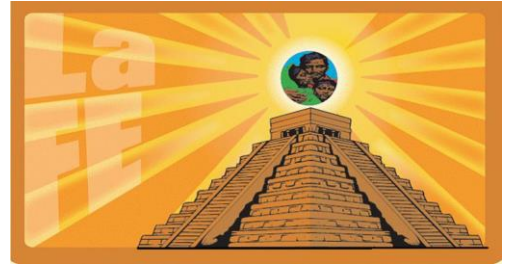




La Fe Policy Research and Education Center



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Uvalde Tragedy: Latinos Want Justice and Change

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The recent tragedy of school children and teachers killed in Uvalde has resulted in extensive media, punditry, and political attention. Yet, has anyone asked what the children's families and the predominantly Latino community want? The failed communications and understanding of their wants are a microcosm of what happens daily across Latino communities.

With few exceptions, the parent, extended families, and the larger Uvalde majority Latino community have not had their stories told. Not only stories of the impact of the tragedy itself, but the interdependent stories of life experiences in Uvalde, the tragedy, and the horrendously incompetent intervention response from law enforcement and public officials.

In addition, public officials display cultural and linguistic insensitivity in the post-tragedy assessment and efforts to aid. The failure to immediately distribute the aid needed and no policy attention to gun control measures is simply a continuing affirmation of ignorance, racial bias, and not caring. Unspoken is the atmosphere of systemic racism that a full inter-connected telling of stories would weave, and which appears to begin surfacing.

Parents of children killed, extended family members, and a newly organized advocate coalition are beginning to grab the media mike and confront local and state policymakers to tell a different story and make demands for justice and change. They situate their pain, anger, and advocate wants from growing up 'en Uvalde' and connecting the history of neglect to the tragedy response.

In a larger context, Texas has 254 counties across twelve distinct economic regions. Unlike the civil right and Chicano movements of the 1960s and 70s, the Latino population has expanded beyond South Texas and the border and increased ten times across the twelve regions.

For Latinos, each region and its barrios represent its personal and familiar history, tragic events, and how they experience social and economic barriers for their families. We must take lessons

from the civil rights activist and action, plus do better to determine their concerns and priorities and align them with advocacy and policy priorities – locally and statewide.

Most Latinos in the U.S. want the American dream, and they believe hard work and the ability to speak English are needed to succeed. According to an [Axios-Ipsos Latino Poll](#), in partnership with Noticias Telemundo, this optimism remains despite the Covid-19 pandemic, polarization, and systemic racism,

Given that Texas has a history of, and currently is a national beacon for polarization and systemic racism, e.g., threaded through voter suppression, and economic mobility-related opportunities affected by inequitable education, health care, and immigration policies. Do Texas Latinos share the same optimistic view about achieving the American dream?

Woefully, there is limited information from well-designed Latino-focused surveys or inclusive grass-root approaches that better help understand their perspectives and issue priorities. Even with concerns about generalizing survey results to the larger population(s), the following quoted highlights are from Texas-based sources.

A Texas Public Policy Foundation survey noted that Texan Hispanics are no longer reliably democratic and that both parties should take heed.¹ They note:

- 40% of respondents said Hispanics do not have access to the American dream to the same extent as white Texans.
- 78% of Hispanics surveyed said they strongly or somewhat support school choice. And not just charter schools; the question included the idea of vouchers for private schools.
- 73% agreed that a crisis is happening at the southern border. However, only 51% said the answer is increased security measures.

The results of a University of Texas and Texas Tribute survey indicated that Texas voters were doing about the same economically compared to the prior year. “The political context here is we’re not in a state of ‘the Texas miracle.’ You cannot look at these data and say, ‘Yeah, we’ve come out of the pandemic stronger.’ Or that we are even out of the pandemic as far as all its consequences are concerned.”² More specifically,

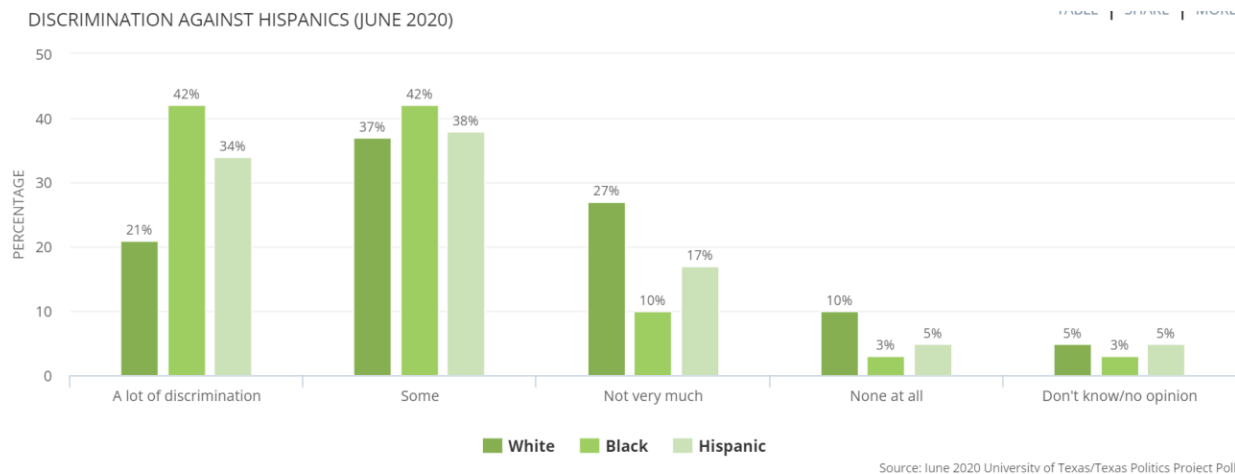
- 31% of Hispanics said they were doing somewhat, or lots worse compared to whites at 39%.
- 57% of Hispanics said the state was heading in the wrong direction compared to whites at 43%.
- 40% of Hispanics disapproved somewhat or strongly of what the Texas Legislature is doing compared to whites at 39%.
- Among Hispanics, immigration, political corruption, and leadership were the top 2 most important problems facing the state.

A Texas Hispanic Policy Foundation elections survey of state voters indicated the following:³

- 39% of Hispanics would vote for Governor Abbott compared to 65% of Whites and 8% of Blacks.
- 53% of Hispanics would vote for Beto O'Rourke compared to 29% of whites and 88% of Blacks.

Instead of a traditional multiple-choice survey, the Texas Organizing Project commissioned a one-on-one interview study. They found that issues such as the economy, jobs, education, and health care were more important to Latinos in the state. The survey interviewers noted, "Mainstream media and political parties underestimate Texas Latinos' political diversity, agency, and independence, portraying their political behavior through simplistic, sometimes racist tropes."⁴

A survey conducted by the Texas Politics Project at the University of Texas at Austin indicated that 72% of Hispanics felt there is either a lot or some discrimination against Hispanics. The chart below details the results.



Regarding health concerns, in an Episcopal Health Foundation survey,⁵ Texas Latinos:

- Indicated a higher percentage of difficulties in affording health care, paying for care, and skipping needed care due to costs and lack of insurance.
- 58% of Latinos support increased funding for health care compared to 81% and 53% for Blacks and whites respectively.

Latino demands for equality and justice across issues are related to efforts to increase their political power and policy influence. The political challenge for achievement is exemplified by the relationship between health outcomes and the Cost of Voting Index (COVI).⁶ States with more inclusive voting policies and great levels of civic participation are healthier.

Public health outcome indicators and voter turnout were compared to the Cost of Voting Index for all U.S. states for the 2020 general election. The health indicators and measures selected were based on an analysis of published literature linking civic participation and health.

The COVI targets nine issue areas:

- Registration deadlines
- Registration restrictions, such as no online voter registration
- Registration drive restrictions, such as training required by the state
- Pre-registration laws for 16 and 17-year-olds
- Automatic voter registration
- Voting inconvenience, such as excuse required to vote absentee
- Voter ID laws
- Poll hours
- Early voting

The public health indicators included individual health measures and factors that influence health outcomes, also known as determinants of health.

Individual and Community Health

- Self-rated health
- Self-rated mental health
- Adults receiving disability benefits
- Premature mortality
- Infant mortality
- Chronic disease prevalence
- Active physicians per capita
- Uninsured
- Overall health

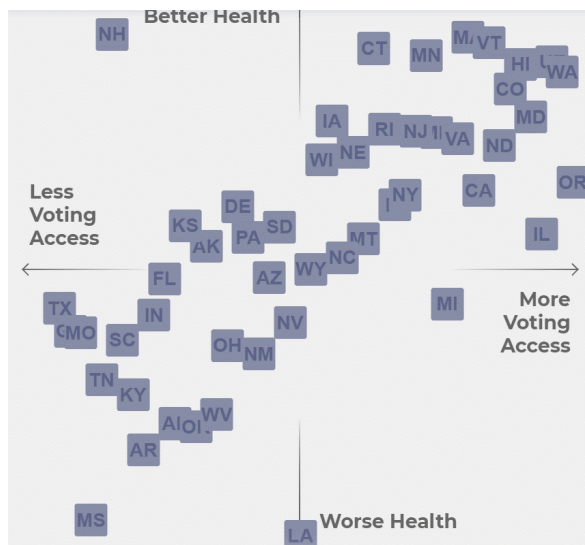
Other Factors

- Poverty
- Community and Family Safety
- Gini index of income inequality

The overall results were unsurprising for Texas – less inclusive voting policies and poorer health as illustrated in the chart below.

In summary, in a wider state context, the Uvalde tragedy reflects Texas’ discriminatory history and existing systemic racialized response and policies.

Surveys can provide useful information for advocates and policymakers. Three caveats are important; 1) understand the survey’s purposes and design, 2) do not place primary reliance on survey results, and 3) seek out multiple information sources grounded in cultural and linguistic approaches to ascertain Latino values and perspectives across issues.



¹ <https://www.axios.com/2022/03/24/axios-ipsos-poll-american-dream-latinos-politics>

² <https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/editorials/2022/03/23/hispanic-texans-arent-getting-behind-progressive-policies/>

³ <https://www.txhpf.org/>

⁴ <https://www.ncronline.org/news/people/study-highlights-texas-latinos-political-diversity-agency-independence>, and <https://www.texasmonthly.com/news-politics/dont-call-texas-latinos-voters-sleeping-giant/>

⁵ “Texas Health Policy Poll on Access and Affordability, Episcopal Health Foundation, May 9, 2022.

⁶ <https://democracyindex.hdhp.us/>