

CAPITOL ALERT

## Latino turnout dropped in California's primary. These groups want to bring out midterm voters

BY **MATHEW MIRANDA** UPDATED JULY 20, 2022 1:49 PM



Volunteer Jadon Gutierrez, left, points down the block as he and Uziel Jimenez, right, search for latinos living in an apartment complex to encourage voting in 2016 in Fresno. ERIC PAUL ZAMORA [ezamora@fresnobee.com](mailto:ezamora@fresnobee.com)

Latino advocacy groups this month are gearing up campaigns to mobilize voters ahead of this fall's midterm elections, when Hispanic turnout could be critical to determining several California races.

The [Latino Community Foundation](#), a San Francisco-based nonprofit, recently announced the relaunch of its Yo Voy A Votar campaign to increase voter engagement. Thirteen organizations across the state will receive \$350,000 in total from the foundation.

Other groups are looking outside of California. [UnidosUS](#), the country's largest Latino civil rights and advocacy organization, and [Mi Familia Vota](#) also announced a multi-year partnership last week. The campaign includes a \$15 million civic engagement effort spread across eight states.

The outreach comes as pivotal midterm elections near. Republicans need to flip only a handful of seats across the country to take the majority. Latinos are viewed as swing voters, especially in battleground states like Florida and Texas.

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California Latinos tend to vote for Democrats and the groups launching outreach campaigns are left-leaning organizations. According to a 2020 Public Policy Institute of California study, 58% of Latino likely voters are registered as Democrats.

The announcements also come as preliminary data from California's June primary election show Latinos were underrepresented at the polls. Only 15% of the 6 million registered Latino voters handed in their ballots, according to Political Data Intelligence.

The data does not include all ballots. In the next couple months, researchers will take voter data and release more accurate reports of the turnout.

"It was lower than we expected," said Jacqueline Garcel, executive director for the Latino Community Foundation. "They usually are low for primaries for midterms. But considering the increase that we've had in the recent midterm elections. This was a pretty sharp drop-off."

Her organization and others are steering money to on-the-ground organizations that aim to ramp up bilingual canvassing, community events and youth outreach. They will try to overcome a system that experts say has disadvantaged Latinos for years with biased voter models, skewed outreach and lack of bilingual services.

Garcel said both political parties have failed at engaging Latino voters. That's why she prioritized funding local groups.

"We got to fund that infrastructure because we need it," Garcel said. "Our democracy needs it. Ads on TV are not how people connect. People connect with conversations in their living rooms."

### **WHY DO LATINOS TYPICALLY VOTE LESS?**

Fewer people in general vote in primary elections than in November general elections. The trend is especially pronounced among Latinos, said Mindy Romero, founder of the University of Southern California's Center for Inclusive Democracy.

Campaigns tend to plan their voter outreach based on models showing which people are most likely to vote. That can lead to fewer attempts to connect with Latinos, Romero said, despite research showing that committed engagement over time increases turnout in a community.

"It just reinforces this idea of Latino apathy and there isn't apathy in the Latino community when it comes to caring about change and wanting to see change," Romero said. "It's about feeling disconnected or not being connected with the political structure."

At times, there's also a perceived lack of sincerity from candidates who do not visit a community until election season. Other people might not participate for fear of choosing the wrong person or option, Romero said. All these factors add up, making it harder for campaigns and non-profits to encourage voting.

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“The political system is just not that welcoming,” Romero said.

Another recent challenge in mobilizing Latino voters comes from a lack of an “obvious villain,” said Matt Barreto, president of BSP Research in Los Angeles, which studies Latino voting trends.

Barreto said Democrats are attempting to galvanize voters by pointing to recent Supreme Court decisions like the elimination of the right to abortion, while Republicans do the same with rising gas prices and inflation.

That leads to an overload of negative information in the media, he said. It also creates frustration among Latinos voters who are unable to direct their anger to one focused effort.

“That is why it’s challenging to mobilize voters this cycle,” Barreto said. “It’s hard to get people excited to come vote for you, when there’s so much bad news in the information environment.

### **‘FROM OUR COMMUNITY TO OUR COMMUNITY’**

California Freedom Summer, one of the organizations that received funding, has been promoting youth engagement to increase overall voter turnout. It is led by Veronica Terriquez, director of the UCLA Chicano Research Center.

Terriquez said the organization started with a Spring 2022 class to train college students in voter education. Now, these students will spend the summer mentoring other youth leaders. Students will also be conducting workshops and community events in the following months to further encourage voter participation.

“We know that young people get together around culture, around the arts, and they’re excited to build community,” Terriquez said.

Barreto said groups, like the Latino Community Foundation and California Freedom Summer, are vital because of their bilingual and bicultural outreach. He cited research showing that culturally relevant engagement is more effective. The outreach should be tailored to the specific community and through manners they can relate to. Barreto gave examples of bilingual canvassers, events with Spanish music and postcards featuring Latino people.

“It needs to look like it’s from our community to our community,” Barreto said.

*McClatchyDC’s Gillian Brassil contributed to this story.*

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