



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

School of Law

TAMU Law Answers Webinars

LATINX CIVIL RIGHTS Webinar Series

“The Latinx Community in the 2020 Election & Beyond”

Presented November 10, 2020

Panelists:

- [Secretary Julián Castro](#), Former Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- [Lisa García Bedolla](#), Vice Provost for Graduate Studies and Dean of the Graduate Division, University of California at Berkeley
- [María Teresa Kumar](#), Founding President, [Voto Latino](#)
- [Thomas A. Saenz](#), President and General Counsel, Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund ([MALDEF](#))
- Moderator: [Rachel F. Moran](#), Distinguished Professor of Law, UC Irvine School of Law; Distinguished Lecturer, [Hagler Institute for Advanced Study](#) at Texas A&M University

Disclaimer: While some of the panelists are attorneys, they will be discussing the law generally, and nothing in the webinar should be considered as legal advice. Attendees should consult their own legal advisor to address their own unique circumstances.

TRANSCRIPT of webinar video at <https://youtu.be/baSsoM8Bc-I>

- Welcome to the Texas A&M School of Law's webinar, the [Latinx Community and the 2020 Election and Beyond](#). This is the sixth installment and the final installment of the [TAMU Law Answers Latinx Civil Rights Series](#). We are very excited to share this particular conversation with you and to have so many of you join us.

We've done a number of webinars and you can find all of them -- we're going to have recordings of this one as well. You can find past recordings on [TAMULawAnswers.info](#). We'll provide that information again as the webinar continues. Today's webinar is hosted by the [Network for Justice](#), and the [American Bar Association's Commission on Hispanic Legal Rights and Responsibilities](#), in addition to [Texas A&M School of Law](#).

I'm going to briefly introduce the panelists. Most of our panelists don't need much introduction, and we will provide their full bios on the chat. I will say that some of our panelists and participants are lawyers. But none of what we talk about today will be deemed to be legal advice. We're just talking about legal issues generally.

We will have the opportunity for you to ask questions. And if you wouldn't mind placing those questions in the question and answer function of the platform, we will get to them towards the end of the platform and some of them might be addressed through the conversation. So I'm going to briefly introduce our panelists. We have [Lisa García Bedolla](#), who is the Vice Provost of Graduate Studies and the Dean of the Graduate Division at the University of California at Berkeley.

We also have [María Teresa Kumar](#) who is a founding president and board member of [Voto Latino](#). You've probably seen her and her commentaries in the last few weeks as she's talking about the election. We also have [Thomas Saenz](#), who's the President General Counsel of the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund. And this panel will be moderated by Professor [Rachel Moran](#), who's a Distinguished Professor of Law at UC Irvine School of Law and the Hagler Distinguished Lecturer at Texas A&M University.

But before I hand it off to Professor Moran, who's going to moderate the discussion, I'd also like to introduce [Secretary Julián Castro](#), who has served as the U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development under President Barack Obama. And before that he was Mayor of his native San Antonio in Texas. And in 2012, we were so proud of him as he gave a wonderful speech at the Democratic National Convention. I'm sorry, Senator, look I am projecting.

Secretary Castro, launched the [People First Future](#) in May, which is a political action committee that is committed to helping elect bold progressive candidates whose campaigns are focused on improving the lives of all people they hope to represent. I'm very excited to have this conversation. I'm going to turn it over to Secretary Castro, so he can lead us off with some remarks and then we'll head on to the discussion by the panel. Thank you.

- [Luz](#), thank you so much for the invitation to be here and to everybody at the [Texas A&M School of Law](#) and to all of the distinguished panelists; I'm familiar with their work and excited to hear what they have to say. You know, I can't believe that this election is over. But I'm very glad like a lot of people that we just got through a very big election. And given everything that has happened in 2020, I think it's fair to say that, right now for the Latinx community and for the entire United States there's a sense of change and of possibility in the air. Before I speak about what we see going forward, let me just address what just happened in the election.

The question coming out of 2016 and 2018 was whether the Latinx community would show up at the polls. As folks on the panel and folks that are watching know, the challenge, one of the challenges for our community in terms of voting has been that the turnout rate for Latinos has been lower generally than the turnout rate for non-Hispanic whites and for African-Americans. In fact, from 2012 to 2016 that turnout rate had fallen by about a point and a half. The good news from 2020 is that the Latinx community showed up. It turned out.

And especially young Latinos helped to propel Democrat Joe Biden to victories in places like Nevada and Arizona and even, with growing Latinx populations in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania, in those states as well. On top of that, the Latinx vote was consequential everywhere, including of course, traditional swing states like Florida and in our home state of Texas, where in many places the Latinx turnout increased significantly.

There were also some surprises, and for a Democrat like me, some disappointments. What happened for instance in border communities, border counties in Texas, was disappointing and surprising and definitely worth analysis and understanding as some of those counties tended to vote more Republican. But Republican or Democrat, no matter how people voted, the big story is that the Latinx community is both an indispensable part of the Democratic coalition and also is a community that will be competed for by both parties for a long time to come as it continues to grow and I think, after we understand the turnout rate this time, continues to improve its participation rate.

This year and the last couple of years have been very challenging times for the Latinx community. There is an image that I have seared into my brain, which is from a few months ago of farm workers in a field in California picking crops underneath a bright orange sky as the wildfires raged in that state. It was a very poignant image of the challenges that our community has often faced of doing hard work, essential work, and oftentimes for low pay, for meager benefits.

I think of folks not only in the fields as farm workers but also those in meatpacking plants, fast food workers, grocery store workers, city government officials, frontline health care workers, that during this pandemic have been the ones asked to step up the most and have done so, oftentimes in our society are rewarded the least. And so as we go through this moment of, as President-elect Biden described America the other day, sense of possibilities, I hope that first and foremost, in terms of the agenda going forward, we understand how we can ensure that we have a stronger social safety net, so that not only for the Latinx community, but to impact the Latinx community a lot, we invest in things like health care and housing and educational opportunity, closing the digital divide.

And that we finally have the opportunity to reform our immigration laws to inject some compassion and some common sense to replace the cruelty of the last few years. I think all of those things are possible. Of course, what happens in Georgia in a few weeks with the runoffs there will determine a lot of the reach of that possibility. But still, so much of what the current president has done, so many ways that he's negatively affected the Latinx community have come by executive action. And I believe that there's tremendous opportunity through executive action to do the reverse, not only to undo the damage, but to invest positively in the community.

And then to go beyond that and to work with the Congress on making those social safety net investments, creating greater opportunity for everyone in a way that will, I believe, disproportionately benefit the Latinx community, and ensuring that we champion the notion again that no matter who you are, no matter how long you've been in this country, what your last name is, the color of your skin, what your first language is, that when you work hard, you're able to reach your dreams. That certainly is the story of my family and its immigrant's American

dream experience, and I know of the families of everybody that is on this panel and so many people who are watching this zoom.

That's what I hope for. That's what I know many of us are working for. And I'm confident that we can see that come to pass in the years to come. Thank you.

- Thank you Secretary Castro. We really appreciate your time. You have a couple of questions. I'm not sure you're prepared to answer them. I'm going to pass them over to Professor Moran to begin with our panel conversation.

- Terrific. Well, wonderful start to this discussion. How very inspiring and reminding us of possibilities. So what a terrific beginning. I wanted to start off with, as you reflect on the election, what do you think are the most important lessons about the role that the Latinx community played in the outcome? And I know, Secretary Castro, you have to leave in a couple of minutes. If you want to speak briefly before you leave to that question, great. Otherwise, we're just so happy to have you here.

- Yeah, and I know each of the panelists has a lot of insight into this. I would just offer that my hope is that the narrative coming out of this election is not to blame somehow the Latino community, which some people are doing in some quarters. Because I think the main story was that the community came out at a greater level in 2020 than in 2016, that it was impactful everywhere as I mentioned, even when the Democratic party did not gain as much of the vote share as they thought they would.

But it's still an indispensable part of the Democratic coalition. And we saw that in wins in Arizona and Nevada. And people forget, because the expectations were so great for Texas, we actually closed the gap here in Texas from nine points to six points versus also 16 points just eight years ago in 2012. The last thing I would say about it is, all of us know that there has never been as much investment in reaching out to the community as there should be. And so, my hope as a proud Democrat on my end is that the party will continue to make more investment, a full court press 365 days a year in registration and in turnout.

- María Teresa, I know you played an integral role in turnout and outreach, as well as having some really interesting thoughts about the impact of the Latinx vote. So I wondered if you would like to expand on these initial comments.

- Thank you. First of all, thank you so much for having this conversation, so timely. And I think that it's so important and telling the fact that Texas is leading the way in these, what can we learn. Secretary Castro just jumped off the phone but he has been an integral part of the [Voto Latino](#) team as a senior advisor, helping us with strategy and with better exploring Texas. I deeply believe that actually Texas is the new Georgia.

And when we talk about what happened in Texas just most recently, and all I could dive in more broadly. But in Texas to give you an idea, the youth vote was up 600% from 2016. Voto Latino, we registered over 261,000 Texans and we mobilized 1.5 million of them. Disproportionately, close to 79% of the people that we registered were youth and 61% of them were Tejanas in

Texas in particular. And when you look at where we were on the map, Voto Latino we made a big bet.

We decided that we weren't going to be everywhere. But we were going to be in the places where we could help move margins. So we were in Texas, in Florida, but we were also in Nevada, in Arizona, in North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and in Georgia. And we registered a total of 601,000 individuals and we targeted and mobilized 3.7 million people. When people say that the Latino vote didn't come out, we had 2.4 million more Latino voters show up in the polls than in 2016. That is not small.

Close to 33% of the Latinos who cast a ballot early had sat it out in 2016. 40% of the people that voted for example in Georgia were first time voters. So you start looking at the narrative and you start seeing actually looking, contrasting the narrative of what people are trying to tell about our community to actually what happened. Colorado, Arizona have new representation right now in the Senate because of the Latino vote. Joe Biden is in the White House because of Nevada and Arizona because of the Latino vote.

Georgia is in play because of the great work that was done by Stacy Abraham and African-Americans, but these elections are won by the margin. In Georgia you have 5% of Latinos who are eligible voters. In that state Voto Latino registered over 35,000 new Georgians. And we know for a fact that close to 30% of the people that we registered early voted. So it kept the momentum up. So when people were trying to scramble why the margins were so small, we also know that Latinos because we got our communities in some cases to change behavior because they're not used to early voting, the fact that they did was one of the reasons why we saw this in play.

And I want to say this as all of this backdrop, that this happened in the Latino community despite a pandemic that disproportionately hurt our community, that disproportionate-- we are the ones that are essential workers. And despite the fact that disproportionately we don't get the same resources as other as other communities do. And despite that we did what we often have to do. We self-organized and mobilized.

Because we knew that we had so much skin in the game, so much skin in the outcome of having another Trump presidency or having a Joe Biden Kamala Harris presidency. There was no contrast. And so you know, we were fortunate enough, because Voto Latino we're a digital first organization, our goal was originally to register 500,000 folks. We ended up registering an additional 101,000 because we worked very closely with local community groups and helped them close the gaps where they couldn't because they couldn't physically be on the ground.

And the work can only be done in community and mobilization. We will double down in Texas because we believe that you are all the biggest great opportunity. People talk oftentimes of the wall up in the Midwest. And I'm like well what about the Blue Shield, the Blue Shield that we are seeing in the Southwest? And it is because of the young Latino community coming of age.

And something to think about, Lisa, you and I were talking a little bit earlier with Luz, and Tom, you'll appreciate this, is that in California, California was a swing state until we had a governor

that created anti-immigrant show me your papers laws at the same time, many of us on this call were coming of age. And us, and millions of us heard the call.

And we organized, we mobilized. We registered, we voted, and California became a solidly blue state. Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, Colorado, Nevada, Arizona, and even Texas have all the exact same makings of the ability for the Latino community not only to rise, but to wrestle control of an agenda that needs to better reflect us. And so while people are trying to piggyback and try to say, well, what didn't they do?

Damn it, not only did we do, but we rose to the occasion and we overcame, like once again we always have to. And the story and the narrative is that if we received you know, pennies on the margin compared to other groups, imagine what we can do when we're actually fully funded.

- I didn't know if anyone wanted to add to that?

- I would, Rachel, thank you. I want to emphasize a couple of things that María Teresa said. I think first of all the major lesson is that media and political commentators need to shift their gaze, their focus from the Rust Belt to what I call the Brown Belt. María Teresa has called it the Blue Shield, but the Brown Belt, and the reason I wouldn't call it Blue Shield is because it's still up for grabs at least partially. But the Brown Belt running from California through Texas, and Texas, as María Teresa emphasized, is the next game.

That's where it's going to happen in two years and in four years. That Brown Belt is what determined this election. It ended up being Pennsylvania that put President-elect Biden over the 270 threshold. But in truth, it could easily have been Arizona and Nevada had Arizona have been called sooner as María Teresa suggested. So four years ago, the story was the Rust Belt.

But we've got to get folks to move off of the Rust Belt and focus on the Brown Belt because that's where the action is in the future. And that's about the Latino community, which defines the Brown Belt. The truth is unless [this census](#) is hopelessly flawed, more power will shift from the Rust Belt down to the Brown Belt in 2021 with [reapportionment](#) of the House of Representatives and in turn the electoral college.

So that's where the action is. The problem is, we do this every two years, every four years, Latinos are consequential or decisive in the outcomes of elections. And then all of a sudden pundits and political organizers and political powers, they forget about it. And then becomes another surprise two years later. Maybe there is something to be said for a surprise gift every two years or four years.

But the truth is, we need the focus to be on the Latino vote between elections just as it is when they end up being consequential and decisive in the outcome of the election. So the biggest lesson is we need to get the powers that be, including media powers at be, to shift their focus from the Rust Belt down to the Brown Belt, which extends beyond Texas, as the Latino community grows in the South, as María Teresa indicated, in Georgia, North Carolina, the Latino vote is significant.

And of course, even in Florida, which seems to always be a swing state that then doesn't really swing as much as we expected it to. But if that's going to change, it's going to be because of the growth and changes in composition of the Florida Latino vote.

- Great, Lisa, I didn't know if you wanted to add anything to that and maybe also tell us a little bit about what the election can teach us about the future impact of the Latinx vote, which I think we've been hearing about in some of these comments.

- Yeah thank you so much. Thank you very much. Just to build on what's already been said, I think is very interesting if you think about the logic of the narrative coming out of this election that supposedly we were consequential only where we voted Republican, right? So somehow we're the reason that Florida turned out the way it is and we are the reason the Texas turned out the way it is, but nobody talked about, to María Teresa and Tom's point, nobody talked about Arizona, Nevada, Colorado, New Mexico, and California, all the places. If you look at that bottom part of the map where we played a role.

So I think in the future, I think the most important thing to take from this is that the vote can't be taken for granted. If you look at the states, as María Teresa said, where investments were made and the work happened, it worked, right? So you need to actually talk to Latino voters. You need to have policy positions that appeal to them. You need to talk to them about things that they care about in their lives.

And if you do that, in fact, they will vote for you. But that outreach needs to be substantive. And yet again this cycle, we saw again how you had President Biden playing '*Despacito*' on his phone or you had other kinds of cultural outreach. Or the fact that Spanish language media is the most common sort of demonstration of the next outreach, when in fact, the majority of our voters are actually English dominant and want to know about policy.

And so the potential is definitely there but the investments have to be made. And again, it has to have policy that in fact addresses the real, and especially right now, critical issues that our community faces. And when that work happens, the outcome is what we saw in places like Arizona and Nevada.

- Well, that leads me to the next area that I wanted to talk about, which is what is the Latinx agenda? What should it look like during this new presidential administration? What would the first 100 days look like? Do you think your ideal agenda is likely to emerge? Tom, why don't you lead us off on that one.

- Thanks, Rachel. I think of course, we have to recognize that so much damage was done by the Trump Administration and its executive orders and administrative regulatory action in the field of immigration but in other areas like education and housing as well. So much damage was done that we have to begin with reversing that damage. But I think it's important to emphasize that that's not an agenda that only occurs in the first 100 days.

Yes, we need to take significant steps initially in reversing some of the really terrible, demeaning characterizations and policies that affect so many immigrants currently in the country and those

who are interested in immigrating to the country. We've got to reverse those. But I used to refer to this as the Cheetos approach to reversal. That is, you look at Cheetos with the dust that's on your fingers. You look for anything with orange fingerprints and you throw it out. Well, that's not enough. That's part of it.

So you've got to start with the Cheetos approach and look at what has orange fingerprints on it and reverse some of those things. But truly the damage has been so deeply established that you've then got to do work long term to make sure that those who were harmed by those policies are returned to where they should have been. There are countless immigrants who have been deported wrongfully from this country in the last four years because they should never have been enforcement priorities.

And indeed under prior administrations, many of them were not enforcement priorities. They were allowed to stay in the country with work authorization. They were asked to come in and report to DHS on a periodic basis. And under this administration all of sudden those folks found themselves taken into custody and removed from the country. That's just one indication of what needs to be done to reverse the damage.

You can't just get rid of the orange fingerprinted policy. You've got to make sure that we are engaged in reparations if you will, for those who were harmed by so many of these policies. And those reparations go beyond the immediate, who was wrongfully removed to the tenor of our policy as a nation for groups of people, whether that's refugees, asylees, coming to our southern border, whether that's the immigrants who have been undocumented for long periods of time and in this country contributing. We have to change our entire approach.

The folks who have been really wrongly put into private detention facilities with all of the wrongdoing that occurs, that we know occurs, in failures to provide adequate nutrition, failures to provide education to children, failures to adequately provide medical care to those who need it in these private detention facilities. We've got to make up for that as well.

So it really is a long term Latino agenda, even if much of it begins with reversing policies, then we have to adopt and move forward with future policies that not only provide reparations for those were harmed under the Trump Administration, but looks forward to those like them and treats them as a more integral part of our national community. And in the end, that's what the Latino community demands, is that we be included and recognized as an integral part of our national community.

That means acknowledging our importance. That means acknowledging for example, that we have been the essential workers and that we ought to be recognized and we ought to be in many ways rewarded for our service, very dangerous service in this pandemic. So it begins with reversal, but it continues with future policies that incorporate and acknowledge the importance of our growing and significant Latino community. We are now nearly 20% of the population.

We are over one quarter of all public school students nationwide from kindergarten through 12th grade. And we have been the largest minority group in this country since 2003, meaning that within this Biden Administrations, first Biden Administration, we will celebrate, commemorate

the 20th anniversary of Latinos becoming the largest minority group in the country. And if you think about 20 years with that status, we have not been incorporated by either party into the important decision making influential fabric of our nation in the way that we should have been.

- Would anyone like to add? Lisa, if you want to add. OK.

- Then I'll add something.

- Yep.

- Just to say absolutely all of that. And then also the quality polling of Latinos before the election made clear that folks were concerned about COVID response, health care, and jobs. And so to lift up what María Teresa has already said here in California, Latinos make up 38% of the population. They're 60% of our COVID cases. So whatever the COVID response is cannot be race neutral, because the impact of the pandemic is not race neutral.

And so we have to make sure that the policies that are moving forward on those three important fronts take into consideration the significant disparities that exist and one of my criticisms of the Obama Administration is that in many cases, if policies positively affected the Latino community it was by accident. It was very rarely by design. And so, making sure that actually thinking about the specific needs of particular communities as you develop these broader policy positions is critically important if we're actually going to affect, positively affect, the needs of the community right now.

- María Teresa?

- So yes, so for the very first time Voto Latino endorsed Joe Biden. We had never endorsed a candidate before. And it was because we saw that we were entering-- the last four years have been in an unusually painful experience for Latino community for all the reasons that Tom highlighted, and for the real racial disparities that Lisa is alluding to that we saw under COVID. COVID basically broke open the institutional racism that we have been fighting for our country, and we were able to finally expose what the fault lines are that, when we asked people to shelter in place or to sacrifice, it wasn't equal under COVID.

Some people had other opportunities where others were not. And so, when we endorsed Joe Biden, we actually asked him for policy positions that the community, our audience, told us they cared about. And what was returned to us was 22 pages of promises. And so I like to say now we have 22 pages of receipts. Because we helped get him into office. And that was an outline on his immigration policy, education policy, health care, and criminal justice reform, and the last one was where he stood on the environment, because we know that those are the things that were critical.

As COVID started ravaging the community though, the things that we realized were really highlighting the Latino community as Lisa mentioned, were really three things. It was health care under COVID, jobs, and the real racial disparities that exist in Black and Brown communities. And so Voto Latino, we are right now coming up with an agenda for the next 100 days that we

expect from the administration, based again on those 22 pages of promises, now it's the time for us to deliver.

And this is where we have to reimagine our traditional relationship with Washington and with our elected officials. In our communities, we have a tendency of voting people in and then expecting them to do their job. And we have to recognize that they only do their job with transparency and pressure. And oftentimes, we have to give people courage to do the right thing when they are hearing from everybody else perhaps. I do believe though that we are in a once in a lifetime opportunity to reimagine government, reimagine our services, and reimagine what we can do.

We have not had the same opportunity to reimagine ourselves since the last century, since FDR and the New Deal, where the American public decided that they were going to do a reset and decided to double down and nation build. And if COVID has showed us anything is that it's not enough to go back to where we are. But we actually have to start building for the future, because when we start saying that does our country right now reflect, the echelons of power, truly reflect the children in grade school? They do not.

And so we have to reimagine, what does that look like? And we have to be aggressive about it. And I believe that we have to be audacious about it. And when people say, well, we don't have time for that, I'd like to remind people that there was a moment in time when some man rolled out of bed, looked up at in the middle of the night, looked up on the moon and said, let's go to the moon.

And with less technology than our cell phones, this audacious man gave audacious commands and we went to the moon with less technology than our cell phones. And it is that moment now for us to think just as audaciously. Because the future will ask us, were you guys ready to lead? Were you able to really go into a greening economy? Were you able to level up a majority of people so that they truly could be in the middle class?

Because right now there is a very fault ridden middle class. And we have to figure out how do we actually create again those foundations that we created 100 years ago, how do we prepare them now for the 21st century? And how do we do it in a way that we recognize and acknowledge that it is a very diverse country, different group of Americans than what was built for 100 years ago. So I do think that we have to hold people accountable and we have to think bigger to actually get to the root causes of a lot of the inequities that we have right now.

- Well, that really leads--

- Rachel, if I could just-- I wanted to just make the point that of course the first 100 days a critical element of that is the appointment of high level officials.

- Absolutely. Of course, so many of us many of us, María Teresa, are focusing on that now appropriately, because we have to do things differently. The election of Kamala Harris as vice president has changed the aspirations of millions and millions of girls and young women across the country. And we have to be looking for the same change for our Latino community broadly.

And that in my mind means that we've got to be looking for, not just significant representation in the Cabinet, any representation is going to be an improvement off of our current situation under the Trump Administration where there is no Latino or Latina member of the Cabinet.

And you'd have to go back decades to find a similar time. And you'd have to go back a half century if you define that as leaving out the largest minority group in the nation from the Cabinet. But we want significant representation, commensurate with the size and growth of our population and commensurate with the contribution that we've heard so eloquently described to the outcome of this election. But it certainly also means not just representation in the lower level, but very important, positions in the Cabinet. The Latino community wants representation in the top Cabinet positions.

And it's not like we have to guess what are the top Cabinet positions. It's laid out in the legislation that implements the 25 Amendment. We know what those positions are. Right now we need to ensure that there is a Latino or Latina as Secretary of State, Secretary of Treasury or Attorney General of the United States. I don't think there is any alternative to ensuring that there is representation at that level. And it's not just about changing aspirations for young people in a positive way. It is about ensuring that the largest minority community amounting to almost one in five Americans is represented at the very top levels of our government.

- Well, that actually brings me to another question that I had and it relates to this idea of reinventing our identity that María Teresa mentioned. Because we don't reinvent our identity just by voting every so many years. We have to think about other forms of civic engagement and political participation. You mentioned serving in office. Lisa, would you like to give us your thoughts about how to kind of think about the future of civic engagement and political participation for Latinx as we think about this kind of reinventing of identity and a new kind of place of importance and prominence for the Latinx community?

- Absolutely. I think it's important to think about on two levels. So if we think about kind of on the general level in terms of people's civic engagement, the first thing I want to be sure to clarify, when I say investment, I mean year-round investment. So we need to have people, community based organizations, we need to fund them so that they can go to the people in their communities. They can talk to them about what matters in politics, and really re-educate people.

If you think about the ways in which we teach civic engagement in the United States, it's often, the institutions are perfect, the founders were brilliant, don't worry your pretty little head about politics. Instead of saying, you know what? If you want that stop sign on the corner, here are the people who are responsible for doing that in your community. Or if you care about education in your community, here are the people who are on your local school board.

We don't teach people how to access government in order to take care of the things that they care about. And that's the information that people really need to have. And those are the conversations that have to happen with people who are from the same community. So we need to really invest in that development of civil society, not only in the Latino community, but across the United States. And that will lead then to more broad political engagement.

The second thing, though is the question of our elected officials. And I think it's really important to realize how hard it is to run for public office in this country, in particular, and I say this, I now have firsthand knowledge, my husband actually ran for school board in Berkeley. He lost. But what we learned, I knew this intellectually, it was very different to experience it personally. You need to be running for a year before the election.

Who can afford that realistically? So first of all, it's who gets tapped, right? Because who is seen as a good candidate? That's a big issue. But secondarily how do we fund, you know, single mothers or low income people to be able to take the time that it takes to get the endorsements, to lay the groundwork, to raise the money, to put the platform together, to have a website, to take donations, you know all the things you need to run for office.

And so building that bench in terms of our leadership is critically important. And that's another place where the investments just haven't been made. And we have incredible potential in our community that's untapped, because essentially right now you have to be independently wealthy in order to consider running for office at pretty much any level.

- Would anyone like to add to that?

- I'm all for public financing of our campaigns. Get the big money out of politics. I'm right there with you.

- So I think that the last question before we get to questions from the audience is really about developing a cadre of Latinx leadership. You mentioned for example, the real growth rates in registration and the energy among younger people. And they were kind of registering in record numbers and so on. But María Teresa, just to get us started, how do you think we need to work to develop the kinds of leaders that Lisa was mentioning in her answer about civic engagement and political participation.

- So I'm going to answer the question but I'm going to take a different tact. One of the reasons that right now we are having a conversation where the narrative is that Latinos didn't show up, but let's double down on certain other communities. It's often that the people, the consultants, are going to encourage people to go after the community that that person knows, if you catch my drift. So if you're hearing that we have to double down on the Midwest, it's because the person that, and it sounds crass, but it is true that that is how they're making their living.

So if all of a sudden, they say, wait a second. We have to go focus on the Latino community; that may not be their area of expertise. It is actually not in their favor to actually say that out loud. So when we are developing our leadership, we want to make sure that we're developing the leadership in a holistic way. It's not enough for example, for campaigns to come knocking on our door and train field organizers and then get them stuck there. Because that way they're never going to run a presidential campaign by that sum.

They're not going to be in charge of data. They're not going to be the consultants. They're not going to be the pollster class. And so, what we should do is make sure that when we have young leaders, that we're providing them with a plethora of what their opportunity is. Lisa, your

husband ran for school board. We should be encouraging young people to run for office. And there's very good programs out there.

One is called the Arena. There's another one that's called [Run For Something](#). And they focus specifically on young leadership. And Voto Latino, about four years ago, the MacArthur Foundation said you're telling all these people to vote. Have you ever considered asking them to run for office? I was like, that's a new one.

So we actually started partnering with Emily's List and with Emerge and we do have a training track. And I have to share with you-- and we teach them all the different parts of what a campaign looks like. So not just the field organizer, but the fundraiser, the data analytics, the social media person, all of it. So that people can see where their tastes are so to speak. And then we send them out to campaigns.

But what's been fun is that we started-- I'm sorry, we started this in 2014 and since 2014, we've had six young people that we know of that have decided to run for office. And we've plugged them in when we've known in advance. And of those six, five of them have won and they've all won their-- they've all won, but they're also the youngest in their entity. So in Austin, [Gregorio Casar](#) is the youngest city councilman to serve in Austin City Council. He came from us and he'll tell you.

We also have Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez that came to one of our power summits, and you know, the tale is that she was inspired by us. She hasn't yet to confirm that with me. But I'll take it. The idea is like how do we reimagine-- the reason Voto Latino, the reason we focus on young people is that one, yes, they're the largest demographic. But in many ways I built it for a mirror of what I needed as a young person trying to navigate the country for my family.

When I was, just like so many young Latino youth that were at the time, I was translating in the doctor's office for my grandmother when I was six years old. And I was filled always with anxiety, trying to figure out, was I going to get her medication wrong. Was I going to translate something wrong.

And so you have a whole million of young Latinos who are leaders in their families, who have outsized roles. Why not give them the reins of leadership long before? And so we really try to reimagine what leadership looks like, Lisa, that is not when you hit certain marks or certain-- the way traditionally people are encouraging you to think of leadership. It's more of, put yourself out there. Learn your skills. Be really good at what you are.

But don't hold yourself back and try to find and squeeze out the opportunity every chance you get. But we really deeply believe that if you look at the leadership, the reason Texas is in play is because you have amazing young leaders stepping up to the plate running for office. [Lina Hidalgo](#) is going to be governor. There's no doubt in my mind. She is fierce and she is what we need. And she is reflective what I would say of the young leaders that Voto Latino tries to train and attract all the time.

- Does anyone want to add anything on that, Tom?

- I would just like to echo that we need leadership across the board in every sector. So as important as elected leadership is and encouraging folks who are up and coming in our communities have put themselves in position to run for office and make the investment, it's also important that we ensure that we have leadership in every sector imaginable. Part of what made Donald Trump able to focus on demonizing the Latino community from June of 2015 when he slandered Mexican immigrants in announcing the launch of his presidential campaign to June of 2016, when he demonized a Mexican-American sitting federal judge as biased against him simply because of that judge's race, what's allowed him to succeed in getting to the White House by targeting our community is the vacuum that we see in every sector of our society.

You start with media. We're really, really privileged to have María Teresa up in the media talking about elections, talking about policy. But she's lonely. I know she's lonely, because I don't see enough--

- Super lonely.

--folks like her in that position. And yet we have folks of different, other races talking about Latino community, talking about Latino issues. And I like it when they get it right. But I'd sure like to see Latinos and Latinas up there talking about it. And it's not just the news media. It's the entertainment media where Latinos are the most underrepresented of all communities if you compare our population to our representation in front of the camera on both television and in film, we are the most underrepresented.

But it's not only there, it's in academia. There's no reason Rachel Moran shouldn't be the president of the university. First of all, there's no reason Rachel Moran shouldn't be a candidate to serve in the Cabinet of the United States and I have to say, but there's no reason you should not be the president of the university. We don't see enough of that. In the corporate sector.

So the truth is when I talk about those four most important Cabinet positions, the Secretary of Defense is going to come out of the military. But our problem in the military is this, the military across the board has treated diversity as meaning Black and female only. They have not included Latinos and that is why Latinos have the lowest number in comparison to representation in military, in comparison to our population we have the lowest number of general officers at the level of general in the Army, at the level of Admiral in the Navy of any community. And that's the future ranks that are going to serve as Secretary of Defense. And that's one of the top four Cabinet positions.

Similarly the Secretary of the Treasury, don't make any mistakes. We have people who are qualified now to serve as Secretary of the Treasury. But the future Secretary of the Treasury going to come out of the finance arena. We need leadership in the finance community as well. We need to ensure that our ongoing underrepresentation, not just underrepresentation, severe underrepresentation in every sector of leadership changes and changes permanently.

And that means working to ensure that we are promoting each other. We're advancing each other's interests. We are ensuring that folks get the guidance and support they need to move into leadership in every sector that we are talking about. If we don't take those steps, then we are

enabling a future racist populist like Donald Trump to once again gamble on targeting our community to inspire folks to support a racist agenda. That's what he did.

Now some of the folks who supported that agenda may have had those ideas in their head all along. Some of them may reject them. But they were appealed to by demonizing the Latino community because they had no personal experience of our community. And personal experience doesn't have to be your neighbor, though we know that makes a difference. Doesn't have to be a classmate though that makes a difference.

But it can also be who you see on television. It can be who you see in the movies. It can be who you see at the top of a field that you keep an eye on, whether that's academia or the corporate sector. Wherever that may be, we have to fill that vacuum or we risk the future racist populist like Trump fills it for too many people in this country.

- Well, I wanted to turn to-- thank you very much, everybody, for this discussion. And it sparked quite a lot of questions from the audience. And I wanted to get to a few of those before we have to leave. And so one set of questions really relates to, once you get these people in office, how do you hold them accountable to deliver on these agendas? Are we really creating mechanisms, not just to mobilize people and get people into office, but you mentioned that people don't change except under accountability and pressure. How do we create accountability for whatever we believe the Latinx agenda to be?

- I would think that it would be multifold, right? So I could speak for what we're planning on doing at Voto Latino is that we are right now working on that 100 day, what we expect. And then we will send it over to the White House. And we're right now also undergoing a research that focuses on taking the temperature of what is the health and the wealth of the Latino community under the age of 33, between 18 and 33, because that is our audience.

Because oftentimes everything is a monolith, and we recognize that there are different sets of stresses within this age group. And so, that's the second one. And then we'll start briefing Congress. But then we will also basically come up with policy recommendations and in that, inform our audience to call members when they have to. So that's one.

The other is that this is led by [Unidos](#), by Unidos, [NALEO](#), [Hispanic Federation](#), and [Mi Familia Vota](#), I believe, we, today Unidos launched a Bring It to 20%, which is something to what Tom was alluding to where we are demanding that the new administration reflects at least 20% of the new workforce that will be filling in appointed positions be Latinos. But I think back to something that Thomas was saying and it's something it's really important for us too.

This only happens by demanding it. We have a tendency in the Latino community to say we're going to wait our turn. To Tom's point, we have been the second largest group of Americans since 2003. And you would never guess it, because we've been waiting for someone to basically see our great work and efforts and appoint us. That does not happen. And we have to take lessons from other groups that really make noise and really rattle the cages, and expect that from our leadership, and tell our audience when to go, and that there should be consequences.

Donald Trump went after our community because he didn't expect any consequences. We took him out, not to the margins that I would have liked, quite frankly. But there was a consequence. But then that also gives conversely, people courage to stand in front of us. But our community is going to have to be our best allies. And we also, I will share with you an experience of 2016. In 2016, in the 2016 election in Florida, that dreadful Florida, we saw the hurricane hit right on the day of voter registration deadlines.

And so a judge moved it for seven more days, saying we're going to send the voter registration deadline seven more days. We got together with our consultants. We calculated that in those seven days Voto Latino could register an additional 122,000 people. We started doing what we traditionally do is trying to call donors and saying, can you help us fill this gap? It was negligible. It was roughly about half a million dollars, when we knew that they were sitting on a \$22 million war chest.

We weren't asking for \$1 million. We were asking exactly what we could do and what we could absorb. The response that I got from three major folks was that Florida had enough voters. We didn't need to register any more. And that's when a light bulb hit. A light bulb hit is that, yes, I'm a Progressive. Yes, I'm a Democrat. But they're not the same thing.

They're not the same thing because my charge is to register all the voters in the Latino community. And by registering all the voters, you can actually start accumulating political power. What the other side of the phone was telling me was that they had enough of our voters to get their candidate over the top. And by that measure, we will never have enough voters to get our folks over the top.

So a real come to Jesus moment in the Latino community is that we have to start investing in ourselves because if we expect to have political power, we can't expect someone from the outside to do it for us because they will invest just enough. And how do you invest that political power, whether it's volunteering, whether it's buying a \$5 t-shirt, whether it's spreading the good gospel, that is how we start investing in ourselves.

But until that moment, that tipping moment comes, we will always be at the mercy of what someone thinks that we should have. And to Tom's point earlier, this is not something that we are-- [SPEAKING SPANISH]. We're not waiting for the handouts. We actually built this country. We have demonstrated that we are at the front lines. We have demonstrated that we have over-sacrificed.

And now there's a time where we actually have to stop-- it's not that we're ungrateful is that we're grateful for everything but recognizing that it wasn't given to us, you know. Rachel Moran, you did not show up one day and decide that you wanted a law degree. You had to fight like hell for that. And all of us in the Latino community, we have to fight like hell to be in those spaces.

And we have to recognize, so in that we have to start investing in us in a different way that has never been required by our community, but that we should take example of what the LGBTQ community has done so beautifully. They represent 5% of the population. No one would guess. They flex. We have to take those lessons.

- Tom.

- I just would like to add that, I think we also have to recognize that our focus in the Latino community has to be on the entire Latino community, and not just on the swing state Latino community. We talked about the importance of Texas and no way to deny that. We've talked about the importance of the Brown Belt. No way to deny the importance of Arizona that flipped and Nevada and the flip of the Senate delegations in Arizona and Colorado, really critically important.

But I want to make a pitch for my home state and yours of California, where we feel like, Latinos in California, we made it already. We're the example of the future. Yes, but, we still have lots of work to do in this state. First thing we need to do is make sure that Kamala Harris is succeeded by a Latino or Latina in the U.S. Senate from the State of California. We have 40% of the population here, 27% of registered voters. It's more than time.

In addition to that, we've got to see that our folks are represented in the Cabinet. [Xavier Becerra](#) should be the Attorney General of United States. I have no doubt about that in my mind and I want to see it happen. But we also need to recognize that California may be the wave of the future in a different way. And that is, in the State of California today, in large part because of the Latino community, but because of others as well, Republicans are outnumbered by [Decline to State](#) voters.

This is a crisis for the two party system that has been in place since the middle of the 19th century in the most populous state in the country. So if that continues in the future, Republican registration shrinks further, [Decline to State](#) registration increases more, then the future changes of the two party system in the United States of America to begin in California. And who's going to be at the front of how the new system evolves is the Latino community.

So I just want to make sure we all recognize that as important as these swing states are, we have lots of influence to be made real in each of those states, we are also at the cutting edge of what may be changing politics long term and permanently in the United States in states like California that we view as having flipped so long ago.

- Lisa, did you want to add something?

- Just quickly, I agree with everything, but I do want to bring us back to the accountability question. And just make the point, we tend to focus on the presidential and the presidential is important and everything that's been said about representation and demanding accountability at the federal level is important. But we tend to forget that actually people's lived experiences are much more affected by their state and local governments.

- Absolutely.

- Particularly at the local level. And so accountability presumes you have to force people in office to do what you want. But I want to broaden accountability to say we need to help. If we've

elected these amazing young Latinos in office, we have to help them govern. And so it's also about that this is why it has to be year around.

This is why it has to not just be about elections, but people have to be paying attention. And we have to be supporting our leaders as they go into these spaces and face a lot of resistance to what they're trying to do if they're wanting to make change. And the best example of this if you talk to Karen Bass, when she was elected she started community coalitions. She was elected to state government and she felt like she didn't have anybody at her back. And so we also really have to lift up and sustain the folks that we put into office so that they can actually make the real substantive change that we want them to make in those roles.

- Well this is great and we have just a couple of minutes left. And so this is going to be an audience question. But it's our lightning round. And you've inspired so many people in the audience and they just want to know, "What can I do?" And so if you could just give us one thing that you think that someone might do who wants to make a difference in this area. If you have two or three that's OK, but with a lightning round. Go ahead.

- I will just say, go to [VotoLatino.org](https://www.votolatino.org). We have active program going on in Texas. And if folks are interested in volunteering from the comfort of your house to Georgia, you can go ahead and text volunteer to 73179 we'll get you to work.

- Just quickly, I think the most important thing is to support local organizing in whatever form. So go to [Voto Latino](https://www.votolatino.org). Go to [Fair Vote](https://www.fairvote.org) if you're concerned about Georgia. But also find out what your community organizations are in your community. Either fund them, participate in them, tell your friends about them. But just get more involved and try to connect with other people who care about the things you do.

- And I know our community uses social media adeptly. So I want to see social media, every platform light up with Latinos and Latinas talking about the importance of our representation in the Cabinet of the United States and providing suggestions about the first policy measures that the Biden Administration should put in place for our community. It's critically important that organizations like [MALDEF](https://www.maldef.org), organizations like [Voto Latino](https://www.votolatino.org), organizations like [Unidos](https://www.unidos.org), be out there in support of these efforts. But it's even more important in my view that we see Latinos and Latinas across the country from every state lighting up social media with the importance of these issues.

- Well I wanted to thank our panelists, Lisa García Bedolla, María Teresa Kumar, Thomas Saenz, and also of course Secretary Julián Castro at the beginning. I think that this has been both an exciting look at the recent election, but also an even more exciting set of possibilities for the future. So I think Secretary Castro really got us off on the right foot because we've really been talking a lot about the future potential.

And in our last minute or so, I did want to give [Professor Luz Herrera](https://www.luzherrera.com) an opportunity just to wrap up since this is the last session of our fall series.

- Yes, and thank you Professor Moran for your great moderation of the panel. We really appreciate it. And to all of you all of you who joined this presentation and others, we hope that you will come back for future iterations of our webinar. We're looking at all these questions and understand that we have we have many more conversations to engage in. So we look forward to being in touch with you.

And for those of you who have friends who want to see this conversation that could not make it, we will provide a recording of today's presentation at TAMULawAnswers.info. Usually takes about a week and a half or so to get it up. But you should find it there. Thank you again, and thank you to our great panelists for this wonderful conversation.