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**The Texas Way to  
Economic Miracles:  
Generations of  
Inequality**

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# **The Texas Way to Economic Miracles: Generations of Inequality**

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## **I. Executive Summary**

This report illustrates the state's poor performance in national ranking among 10 major human capital investment areas and its contributing effect on generations of a Latino underclass. The *bienestar*<sup>1</sup> (well-being) of Texas Latinos has been disadvantaged over generations by Texas' racial and ethnic prejudices and a policymaking ideology that limits human capital investments.

Human capital is the economic value of a worker's experience and skills. Human capital includes assets like education, training, intelligence, skills, and health with monetary value that impacts mobility toward financial stability and independence.

The structures enabling inequitable policies are entrenched in the state's political foundation of limited government, pro-business positions, minimal human capital investments, and the belief that lack of individual initiative defines one's failure to achieve. Further, suppression of civic engagement, regulatory rules, and processes reinforce disenfranchisement and marginalization.

For decades, political leaders assert that their political foundation demonstrates that the 'Texas Way' to governing has resulted in the 'Texas Miracle' - sustained economic growth and prosperity. However, the state's poor performance in national human capital rankings reports seriously disputed the Texas Way and the Texas Miracle. Research reports, books, and media investigations also conclude that economic growth and prosperity have not benefited most Texans' social, health, and economic status.

White men have been the dominant political power and economic beneficiaries of the Texas Way, whereas, for Blacks and Latinos, it has contributed to generations of low-income, politically weak status. While Latino civil rights advocacy has resulted in incremental education, income, and other *bienestar* improvements, less than one-half have achieved middle-class economic status today.

As the new majority (40.21%) of the state population, they drive labor growth with increased economic effects as the Texas Way continues obstructing their economic mobility. Indeed, the state's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2017 would have increased from \$1.84 to \$2.4 trillion if Texas eliminated racial gaps in income.

The challenge for Latinos and allied advocates is to make structural changes to the Texas Way that can result in an equity-based approach to laws and policies. It requires an electoral power, policy analysis, and communication strategy that increases human capital assets. Where most Latino children will be in financially stable families, live in supportive communities, and meet developmental, health, and educational milestones.

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<sup>1</sup> *Bienestar* is defined as a quality-of-life status among individuals, families, and communities affected by social, environmental, and systemic factors – a holistic wellness concept. It embodies social justice concerns, given the Latino experience with institutionalized racism and harmful public policies.

## **II. Introduction**

This policy report focuses on Texas' minimal support for legislative policymaking regarding human capital investments and the inequitable impact on Latino families' *bienestar*<sup>1</sup> (well-being). The state's policymaking approach is often called the 'Texas Way.' It relies heavily on being overtly pro-business and less on improving all Texans' social, health, and economic mobility opportunities. The Texas Way has resulted in the state's poor performance across numerous human capital investment indicators in national ranking reports.

**Human capital is the economic value of a worker's experience and skills.** Human capital includes assets like education, training, intelligence, skills, and health with monetary value that impacts mobility toward financial stability and independence. Social and economic development are inherently linked, meaning that social concerns such as one's health, education, and nutrition are essential and are instrumental in nurturing dynamic, competitive, and thriving economies. Also, investments in human capital have demonstrated that they result in economic returns.<sup>2</sup>

The Texas Way is driven by the belief in individual responsibility, lower taxes, limited government, and personal success or failure ownership. Therefore, individuals must 'pull themselves up by their bootstraps,' work hard, and achieve success -the American Dream. This underlying belief drives the state's minimal human capital investment policy approach, historically traceable to when it was annexed into the United States in 1845.<sup>3</sup>

It is fundamentally inequitable because it creates community inequalities and perpetuates biases. Evidence supports it is a contributing cause for the decades of inequities among Texans, particularly Latinos, across education, income, health care, housing, civic engagement, and other issues. The beliefs or ideologies driving the Texas Way involve conservative, nativist, and increasingly white nationalist views.

Not investing in your citizens is counterproductive, i.e., governmental policies affect the everyday lives of its citizens, **which are the capital driving** local, state, and national economies. Their effect may be beneficial or detrimental regarding the taxes we pay, opportunities to acquire quality education, access to care, quality of neighborhood infrastructure and safety, civic engagement, business development, the air we breathe, and many other economic-laden and quality-of-life concerns.

## **III. Methodology**

This report was partially guided by previous research publications that urged state policymakers to invest in its citizens. Examples include

- "Texas on the Brink" reports, first initiated in 2003 by former State Senator Eliot Shapleigh from El Paso. The report profiled Texas' dismal national rankings in spending for education, health care, environmental protection, workforce development, public safety, and other services and protections. He noted, "Our failure to invest in ourselves puts our children (*predominantly Latino children – emphasis mine*) at risk

and our future in jeopardy”. The Sixth Edition of the Report was published in 2013 by The Texas Legislative Study Group under the leadership of retired Senator Garnet Coleman of Houston.

- Steve Murdock, state demographer and a former director of the U.S. Census Bureau, was explicit in his 2003 and 2014 Latino-driven population growth publications and countless public presentations that Texas must change its minimalist policymaking toward increasing human capital investments or face long-term negative economic consequences.

We assess and compare key relevant human capital indicators across all 50 states and Washington, D.C. The information was collected from governmental and private research sources (see endnotes and appendix). Only standardized and verified information was considered to ensure consistency and correlation to Texas policymaking.

The selection of indicators for this report was based on their relevance and significance in affecting economic mobility and the link between legislative policymaking and human capital impact. Each indicator was chosen to provide a comprehensive view of Texas’ performance and rank in each area. In most instances, a higher rank denotes a better performance, while a lower rank signifies a lower performance.

It is important to note that each ranking presented in this report is based on available data and indicators considered during the study. As such, the rankings may vary in subsequent assessments and have improved or worsened due to updated data. Further, multiple sources may issue a ranking report on the same area, i.e., education, and use different metrics to conclude different results. Nonetheless, we assess whether there are common themes, developments, and trends from multiple human capital investment areas and sources.

We aimed to provide a comprehensive update of Texas’ performance to invest in its citizens equitably, identify policy-relevant performance implications for Latino families, and recommend structural changes needed for a different, inclusive ‘Texas Way.’

We utilize recent national ranking reports across key human capital indicators to measure the state’s most recent performance. For Latinos, they represent an integrated review of indicators that affect their *bienestar*. Therefore, we also highlight the related social, health, and economic status of Latinos impacted by each indicator. The indicators are:

Income	Housing	Immigration	Business
Gender Equality	Health	Incarceration	
Education	Environment	Civic Engagement	

Finally, we do not profile ‘positive’ state rankings; comparatively, there were fewer targeting human capital indicators. Also, we left out many poorly ranked indicator detailed metrics, e.g.,

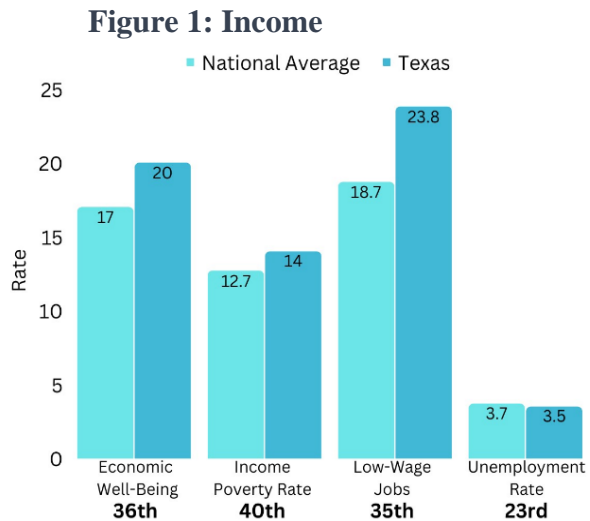
health indicator metrics focused on specific chronic diseases, health professions shortages, and healthcare costs.

#### **IV. National Performance Ranking: Human Capital Investments**

##### **Income**

The state is 11<sup>th</sup> behind other states and Washington DC, in overall income inequality based on the Gini Index of .48.<sup>4</sup> The Index is a statistical measure of income or wealth distribution. It ranges from 0 (0%) to 1 (100%), with 0 representing perfect equality and 1 representing perfect inequality.

Figure 1 profiles relevant income and economic mobility ranking measures. Texans rank above the national average in economic well-being, income poverty rate, and low-wage jobs. Compared to all states, it ranks 36<sup>th</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup>, and 35<sup>th</sup>, respectively. In its unemployment rate, it ranks 23<sup>rd</sup>. In July 2023, a U.S. Department of Labor report ranked Texas at 48<sup>th</sup> with an unemployment rate of 4.1%, resulting in the state being among the five states with the highest unemployment rates.



**Latino Bienestar:** Income and financial assets for Latinos are 2 to 4 times less than that of Whites in several significant areas. Examples include median household net worth (\$39,000 vs. \$151,000,000), unbanked (16.1% vs. 2.8%), income poverty rate (20.6% vs. 8.7%), and overall asset poverty rate (28.5% vs. 17.3%). Only 47% of Texas Latinos have achieved economic middle or upper-middle-class status compared to 70% of Whites.<sup>5</sup> The Latino unemployment rate was 4.9% compared to Whites at 2.8% in the first quarter of 2023.

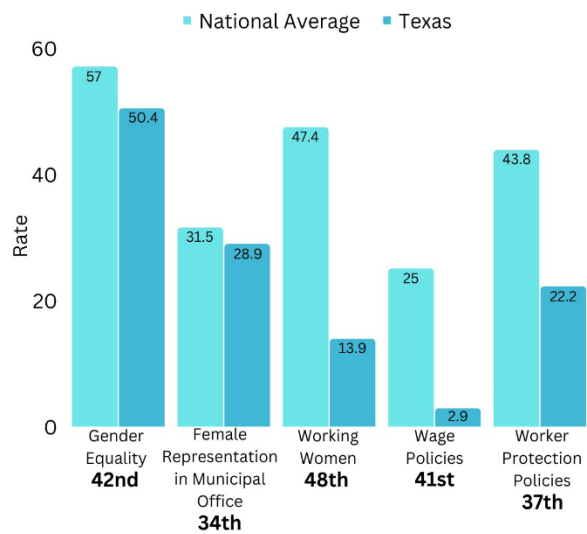
##### **Gender Inequality**

Texas ranks 49<sup>th</sup> as the worst state for women's equality.<sup>6</sup> The ranking was measured by targeting gaps between men and women across 17 metrics. Texas women encounter an unequal economic playing field due to barriers such as pay inequity, college loan debt, access to affordable childcare, lack of health insurance, and housing cost burdens. These economic and systemic barriers disproportionately impact women of color and single mothers.<sup>7</sup>

Figure 2 demonstrates Texas' poor performance, ranking at 42<sup>nd</sup> in overall gender equality. Other state employment equity-related indicators illustrated are representation in municipal office (34<sup>th</sup>), working women (48<sup>th</sup>), wage policies (41<sup>st</sup>), and work protection (37<sup>th</sup>).

**Latino *Bienestar*:** Latinas' crucial family caregiving role have been extensively documented. In addition, their contribution to family financial stability and community economic impacts is increasing. They now enter college in larger numbers than Latino men and comprise the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest workforce group among women.

Figure 2: Gender Inequality



However, the Latina wage gap is the highest in the state. If the slow progress in achieving wage equity continues at the same rate since 1985, “Latinas will not reach equal pay with White non-Hispanic men for another 185 years, or until 2206.”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, they lack vital protections in the workplace, which is a significant contributing factor, and 51% cannot earn paid sick days through their jobs.<sup>9</sup> Texas ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> with the worst Latina pay gap – earnings ratio of only 45.4 to White men, equivalent to an annual earnings gap of \$36,053.

### Education

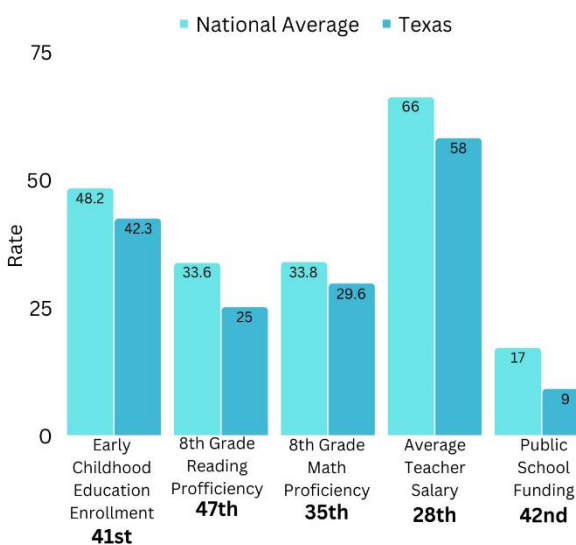
Texas presents a complex, inequitable education landscape resulting from a history of underfunding in this critical human capital investment resource.<sup>10</sup> Although education funding has increased, public school funding has not kept pace with inflation and student population growth.<sup>11</sup> The social and economic returns from investing in education are well-established. The state ranked 43<sup>rd</sup> in public spending per K-12 students<sup>12</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> in overall educational opportunities and performance in 2021.<sup>13</sup> The state also received a grade of ‘F’ in its support of teachers.

Figure 3 illustrates the state’s rank of 42<sup>nd</sup> in overall public-school funding and demonstrates low performance in significant areas of early childhood education enrollment (41<sup>st</sup>), 8th-grade reading (47<sup>th</sup>) and math (35<sup>th</sup>) proficiency, and average teacher salaries (28<sup>th</sup>) - the state ranks below the national average in all the preceding indicators.

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Further, Early Head Start, which has proven to promote social-emotional and language development in children before they reach pre-k, ranks 49<sup>th</sup>. Based on the available slots, only 4.5 percent of eligible Texas children have access, whereas the U.S. average is significantly higher at 8%.<sup>14</sup> The preceding indicators all contribute to the state’s rank of 43<sup>rd</sup> in overall educational attainment.<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 3: Education**



**Latino Bienestar:** Texas continues to not fairly and equitably fund its public schools, despite several decades of legal battles and advocacy by Latinos and its allies.<sup>16</sup> There were 5.4 million children enrolled in Texas public schools in the 2021-22 school year. The Fall 2021 enrollment headcount in higher education was 1,551,000. Students of color comprised 72.2% and 59.9% of public school and higher education enrollment, respectively. Latino enrollment was 52.7% and 40%, respectively.

Texas is failing to graduate one out of every five students, losing ten students per hour. The statewide attrition rate is 19%, meaning 19% of the freshman class of 2017-18 left school before graduating in the 2020-21 school year. Schools are twice as likely to lose Latino and Black students as white students before graduation.<sup>17</sup>

Over 75% of Latino public school students are identified as economically disadvantaged compared to 30% of White. Of over 1 million English Language Learners (ESL) enrolled, 87% are Latino, who continue to have inadequate access to a quality education because of underfunding.<sup>18</sup> In 2021, the educational attainment of adults aged 25 years and older who obtained an associate degree or higher was 67% Asian, 50.5% White, 38.1% Black, and 24.5% Latino.<sup>19</sup>

### **Housing**

Rising prices have made homeownership for Texans significantly more difficult. According to a Texas 2036 report, the following exemplify the difficulty:<sup>20</sup>



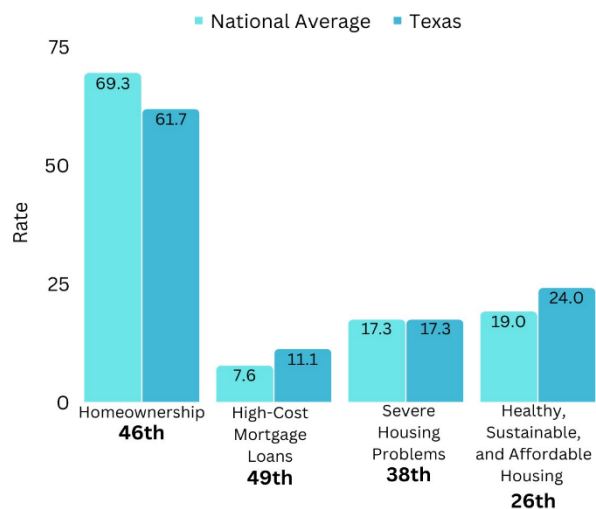
- In 2018, the median house price in Texas hit \$232,900 and **surpassed three times the state’s median household income** of \$59,670, a standard measure of unaffordability.
- Median home prices in Texas in November 2022 stood at \$330,000, 35% higher than in March 2020.
- The country lacks 3.8 million market-rate housing units with Texas accounting for 322,000 of those missing units.
- As housing prices rise, so does the percentage of Texans who are housing “cost-burdened,” meaning they spend at least 30% of their income on housing. More than 45% of Texas renters are cost-burdened, as are 26.4% of homeowners with mortgages.

The implications for low and below-poverty households to access affordable housing worsened. In addition, affordable rental housing for the lowest-income renters is a crisis. Texas is among the worst states for affordable rental housing.<sup>21</sup>

Figure 4 presents the state's national ranking on select housing indicators. The state ranks 46<sup>th</sup> in homeownership. Further, it ranked 49<sup>th</sup> in high-cost mortgage loans, 39<sup>th</sup> regarding severe housing problems, and 26<sup>th</sup> in having healthy, sustainable, and affordable housing.

**Latino Bienestar:** Latinos encounter significant challenges to home ownership. Whites, ages 18 and over, represent 45 of the state population but comprise 56% of all homeowners, compared to Latinos at 36% and 30%, respectively. The cost burden and affordability of homes for Latinos are nearly twice that of Whites. Finally, the median home value of Latino homeowners is the lowest at \$135,000 compared to Asian, White, and Black homeowners. The ratio of value to household income for Latinos is also the lowest at 2.2. Home lenders recommend at most 2.5 times of annual income.<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 4: Housing**

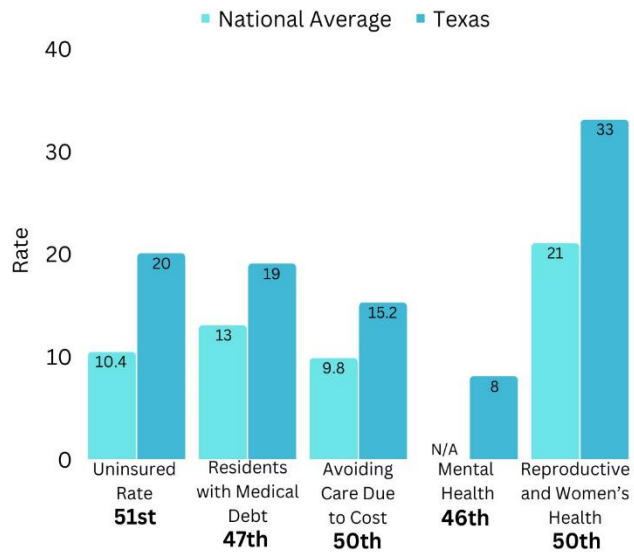


## Health

Texas’ long history of underfunding essential human capital investment resources results in a comprehensive inequitable health space. Nationally, it ranks 48<sup>th</sup> in overall health system performance, encompassing access to and quality of care metrics. It also ranked 44<sup>th</sup> in multiple metrics that assess its healthcare response to COVID-19.<sup>23</sup> Despite its poor performance, Texans are paying more for healthcare than most states, ranking in the top 10 states with the highest costs.<sup>24</sup> Regarding healthcare for children, the state is one of the worst, ranked 48<sup>th</sup>.

**Figure 5: Health**

Figure 5 shows that the state is significantly above the national rate average for the uninsured, residents with medical debt, avoiding healthcare due to costs, children who are overweight or obese, and reproductive and women’s health services. The state national rankings in all the preceding indicators are dismal; they are all at the bottom, 47<sup>th</sup> – 51<sup>st</sup>, as the worst.



**Latino *Bienestar*:** Latino adults and children are uninsured at three and two times the rate of their White counterparts, respectively. This is partly due to the higher rates of Latinos in low-wage jobs, as low-wage jobs are less likely to offer healthcare coverage. Additionally, because Latinos are uninsured, they are more likely to accrue medical debt, dissuading them from leading healthy lives by avoiding care in the first place. Approximately 23% of Latinos avoid care due to cost, nearly double compared to Whites (12.8%).

Latinos comprise over 49% of all children; the state's dismal child well-being rankings (health and economic) importunately impact them. Texas is also failing at caring for women and their reproductive needs. 33% of women do not have a usual source of care. 26% of Latina women have not received a mammogram in the past two years. 25% of Latinos did not receive a cervical cancer screening in the past two years.

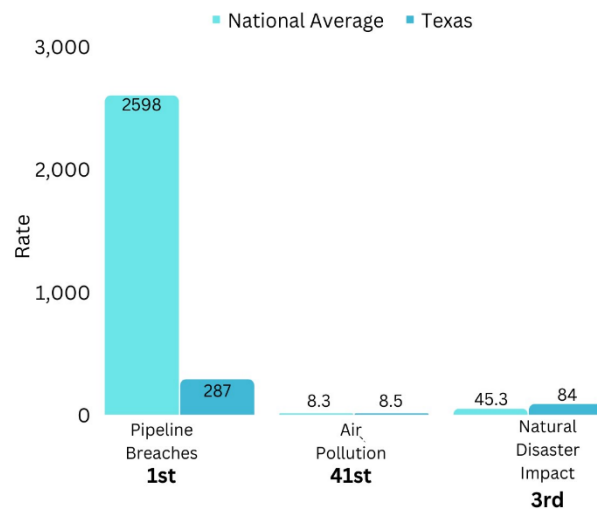
The state’s overall health equity for Latinos ranks 40<sup>th</sup> (of 42 states), and health care access, quality, and outcomes metrics rank 46<sup>th</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup>, and 33<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>25</sup>

**Environment**

Texas ranks as a major polluter of the environment<sup>26</sup> and does a poor job of caring for the environment based on 25 metrics.<sup>27</sup> Its political leaders are climate change deniers,<sup>28</sup> and their leadership response to climate disasters has been wholly inadequate and caused substantial deaths and health and economic harm.<sup>29</sup> The state also got an ‘F’ in how its public school's science standards address climate change.<sup>30</sup> However, Texas ranked second in budget cuts for environmental protection between 2008 – 2018. They prefer protecting the state’s oil and gas industry rather than dealing with climate change.<sup>31</sup>

Texas’s inadequate approach to environmental policy has resulted in significant health and economic harm. The potential for continued detrimental damage is still high. Figure 6 further highlights Texas’ poor performance on several environmental indicators - ranking 41<sup>st</sup> in air pollution, 1<sup>st</sup> in oil pipeline breaches – Texas had the largest number of breaches of the national total. The state also ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> in natural disaster impacts.

**Figure 6: Environment**



**Latino Bienestar:** The Texas Winter Storm in February 2021, disproportionately impacted Latino, Black, and low-income people.<sup>32</sup> The winter disaster occurred while they struggled with pandemic conditions and its disproportionate economic and health effects.<sup>33</sup> Notably, Latino concerns about climate change and its impact on them are higher than most other population groups.<sup>34</sup>

Companies choose to locate in areas with higher populations of color, disproportionately telling Latinos and hindering their quality of health and chances at future real wealth.<sup>35</sup> Latinos in lower-income communities are more likely to be exposed to particulate matter. Air pollution and early-life exposure to particulate matter are directly linked to economic mobility, and there is a 5-27% wage gap between Latinos and Whites.<sup>36</sup>

“Across the state, poor, brown, and black communities, who have less access to resources, will bear the greatest brunt when it comes to climate change.”<sup>37</sup>

### **Immigration**

U.S. immigration policies have been problematic for at least a century; however, nativism, political partisanship, and business labor needs have been the cause and failures in undercutting long-term solutions – not immigrants. Over the past two decades, Texas has increasingly become more nativist, villainized immigrants, spending billions of taxpayer dollars on inhuman and illegal border security to stop the migrant ‘invasion.’<sup>38</sup> Governor Perry (2000-2015) and Governor Abbott have led the charge against immigrants, particularly Mexicans. Today, ‘Operation Lone Star’ is the cornerstone of state rights justifying White Supremacy policy action against federal immigration policies. Indeed, Texas is a national leader and arguably #1 among states in anti-immigrant dogma and destructive human rights policy actions.<sup>39</sup>

Since 2020, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton has brought 20 lawsuits to federal court, 11 of which concern various immigration-related policy issues; the most recent lawsuit was obtained in May 2023. These lawsuits starkly contrast other states bordering Mexico, such as California, New Mexico, and Arizona. The three fellow states only filed lawsuits against the federal government for the opposite reason: to protect migrants and their safety. Since 2020, Arizona has filed one case

in 2021, California has filed no lawsuits (with their most recent being in 2019), and New Mexico has only filed one.

**Latino *Bienestar*:** Because of these non-solution and harmful border policies, Latinos are negatively impacted and at risk for harmful health and economic impacts. Since 2022, border counties in Texas have seen a significant increase in law enforcement agencies, increasing the amounts of violations and citations received by Latinos. State troopers have increased by 55% in Latino-majority counties while decreasing by 7% in white-majority counties.<sup>40</sup>

More critically, over 100,000 of Latino children in public schools and youth enrolled in Texas colleges are at risk. Abbott and Republican allies want to eliminate a 40-year Supreme Court ruling that provides free public education for immigrant children. Attorney General Ken Paxton is leading a multi-state lawsuit to eliminate the Deferred Action for Child Arrivals (DACA).

Immigrants are a vital part of Texas' economy. In 2019, they comprised 17.1% (4.9 million) of the state's population, of which nearly 65% are Latino. Over two-thirds of the population are between the work-productive ages of 18 - 64. Their consumer spending power totaled 120.3 billion dollars, and they paid 40.6 billion dollars in local, state, and federal taxes.<sup>41</sup> Immigrants are significant economic contributors to every Congressional District. Their contributions as farmworkers, caregivers, construction and hospitality workers, health professionals, and entrepreneurs span the state. Unfortunately, failed immigration policies and xenophobic politics continue to assault immigrants, particularly the undocumented.

### **Incarceration**

For all the hype about Texas' as a model for criminal justice reform, the state remains "more or less the epicenter of mass incarceration on the planet – it operates some of the meanest and leanest prisons and jails in the country."<sup>42</sup> Over 700,000 or about 1 of 30 adults in the state are under state control; it includes adults in prison, jail, probation, and parole.

Underfunding and inhumane treatment in state prisons and juvenile detention centers reflect the meanest and leanest example. For nearly a decade, the state has failed to address the lack of air conditions in its prisons or the scandal-plagued history of the Texas Juvenile Justice Department. Deaths and abuse characterize the result.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, Texas is also the epicenter of capital punishment.<sup>44</sup>



Texas is often acclaimed for its “tough on crime stance”, demonstrated in Figure 7 by being ranked 1<sup>st</sup> in incarceration rates. If Texas were a country, its incarceration rate would rank 8<sup>th</sup> globally.<sup>45</sup> Texas has 12.8% of the total prison population in the U.S.<sup>46</sup> Being tough on crime appears to have little effect on its national ‘safest state ranking of 47<sup>th</sup>. Further, it ranks 1<sup>st</sup> in verified wrongful convictions (1<sup>st</sup>).

**Latino Bienestar:** Texas continues to disproportionately incarcerate Latinos, and despite years of Latino and ally’s criminal justice reform advocacy, they represent 33% of the Texas prison population. Latino men are 2.5 times likelier to be incarcerated<sup>47</sup> and have a higher rate of serving time in state or federal prison<sup>48</sup>. Regarding capital punishment, nearly 60 percent sent to death row have been Black and Latino, and the disparity has continued to grow.<sup>49</sup> In addition, they represent 39% of the state’s juvenile detention centers.

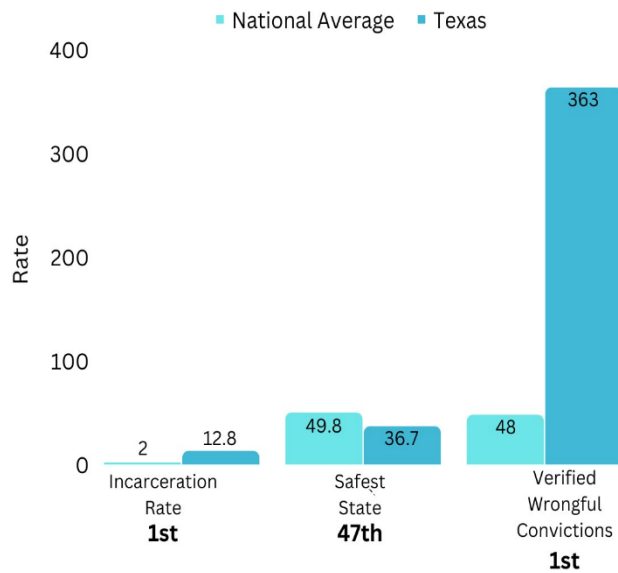
A child of a parent who is or was formerly incarcerated has limited future economic mobility and security. Children of individuals who have been imprisoned are shown to have lower education attainment, which hinders future economic prosperity.<sup>50</sup> For the parent, the restriction and barriers to community reentry and moving toward social acceptance and gainful employment are significant.<sup>51</sup>

**Civic Engagement**

Texas has a 150-year history of voter suppression. It’s a foundation which over the last 15-20 years, “Texas Republicans have attempted to purge voter rolls, forced polling places to close, fought to keep voter registration difficult, and punished minor violations of election law with draconian prison sentences.”<sup>52</sup> The state ranks 46<sup>th</sup> nationally in voting access according to the nonpartisan 2022 Cost Voting Index, published in the Election Law Journal. It dropped from the 2020 rank of 45<sup>th</sup>.<sup>53</sup>

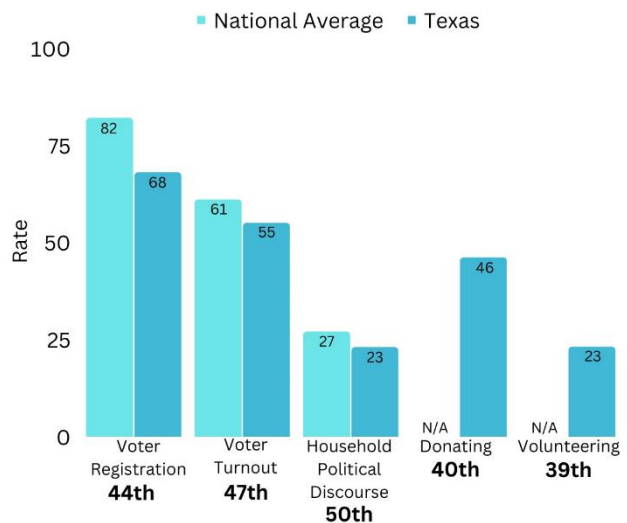
Civic engagement is crucial to maintain a democratic society. Figure 8 illustrates Texas is below the national average across three important civic engagement indicators – in voter registration, voter turnout, and household political discourse rates.

Figure 7: Incarceration



Civic engagement is crucial to maintain a democratic society. Figure 8 illustrates Texas is below the national average across three important civic engagement indicators – in voter registration, voter turnout, and household political discourse rates. Concurrently, the state ranks 47<sup>th</sup> in voter turnout, 44<sup>th</sup> in voter registration, and 50<sup>th</sup> in household political discourse. Further, Texans rank 40<sup>th</sup> in charitable donations, and 39<sup>th</sup> in volunteerism.

**Figure 8: Civic Engagement**



**Latino Bienestar:** Texas is widely known for its decades-long battle against unfair and strict voting laws.<sup>54</sup> Since the Supreme Court’s 2013 ruling that removed federal oversight of voting laws, Texas Republican legislative leadership has submitted hundreds of voter suppression bills and passed several new voting restrictions.<sup>55</sup>

People of color accounted for 95 percent of the 3,999,944 people the state added to its population between 2010 and 2020. The Latino voting age population increased by approximately 2.3 million during this period, four times greater than the White population. Yet, Texas created no new Hispanic-majority districts when redrawing Congressional, State House and Senate, and State Board of Education redistricting maps.

A coalition of plaintiffs, led by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, have filed suit against the Governor and Secretary of State over the adopted redistricting maps because they violate the Federal Voting Rights Act. Again, this demonstrates Texas’ legacy of voter suppression and marginalization of Latino voters.<sup>56</sup>

**Business**

Despite the low national ranking in human capital investments and outcomes, the Texas Way is good for the business sector. Indeed, the state is recognized as having the best business climate in the country – “Taking the top spot this year is based not only on the impressive capital investment and job creation numbers, but also for diversity of industries, robust infrastructure, and a business-friendly regulatory and tax climate.”<sup>57</sup> The Tax Foundation ranked the state at 13<sup>th</sup> nationally. Of the five metrics, individual and unemployment insurance taxes are ranked 7<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, respectively, while corporate, sales, and property taxes are ranked 47<sup>th</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup>, and 38<sup>th</sup>, respectively.<sup>58</sup>

Texas ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> in the nation for its workforce and economy. In addition, associated rankings for the state’s business climate include 1<sup>st</sup> in access to capital, 8<sup>th</sup> in technology and innovation, 16<sup>th</sup> in the cost of doing business, and 25<sup>th</sup> in business friendliness.

While Governor Abbott equates the state’s economic success, profiling it 2.3 trillion annual gross domestic product, to his winning nine college national football champions throughout his governorship, others would disagree, questioning who has benefited.<sup>59</sup> A University of Texas

and Texas Tribune poll indicates that the lauded ‘Texas Miracle’ of economic success has not affected Texans equally.<sup>60</sup> In life, health, and inclusion factors (e.g., crime rate, environmental quality, health care, childcare) combine to make Texas #1 the worst place to live and work in America.<sup>61</sup>

**Latino *Bienestar*:** Most Texans have not been the beneficiaries of the Texas Way/Miracle. For many Latinos, building wealth is a dream unmet. Less than one-half of Latinos have achieved middle-class economic status compared to 70 percent of Whites.<sup>62</sup>

Wealth, what we own minus what we owe, provides a better measure of opportunities for a family to increase their tangible and intangible assets – children’s development needs, education, home ownership, savings, retirement plans, increased civic engagement, etc. Low-income status limits choices to strengthen families socially and economically and reduces civic involvement. Whether intended or not, Texas's history of discriminatory and inequitable policies continues to marginalize Latino families. Moreover, the economic mobility and influence of the succeeding generation will also be limited and marginalized.

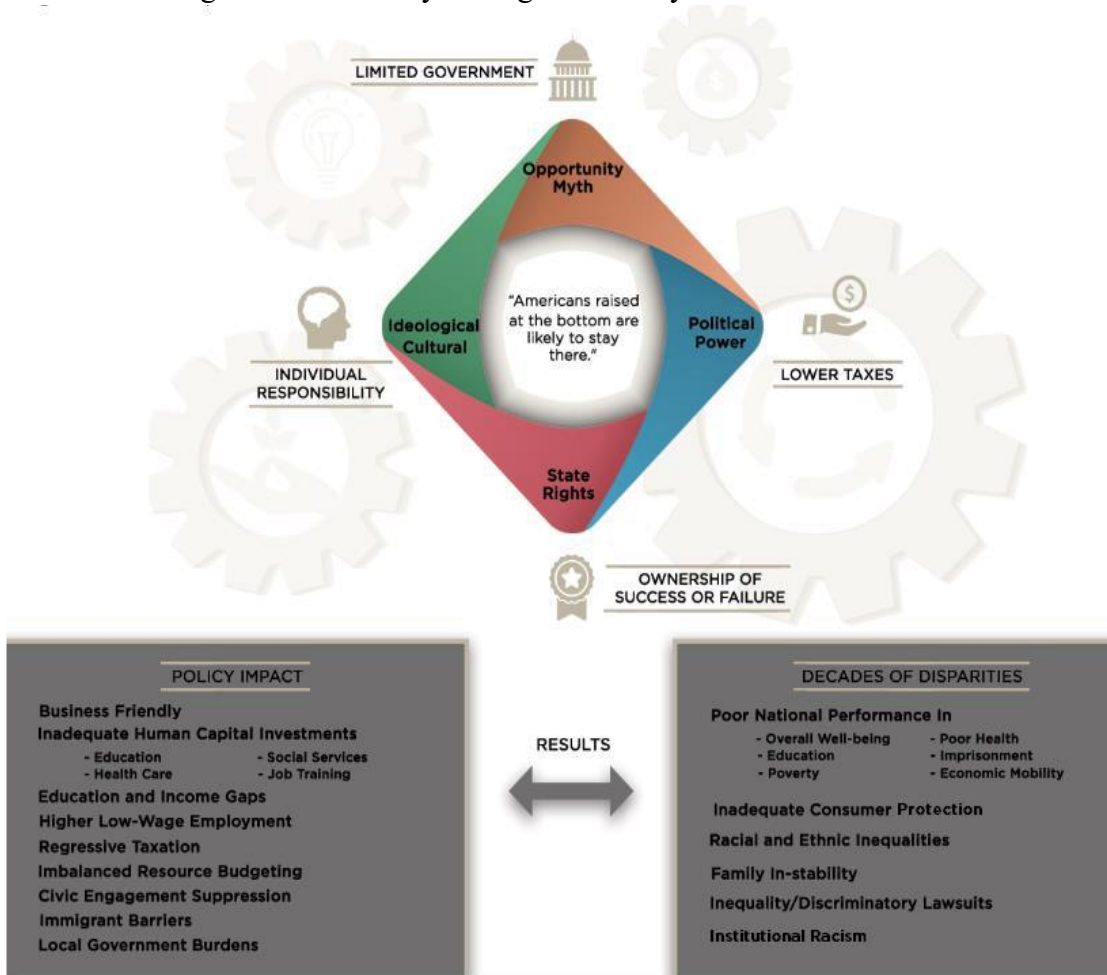
Latinos are now the state's majority (40.2%) population. It's well-known they drive the state’s population and labor growth, contributing significantly to its economy. Nonetheless, their economic contribution can be much greater if not for the Texas Way of limited human capital investments and inordinately focused support on business investments.<sup>63</sup>

In summary, without transforming the State’s minimalist policy making approach, Latinos will experience another generation (1 of 2 children) of unequal social, health, and economic mobility opportunity. Latinos have and will continue to make *Bienestar* improvements despite the Texas Way. However, they will be slow and incremental, with limited generational improvements for **most** Latinos. Texas policymaking must be transformed into a system driven more by principles of inclusion and equity.

## V. Latino Texas Way: Transformative Policy Change Framework

Figure 9 illustrates how the Texas Way of policymaking is entrenched in historical, ideological values, political power, and state-rights perspectives masked by messaging related to individual responsibility, lower taxes, limited government, and ownership of personal success or failure. Simplicity messaging that hides ‘structural’ problems from blaming the victim to antiquated tax codes that perpetually lead to a limited budget to meet our states’ growing needs.

Figure 9: The Policymaking Texas Way



The increasing white nationalist ideology among elected officials and leadership further **worsens** the minimalist policymaking that supports voter suppression, election district gerrymandering, gender, and immigrant xenophobia. The damaging effects on family stability are demonstrated in the slow progress in educational achievement, occupational representation, low incomes, incarceration rates, and poor health disparities in communities across the state.

Multiple ideological, political, racial/ethnic, and bureaucratic barriers must be overcome for meaningful policy changes. Fundamentally, there is a direct relational line from each of these barriers to unfair and racialized far-right policies and laws that offer little solutions to inequalities or simply legitimize them. For people of color, the results include:

- Civic/voter suppression
- Minimizing social and economic contributions
- Undermining culture, language, and history
- Recycling immigrants as scapegoats for inequities



Economic inequality is not inevitable: it is a choice we make with the rules (laws and policies) we create to structure our economy, court system, and equal opportunities. State leaders do not demonstrate ‘prevention’ as applied to human capital investments that can help Texans avoid financial insecurity, inadequate education, and poor health, improve economic mobility, and be cost-effective toward growing the state’s economy. However, they provide limited funding for safety-net-related programs and periodically provide favorable funding, often because of heightened disparities, needless suffering, deaths, and litigation actions.

State policymaking must change to an equity-based integrated approach targeting wealth-building opportunities and outcomes. Additionally, state and local governments must be partners, not adversaries, in this approach. The following exemplify some key human capital investment areas:

Gender Pay	Education
Wages and Benefits	Regional Economic Development
Labor Support	Health and Human Services
Employment Training	Immigrants
Affordable Housing	State Budget Allocations

These human capital investments must also be aligned and messaged to:

- Increasing Income and Assets
- Expanding to a Living Wage
- Employment Opportunities in Key Industries
- Growth in Worker Benefits
- Removing Barriers to a Quality Education
- Increasing Access to Homeownership
- Improving Healthcare Access and Outcomes

Advocacy for policies focusing on helping the neediest and vulnerable will not suffice. Latinos would prefer not to merely survive on limited social and health welfare programs. Instead, they want to work on building their resource capacity to enable their children in financially stable families, live in supportive communities, and meet developmental, health, and educational milestones.

Latinos must lead the transformation of the Texas Way to an equity-based and more integrated approach where laws and policies will level the economic mobility playing field.

## **VI. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The preceding data illustrates the state's poor performance in national ranking among 10 human capital investment categories and its contributing effect on generations of a Latino underclass. Research reports, books, and media investigations also conclude that economic growth and prosperity have not benefited most Texans' social, health, and economic status.

Public policies matter. Laws and policies relating to taxes, education, health care, criminal justice, banking, housing and neighborhood development, environment, civic rights, etc., directly result from policies that may have positive or negative consequences. It is expected that they will be fair

and equitable. They should be responsive to human capital investments that build their citizens' social and economic opportunities and prosperity.

While Texas political leaders promote the purported 'Texas Miracle' of economic expansion and growth, the values and beliefs underlying the Texas Way of policymaking are racially biased and inequitable. It fails to strengthen its most crucial economic capital - its people. Indeed, the Texas Miracle is also losing its national pro-business front-runner status because of its poor capital investment performance in its citizens.

Further, the state's zealous 'state-rights' well-known history is filled with conflict, distrust, and legal actions against federally mandated investment initiatives to address education, health, income, and numerous other inequalities. Ironically, the state displays 'state-level overreach,' creating barriers and challenges to local government efforts to implement equitable human capital investment ordinances.

Without a structural change to the State's Texas Way policymaking, Latinos will experience another generation of unequal opportunities and limited *bienestar* improvements. They and their allies must transform the Texas Way into a system driven more by principles of inclusion and equity.

What is required to change the Latino opportunity pathway so that by 2035, a minimum of 75% of Latino families are truly economically middle-class from the decades of under 50%? Is there a statewide or local Latino collaborative agenda(s) to guide strategies in removing structural problems and improving *bienestar* concerns?

Efforts to organize and address single issues (however ugly and important) will not suffice - nibbling at surface problems, reacting to crisis issues, and accepting 'wins' that 'help' but contribute little to structural change. 'Safety-net' programs, if not adequately structured and supported, can also be 'revolving doors' for immediate and growing needs because underlying social and economic mobility, racial prejudice, and equity problems remain.

Structural change demands a Latino-driven, long-term, collaborative-based capacity-building vision and strategies that strengthen:

- Electoral Power
- Local and State Organizing
- Policy Analysis Support
- Media Framing and Messaging
- Litigation Avenues

In summary, the future of Texas is immersed in the Latino presence and contributions. Existing improvements in the quality of Latinos *bienestar*<sup>2</sup> (well-being) would not have occurred without the significant labor movements of the 1920s, post-World War II Mexican American civic organizing and advocacy of the 40s and 50s, and civil rights/Chicano engagement of the 1960s and 70s.

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<sup>2</sup> *Bienestar* is defined as a perceived quality of life status among individuals, families and communities affected by social, environmental, and systemic factors – a concept of holistic wellness.

Yet, as the recent book, “Mexican American Civil Rights in Texas,” surmised, Latino social and economic inequities persist in education, income, health, housing, and civic engagement. The many national rankings and other research reports simply reinforce an entrenched political and policy ideology that requires transformative change.

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<sup>1</sup> *Bienestar* is defined as a quality-of-life status among individuals, families, and communities affected by social, environmental, and systemic factors. It incorporates social justice concerns, given the Latino experience with institutionalized racism and harmful public policies.

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