wealth workers disproportionately could be further interrogated as a possible litigation tool to pursue and integrate into the agenda for improving access to good quality jobs and educational pathways for workforce development.
4. **Research and data collection.** Continue to dive deeper into the role that identity, race, and colorism plays in how Latinos can access or not opportunities, resources, and services. More research should be conducted to better understand the pernicious nature of racism in Latino communities (looking inward) and how other communities receive them. Colorism and racism permeate internal dynamics within Latino families, social networks, friendships, and ethnically based diaspora communities.

Conclusion

This report explores racism, identity, and discrimination to inform how Latinos identify racially and ethnically and navigate economic opportunity, access to services and programs and systems. The analysis uncovers the central role that race, and ethnicity play in structuring attitudes and identity. The lived experiences and stories culled paint a story of the challenges and barriers the Latino community faces in the U.S. and, more importantly, how racism and colorism impact identity. The recommendations provided for LatinoJustice are not exhaustive; however, they are the building block for improving how to better advocate for the rights of Latinos in the U.S.