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UCLA Latina leaders look toward the future with the launch of a research policy lab

Supported by \$15 million in state funding, the Latina Futures, 2050 Lab will inform policymaking in education, health care and other areas



Veronica Terriquez and Sonja Diaz

Jessica Wolf/UCLA

Jessica Wolf | July 7, 2022

As economic, social, political and health crises continue to plague the nation and to hit communities of color disproportionately hard, a pair of Latina scholars at UCLA are working to make sure that Latina voices are shaping our institutions and present in the halls of power — now and well into the future.

Latinas and other women of color have borne much of the brunt of these intersecting crises, but their needs have largely been overlooked in policymakers' responses, said Veronica Terriquez, who directs [UCLA's Chicano Studies Research Center](#), and Sonja Diaz, founding director of the [Latino Policy & Politics Institute](#). Now the two are joining forces on the Latina Futures, 2050 Lab, a project to support research, collect and analyze data, and provide insights on the experiences of Latinas across the country and the policies that affect their lives.

Launched with a \$15 million [California state budget allocation](#) championed by the California Latino Legislative Caucus, the lab will leverage the research might of UCLA to ensure that Latinas are woven into the fabric of United States and are pivotal to the nation's law and policy debates.

In one of its first undertakings, the 2050 Lab will bring together early-career faculty and leading scholars conducting research on Latinas to produce an anthology on the state of Latinas in education, civil society and the labor market. Published by the Chicano Studies Research Center's press, the work will help set a future-focused policy agenda for Latinas, who by 2050 are expected to make up 13% of the U.S. population, account for 11% of the labor force and have a median age 11 years younger than their non-Hispanic white counterparts, according to U.S. census estimates.

"By building on the canon of our scholarly predecessors, we seek to produce cutting-edge research, elevate new voices and deepen community partnerships," Terriquez said. "Ultimately, we aim to inform action and track progress towards achieving more equitable and inclusive institutions where Latinas can thrive."

In sponsoring Latina scholars' applied research and helping them advance in their academic careers, the lab intends to create a pipeline for Latina experts that leads to a feedback loop—style relationship with policymakers. The need for such dialogue between Latina academics and politicians has become particularly urgent, Diaz said, with ongoing crises impacting everything from education to health care and COVID-19 spotlighting the immense health disparities that persist for Latino communities in the U.S.

"Latinas have shouldered the heaviest burden during this pandemic, yet they have remained invisible, disposable and inconsequential at decision-making tables," Diaz said. "This is not only bad for children and families, but for all Americans."

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Sonja Diaz and Veronica Terriquez

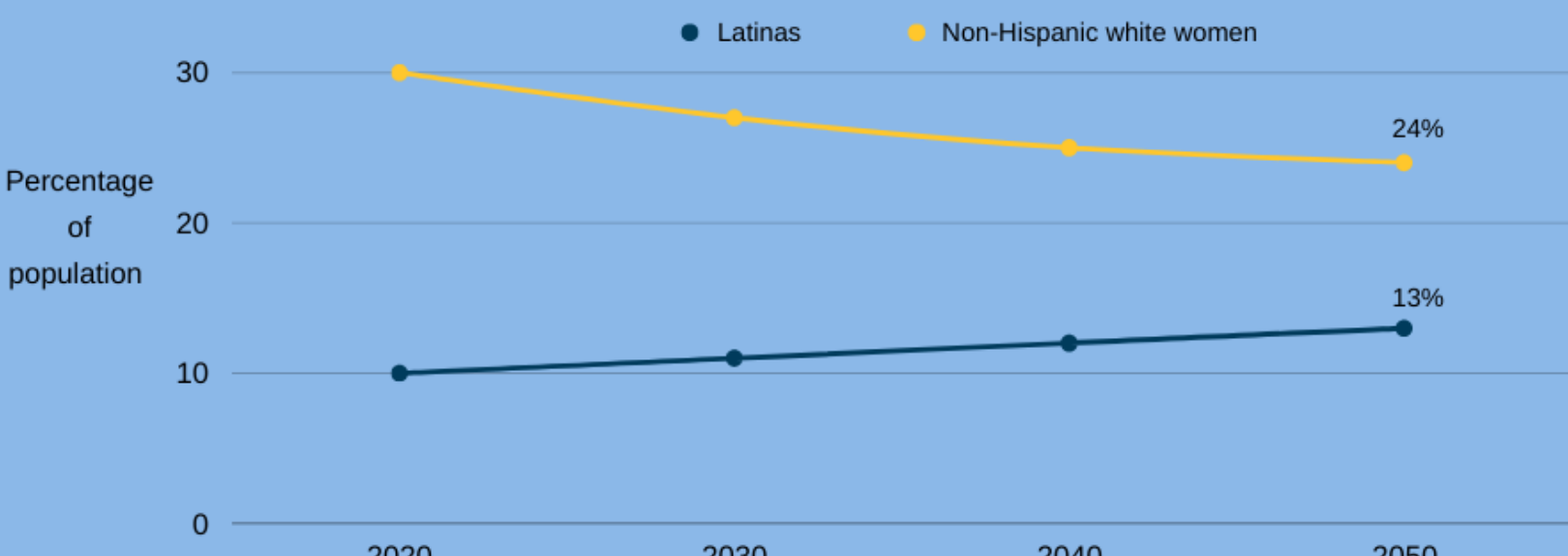


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Latinas are a growing U.S. demographic

By 2050, Latinas are expected to make up 13% of the U.S. population, account for 11% of the labor force and have a median age 11 years younger than their non-Hispanic white counterparts. UCLA's new Latina Futures, 2050 Lab will produce and support research that will ensure Latinas are woven into the fabric of America and are centered in the nation's law and policy debates.



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Population Shares, 2020-50, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Projections, U.S. Labor Shares; 2020-50, UCLA LPPI Estimates based on American Community Survey and California Age by Race and Ethnicity estimated by California Department of Finance, U.S. Median Age, 2020-50.

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To address these issues, the 2050 Lab will support researchers like Dr. Yohualli Balderas-Medina Anaya, an assistant clinical professor of family medicine at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA who studies the role of Latina doctors. With the lab's sponsorship, Anaya will expand her research, identifying policy interventions that help to diversify medical education and practice, build networks of community care, and ensure that more Latinas are represented not just in clinics and hospitals but in the boardrooms of health care providers and in local and national discussions of health policy.

And at a time when America's schools have become ground zero for culture wars, the 2050 Lab will pay special attention to the role of Latina teachers. Through its support for the scholarship of [Lorena Guillén](#), an assistant professor at the UCLA School of Education & Information Studies, the lab will help strengthen teacher education programs so that educators receive the training and support to deliver culturally relevant, emotionally responsive and rigorous academic programming to students from diverse backgrounds.

The importance of expanding support for applied research that can inform current policy and investing in scholarly interventions that can anticipate the next disaster or crisis to ensure leaders are prepared cannot be overemphasized, Terriquez said. But equally important, she noted, are efforts to foster a new generation of Latina researchers, public intellectuals and systems leaders.

"As we work to build a future that centers Latina leadership, we must pay special attention to ensuring that youth voices help define the future of our public institutions and workplaces," said Terriquez, whose own participatory action research serves to prepare young people for leadership roles in civil society.

Looking forward, in fall 2023, the lab will convene a national gathering of Latina lawyers to examine systemic barriers to inclusion and leadership in the legal profession. According to recent data, [Latinas account for less than 1% of all partners in U.S. law firms](#) and have never served on the highest court in [44 states](#). With recent Supreme Court decisions revoking Roe v. Wade's constitutional protection for abortion and rolling back worker protections, leaving immigrants in limbo, the need for Latina leadership in law and policy is acute.

"Spotlighting Latina futures is an exciting new empirical frame that will build on the important research already underway at UCLA and expand it to build out opportunities for youthful and diverse communities," Diaz said. "Through innovative cross-sector partnerships, the 2050 Lab will build the pipeline of academic and policy leaders for generations to come."

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