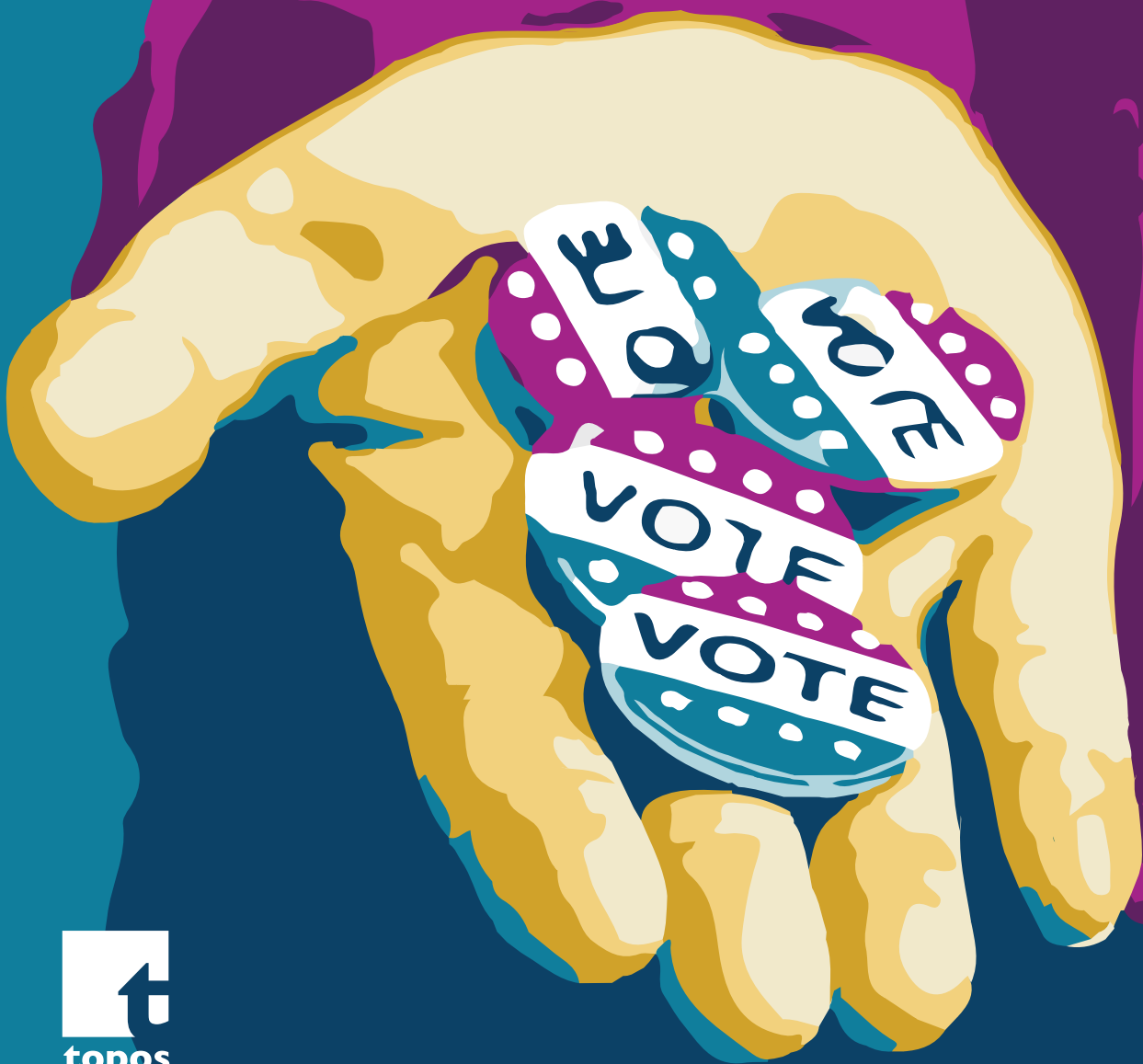


# CONFIDENCE & COMMUNITY

TAPPING INTO LATINO POWER

A research report by the Topos  
Partnership with support from the  
Civic Participation Action Fund

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Voting is the bedrock of American democracy. Yet voter turnout, even in presidential years, hovers at just over 60% of the American eligible population. Among Latinos, the number of non-voters is greater than the number of voters, with turnout in presidential years typically under 50% of eligible Latino voters, and around 40% of Latino millennials. There is a tremendous opportunity to better represent the diversity of voices in America, and to shape the direction of cities, states, and the nation, with increased Latino voter turnout. Elections are one step toward greater civic engagement and more participation in the policymaking process by our communities most impacted by the decisions of those in power.

Topos conducted on-the-ground ethnographic research to uncover cultural understandings of voting and civic participation among Latinos, with the goal of developing strategies tailored to Latinos’ unique needs and concerns.

The assumptions that exist in the field of voting and civic engagement are that we can identify a strategic messenger, adopt a message and deploy accordingly. Our research shows that human behavior goes much deeper than what is assumed by traditional organizing. This provides unanticipated challenges—and opportunities.

The traditional approach assumes that apathy is the fundamental reason people, including Latinos and millennials, are less likely to vote. As a result, communication strategies tend to emphasize urgency and dialing up the rhetoric around the importance of voting. Relational organizing efforts typically give no message guidance (thereby reinforcing reliance

on “urgency” or other rhetorical messages). When they do suggest messaging approaches, these tend to be centered on “naming and shaming” strategies.

Our research demonstrates that apathy isn’t the problem and urgency isn’t the solution. On the whole, the Latino voters and nonvoters we interviewed in Arizona, Colorado, Florida and New Mexico (including low-, mid- and high-propensity voters, unregistered voters, and noncitizens) were far from apathetic. Rather, they believe so strongly in the importance of voting that they don’t want to make a mistake. Many of them think of a voter as a citizen-scholar who has fully researched every option and walks into the voting booth with a clear, considered, correct decision. This image of the ideal voter becomes a barrier for those who feel less knowledgeable, particularly about candidates and ballot measures that get less attention. The perfect becomes the enemy of the good.

Furthermore, many Latinos are unsure whether or not their vote even counts. Latinos, like other Americans, hear about problems but rarely see success stories, particularly successes tied to election outcomes. In addition, Latinos are made to feel in myriad ways like they don’t belong, and this sense of peripheralization and exclusion can make the idea of participation seem all the more futile. Current public discourse and actual life circumstances reinforce the perception that Latinos don’t count, and by extension for Latinos, that “my vote doesn’t count.”

We believe the answer lies not in more rhetoric, urgency, and shaming. Instead, we see an opportunity for inspiration, celebration, confidence-building, and more emphasis on familial and community ties.

Latino culture is grounded in the importance of family and community, and the experience of voting and civic engagement needs to fit this pattern. Low- and mid-propensity voters are surrounded by friends and family who want to encourage voting, and yet those well-meaning influencers hesitate, conflicted about wading into potentially turbulent waters. We can, and should, encourage extending familial and community ties to the sphere of voting by modeling Radical Listening principles.

For example, as our ethnographers engaged with people, listening carefully, asking thoughtful questions, and allowing people to be heard, we saw time and again that people shifted from Rhetorical Mode (combative, defensive, cable news talking points) to Reasonable Mode (considered, reflective, authentic dialogue). People talked themselves into voting as they came to remember what they care about and as they began to believe their opinion matters—someone cares what they think and believes their view has value.

These observations suggest a radical and effective way forward: We need to do everything we can to promote the shift to a thoughtful, supportive conversation about voting, rather than one that is driven by strident emotions. Rather than ratcheting up the emotional energy, we need to be giving people the opportunity to reason their way into voting. And we need to apply this approach in everything we do, including canvassing, relational organizing, and general messaging.

Furthermore, there is a significant and immediate need to address the citizen-scholar barrier by building confidence. MORE information isn’t necessarily the answer. Simplified tools will certainly help. However, we also believe confidence can be built by shifting the expectation from **knowing enough** to **caring enough**. The general message needs to be “you are already well-prepared to make good decisions.” We can tap into this dynamic by prompting people to think about what they are voting **for** (my children, my community, etc.), by asking for a public commitment to vote (which inspires folks to get confident in their choices by Election Day), by making voting a celebration instead of a chore, and so on.

Latino voters are diverse, with different challenges to address and opportunities to tap. Our research identifies two factors that describe most voter behavior: 1) confidence, and 2) believing one’s vote matters. These factors exist along a spectrum, and the intersection of confidence and belief that my vote matters results in four distinct voter profiles, each with different challenges and engagement opportunities:

**TRUE BELIEVERS** who are highly confident in their knowledge and have an unwavering conviction that voting makes a difference; they are influencers to engage in relational organizing strategies.

**BELIEVERS** who are less confident and express a desire for more information/knowledge, but who also believe in the efficacy of voting; they are the primary audience of opportunity for the midterm election and can be activated through confidence-building tactics.

**SKEPTICS** who are uncertain about whether voting matters and are unsure about their knowledge; they are the secondary audience of opportunity for midterms, primary audience for presidential years, and are activated both through confidence-building tactics and through experiences with successes/seeing that voting counts.

**REJECTERS** who definitely do not believe voting matters and do not require or are uninterested in any additional information; they are not an audience on which to waste resources.

Finally, as we move beyond 2018 and into 2020, we should consider the metaphorical journey that voters are on, and identify moments of opportunity to make a difference. Our research suggests seven distinct stages in the Voter Journey, and untapped opportunities in at least three of those stages.

The analysis that follows describes the cognitive and cultural beliefs to keep in mind, the unique dynamics related to four distinct voter profiles, and the stages of the Voter Journey with opportunities for interventions. Lastly, we provide a Strategic Roadmap with tactical examples organized around various principles emerging from the research.

Some of these tactics can be deployed immediately, while others likely need more lead time. Importantly, we offer these as suggestions to build on. With the cultural insights providing a foundation for understanding, advocates in the field are likely to have ideas for how to adapt or build on these tactics.

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# KEY FACTORS UNDERLYING LATINO VOTING PATTERNS


S1




# “VOTING” IS MANY DECISIONS, NOT ONE.

For many Latinos, deciding to vote is not a singular decision but rather multiple distinct decisions where each decision impacts the next. Understanding each of these decision points helps us understand how to bolster existing efforts to increase Latino voter engagement. Moreover, analyzing the distinct decision points underscores that voter registration, GOTV and candidate/ party efforts to shore up Latino voter engagement are not necessarily in alignment.

**REGISTERING TO VOTE IS NOT AN INTENTION TO VOTE.**


While an important decision, many Latinos discuss registering as something perfunctory with little intention to follow through on Election Day. 

Even those who intended to vote when they registered sometimes find themselves cast adrift. They desire more guidance and knowledge about taking the next steps, and yet, voter registration efforts often miss that opportunity for engagement. The signature of a new voter is the end, with little discussion, support or encouragement about anything that comes after. 

**A SEPARATE DECISION IS WHETHER OR NOT TO VOTE.**

Here our research uncovered key insights that will make GOTV efforts more successful. In short, GOTV efforts that dial up the urgency can easily backfire. Most mid-propensity and many low-propensity voters believe that voting is important. What they lack is confidence, and the proof that voting makes a difference. On the ground, this translates into mid- and low-propensity voters remaining as such. (This dynamic is discussed in more depth in the next section.)

**WHO OR WHAT TO VOTE FOR IS A DIFFERENT DECISION ALTOGETHER.**

Candidates and parties attempt to address this aspect but fall short in multiple ways. There is a strong desire for authentic engagement, but very few people have ever met or interacted with a candidate in person. Party outreach to voters comes off as biased (and therefore unreliable). Without authentic engagement over time, many potential voters are disillusioned with both parties. The fly in, fly out nature of both candidate and party involvement backfires with Latino potential voters. They conclude that politicians don’t care and are making promises they don’t intend to keep simply in order to gain votes. 

On the issue side, people are often quite passionate about particular issues, but many voters are unclear about which candidate or party shares their perspective. More fundamentally, they do not always see how voting affects the issue(s) they care about. Rarely do they see a direct link between an election and the consequences for a particular issue.

Disaggregating and teasing out the dynamics of each of these distinct decisions allows for future voter engagement efforts to address the decision at each juncture, filling in the gaps and guiding voters through each one. These stages are discussed in more depth in the Voter Journey section of this report.

“It [registering] was just in school – they come and offer you. I wasn’t really interested in it – I didn’t even know what I was doing, so I just went with the flow. I wasn’t really into it.”

Female, Age 25  
US Citizen/Mexican  
Hospital Eligibility Specialist  
Phoenix, AZ

“We always hear, even in high school and these carnivals and festivals, ‘Did you register? Are you updated?’ but they stop right there. They never tell us, ‘Here are the political parties.’ I’m about to be 18 and I had to figure out what party I am. I don’t even know how many there are. So it just stops at, ‘Are you registered? Okay, cool. You’re on your own now.’ We just need more information. Like, where do I go? How do I look up these people? How do I know if it’s real or not? How do I know what party I belong to, or if I don’t belong to any party, can I start my own? And that’s why it’s kind of dreadful. I have to vote? I have to do all this? I don’t even know where to start.”

Female, Age 17  
US Citizen/Mexican Heritage  
College Student  
Denver, CO

“I feel like a lot of mainstream politicians don’t really pay attention to the Latino community in general, or when they do it feels like they’re pandering.”

Male, Age 28  
US Citizen/Mexican and Jewish  
Crisis Counselor and Refugee  
Phoenix, AZ



# APATHY ISN'T THE PROBLEM. URGENCY ISN'T THE SOLUTION.

Many voter registration, GOTV and candidate/party efforts assume apathy is the main reason a person chooses not to vote. Therefore, they dial up the urgency and the stakes. Our research suggests that apathy is not the problem for most low- and mid-propensity Latino voters. In fact, dialing up the urgency and the stakes is likely to backfire with certain types of low- and mid-propensity voters.

The cornerstone of voter engagement efforts—from voter registration to GOTV to party/candidate efforts—is to underscore how important it is for each and every person to vote. These efforts are misdiagnosing nonvoters and low- and mid-propensity voters as apathetic, and thus the “cure” becomes trying to convince them that voting matters. Many of these potential voters already believe voting is very important, so these efforts do little to sway them to head to the polls.

Instead, our research finds that many Latinos are operating from the framework that “Voting is so important that I don’t want to make a mistake. If I haven’t done my research to figure out these choices, the right course of action is to not vote.” Messages that highlight the stakes and significance of voting miss the mark in addressing the salient framework among potential voters—especially those who are already interested in voting or considering voting.

Instead of apathy, the dominant feeling about voting is often one of respect. ■

Many Latinos believe so deeply in the importance of voting and idealize voting to such an extent that they do not want to make an unprepared or under-thought voting decision. To do so would be to make a grave mistake that could affect not just themselves but everyone around them. ■

Messages that reinforce the importance of voting underscore the idea that it is not to be taken lightly, and amplify potential voters’ trepidation. That in mind, many Latinos, especially younger voters, believe it is better not to vote if they are not completely prepared because of the potential negative consequences. ■

“For me, being the first time that I’m going to be able to vote, I’m excited. And I want to educate myself about who I’m going to vote for. Not just go and vote because I can. I want to educate myself on who I’m going to vote for.”

Female, Age 37  
US Citizen/Mexican immigrant  
Food service at a public school  
Tucson, AZ

M1: “When I vote, I research on the person I’m going to vote for. I look at his background. I have to look at everything because we’re going to put one person in power who we really don’t know about.”

M2: “If we make the wrong vote we can put in somebody who just wants to start war with other countries as president—and that’s our life, that’s it.”

Male 1, Age 19  
US Citizen/Born in Dominican Republic  
College student  
Homestead, FL

Male 2, Age 21  
US Citizen/Born in Puerto Rico  
College student  
Homestead, FL

“This last presidential one, I wanted to vote but...you vote not just for the president, but there are so many other people you have to vote for, and I didn’t even know 80% of the other people. You have to vote for your state representative, the house, and different laws they’re trying to pass. I saw my dad with it, and I was like, ‘I’m not going to just check things off.’ So I didn’t vote.”

Female, Age 23  
US Citizen/Mexican  
Teacher  
Phoenix, AZ

# A VOTER IS A “CITIZEN-SCHOLAR.”

As the default frame holds voting as something that should be taken very seriously with lots of thought, preparation and reflection, it becomes a barrier to voting. Potential voters envision an unrealistic ideal scenario where a voter should be a kind of “citizen-scholar”—someone who knows the ins and outs of each policy, each issue, and each candidate so thoroughly that they can anticipate any potential negative consequences down the road. They want their vote to only do good.

The model voter in this scenario requires almost complete omniscience, and is expected to do their due diligence through endless research in order to obtain the necessary knowledge to fill the role properly. By comparison ordinary people fall short as voters, and therefore many sit out altogether because they cannot live up to the ideal they have created.

Such self-questioning is especially rife for millennials for whom endless online news, commentary and social media opinions make it seem that due diligence is practically impossible.

There is a lot of information out there, but that’s part of the problem. There are endless sources on the internet and social media—each with a different take. The issue of navigating media bias then too becomes an insurmountable task. If everything is biased, then their task is to know everything thoroughly enough to be able to see through the bias and get at the objective truth. Again the task becomes unmanageable for one person to shoulder.

Not only do they feel the need to know “both sides,” but Latinos also do not simply want to adopt someone’s position or feel like they are being swayed to think one way or the other. They strongly desire reaching decisions about who or what to vote for as autonomous, independent thinkers, with conclusions that are objective and solely their own.

Some begin the research process in order to live up to the citizen-scholar ideal and then abandon the project because the sheer volume of information overwhelms them. Dense voter guides compound the problem. People want to decipher the information but may not be confident in their ability to do so. Ultimately, the information that they desire always feels just out of arm’s reach. The seemingly endless stream of information converges with their lack of confidence about “knowing enough,” to become a major barrier for many low- and mid-propensity Latino voters.

Some think of themselves as “not having voted yet,” not as “nonvoters.” They are observant of the opinions and political leanings of people around them. They soak up ideas like a sponge but haven’t taken the step of voting because they feel as though they haven’t formed their own solid opinions about what or who to vote for.

“I haven’t voted because it’s lack of knowledge. I’m not really informed. All I knew last year was Trump and Hillary, and there are so many other people to vote for besides just the president. So I feel like why should I go if I don’t know governors or anything else? I don’t want to mess it up because I don’t know. I think that has a lot to do with why a lot of Latinos don’t vote.”

**Female, Age 27**  
US Citizen/Puerto Rican  
Paralegal  
Orlando, FL

“I was kind of intimidated [waiting to vote] because just going in, there’s a lot of older people who probably voted all kinds of times, they probably have the political information and background and stuff. But me it’s the first time, honestly, like actually looking at it because I tried to look at the stuff that’s going around me political-wise. Sometimes I don’t understand it that good, sometimes I do. But just having other people who are much older than me going to vote, I feel like that’s probably part of the reason why some people, younger people, don’t like to vote, maybe because they’re intimidated by the fact that they don’t really know about this political stuff and they just don’t want to vote, because they don’t know about it.”

**Male, Age 21**  
US Citizen/Mexican heritage  
Fast food worker/aspiring personal trainer  
Tucson, AZ

“Just having to do your research on who you vote for. I feel like a lot of people just don’t do that, or they do it based off of commercials or the popular opinion, and I think that’s the part that was nerve-wracking. Like am I making the right choice or not?”

**Female, Age 25**  
Mexican American/US Citizen  
Data Entry Clerk  
Denver, CO

“You look at the commercials for one prop and then another commercial for the same prop and it looks like two different laws, and I think sometimes that also makes it very difficult to even vote educatedly. And then there are some non-partisan websites and places to get information that just tell you the law the way it is, but that’s a lot of work for an individual to go out there and really research each individual one.”

**Male, Age 34**  
DREAMer/Mexican  
Business Owner, Non-Voter  
Phoenix, AZ

“I think the media has served as a good and bad tool for that. All types of media—social media, journals, news—all of that has helped with the dissemination of information. I just think people have trouble selecting what’s accurate and what’s not, or even analyzing it for themselves. So I think in that sense, media can help. It just brings other problems too—what’s reputable, what’s accurate?”

**Female, Age 26**  
US Citizen/Hispanic  
PhD Student/College Advisor  
Tucson, AZ

“Unfortunately, as everybody has seen in the last few years, the news is biased. There’s not anybody that isn’t biased. The only thing I think you really can do is just get as much information as you can from all sources and then try to make as best of an informed decision for yourself for what you think is best for yourself, or what you believe in.”

**Male, Age 54**  
US Citizen/Hispanic  
Tucson, AZ

“I do listen, and I’m more independent so I just listen to everybody’s opinions and choices, but I really never got into the voting...I did ask my mom and she had a lot of different opinions, and then also my brother—they’re both different parties—so I didn’t know. So I just never voted. I still listen and see what people’s opinions are, but I’m still thinking about voting.”

**Male, Age 29**  
US Citizen/Yaqui and Mexican  
Chef and Tattoo Artist  
Phoenix, AZ

# THE SOLUTION ISN'T MORE INFORMATION, IT'S CONFIDENCE AND CARING.

Logically, it seems that providing more information is the conceptual bridge to get more Latinos voting and engaged. However, our research suggests that is an overly simplistic conclusion. Undergirding their hesitation to vote is confusion and feeling overwhelmed, giving rise to a lack of confidence about how to understand and navigate the very information they seek.

Latinos who are low- and mid-propensity voters often lack the confidence that they already know what they need to

know to make good choices, or that they know how to find and assess relevant information.

We believe we have an opportunity to replace “knowing enough” with “caring enough.” In this way we can break away from “having information” as the key to unlocking voter engagement, and shift the focus to an arena where voters can feel more confidence in their own decision-making abilities.

# DOES MY VOTE COUNT?

In addition to the citizen-scholar dilemma which intimidates Latinos into not voting, another significant barrier to voter engagement is people's perception that “my vote doesn't count.” This statement can signify many things.

It can mean that my one vote, even when tallied, will not have a deciding impact.

It can mean that as a Latino, my voice gets ignored by whoever is in power anyway.

It can mean that voting doesn't lead to actual change (maybe other actions do).

It can mean that my one vote, which can potentially have an impact, will not actually get tallied because the collectors will fraudulently ignore it.

Not only can “my vote doesn't matter” mean multiple things, but people often use it to mean different things all at once.

Racism and marginalization are an integral component to be mindful of in this dynamic. Latinos are made to feel like they don't belong, and this sense of peripheralization and exclusion can make the idea of participation seem futile. Current public discourse and actual life circumstances (deportations, targeted by police, neglected communities) reinforce the perception that Latinos don't count and, by extension for Latinos, “my vote doesn't count.” While most sentiments of “my vote doesn't count” are grounded in the real life experiences of Latinos in general, some expressions are supplementary justifications that seek to underscore the underlying feeling after the fact.

The traditional response to “my vote doesn't matter” is to highlight the urgency and importance of voting, sometimes by pointing out examples of small margins of victory. However, these conventional responses do not address the common cultural framework that Latinos hold, the life experience that shows them their voice isn't heard.

“I feel as one individual I can't make that big of a difference. I feel like my vote doesn't matter...when you're watching the polls and you're watching who's winning, you're thinking, 'My vote was in there. My vote's in those numbers.' But once you realize...Hillary won the popular vote and Trump won the electoral vote, you realized, 'It doesn't really matter'...like, 'It didn't make a difference.'”

Male, Age 23  
US Citizen/Mexican Immigrant  
Self-Employed, Cleaning Business  
Tempe, AZ

“Many people here think it [voting] is controlled by the Americans. That they will say that someone will win because they don't like Hispanics, and like there are a lot of Americans here that do not like us, they will buy votes or find a way to change the elections so that the person who wins will be the one that doesn't help us. And when there is someone who will help us, there is always something that the people do in order so that things do not go well for us.”

Female, Age 20  
US Citizen/Mexican  
Interpreter  
Albuquerque, NM

“To me, the current political system isn't designed to create those changes. That's why we need to build our own alternatives, because when we look at the state, the government, they're going to do what they're going to do regardless of what we say and how hard we fight. We've been talking about comprehensive immigration reform for how many years? 170—since Mexicans became part of this country. Yet here we are today still debating what to do and locking kids in cages and stuff like that. It's absurd. The political system isn't going to change that. We have to change ourselves. We have to create the institutions that'll go beyond that and will really serve the people in a way that government at this moment isn't capable of doing.”

Male, Age 26  
US Citizen/Chicano/Mexican  
High School AP Government Teacher  
Denver, CO

“If they tell you your vote counts, and then you do something but you don't feel the effects that you actually made a difference, it's hard to convince yourself the next time that it is going to make a difference...It's really hard to trust or believe any candidate, anybody in politics...It's hard to really get a good grasp of somebody, so it kind of makes you just choose nobody, I guess, in the end.”

Male, Age 26  
Recent US Citizen (DREAMer)/Colombian  
Works for Family Business  
Lauderdale, FL

“It was just one of those things that this year, with everything going on, especially considering the recent events where corruption and...you don't trust it. You don't trust the ballot system, you don't trust those types of things. It really falls into a realm of distrust where you're just like, well, even if I did vote one way, they could just manipulate it for their gain.”

Female, Age 23  
Hispanic  
Albuquerque, NM

“I voted over the mail, which I felt wasn't as authentic...I never got any confirmation that they received my vote, so it felt like it didn't really count.”

Female, Age 22  
US Citizen/Mexican  
FT Mom/PT Customer Service Whole Foods  
Phoenix, AZ



# RELATIONSHIPS HAVE BEEN A LARGELY UNTAPPED OPPORTUNITY FOR ENGAGING VOTERS.

Latino culture is grounded in the importance of family and community, and the experience of voting and civic engagement is no different.

High-propensity voters often share memories of being taken to the polls or protests as children, pointing to these experiences as nurturing their awareness of political issues and compelling them to vote as adults. New parents also frame their interest in issues as stemming from wanting to make their children’s lives better, or wanting to vote to set a good example for their children.

Mid- and low-propensity voters are often embedded within family and friends who regularly vote and who talk about voting with them. They trust their friends’ and family members’ opinions and knowledge about politics and voting, but potential voters also want to forge their own opinions without undue influence.

Many Latinos are on the receiving end of their loved ones’ efforts to get them to vote or vote more often. Yet these efforts too often fail to move the needle because conversations around politics can be fraught. Politics is viewed as combative, and oftentimes families and friends either avoid these conversations altogether, or conversations devolve into arguments. Relational organizing typically stresses the relationship, not the message. But this research suggests the message is key. Opportunities are missed if people don’t know how to engage effectively and without rocking family structures.



Harnessing the enthusiasm and passion for voting that some Latinos have and helping them understand key ways to create open and inviting spaces for dialogue can generate increased voter engagement, while also deepening social ties and creating new social ties—something Latinos across all states and across all levels of voter engagement desired.

All of these insights add up to two central factors that describe most voter behavior: 1) the extent to which people have confidence that they know enough, and 2) the extent to which people believe their vote counts. We have identified four voter profiles that explore the intersection of confidence about information and belief that voting matters, which exist along a spectrum.

By understanding voter behavior around those central axes and utilizing the other insights, we can address how to effectively engage each of the different types of voter profiles.

“You say one wrong thing and someone’s going to lash out...I think before I post anything whatsoever—before I speak to someone about anything. I think about what’s going to make them mad. Usually politics is one of the big things. You can’t just go around saying, ‘You can’t be a Republican.’ I’m a Democrat. I don’t see things the way you do. Otherwise, you’re getting ready to just start a backlash.”

Male, Age 24  
US Born/Cuban  
Student/Works at Whole Foods/Musician  
Weston, FL

“As far as someone having strong opinions and me being against it, I won’t talk to them about it. When people are that passionate about something or they have such a strong opinion about something, someone told me you can’t argue with stupid, and I believe that...they’re always going to see it their way.”

Female, Age 35  
Mexican Heritage/US Citizen  
Works in Finance  
Denver, CO

# VOTER PROFILES

S2



# OVERVIEW

This research has resulted in very rich, nuanced findings concerning Latinos’ perspectives on voting and civic engagement. To turn those cultural understandings into actionable insights, we identified two factors that describe most voter behavior: 1) confidence, and 2) believing one’s vote matters. These factors exist along a spectrum, and the intersection of confidence and belief that my voting matters results in four distinct voter profiles, each with different challenges and engagement opportunities.

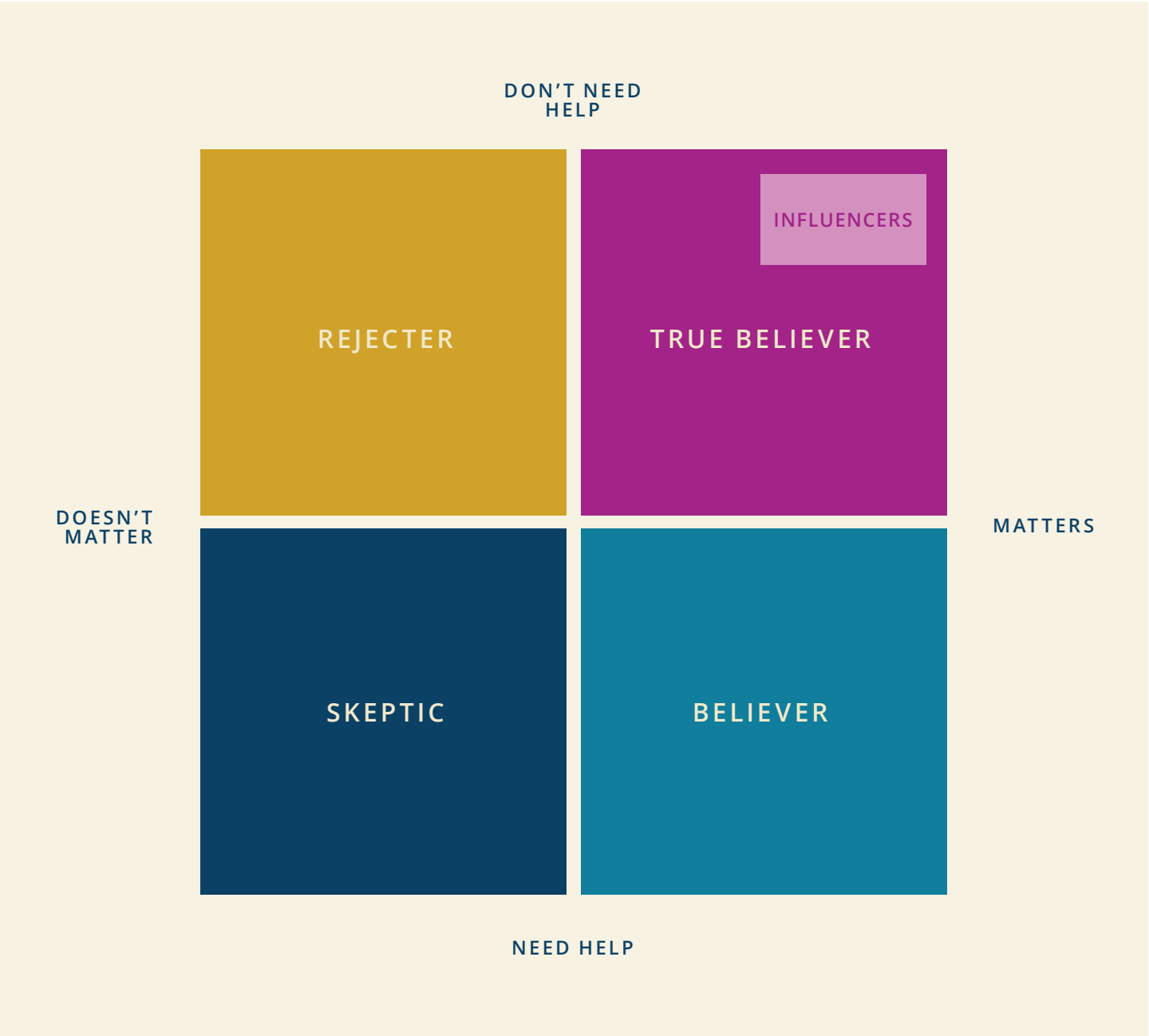
One factor represents the confidence continuum—from those who need help making a decision, to those who are quite confident they know enough or know how to get the answers they seek. The second factor represents the belief continuum—from those who believe their vote doesn't matter (for a variety of reasons), to those who firmly believe it does.

In the upper right quadrant are those who are highly confident in their knowledge and have an unwavering conviction that voting makes a difference; we call them TRUE BELIEVERS. In the lower right quadrant are those who are less confident about how much they know (and express a desire for more information/ knowledge), but still believe in the efficacy of voting; we call them BELIEVERS. In the lower left quadrant are those who are uncertain about whether voting matters and are unsure about their knowledge (and unsure whether they want more information); we call them SKEPTICS. Finally, those in the upper left quadrant are those who definitely do not believe voting matters and do not require or are uninterested in any additional information; we call them REJECTERS.

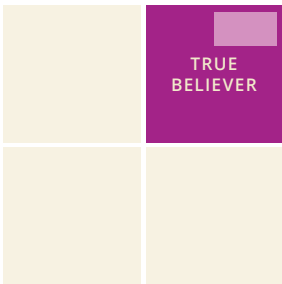
These profiles generally align with propensity to vote: TRUE BELIEVERS are usually high-propensity voters; BELIEVERS are most often mid-propensity voters; SKEPTICS tend to be low-propensity voters and people who identify as not having yet voted; REJECTERS are resolute nonvoters.

How these central factors interact shape the interventions that will make a difference, with the ultimate goal of moving SKEPTICS and BELIEVERS towards the TRUE BELIEVERS quadrant and keeping TRUE BELIEVERS as such.

With a deeper understanding of the voter profiles that follow, their concerns and inclinations, we can boost voter turnout and engagement, and create the conditions for political socialization.



# TRUE BELIEVERS



TRUE BELIEVERS possess a coherent ideology that keeps their issue awareness high and their motivation to vote strong, making them the most consistent and reliable voters. They have faith in the political system and relish the opportunity to participate in democracy. For Latino TRUE BELIEVERS, voting is a highly affective experience imbued with excitement, joy, pride, and emotional investment that can bring people to tears.

The principles that give TRUE BELIEVERS their conviction are wide and varied, including: civic duty; expressing their own voice and giving voice to those who can't vote; acknowledgment of previous generations' sacrifice; shaping the direction of their neighborhood, city, state and the country, and so on.

Family matters, as TRUE BELIEVERS relate memories of political participation with their parents, either by going to the polls or attending rallies and marches. Parents who are TRUE BELIEVERS often note that they find ways to involve their children in similar ways.

Their confidence to form opinions is high: they are very aware about issues important to them and seek trusted advice when they run into things they don't understand. TRUE BELIEVERS rely on their experience and are self-assured by their knowledge. For example, they are comfortable doing last-minute research, skipping certain down-ballot votes, and may vote along party lines if they are unsure or unprepared at the booth. TRUE BELIEVERS may express some guilt that those decisions do not follow the ideal way of voting, but deem it more important to vote as much as possible rather than not vote or to vote less.

TRUE BELIEVERS are not without doubts about the political system, but feel called on to vote despite reservations. They trust that the U.S. is a place where voting really matters and may contrast that belief to their perceptions of voting and politics in their home countries or the countries of other Latinos, where corruption prevails and democracy suffers.


Many Latinos who are currently ineligible to vote, including noncitizens and individuals less than 18 year old, are TRUE BELIEVERS and share the conviction that voting not only matters, but is an indispensable way to make their social world a better place.

**ORGANIZING OPPORTUNITIES**

TRUE BELIEVERS are excited to vote—it's a chance to make a big change, to affect lives, a rite of passage to adulthood, or the first chance to finally have their say or make an impact.

People who register first-time TRUE BELIEVERS can help propel them further along and solidify their commitment by reminding them of those meanings.

Experienced TRUE BELIEVERS are already highly likely to vote, so they can be targeted as influencers in relational organizing efforts—talking to and helping BELIEVERS and SKEPTICS to vote. TRUE BELIEVERS are paying attention and are willing to act; they have already attempted to convince others in their life to vote or get aware or engaged. But these previous attempts have often fallen flat; thus, building up relational organizing tactics with careful attention to specific messages and tactics—what to communicate, how to communicate, and how not to communicate—are essential.

More than simply instruct, TRUE BELIEVERS can help BELIEVERS and SKEPTICS adopt new decision-making frameworks and heuristics. Consider the following idea that is a neat reversal of the usual SKEPTIC's explanation of not voting because of corruption. 

It's the kind of argument a SKEPTIC, dismayed by the role of money in politics, could use to begin thinking differently about the importance of their vote.

Though TRUE BELIEVERS are the most reliable voters, it is possible for them to “backslide” into SKEPTICS or even REJECTERS. Organizing opportunities should be designed not only to parlay the important place they hold in the lives of BELIEVERS and SKEPTICS, but also to keep TRUE BELIEVERS as such. In particular, through relational organizing, TRUE BELIEVERS become mentors and guides to other potential voters. This leadership role will remind them of their own reasons to vote.

“You vote *because* there's misappropriation of funds. You vote *because* you have to make it clear that you're not going to be led by people who are unworthy of the position. ...You have to. What's the point otherwise? What are we doing, if we're not in a society, if we're not living the democratic ideal? We all need to speak, and make a record of that speech through our votes.”

Female, Age 45  
US born gringa Colombiana  
College instructor  
Albuquerque, NM

“I think it's the American side of me—this is your patriotic duty. I see my husband—he can't vote. And he's so passionate. ...But he can't vote. So it's really frustrating—I have to vote. And I raised my daughter that she has to vote whenever she's older. I got here and my nephew just turned 18. I said, “So what are we going to do? Did you register?””

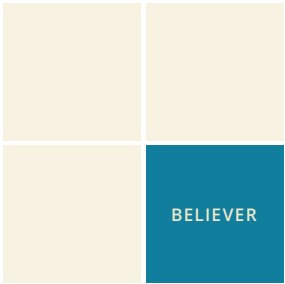
Female, Age 35  
US Citizen/Colombian  
Stay-at-home mom  
Weston, FL



<https://youtu.be/fYbaDPS6aUc>



# BELIEVERS



BELIEVERS feel strongly about the power and efficacy of voting, yet what distinguishes this group is that they may not be as politically engaged and their personal political ideology may not be as fully formed as that of TRUE BELIEVERS. Their commitments to voting are rooted in many of the same positions as TRUE BELIEVERS and they share an emotional connection to voting, though it might be less deep.

They are likely to vote in presidential years, but fall off in midterms—and lack of awareness about midterms, primaries, and local elections contributes to this drop off. BELIEVERS often want more information in order to know more about politics and non-presidential elections, but do not always follow politics on a regular basis to take note of off-year races or know about their local representatives.

BELIEVERS are torn between their conviction that voting is a deeply important responsibility and their fear of doing it incorrectly. They idealize voting as something to be done by citizen-scholars who are deeply informed about every person and item on the ballot. BELIEVERS are afraid of making a mistake while voting because it could lead to the election of a terrible politician or passage of a bad policy with widespread ramifications. This mindset bolsters their desire for more information, but also sabotages their confidence.

This conviction can lead to decisions not to vote if they feel they are not well informed, as they:

- May overestimate the preparation required to vote
- Can feel intimidated by official-sounding language
- Are critical of bias in a seemingly endless sea of news sources

These factors often converge as BELIEVERS get overwhelmed while gathering information to vote and decide to abandon the project altogether.

Nevertheless BELIEVERS can easily point to important reasons they have to vote, and a particular person in their lives who gave them the encouragement to and expectations for them to vote.

Ultimately, BELIEVERS want to vote, but do not always have the awareness or confidence to make good decisions about every election or every measure on a ballot.

BELIEVERS can have doubts that the political system is completely just and fair and can doubt that their votes count, but they decide it's better to vote for peace of mind, despite these doubts.

**ORGANIZING OPPORTUNITIES:**

Addressing the nexus of confidence and education—the idea that it takes a lot of knowledge and study to know how to vote—presents the biggest opportunity to engage more BELIEVERS to vote. While it may currently be their biggest obstacle, there are clear messages and strategies that will allow BELIEVERS to build confidence.

BELIEVERS already come armed with believing that their vote matters, and organizing efforts ought to focus on getting practical help, right away, to feel confident about the tasks ahead. Central to this are concepts around self-education.

BELIEVERS can grow deeply conflicted about whether they know enough to go forward. The process can seem overwhelming. There are too many points of view, too much information, and too much pressure to do it all right: How do you sort through it? Who do you trust? Who are you comfortable with to reveal how little you actually know? You know your vote matters, so you can't just ignore the election—you either have to “study up on the issues,” or consciously opt out.

The embarrassment of not knowing much can be isolating, so finding a family member, friend, or mentor to work out one's impressions with is one of the better ways people are finding naturally to get comfortable deciding how to vote.

At the same time, people feel strongly that they wish to arrive at their own decisions and not be influenced by others, whether people they know or the media. Relational organizing offers the chance for information seeking and sharing to be done among friends and family rather than in isolation.

Finally, changing the expectation from “knowing enough” to “caring enough” may break through this barrier and provide the confidence BELIEVERS need.

“I’m registered to vote, but I’ve never voted, because I feel like I haven’t done my research properly and I don’t just want to vote because people are voting. I want to make a good decision, but I haven’t done the research to vote.”

...

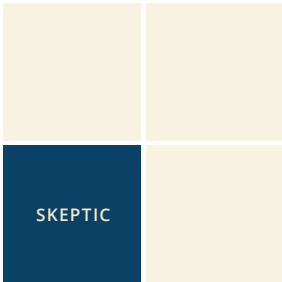
“I feel like sometimes you vote for certain people, but they do something else. I don’t want to make a mistake, like, ‘Thanks to me, now that happened.’”

Female, Age 23  
US Citizen/Mexican  
Teacher  
Phoenix, AZ



<https://youtu.be/LJ7a7urfbqM>

# SKEPTICS



SKEPTICS express a sense of powerlessness to change the world around them. Often this sense of powerlessness is expressed as generalized distrust of the powers that be, in particular the government. Not only may they articulate explicit distrust in government and electoral politics, but SKEPTICS also genuinely question whether government and electoral politics are relevant to their lives in the first place.

This pessimism leads SKEPTICS to question the value of a single vote, especially in bigger elections, as well as voting in the aggregate. They point to distrust in the electoral process (unfairness of the electoral college, the possibility that votes are ignored), the radicalized mistreatment of Latinos in their communities, and dissatisfaction with candidate selection as the rationale for their lack of faith.

Though SKEPTICS may vote, it may be infrequent, and they feel comfortable sitting out even in presidential elections if the two main party candidates do not appeal to them. Still, SKEPTICS feel uncertain about whether they are doing the right things, or ambivalent about their lack of participation. This ambivalence stands in contrast to the emotional attachment experienced by others, as TRUE BELIEVERS and BELIEVERS feel positive about political participation and REJECTERS feel negative about electoral politics.

Some SKEPTICS rationalize not voting by saying it’s something “others” do, who “know more than I do,” who “are into those kinds of things,” or for whom “that will make a difference.”

While they are currently less likely to vote, SKEPTICS leave the door open to getting more involved at some point in the future, especially if new candidates emerge or they find

an issue of importance, or if they see others succeed in making changes they value. Though they may have never voted in the past, they believe they might vote in the future.

SKEPTICS emphasize the difficulties of voting—waiting in lines, busy with school, worried about missing work—as reasons for their lack of participation.

They may be involved in charitable community causes or even political actions or protests that do not involve voting. SKEPTICS can also be focused on the immediate concerns that affect their day-to-day lives, like paying rent, with doubts that those immediate concerns are connected to politics or could be improved with different elected officials or laws.

**ORGANIZING OPPORTUNITIES:**  
In order to reach SKEPTICS, strategies will need to address both the education/confidence challenge and the issues of powerlessness, pessimism and futility.

SKEPTICS start without belief in the power of voting, nor much confidence to move forward. They may dutifully fill out a registration card when asked, but they have only vague intentions about the road ahead.

At this point, the key may be to give them an opportunity to

air their concerns and ideas with somebody else open to hearing them and to have them identify a personal reason to vote.

We’ve noticed in the course of this research that some people, who otherwise seem disinclined to vote, in the course of discussing the reasons why they haven’t voted, sometimes change their minds about it. It’s as if they have not fully examined the idea before, so they talk themselves into voting. This suggests that Radical Listening may break through their skepticism.

“I don’t agree with the politics of it. I feel like we get lied to a lot, so it’s like why should I vote if at the end it’s not going to happen? So that’s my reason. My family is like, ‘Please vote,’ but I say no. I feel like it’s lying to you, it’s lying to me, it’s not going to happen. All these changes they said they were going to do, nothing has really changed.”

Q: “Have you ever come across a candidate or someone who actually spoke to you?”

A: “There’s one now—I forget his name—he wants all the preschoolers to get affordable education and all of that. I know that’s kind of what’s changing my mind, because it seems like he’s more realistic than other candidates I’ve seen in the news. I think it’s just the change of it. Low-class population, there’s not much they can do to put their kids into school. My career has to do with kids, so that’s what’s changing my mind. So I think I’d want to vote for that one.”

Female, Age 22  
Hispanic American  
3 Jobs - Wants to Be a Social Worker  
Denver, CO

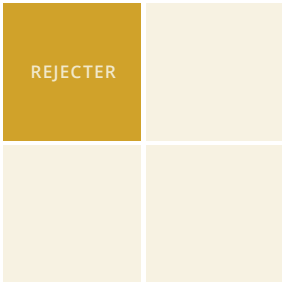


<https://youtu.be/iSAQYOlbjLA>

“Now that you made me think about it, I’m going to go back and look, and (see) who’s going to be our next—who’s going to be in control. Now that you mentioned it to me?”

Male, Age 19  
US Citizen/Mexican heritage  
Unemployed  
Phoenix, AZ

# REJECTERS



REJECTERS have strong convictions and well-formed political opinions that offer no place for voting. They rebuff the idea that the electoral system works effectively to represent their views and the views of others. They generally see society and politics as staying constant, which in their perception is already bad, or getting worse.

Some REJECTERS point to experiences with voting and disillusionment in their home countries as the reason they avoid voting and political engagement in the U.S. Others emphasize U.S. government mistreatment—specifically deportation, racial profiling, and ignoring Latinos’ needs—as proof that the systematic exclusion of Latinos is part and parcel of the political system.

While some REJECTERS remain completely divorced from civic and political engagement precisely because of corruption and disillusionment, there are other REJECTERS who remain deeply engaged in political and community organizing outside of electoral politics.

Some REJECTERS may have previously been BELIEVERS or TRUE BELIEVERS, but particular experiences or changes in ideology have shifted their perspective. Thus they often remain deeply committed to creating change and may assume responsibility for creating that change, but devote their time and energy to actions other than voting.

Still other REJECTERS simply have a deep dislike of politics and the discord it brings out, so they refuse to engage with it or even think about it.

The main reasons REJECTERS refuse to vote include:

- Corruption [both general and specific]
- Elections are rigged, and the outcomes predetermined
- Politicians get rich through politics
- No difference between political parties or individual politicians
- Politics is uncivil and thus very upsetting

As a group, REJECTERS believe electoral politics is a purposefully dysfunctional system whose objective is maintaining the status quo rather than creating meaningful positive change. They perceive politics and politicians to be corrupt and dead set on personal enrichment at the expense of everyday people. No matter who is in power, the result will be the absolute same because for REJECTERS, the system is created to benefit those who run it.

REJECTERS have deep-seated identities as “nonvoters” which is resistant to persuasion.

**ORGANIZING OPPORTUNITY:**

Not a good use of scarce resources, as REJECTERS have checked out completely—though the good news is that they seem to be a very small percentage of Latinos overall.



<https://youtu.be/CR3IU4j2spw>

“So the same folks who made these programs—the same government that’s responsible for the very programs that were hired to annihilate specific groups of people—are now the same ones who are telling you that your vote matters.”

...  
“My belief is that if I then participate in the very system that has oppressed so many people for so long, I’m basically legitimizing the stranglehold that it’s had on our communities.”

Male, Age 27  
US Citizen, Chicano/Mexicano  
Non-Profits/Advocate/Restorative Justice; Humanitarian  
Englewood, CO



# PROFILE SNAPSHOT

Latinos across all voter profiles identified important issues they wanted addressed—the most salient being education, healthcare, affordable housing and better jobs. DACA and immigration reform hold special positions as not only being important to many Latinos, but as issues that seem to cross party lines. Even self-identified Republicans or conservatives (as well as the many folks who did not identify with either) discussed the need for DACA to remain intact, spoke out against deportation and family separation, and noted support for fair immigration reform to allow immigrants to remain in the U.S. and enjoy fuller political rights. Nevertheless, meaningful voter engagement would do best to address the broad spectrum of concerns, and to not solely focus on immigration as divorced from the other concerns.

Differences in political ideology and partisan identity vary between profiles. As we move from TRUE BELIEVERS to REJECTERS, each group’s connection to and identification with political parties diminishes. While TRUE BELIEVERS and REJECTERS both have thoroughly formed and consistent ideologies, they are diametrically opposed. BELIEVERS and SKEPTICS have political ideologies that are still being shaped (though BELIEVERS have one that is positively oriented toward electoral politics and voting, while SKEPTICS ideological bearings skew negative).

These profiles align with propensity: TRUE BELIEVERS are usually high-propensity voters; BELIEVERS are most often mid-propensity voters; SKEPTICS tend to be low-propensity voters and people who identify as not having yet voted; REJECTERS are resolute nonvoters.

While many people may remain in one category for long periods of time, if not their lifetime, particular experiences with voting, especially those related to outcome and perceived efficacy of electoral politics, can shift people into having more or less faith in the political system.

How these central factors interact shapes the interventions that will make a difference, with the ultimate goal of moving SKEPTICS and BELIEVERS towards the TRUE BELIEVERS quadrant and keeping TRUE BELIEVERS as such.

With a deeper understanding of the voter profiles, their concerns and inclinations, we can boost voter turnout and engagement, and create the conditions for political socialization.

	TRUE BELIEVER	BELIEVER	SKEPTIC	REJECTER
Relationship to Voting or Vote Engagement	Voting is the avenue for change, follows politics and it confident about their knowledge	Has faith in voting and feels strongly about certain issues, but not as engaged	Some issues may be of personal importance but worldview does not always connect voting to those issues	Does not wish to engage with electoral politics under any circumstances
Partisan identity	Strong, and rely on the inextricable link between party affiliation and personal stance on policy to guide their voting process	May identify or lean towards one main party but not as strong, may not feel comfortable relying solely on party affiliation to make voting decisions	May be open to ideas presented by both major political parties, but may not be sure about differences between parties	None
Mobilizing Opportunities	As influencers in relational organizing	Decoding the election Building confidence Voting as “show you care” Midterm awareness Finding a reason to vote and committing	Success stories Voting in the aggregate Tie issues of personal interest to progress and electoral politics Finding a reason to vote and committing	None



# VOTER JOURNEY

S3



1 DO THE PAPERWORK	2 DECIDE MY VOTE WILL MATTER	3 FIND MY REASON	4 EDUCATE MYSELF	5 GO TO VOTE	6 VOTE	7 CONFIRM MY VOTE MATTERED
Complete a registration card Choose the best method for me (e.g., mail-in, early voting, in-person) Receive confirmation	See evidence other voters are creating change Believe officials will count votes of people like me	Discover an issue, candidate, or election I care about or, Acknowledge I have a duty to vote	Figure out who and what I should vote for Understand the ballot Learn the date of the upcoming election	Remember the date Confirm the location Go to the right place Show ID (when needed)	Read and comprehend the ballot Fill in the ballot Turn in the ballot	Confirm the ballot was accepted and counted Judge that the outcome was fair Discover results in my life

## ABOUT THE JOURNEY

**Purpose:**  
The purpose of creating a sequential model of “stages” in the potential voter’s experience is to help the teams working on outreach to develop a consistent point of view as a team on where we are losing potential voters, and where we can intervene.

It also helps us to see where efforts in the past have tended to focus, so as to spot new areas for potential action.

- Principles:**
- 1. Voter-centric. A good journey should be voter-centric; it should express the voter’s language and point of view.
  - 2. Behavioral. The model should reflect the empirical facts of what people do and say, so

that we can agree which step they are in. The team must be able to judge with certainty whether the person is in one step, or instead another.

3. Rational structure. Emotionally powerful stories help to flesh out the journey, but are not part of its organizing structure. A single journey has to translate across all potential voters, so emotions, which are variable, must be added into the journey later as variants. Such a structure makes it possible to discuss where to prioritize our efforts as a team. For example: “we’re losing most people right after *Do the Paperwork*, which is unemotional” and “people can’t get past *Educate Myself*; they’re super conflicted” and “this solution is more for *Go to Vote*, but they’re not even

there yet.” (Indeed, many of the team’s early hypotheses were about Go to Vote.) Terms relating to emotions take on special value for each Profile’s unique experience along the journey.

4. Personal. Note that in describing the steps we use “my vote” and “my reason” and “educate myself”. This is because voting, while a public act, requires a set of inner dispositions and decisions that personal.

Issues-based action groups may forget the role of personalization. We can register someone, expose them to issues and ideas they may find relevant, and give them all the tools they need to come to a decision and vote. But if we have not helped them to become comfortable and confident with

what they must do, they will not vote. But if we have helped them see what they can do themselves, successfully, from out of their own perceptions and attitudes, then—all else being equal—they will vote.

“At that moment (when I first voted), it felt like growing up at that moment...It still brings me to tears.”

Age 45  
US Citizen/Colombian  
College Instructor  
Colombian, NM

“They had a table somewhere. I think somebody came up to me, and I filled out a card.”

Age 19  
US Citizen/Mexican parents  
Pizza shop worker  
Arizona

1 DO THE PAPERWORK


- Complete a registration card
- Choose the best method for me (e.g., mail-in, early voting, in-person)
- Receive confirmation


UNCELEBRATED. NONBINDING.

Motivation usually precedes method. Not necessarily so with registering to vote. The reality is that people may well register before they have any inclination to vote.

To be sure, this is a credit to Get-Out-the-Vote efforts, and to states’ routine registration mechanisms. But there is a downside, which is that registering, on its own, doesn’t seem to mean very much.

The missed opportunity in voter registration is to drive forward momentum by helping people get at least a little further along in the journey—in the immediate context of signing up.

People speak about being registered in different ways than they do voting. The idea of voting is exciting. 

But registering, not so much. 

Registration creates the opportunity to vote, which is why voter registration drives are so crucial. But it doesn’t create an obligation or even an intention to vote.

Obligation comes from potential voters moving further along their journey. Do they believe their vote will matter? Do they already have any particular reason to show up? Can they get comfortable making a decision without knowing everything? Do they know when the very next election is, and what it’s about?

At some point, they have to move through those steps to solidify their identity as a voter and complete their first ballot.

2 DECIDE MY VOTE WILL MATTER

- See evidence other voters are creating change
- Believe officials will count votes of people like me

UNCERTAINTY. INVISIBILITY.

At this stage, reaching SKEPTICS is crucial. The idea that “my vote doesn’t count,” with its underlying sense of powerlessness, is widespread. It essentially says, given the way I see the world working, with everything stacked against people like me, it is futile for me to try to change things with my single vote.

This is the kind of thinking that separates REJECTERS and SKEPTICS as a group from the others, who, election after election, are more willing to give the idea of voting for elected officials a chance.

BELIEVERS and TRUE BELIEVERS have, by definition, generally made it through Stage 2, so efforts focused on them should take up the principles governing other stages—particularly Stage 7 (CONFIRM MY VOTE MATTERED).

For SKEPTICS to conclude that their vote can have an impact, two things have to happen: first, SKEPTICS must be able to decode the political landscape in such a way as to discern results; second, they have to perceive that something is at stake for themselves or their friends, family, and community. Relational organizing with those they trust can help them navigate the uncertainty they have about electoral politics in order to help them take the next step. Exposure to success stories will lift up the progress that has been made and can be made so that change becomes tangible and concrete, helping SKEPTICS move through to the next stage of the journey.

3 FIND MY REASON

- Discover an issue, candidate or election I care about or
- Acknowledge I have a duty to vote

UNCONNECTED.

Once they believe their vote matters, the person has to “own” their reasons, see these reasons as personally important, and that they have something at stake in these decisions. Otherwise, they won’t move along in the journey to find out more, or to decide they know enough already.

In addition to internalization, FIND MY REASON is about sorting out competing messages about “issues,” many of which are already a part of public discourse. This Stage 3 is the classic space of polling and pollsters.

The reasons people find to vote are innumerable. To give a sense of their diversity, following (not in any weighted order) is a select list of just some of the reasons Latinos in the four states under study supplied to us for their wanting to vote.

- To correct problems / to make things a little better
- To support my community
- To support my country
- To do my duty
- To make my voice heard / share my opinion / put in my two cents
- To stop misappropriation of funds
- To get rid of people like Trump, because he is:
  - anti-immigrant
  - anti-Mexican/Latino
  - unprofessional
  - a bad leader
- To have a leader whose message and character resonates with me
- To get officials who really represent me, us, our community
- To prevent school shootings / restrict assault weapons
- To increase affordable college education / loans / tuition assistance
- To increase funding for public schools / improve teachers’ pay
- To reform immigration
- To keep DACA in place
- To prevent families from being separated / keep families together / prevent excessive deportations / stop everybody being afraid of ICE
- To make it easier to stay in the US legally

- To prevent police corruption / improper arrests
- To make life less difficult for agricultural workers
- To get more jobs / a living wage
- To improve city services: have trash picked up / fix the roads / have adequate police
- Cuban: To open up Cuba
- Puerto Rican: To get more money, food and support to Puerto Rico survivors of Hurricane Maria

At any rate the profiles under consideration here do not differ by issues. But they do differ in how they approach those issues they find important. TRUE BELIEVERS are systematic, while BELIEVERS and SKEPTICS are unsystematic.

The organizing opportunities will help BELIEVERS and SKEPTICS work through the questions and concerns, which may vary between different elections, as related both to their confidence in themselves (BELIEVERS) and in electoral politics (SKEPTICS).

4 EDUCATE MYSELF

- Learn the date of the upcoming election
- Figure out who and what I should vote for
- Understand the ballot

**CONFUSING. OVERWHELMING.**  
Education in this sense is not about information, but esteem. It’s about gaining the confidence necessary to feel comfortable making a decision.

Yes, some need more information. But they might just as well be helped to decide that they know enough already. Or that, if they feel they don’t know enough, that it’s still OK to go forward and make the decisions they can, based on what they do know.

TRUE BELIEVERS have what they need here. SKEPTICS, if they remain SKEPTICS, are likely to fall off; unsure that what they’ll do matters, they may not deliberate much about their decision when they do vote. But for BELIEVERS, EDUCATE MYSELF is the defining stage.

5 GO TO VOTE

- Remember the date
- Confirm the location
- Go to the right place
- Show ID (when needed)

**INCONVENIENT. TIME-CONSUMING.**  
SKEPTICS emphasize the difficulty of making time to vote. Long waits in line (based on personal experience or perception), the inability to take off work, or fears about making it to work on time present the main obstacles for this stage. Going to vote becomes an inconvenience as it impinges upon the rhythms of daily life, including work and household responsibilities.

BELIEVERS navigate the same obstacles as SKEPTICS, but the call of duty to vote usually supersedes the challenges. At this stage remembering the date, or even knowing the date, for non-Presidential elections limits their voting. Awareness and visibility go hand in hand. Without frequent reminders that an election is coming up BELIEVERS lose sight of the date, and if they only learn about it on the day of the election then the obstacles of everyday living that SKEPTICS point to get in the way.

This is an area for potential investigation to elaborate our findings. Oftentimes Latinos spoke matter-of-factly describing both their previous experiences or their perceptions about this stage. Surprisingly few mentioned issues of transportation. If we shadowed people closer to the elections we would have a fuller understanding of how BELIEVERS and SKEPTICS engage in decision making and navigate the literal and figurative costs of travel and time at this stage.

6 VOTE

- Read and comprehend the ballot
- Fill in the ballot
- Turn in the ballot

**FRUSTRATION.**  
While it is a victory if voters make it to this stage, the confusion and frustration of dissecting a ballot they not have seen before—or still feels unfamiliar and confusing even if they have seen it before—can be a negative experience that impacts future decisions to vote or not.

SKEPTICS may be turned off entirely, and BELIEVERS who may already struggle with confidence can leave feeling that they need more preparation, or that they should not vote until they understand everything on the ballot.

Like the previous stage, there is an important opportunity to more carefully understand this stage with follow-up research on and around election day. Doing so would provide fuller reflections from voters about the way they interpret and frame their particular experiences at this stage.

7 CONFIRM MY VOTE MATTERED

- Confirm my ballot was accepted and counted
- Judge that the outcome was fair
- Discover results in my life

**OBSCURITY. POTENTIAL DISAPPOINTMENT.**  
Along with Stages 2 and 4, CONFIRM MY VOTE MATTERED is one of the three stages we see the biggest untapped areas of opportunity.

After people submit the ballot, they will form judgments about whether the steps they’ve taken to vote were worthwhile, or not. The opportunity is to immediately give shape to those perceptions, since positive feedback can keep people engaged and moving ahead into the next cycle.

Conversely, there is risk in failing to take steps to shape those judgments. People who do not perceive results over several cycles can backslide. Even TRUE BELIEVERS, if too often let down by results they find out of step with their expectations, can become REJECTERS.

The challenge in this stage is to help people perceive results in a way that rejuvenates their interest in voting next time. One approach that can help is compelling true stories that link success to the election just past, so that people notice the outcomes they had a role in producing.

SKEPTICS, who are dubious about the voting process, will benefit most from basic steps toward transparency: Confirmation that their ballot was actually counted, and how many others in their neighborhood voted that day, etc. Just as people without disabilities benefit from accessible design, other voters who are not doubtful will also appreciate such measures for transparency. But for SKEPTICS, these experiences could mean the difference between returning next cycle to vote or not.



# STRATEGIC ROADMAP

By understanding what drives each of the four profiles, we can develop targeted organizing opportunities that fit different needs and motivations. At the same time, there are a variety of civic engagement opportunities that address more than one need, and therefore more than one profile. In this section, we offer ideas intended to inspire activists and organizers. Some of these tactics may already be in use, and by understanding the profile and the need it speaks to, can be better targeted. Others may be new, or adaptations of practices in use.

Note that the tactics offered here often meet more than one strategic principle.

## S3



STRATEGIC PRINCIPLE:  
SUPPORTIVE SELF-DISCOVERY  
TO BOOST CONFIDENCE

BELIEVERS already value voting, but a lack of confidence in making the right decision keeps many of them from voting, especially in midterm elections when the candidates are less known and the issues get less publicity. The wealth of information that currently exists is both overwhelming and, in the voters’ view, biased. They want to come to their own conclusions. In the short term, we see two ways to build confidence and therefore boost turnout:

- Keep it simple: provide basic informational tools that decode the election and make the ballot less daunting;
- Offer messages that encourage a shift in focus from “knowing enough” to “caring enough.”

In addition to building confidence, SKEPTICS need to find their reason for voting (this is critical). Many of the tactics suggested below meet both needs.

RADICAL LISTENING  
CANVASSING

Create an authentic connection.

Provide space to talk.

Ask questions to elicit what they care about, what they want to know more about, provide support.

De-escalate “knowing enough” concerns and replace with “caring enough.”

Provide collateral that meets criteria of “decoding” and/or “matters” and/or “commitment.” (described later)

SKEPTICS are distrustful, so sticking to a fixed script just reinforces their perception that voting advocates are robots and that voting is meaningless. Instead, help them believe in the people who believe in voting—to trust the messenger. Skip the script if it helps to forge an authentic connection. They will talk themselves into voting.

BELIEVERS already value voting; they need confidence that they already know enough (or will know enough by the election) to make good decisions. Conversation and collateral should be geared toward that confidence-building.

QUICK-START GUIDE: SAMPLE  
BALLOT, DIAGRAMMED

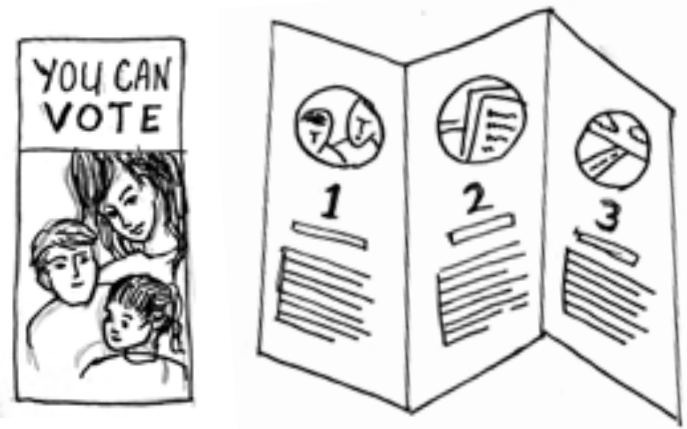
Existing sample ballots increase voters’ sense that they are unprepared.

Apply good graphic design to upcoming ballot options. Reduce fear by labeling and guiding through, which decodes while allowing self-discovery.

Can be handed out in print, and provided online.

BELIEVERS feel relief at having a daunting learning task simplified. Their confidence to make a good decision is bolstered.

SKEPTICS quickly locate the issue(s) they care enough about to show up for.



1-2-3 VOTE!

Instead of specific issues and candidates, this brief guide would break down how easy it is to research and determine which candidate/ policy you should vote for.

Emphasis is on building confidence that they are already prepared to make a responsible choice.

Simplifies the decision making process into a few easy steps.

BELIEVERS have their confidence to make a decision bolstered now and into the future.

GUERRILLA MARKETING VIDEO

Uplifting voter-on-the-street interviews shared via social media focused on “I vote for” from the practical to the idealistic.

Focus on “caring” rather than “knowledge.”

BELIEVERS have their “voting matters” views reinforced; bolsters confidence.

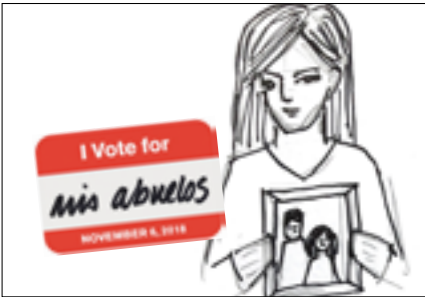
SKEPTICS have reason to believe voting matters.



30-something woman talking about how she used to be apathetic about voting.



But when she moved to New Mexico she stayed with her abuela, who never had the opportunity to become a citizen. She learned so much more about what they went through to get to and live in the U.S.



She's so grateful for their struggle and decided the best way she could honor their memory is by participating in democracy.



Young man playing soccer. He talks about how he didn't always have a close connection to his heritage. He just wanted to fit in with his mostly white classmates.



But now that he has had his first baby, he's thinking more about how prejudice hurt him. And how it seems to be worse now than ever.



He's proud to be American AND Honduran. He wants better for his son. He knows that he needs to speak out when he sees injustice and one of the best ways to be heard is by voting.

DISCOVERY GUIDE

Simple tools to navigate who's who, what's what, and when it's all going to be happening. Weave “caring enough” into the messaging and downplay “urgency,” “educated,” etc.

Can be online or in print.

BELIEVERS have their confidence to make a decision bolstered.

SKEPTICS locate the issue(s) they care enough about to show up for.

ELECTION POP-UP PARTIES

Similar to the DIY Ballot Bash, but run by organizers.

Provide support materials: discussion guide, sample ballot, other potential worksheets.

Swag bag takeaway: a voter guide card, “I will vote” merchandise, etc.

Candidates and Initiative representatives can be present for casual conversations, but this is NOT formal speechmaking. This is a chance for people to connect and share ideas.

BELIEVERS have an opportunity for self-discovery by talking with peers.

TRUE BELIEVERS get ideas and inspiration for relational organizing.

SAMPLE BALLOT ADAPTED TO USER LEVEL

“Quick” vs. “Intermediate” vs. “Expert.” Ballot labeled, with the different parts to fill in—depending on how deeply you challenge yourself to go.

Implies you don’t have to vote for everything.

(E.g., “Quick” version shows simply voting along party lines, “Intermediate” gives brief explanations on key issues, etc.)

Can be online to allow for deeper digging, flipping between levels.

BELIEVERS have an ability to dig in at the level they want. There is also an opportunity for their ideology to become more cohesive as they see patterns in their views.

SKEPTICS see they can focus on what/who they care about and not have to vote for everything.

EVERYMAN’S GUIDE / INFOGRAPHIC

Dramatically streamlined and simplified matrix of options for each issue and candidate.

Helps people to detect patterns in their preferences among the voting options: “these candidates say the same on issue X,” but “these candidates speak differently on issue Y.”

BELIEVERS have an opportunity for their ideology to become more cohesive as they see patterns in their views.

SKEPTICS see they can focus on what/who they care about and not have to vote for everything.

“I don’t really follow it. You know how with presidential elections, you see it everywhere? With state you don’t really see it. If I don’t see it, I’m not looking for it—it just doesn’t cross my mind until the day of the election... I feel like it doesn’t really affect us that much because we just don’t see it.”

Female, Age 24  
US Citizen/Born in Colombia  
Hair Stylist/Nutrition Coach  
Florida

STRATEGIC PRINCIPLE:  
USE TRUE BELIEVERS’ STRONG,  
POSITIVE VIEW OF VOTING TO  
INFLUENCE THE BELIEVERS  
AND SKEPTICS IN THEIR LIVES;  
RELATIONAL ORGANIZING

Relational organizing typically focuses solely on outreach, and leaves the message decisions to each influencer. This research suggests that there are tools and support we should provide to make these conversations more fruitful and rewarding.

DIY BALLOT BASH/VOTING  
MEET-UP KIT

TRUE BELIEVERS are encouraged to have friends and family over and “just talk” about voting and the candidates/ issues. An informal, open and honest atmosphere like that of a book club or salon. This could be a group or one-on-one engagement, phone or in-person. Also an opportunity for places of faith, civic organizations, etc. to sponsor discussions.

A set of materials: discussion guide focused on radical listening techniques, Quick Start Guide/sample ballot diagrammed, other potential worksheets.

Swag bag take-away: a voter guide card, “I will vote” merchandise, etc.

Discussion guide will focus on radical listening tools, supportive self-discovery, boosting confidence.

Target TRUE BELIEVERS

- encourages relational organizing
- allows their conversations with BELIEVERS and SKEPTICS to be more rewarding and effective
- deepens bonds instead of making politics combative





TYPING TOOL

Create criteria to identify influencers among TRUE BELIEVERS. Create a call script or survey based on the criteria to generate a list of influencers.

Target Campaign Organizers if it would help them identify TRUE BELIEVERS.

MODELING THE VOTER FILE

Develop questions that allow us to model voter files to flag the four profiles we’ve developed, so it can enhance organizing in future elections.

“I would trust people who, for example, like sports—there’s the actual fan who’s following pre-season, season, post-season and knows everything all the way through, and then there’s a group of people who basically jump in right before the main event ready for the Superbowl or the finals. I feel like politics is the same way where there are some people who follow every level of election, and all the way up, from local government, state, all the way up to the presidential...I’d trust somebody who follows it and knows a little more about what they’re talking about than the person who just started talking politics just a few months before the election. So if I have any friends who are into politics and will actually like follow it—not just for the election—that’s someone whose opinion I value more.”

Male, Age 26  
Recent US Citizen (DREAMer)/Colombian  
Works for Family Business (Airport & Cruise Park & Ride)  
Ft. Lauderdale, FL

STRATEGIC PRINCIPLE:  
MAKE A PUBLIC COMMITMENT  
TO VOTE

When TRUE BELIEVERS make a public commitment to vote, they signal that they are influencers others can turn to. When BELIEVERS make a public commitment to vote, they make a promise to themselves that they will get informed/confident enough by Election Day. When SKEPTICS make a public commitment to vote, they have found the issue(s) they care enough about to show up.

“I WILL VOTE FOR \_\_\_\_.”

Immediately on signing a registration card, the person jots something onto a personal pledge card that expresses why they vote, from the idealistic to the practical.

This is not a commitment to vote for a particular candidate or ballot initiative. Rather, it is a reminder of what is important to them, why they vote.

BELIEVERS have their “voting matters” views reinforced.

SKEPTICS have reason to believe voting matters.

“VOTING” ARTISTIC YARD/  
WINDOW SIGNS

A handful of different designs, linked to the issues, concerns, reasons people vote, e.g., AZ, children, environment, Latinos, etc.

Highlights what to vote “for,” why voting matters.

Promotes Election Day, provides a public commitment to vote.

Great political art will live beyond one election.

BELIEVERS have their “voting matters” views reinforced.

SKEPTICS have reason to believe voting matters.

## “I WILL VOTE” SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILE STICKERS

Modeled after the popular “I voted” election stickers, these would be available as a social media filter to demonstrate commitment to voting, promote the election date, and open conversations.

Can also be printed and handed out during canvassing to serve as a commitment to vote.

TRUE BELIEVERS signal their excitement, willingness to engage.

BELIEVERS make a public commitment to vote which pushes them to learn what they need to get confidence.

SKEPTICS only make the commitment if they come up with a reason to believe voting matters.



## STRATEGIC PRINCIPLE: MAKE VOTING A CELEBRATION INSTEAD OF A CHORE, BOLSTER PRO-VOTING ATTITUDES, PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE EXCITEMENT

### REGISTRATION “WELCOME” CARD

Congratulating new registrants for their decision to register.

Provide “what’s next” encouragement, follow up.

Target BELIEVERS to continue their enthusiasm through Election Day.

### GRADUATION GIFT

A token gift to celebrate and solidify identity as a voter. On the gift appears the name of the next election, and its date.

Target TRUE BELIEVERS

- reinforces their commitment
- something for them to give to BELIEVERS and SKEPTICS to bring them along

### VOTING AS A RITE OF PASSAGE

Families celebrate a new voter’s first time together. Pride and celebration of this milestone as fits into existent culturally relevant celebrations.

Target TRUE BELIEVERS

- reinforces their commitment
- something for them to give to BELIEVERS and SKEPTICS to bring them along

## ELECTION DAY PARTIES

Invite low- and mid-propensity voters to an Election Day celebration—the only ticket to get in is their “I Voted” sticker. The party runs all day, until an hour or so after the polls close. Focus is civic celebration. Can include stories of past successes, collective action, etc.

Potentially connect with the Joy of Voting project.

*NOTE this is not an election watch party. An election watch party is about watching the returns and hoping for a particular outcome. This is about celebrating the act of voting, no matter the outcome.*

Target BELIEVERS, reinforce their decision to vote.

Something TRUE BELIEVERS can provide in their relational organizing.



“Like quinceaneras we put a lot of emphasis on those kinds of things. It’s like, ‘Oh my god, next year I’m going to turn quince!’ So if you start creating those type of events, I think it will be very positive for the younger generations to be like, ‘Oh my god, my 18th birthday, it means a lot.’ I think it would be really cool...It could be a good way to encourage younger people to actually vote and take more interest into their 18th year.”

Male, Age 24  
Mexican immigrant/non-citizen  
Architectural engineer  
Denver, CO

## STRATEGIC PRINCIPLE: CONNECT VOTING TO REAL CHANGE

Election Day is typically seen as the “end” rather than the “means to an end.” People rarely hear about success stories, and even when they do, those stories aren’t connected to voting decisions. To continue to reinforce that voting matters, we need to continue to connect voting to real change.

Post-voting efforts for BELIEVERS need to confirm and reinforce the idea that their vote mattered. They need to understand the results of elections, see evidence of movements that have had an impact, see examples of inspiring leaders who have won seats, hear “names that sound like mine,” and other signs of success, to keep from retreating to the dim view of the elections system held by SKEPTICS and REJECTERS.

### BRIGHT NIGHT

An artistic rendering, focused on an uplifting message of “Latinos can make positive change together.”

Reinforces voting matters, power of Latino voices, reminds of Election Day date and details.

Can be poster or card to hand out in canvassing, parties, Ballot Bash swag bag.

BELIEVERS have their “voting matters” views reinforced, tied to upcoming election.

SKEPTICS have reason to believe voting matters.





## NEW PEOPLE, NEW IDEAS

Stories of victories by new people and the new ideas they bring, the successes they have.

TRUE BELIEVERS and BELIEVERS have their “voting matters” views reinforced.

SKEPTICS have reason to believe voting matters.

## “STEP TWO.”

Commitments of the concrete next step that will happen, and on which date, and by whom, based on a specific initiative or candidate just voted in by progressive voters.

(“Be there on \_\_\_\_ when the Governor will sign the new bill that all of us—all 1,234,409 of us—just told him to finally enact!”)

TRUE BELIEVERS and BELIEVERS have their “voting matters” views reinforced.

SKEPTICS have reason to believe voting matters.

Because SKEPTICS may vote infrequently (as they are often low-propensity or nonvoters), their investment in voting needs to be amplified after voting to let them know that their vote counted. Most importantly, because SKEPTICS can be distrustful of government and question corruption, election rigging and whether their votes are purposefully ignored, lifting up successes and results is essential.

## SIGNS OF SUCCESS

Email or text blasts to keep voters invested in results and progress.

Advocacy organizations typically email about what’s wrong or to protest problems. We need far more emphasis on Signs of Success.

This is an opportunity to partner with existing publications/apps.

SKEPTICS are more inclined to vote when they already see signs of great movements underway—not just difference. They feel encouraged by “hearing names that sound like mine,” “seeing signs of a movement” and “exciting leaders making positive change.”

## VOTING IN THE AGGREGATE

The numbers add up.

A numbers-based message proving that the Latino vote has the power to change the election results.

E.g., 2016 Presidential candidates won/lost the state by ~100,000 votes. The Hispanic population in these states obliterates that number.

Inspires the voter to think “just imagine what we could do if we all voted,” a topic that really engaged people during interviews. We found a sense of certainty of positive change and excitement through getting people to think through what could happen if all (eligible) Latinos voted.





# METHODOLOGY

Developed over a decade of close collaboration between its three principals—a cognitive linguist, a public opinion strategist, and a cultural anthropologist—Topos’ approach is designed to deliver communications tools with a proven capacity to shift perspectives in more constructive directions, to provide a deeper picture of the issue dynamics communicators are confronting, and make visible the fundamentally different alternatives available to them.

For this project, Topos undertook complementary research approaches to understand Latino common-sense frameworks about and experiences with political engagement, community change, civic action and voting.

**EXPERT INTERVIEWS** offered an in-depth look at the ways experts have been thinking about and working on Latino voter engagement in academia/education, nonprofits, politics, and as organizers, policymakers and researchers. Topos conducted 9 interviews by phone; each lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Experts provided their knowledge about things that both mobilize and inhibit Latino voters, as well as suggestions for what gaps in knowledge Topos might address in research.

**STATE ADVISORY GROUPS** in Arizona and Florida offered valuable insights to state dynamics as well as their existing strategies for increasing Latino engagement. One-on-one conversations with state advisors complemented in-person workshops to help refine the questions explored in the ethnography and analysis. Feedback on findings shaped our strategic roadmap for immediate and future implementation.

**ETHNOGRAPHY** provided a deep view into people’s experience of the world—through observation and description of people in their natural environments, on their own terms, rather than on terms imposed by the researcher.

Our research team conducted semi-structured interviews designed to approximate a natural conversation while revealing the underlying cultural and cognitive models that people use to think about the topic at hand. The conversations and observations occurred in natural settings like homes, stores, workplaces, parks and other public spaces where people live their lives and where civic participation takes place. In addition, we conducted selected sit-down interviews that captured in-depth patterns and processes of thinking. Our ethnographic research team, which included several Latino and local researchers embedded in their communities, combined with our ethnographic approach, allowed us to reach Latinos who might not participate in other forms of research and to elicit authentic responses.

Between May 2018 and August 2018 our researchers conducted 350 of these semi-structured interviews with diverse Latinos in Florida, Arizona, New Mexico and Colorado, paying careful attention to capture the experiences of different nationalities, socio-economic statuses, legal status, generations, ages, and gender identities. In Arizona we spoke with 105 Latinos across three localities. In Florida we spoke with 101 Latinos across three localities. In New Mexico and Colorado we focused our ethnographies in one metropolitan area in each state and spoke to 70 and 74 Latinos respectively. In addition, researchers employed observational ethnographic techniques, especially regarding canvassing.

# ABOUT TOPOS

Topos has as its mission to explore and ultimately transform the landscape of public understanding where public interest issues play out. Our approach is based on the premise that while it is possible to achieve short-term victories on issues through a variety of strategies, real change depends on a fundamental shift in public understanding. Topos was created to bring together the range of expertise needed to understand existing issue dynamics, explore possibilities for creating new issue understanding, develop a proven course of action, and arm advocates with new communications tools to win support.



For more information: [www.topospartnership.com](http://www.topospartnership.com)  
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