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LATINO PROTESTANTS AND THEIR POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

HOW ARE LATINO PROTESTANTS ENGAGED IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND THE BROADER SOCIETY?

On a rainy early spring morning in a modest brick Presbyterian church just outside the Fruitvale neighborhood of Oakland, California, sixty-four worshippers gather. The entire worship is in Spanish. During the sermon, the pastor makes a passing reference to how few of the attendees now live in Oakland proper, that many have to drive farther than ever for church services. The implicit message: the leadership of the church realizes that gentrification of San Francisco has spilled over the Bay Bridge and now threatens the availability of affordable housing throughout Oakland. In response, the congregation has started programs that offer legal advice for responding to rent-hiking landlords and identifying housing options around the city. Though resources and attendees tend to be somewhat scarce, the leadership has creatively organized in an effort to address the structural and policy concerns of housing. Beyond that, the pastor proudly notes that this church readily offers immigration status services, computer classes, and English classes.

Later that day, down the road forty-five miles in San Jose (still in the rain), over five hundred people gather in line outside the local Victory Outreach church for the second night of the theatrical production "Duke of Earl: Legacy." When the doors finally open, over one thousand attendees will overflow the sanctuary to the point that the foyer

will be filled with folding chairs for viewing the drama on two flat-screen closed-circuit televisions. After warm-up acts that include a praise team, two separate Christian rap performances, and a free “Duke of Earl: Legacy” T-shirt being thrown to the loudest section of the audience by the head pastor, the drama begins. Impressive production values include fog, intricate lighting, stage prop cigarettes, a full band for musical performances, and copious gun battles with blanks that leave eardrums ringing. The entire event is in English. The plot of the play earnestly encourages the audience to leave behind drugs, gangs, and violence and to commit their lives to Christ and join a church. The evening ends with a well-received altar call that overwhelms the stage.

Both of the aforementioned churches reside in the San Francisco Bay Area. However, due to a host of reasons (including denominational background, neighborhood context, leadership, and resources), they engage their respective communities very differently. They have variegated blinders and telescopes—social issues on which they focus intensely, and those that they ignore or fail to notice. Moreover, while one congregation has an explicitly singular agenda, the other remains more multifaceted. In multiple ways, then, these two congregations serve as a microcosm of the diversity with which Latino Protestants across the United States engage socially and politically.

POPULATION GROWTH AND GEOGRAPHIC DISPERSAL

Increasing Presence of Latinos

Latino Protestants continue to be a religious minority within an ethnic/racial minority¹ in the United States. However, both of these groups demonstrate robust growth in terms of percentage and raw population numbers. Moreover, as Latinos continue to expand in terms of numbers, they have also dispersed throughout the United States—arriving in rural, suburban, and urban places that heretofore had little to no Latino population. With that in mind, we know that Latino Protestants will likely have a burgeoning influence on public life in new ways and new places in the United States. In this chapter we consider Latino Protestant attitudes and behaviors related to social and political issues. Consistent with the diversity seen in previous chapters, we see hetero-

geneity in how Latino Protestants and their churches approach social and political engagement. Moreover, any monolithic arguments about Latino religiosity and public policy preferences will be found wanting by the preponderance of social science evidence.

It remains difficult to overstate the critical role that Latinos have played in the shifting sands of the U.S. ethnic and geographic landscape in the last forty years. Owing to immigration and high fertility rates, the Latino population has surged to the point that they have surpassed African Americans as the largest minority in the nation. This population growth has been described as a “demographic revolution.”² Studies indicate that nearly one million U.S.-born Latinos reach voting age every year.³ Beyond that political power, they also have economic clout: U.S. Latinos have a purchasing power equivalent to the world’s sixteenth-largest country.⁴ The 2010 U.S. Census reported that 50.5 million people (16 percent of a total of 308.7 million) claimed Latino or Hispanic ancestry. Moreover, Latino population increases accounted for more than half of the overall growth in the total population in the United States from 2000 to 2010.⁵

In addition to population growth among Latinos, we have also seen population *dispersal*. These demographic shifts translate into new contexts for Latinos that likely demand adaptation of some sort—both on the part of the receiving communities and the freshly arriving Latinos themselves. The Census Bureau reports that the South and the Midwest experienced the most significant growth in Latino population between 2000 and 2010. Scholars have described these demographic movements as “unprecedented geographic scattering . . . where [Latinos] often revived dwindling nonmetropolitan communities” and “transformed” U.S. urban landscapes.⁶ In short, while Latinos continue to cluster in traditional nodes in the Southwest and Northeast, they are also dispersing to unprecedented locales like the rural South and Midwest.⁷

With shifting demographics, we see that Latino residential patterns and geographic diffusion has not followed the pattern of African Americans. That is, the story of Latinos in the United States in no way serves as a replication of the African American narrative. In the early years of the twenty-first century, “Latino’s geographic scattering is national in scope and involves a broad range of places, from global cities to rural boomtowns. Furthermore, it simultaneously involves concentra-

tion and re-segregation as well as dispersal and, presumably, social integration.”⁸ In contrast, the Latino population in the United States remains fluid and in flux. Part of the shift has included the Latinization of the U.S. South. Some have argued that Latinos settling in the South frequently receive the label of “undeserving outsiders” because of skin color and perceptions about citizenship.⁹ Of course, the cold shoulder of the South has not been the uniform welcome for all Latinos in all corners of the country—as some communities recognize newly arriving Latinos as social and economic stimulators. These varying attitudes and contexts also play a role in how Latino Protestants position themselves within their local neighborhoods and the wider community.

Latinos and Residential Segregation

Even outside the South, Idelissa Malavé and Esti Giordani claim that the average Latino in the United States still “lives in a segregated, lower income neighborhood.”¹⁰ Moreover, while there has been a shift to more rural regions, 91 percent of Latinos continue to live in metropolitan areas.¹¹ That is, they tend to be in urban or suburban locales. However, they also note, “On average, between 1990 and 2009, affluent Latinos were more likely to live in neighborhoods with fewer resources than poor whites.”¹² That dissonance between relative wealth and a lack of neighborhood resources festers because, similar to African Americans, Latinos in the United States have suffered from residential segregation: “The average or ‘typical’ Latino lives in a neighborhood that is 45 percent Latino, even though Latinos represent just 17 percent of the total population.”¹³ Of course, these patterns do not occur by chance: Latinos have experienced residential restrictions from real estate practices that include redlining, steering, and predatory lending. Beyond residential segregation, Latinos in the United States also suffer from lower earnings (even when held constant for similar types of work): “With a median annual household income at \$39,000, Latinos earn \$11,000 less than the median for the total U.S. population and have the lowest weekly earnings out of any other group.”¹⁴ The discrepancies grow starker when considering wealth: the median wealth of whites in the United States soars to almost twelve times the median wealth of Latinos.¹⁵

Marta Tienda and Norma Fuentes acknowledge that the diffusion of Latino populations has not always translated into socioeconomic mobility, saying, “Latinos residential dispersion evolved against a background of rising income inequality, industrial restructuring, population aging, increasing unauthorized immigration, and political polarization also has implications for their integration prospects” in the United States.¹⁶ Beyond just exclusion, we would also note that Latino Protestants have been subject to what scholars have labeled a “double marginalization” that has consequences for their social and political beliefs and behaviors. In other words, Latino Protestants’ racial minority status within a majority Anglo nation combines with a religious minority status as Protestants among a majority Catholic religious affiliation among their co-ethnics to situate them outside of the mainstream in two areas. As they wrestle with a doubly marginalized identity, Latino Protestants, in particular, demonstrate a fluidity in how they engage with larger communities both socially and politically.¹⁷

In the end, Latino populations in the United States are both growing and dispersing. Moreover, we see that in some instances Latinos have also been marginalized in major U.S. cities, including Los Angeles and New York, to the point that some scholars have described their residential situation as one of “hypersegregation.”¹⁸ Within this context, Latino Protestants must consider how they will engage their neighborhoods, communities, cities, and broader society.

CHURCHES BUILDING SKILLS AND PROVIDING SUPPORT

In the face of exclusion and discrimination, Latino Protestant congregations necessarily become both refuges and sites of public action and advocacy. That is, because religion remains so uniquely salient for Latino Protestants, it follows that their social and political engagement will, in most cases, bear residue and evidence of their faith. Moreover, those commitments will likely occur within the context of congregational life. With that in mind, it only follows that Latino Protestant churches serve as pivotal sites for social engagement.

Perhaps the most geographically focused and exhaustive study of Latino religious life occurred on the shores of Lake Michigan: The aforementioned Chicago Latino Congregations Study (CLCS). The au-

thors describe CLCS as “a multi-level, comprehensive study of Latino churches in the Chicago area.”¹⁹ Though they suffer from double marginality (or possibly because of it), Latino Protestants, according to the authors of the CLCS, tend to be more politically active than their Catholic counterparts. The authors argue that, because of a more hierarchical church polity, Catholics learn comparatively fewer civic skills in their parishes.

A number of other scholars have also argued that Latino Protestants have more opportunities than their Catholic counterparts to enhance civic skills that translate into a form of social capital.²⁰ Proponents of this argument claim, again, that the hierarchical nature of Catholicism limits the ability of attenders to organize and practice relevant political tactics. Paul Djupe and Jacob Neiheisel find, indeed, that Latino Protestants receive more opportunities than Latino Catholics to “develop leadership skills and be recruited into politics through the church.”²¹ They argue that there exists more synthesis between congregation and community in Latino Protestant contexts: “In the broader, more Protestant society, the congregation is an independent community through which members make ties and acquire skills. In Latino communities, on the other hand, the congregation is better integrated into the community. Hence, attachment to a church in a Latino community helps the member to tap into community networks.”²² Thus, the synergy of church and community leads to a localized form of social capital.

Building on that notion of social capital, sociologist Norman Ruano finds that because of a lack of financial resources and histories of voluntarism, Latino Protestant congregations function as sites of civic and administrative skill development. The CLCS reported that well over half of all Latino Protestants indicated that they serve in some type of leadership role within their congregation. Latino Pentecostals led the way at 63 percent, followed closely, though, by Latino evangelicals and mainline at 59 and 58 percent, respectively.²³ Beyond that, it should also be noted that these Latino churches offer a locus for women to exercise leadership. In all of the Latino Protestant faith traditions a higher percentage of women than men reported holding positions of leadership. Of course, some of the gender-related leadership discrepancy relates to the fact that more women than men fill the pews of these congregations. Still, it seems quite clear that “Latino women . . . have power and influence at the church.”²⁴

In the end, Latino Protestant congregations, to varying degrees, have a tendency to nurture social capital for groups that have been historically marginalized. Beyond that, they provide both material and social services. As Elizabeth Dias (*Time* magazine journalist) notes, many Latino Protestant churches become “*de facto* healing centers for a population with limited health care benefits. They act as food banks for people with empty refrigerators. They house people avoiding street violence. There’s a lot more going on there than just saving souls.”²⁵ Latino Protestant churches, then, frequently serve as focal points of community engagement and social service delivery.

LATINO PROTESTANTS AND THEIR POLITICS

Political Party Affiliation

Overall, Latinos in the United States have shaded toward support of Democratic candidates.²⁶ The 2016 U.S. presidential election demonstrated that tendency in stark relief. In the months leading up to the election, 54 percent of registered Latino voters indicated that the Democratic Party demonstrated more concern than the Republican Party while only 11 percent said that the Republicans exhibited more—a 43 percent gap.²⁷ In the aftermath of the election, exit polls revealed that 66 percent of Latinos voted for Hillary Clinton—an overwhelming majority but a slip from the 71 percent received by Barack Obama in 2012. Moreover, despite his provocative comments regarding immigration and Mexicans, Donald Trump managed to garner 28 percent of the Latino vote—a decided minority, but one percentage point higher than Republican candidate Mitt Romney’s 27 percent from 2012.²⁸ Latinos supported Trump in greater numbers than expected despite his strong anti-immigration news and comments about Mexicans as dangerous and undesirable. Also, although some pundits had described the Latino vote as the “sleeping giant” that could sway the election, Latinos failed to surge to the polls—even with the threat of mass deportation of undocumented Latinos and the stakes for the negative perception of legal residents where high.

Even the 2016 presidential primary elections revealed the complexities of Latino voting patterns. Two of the Republican candidates (Sena-

tor Ted Cruz of Texas and Senator Marco Rubio of Florida) highlighted their Latino roots and pollsters watched to see if either could rally a critical mass of Latino support. However, both senators' stances on policy issues like immigration caused many Latinos to withhold their backing. More than that, interviews with Mexican Americans who found little solidarity with Cruz and Rubio's Cuban background undermined any notion of a Latino voting bloc for a Latino candidate.²⁹

Some scholars have noted, though, that Republican politicians in the United States have made particular efforts to embrace *evangelical* Latinos on the basis of shared conservative social values related to issues like abortion.³⁰ However, these invitations for alliance have found limited acceptance. In fact, in a May 2015 editorial in the *Wall Street Journal*, Russell Moore, president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention (the largest Protestant denomination in the United States), warned Republican presidential candidates to be wary of offending both white and Latino evangelicals. He noted the growing political clout of evangelical Latinos and that all candidates would do well to respect them: "The most evangelistic, growing congregations in this country are filled with first- and second-generation immigrants. There is more salsa at our church potlucks lately, and we like it. . . . An immigrant brother in the next pew is a person, a creation of God, not a piñata for politicians. 'Born again' comes in Spanish as well as English versions—and so do voters." Moore noted that in the weeks before he wrote, Latino evangelicals by the thousands had gathered in Houston to discuss issues that included abortion, racial justice, and economic opportunity. His message was clear: Politicians who ignored evangelical Latinos did so at their own peril.³¹

Other studies have also confirmed the tendency of non-Catholic Latinos to be more likely to support Republican Party candidates than Catholic Latinos.³² For Latino Protestants, frequent church attendance seems to have a relationship with social conservatism on some—but not all—issues. For instance, political scientist Ali Adam Valenzuela found that regular churchgoers were "significantly and substantively more likely than infrequent attenders to identify as Republican" and to oppose gay marriage and abortion.³³ However, when considering views regarding immigrant amnesty and economic welfare, Valenzuela found no differences between regular and infrequent churchgoers among Latino Protestants.

Committed, churchgoing Latino Protestants remain a tantalizing demographic for Republicans in the United States because when compared to Latino Catholics and the nonaffiliated they consistently report more conservative political preferences. Moreover, Valenzuela finds that Latino Protestants who consistently attend church demonstrate substantially more conservative philosophies than their less-committed fellow parishioners.³⁴ In fact, researchers at the Pew Research Center noted that in the 2012 U.S. presidential election, among the Latino electorate, religious identities played a crucial role in how individuals voted. While 80 percent of religiously unaffiliated Latinos and 75 percent of Latino Catholics claimed support for Barack Obama, only 50 percent of evangelical Latinos said the same. Similarly, on the eve of the 2016 election, the Pew Research Center reported a wide discrepancy in how Latinos planned to vote: While 59 percent of Latino Catholics indicated their support for Clinton, only 12 percent of Latino evangelicals said the same.³⁵ Perhaps not surprisingly, among Latinos in the United States, religious affiliation seems to have a degree of influence on voting patterns.³⁶

Political Attitudes and Stances

More recently, in 2014, Pew found that, in general, Latinos in the United States tend to lean toward Democratic Party affiliations. Over half (56 percent) of Latinos indicated that they identified as Democrats while only one in five (21 percent) leaned toward the Republican Party.³⁷ Even when examining through the prism of religion, the Democratic tendencies remain: Latino evangelicals (48 percent), mainline Protestants (54 percent), and Catholics (58 percent) all lean more Democrat than Republican (evangelicals: 30 percent, mainline Protestants: 23 percent, and Catholics: 21 percent).³⁸ U.S. Latinos demonstrate a sharp break with their co-religionists on political party affiliation. A 2012 Pew study reported that 70 percent of white evangelicals leaned Republican—more than twice the percentage of Latino evangelicals. In a similar fashion, white mainline Protestants also leaned more Republican at a percentage (51 percent) more than twice that of mainline Protestant Latinos.³⁹

From their exhaustive report related to Latino demographics, Idélisse Malavé and Esti Giordani also note that “Overall, religious affilia-

tion does not have the same impact on party affiliation among Latinos as it does among white voters.”⁴⁰ By way of example, they point to the stark contrast in preference for the Democratic Party between white and Latino evangelicals: while roughly half of Latino evangelicals affiliate with the Democratic Party, a scant 23 percent of white evangelicals do the same. Correspondingly, “almost three-quarters of white evangelicals (72 percent) identify or lean toward the Republican Party, while only 36 percent of Latino evangelicals do.”⁴¹

Similar to African Americans, Latino Protestants with strong religious commitment appear to be “less motivated by the faith-based political conservatism observed in white Christian circles.”⁴² There also seems to be a common tendency for African American and Latino ministers to similarly focus more heavily on social justice issues than white religious assemblies. White congregations, as members of the dominant racial demographic in the United States, likely have less appetite for issues related to marginalized minority groups.⁴³

The CLCS found that when examining contemporary issues that ranged from U.S. intervention in Iraq to the U.S. embargo against Cuba, mainline Protestant Latinos tended to express opposition to U.S. foreign policy almost as much as Latino Catholics, while a distinct minority of both Pentecostals and evangelicals expressed negative views regarding such foreign policy issues. It follows, then, that the same study revealed that more evangelical (53 percent) and Pentecostal (53 percent) leaders viewed themselves as politically conservative, while very few mainline (18 percent) labeled themselves the same way. Beyond political viewpoints, we also find differences among Latino Protestants in terms of political activities and engagement in Chicago. Interestingly, a full 93 percent of evangelicals claimed to never participate in political activities. Roughly 83 percent of mainline Latinos made the same claim. It should also be noted that the lack of citizenship status should be remembered as a variable that might inhibit some from participating in overt political action.⁴⁴

While mainline Protestant Latinos show a slightly higher preference than their evangelical counterparts for the Democratic Party, no such discrepancy appears when considering the role and size of government. When queried about whether they would prefer a smaller government with fewer services or a larger government with more services, 62 percent of *both* evangelical and mainline Protestant Latinos indicated a

preference for the latter. In short, both groups favor more government services. However, neither Protestant group favored larger government as much as Latino Catholics (72 percent). In addition, it should be noted that a similar percentage of the minority among Latino evangelicals and mainline Protestants indicated preference for smaller government (25 percent of evangelicals and 29 percent of mainline Protestants). In this regard, Latino Protestants are markedly divergent from the general public of the United States, where the majority (51 percent) prefers a smaller government and the minority (40 percent) prefers a larger government.⁴⁵

In terms of attitudes toward international intervention by the United States, political scientist James L. Guth divides Latino Protestants into two categories: Traditionalists and Modernists.⁴⁶ He describes Traditionalists as those who would be included in fundamentalist, evangelical, charismatic, or Pentecostal camps. Modernists, then, include most of the mainline and any who identify themselves as liberal. Guth reports that more than six in ten (62.1 percent) Traditionalist Latino Protestants qualify as “Hardliners” (strong supporters of preemptive U.S. military intervention and “hawkish” foreign policy⁴⁷) compared to less than three in ten (28.9 percent) Modernist Latino Protestants and about one in ten (10.4 percent) Latino Catholics.⁴⁸ Thus we also see that religious tradition predisposes Latino Protestant attitudes regarding international affairs.

Similarly, in their case study of Chicago, the CLCS noted that when examining political attitudes and behavior through the filter of religious tradition, a pattern emerges where Latino Catholics and mainline Protestants have more liberal inclinations than Latino evangelicals and Pentecostals. For instance, respondents within their study from “Catholic and mainline churches were more likely to vote for Democratic presidential candidates than respondents in evangelical and Pentecostal churches, and were more likely to disagree with the U.S. intervention in Iraq.” The study’s authors went on to “note that the divide is not between Catholics and Protestants more broadly, highlighting the importance of distinguishing between mainline Protestant and conservative Protestant groups.”⁴⁹ Indeed, the heterogeneity of Latino Protestant sociopolitical beliefs manifest in myriad attitudes and behaviors.

Even in an issue like immigration, where uniformity of Latino opinions might be assumed, we see complexity. Not surprisingly, the major-

ity of overall Latinos (53 percent) tend to identify immigration as a pressing issue for the United States. Somewhat counterintuitively, though, a comparable percentage of Latinos rank quality of public schools (55 percent), the federal deficit (54 percent), and the cost of college (53 percent) as critical issues for the country as well.⁵⁰ Corroborating these findings, the Pew Research Center also reports that while 73 percent of Latinos indicate that immigration reform is extremely important or very important to them, *more* say that issues of education (92 percent), jobs and the economy (91 percent), and health care (86 percent) are extremely or very important to them.⁵¹ In short, Latinos in the United States do not monolithically focus on immigration as *the* political issue of significance. Moreover, Latino attitudes regarding the importance of immigration also diverge by religious tradition. The majority of both Catholic (59 percent) and mainline Protestant (57 percent) Latinos express the opinion that they understood immigration as a “critical” issue. Fewer evangelical (48 percent) Latinos see immigration as important.⁵²

On the related issue of “path to citizenship,” again, the majority (67 percent) of Latinos support the U.S. government “[allowing immigrants] a way to become citizens provided they meet certain requirements.” Filtering by religious tradition, though, again also reveals a slight heterogeneity of opinions. While strong majorities of every Latino religious group support a path to citizenship for immigrants currently living in the country without documentation, Catholics (72 percent) and evangelicals (75 percent) report nearly identical rates and mainline Protestant Latinos dip to nearly two-thirds (67 percent). Interestingly enough, the religiously unaffiliated report the least amount of support (59 percent).⁵³ While half of Latino Catholics (49 percent) report hearing clergy speak about immigration, only about a third of Latino Protestants indicate the same (35 percent evangelicals and 37 percent of mainline Protestants). Moreover, when compared to Latino Catholics (26 percent), a very small percentage of Latino mainline Protestants (16 percent) and Latino evangelicals (12 percent) report their churches participating in immigration rights protests or boycotts.⁵⁴ Thus we continue to see that the contours of religion affect even issues that might be assumed to have consensus among Latinos.

PUBLIC ROLES OF LATINO PROTESTANT RELIGIOUS LEADERS

On an issue-by-issue basis, we see a complex picture of Latino religious leaders' political leanings. When asked directly about how they described themselves, about half of both evangelical (53 percent) and Pentecostal (also 53 percent) Latino leaders described themselves as conservative. In comparison, both mainline (18 percent) and Catholic (20 percent) leaders indicated significantly less inclination to do the same. However, these percentages should not be misinterpreted as meaning that substantial swaths of Latino Catholic and mainline Protestant leaders understood their political identity as liberal. Most, in fact, saw themselves as moderate (70 percent of Catholics and 64 percent of mainline). Among Chicago Latino religious leaders, very few defined their political leaning as liberal. Mainline and Catholics leaders had the highest percentages (19 percent and 10 percent, respectively). Interestingly, while 7 percent of Pentecostal leaders identified as liberal, *no* Latino evangelical leaders in Chicago indicated such a political identity. Thus, we see an admittedly narrow band of liberal political leanings within Latino Pentecostalism that does not manifest in that way within Latino evangelicalism. This unique conservatism among Latino evangelical leaders also bore itself out when the prompt asked about political party affiliation. Among all Chicago-area Latino religious leaders, only evangelicals identified with the Republican Party (33 percent) more than Democratic Party (24 percent). For Pentecostal leaders, the numbers were almost inverted: 32 percent Democrat and 22 percent Republican. Democrats saw even more support among Catholics and mainline Protestants. About half of both groups of Latino religious leaders identified as Democrats, and a very scant minority (2 percent of Catholics and 5 percent of mainline) labeled themselves as Republicans.⁵⁵

Regardless of their religious leaders' political affiliations, the majority Latino Protestants want to hear political views from the pulpit. Latino evangelicals (65 percent), especially indicated appreciation for hearing clergy discuss political and social issues. Demonstrating the range of opinions within Latino Protestantism, a significantly lower percentage of Latino mainline Protestants (52 percent) agreed with that sentiment.⁵⁶

Political Activities of Latino Protestant Attenders

Compared to Latino Catholics, Latino Protestants demonstrate as high (or higher) levels of political action.⁵⁷ However, a close look at the Latino churches within the Chicago study still reveals fairly low levels of political engagement. For instance, the CLCS also found that evangelical Latino attenders claimed very little political activity. When queried with whether they participated in a voter registration drive, volunteered for a political campaign, or donated money to a party, over nine in ten (93 percent) evangelical Latinos reported that they *never* participated in any of the mentioned activities—the highest of any of the religious traditions. Some of that seeming political apathy likely found resonance with issues of citizenship status among these evangelicals: U.S. citizens tended (16 percent) to be more likely to say that they had been involved in political action than noncitizens (9 percent). Overall, the vast majority of Latinos in the study, regardless of religious tradition, indicated high levels of political *inactivity*. Beyond evangelicals, the other three religious traditions all had rates of at least eight in ten congregants reporting having never participated in political activities.⁵⁸ Of course, it should be noted that the apparent lack of political activity might simply be a function of the survey question. When the same respondents reported whether they had contacted a religious official within the last year, the percentages of those reporting “never” dropped. Latino evangelicals still emerged as the most reticent with more than eight in ten (82 percent) indicating that they had never spoken with or contacted a public official within the last twelve months. Latino Pentecostals, mainline Protestants, and Catholics, though, should not be classified as activists: a high percentage of attenders from three religious traditions reported never contacting or speaking with a public official in the last year (Pentecostal: 76 percent, mainline: 70 percent, and Catholic: 67 percent).⁵⁹

Limited congregational engagement, though, should not be interpreted as evidence of political withdrawal being preached from Latino pulpits. Instead, we see that almost half of the Latino religious leaders from Chicago had requested their members to call or write a public official. Beyond that, half of the religious leaders reported asking that their congregation sign a petition. Catholic (60 percent) and mainline (58 percent) leaders had a more pronounced tendency to ask that their

congregants sign petitions than their counterparts in Pentecostal (40 percent) and evangelical (42 percent) traditions.⁶⁰

Overall, we also see that Latino mainline Protestants and Latino Catholics tend to have similar views regarding the intersection of religious beliefs and politics. A little over one-third of each (38 percent of mainline Protestants and 36 percent of Catholics) agreed that religious beliefs played a “very important” role influencing their political thinking. In marked contrast, 62 percent of Latino evangelicals offered the same assessment of religion and politics.⁶¹ Thus we see within Latino Protestantism a wide discrepancy in understanding how religion should interact with political issues.

LATINO PROTESTANTS AND SEXUAL AND FAMILY ISSUES

Attitudes Regarding Same Sex Marriage

Moving from politics to social issues, we also find multiple viewpoints among Latino Protestants. Overall, in terms of same-sex marriage attitudes, studies find that Latinos who have at least some ties to faith communities have demonstrated a resistance to progressive policies that allow for the establishment of same-sex marriage.⁶² That is, Latinos of any religious background tend to articulate resistance to same-sex marriage. The assumption, though, that the cultural conservatism that exists among Latinos in the United States serves as evidence of cultural Roman Catholic residue has been proven erroneous. Instead, we see—similar to the general population—conservative *Protestant* Latino leaders and denominations have been at the forefront of those promoting traditional marriage while opposing any movement toward the legalization of same-sex marriage.

A 2012 study by Pew found that 66 percent of Latino evangelicals described themselves as strongly opposed to same-sex marriage. Similarly, a 2013 study by the Public Religion Research Institute reported that 8 in 10 (79 percent) Latino evangelicals opposed same-sex marriage. In short, Latino evangelicals, in particular, tend to be fairly uniform on the issue of same-sex marriage.⁶³ In the mid-2000s, for instance, the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference

(NHCLC), a consortium of Latino evangelical leaders, led an effort to mobilize against same-sex marriage. NHCLC materials couched their argument in a way that framed opposition as motivated by desire for the flourishing of the broader evangelical community. Their resistance, they claimed, was not about being “anti-gay or discriminating against anyone.”⁶⁴ Rather, they argued that, along with faith in God, they simply saw families with both “a mother and a father” as “the primary deterrent in the Latino community to drug abuse, gang violence, teenage pregnancy, and other social ills.” With that sentiment in mind, it should be noted that the NHCLC has sought to distance itself from “the media-exacerbated image of angry white evangelicals who oppose everything.”⁶⁵ Thus in this narrative offered by the NHCLC, resistance to same-sex marriage should be understood as for the benefit of Latino communities, not as intolerance. Though the NHCLC lays claim to being largest Latino evangelical organization in the United States, they clearly do not represent all Latino Protestants. In fact, Christopher Ellison and colleagues noted that in 2008 Reverend Ignacio Castuera, a Methodist, argued in a televised debate that LGBT persons should have the right to marry: “The Bible has many different models of sexuality and many different models of family. . . . We cannot impose the Bible as the right belief onto a population with people who are multicultural and religiously diverse.”⁶⁶

Regina Branton and her colleagues found that Latino Catholics have a significantly higher probability of supporting civil unions for same-sex couples, when compared to Latino Protestants.⁶⁷ Christopher Ellison and his colleagues, though, note that evangelical Latinos, in particular, tend to be much more resistant to same-sex marriage than Latino Catholics. In fact, evangelical Latinos who attended church regularly had an 84 percent chance of being less likely to approve same-sex marriage than their Catholic counterparts. However, we begin to see disparity among Latino Protestants and their views regarding same-sex marriage when we widen the scope and consider mainline Protestant Latinos. It seems that within that subset, church attendance has salience: Ellison and his colleagues find that among mainline Latinos, regular attenders disapprove of same-sex marriage more than Catholics, while non-weekly attenders from the same religious tradition tend to be more supportive of same-sex marriage.⁶⁸ In sum, then, Latino Protestants have representatives on both poles of the same-sex marriage spectrum, while

Latino Catholics seem to embrace more relatively moderate views. Evangelicals and regular attenders among mainline Protestants tend to oppose same-sex marriage, while sporadic attenders among mainline Latinos tend to support same-sex marriage.⁶⁹

In Chicago, when asked about same-sex marriage, Latino evangelicals and Pentecostals modify to the more traditional positions: nine in ten (92 percent) evangelicals and almost all (99 percent) of Pentecostals either “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” with same-sex marriage. In contrast, only about half of mainline (45 percent) and Catholic (62 percent) leaders expressed the same reservations regarding same-sex marriage.⁷⁰

Indeed, a 2012 Pew study found that among Latino Protestants while 46 percent of those who attended mainline churches favored same-sex marriage, only 25 percent of evangelicals felt the same way. Moreover, neither group of Latino Protestants registered as much support for same-sex marriage as Catholics (54 percent).⁷¹ Beyond that, even among evangelical Latinos, views regarding same-sex marriage remain diverse: 71 percent of those who attend church at least weekly oppose same-sex marriage, while those who attend less often expressed less resistance (58 percent).⁷²

Attitudes Regarding Divorce, Cohabitation, and Casual Sex

As already noted, for Latino Protestants, church attendance has salience for other social issues as well. In assessing Latino Protestant views regarding marriage, divorce, cohabitation, and casual sex, Ellison, Wolfinger, and Ramos-Wada found that those who attended church more regularly also tended to report more traditional views. Beyond that, evangelical Latinos also reported more traditional views than their Catholic counterparts. Again, Ellison and his colleagues note that such a finding undermines the long-held assumption that Latino cultural conservatism results as a simple by-product of Catholicism. In fact, in only one of the four issues under discussion, sanctity of marriage, do Latino Catholics and evangelicals maintain the same level of conservatism. In terms of opposition to divorce, cohabitation, and casual sex, evangelical Latinos “are substantially more conservative than Catholics.”⁷³ Ellison and his colleagues claim that these views can be directly traced to the evangelical tendency to believe “that the Bible is the Word

of God and that it is without error and contains necessary and sufficient information to guide most human affairs, especially those involving faith and family.”⁷⁴ That is, a strict interpretation of biblical injunctions leads to social traditionalism among Latino evangelicals.

Attitudes Regarding Abortion

Religious tradition matters significantly when exploring how Latinos in the United States feel about the issue of abortion. Likely due to their overall higher levels of religiosity, Latinos generally express more opposition to abortion than Anglos. However, when we analyze differences among religious traditions, we see that evangelical Latinos are especially hostile to abortion—more so than their Catholic counterparts. Regina Branton and her colleagues report that Latino Catholics have a higher probability of also supporting legal abortion in all circumstances than Latino Protestants.⁷⁵ On this score, Latino Catholics represent the middle ground: About half indicate that abortion should be illegal in all or most circumstances. Among Latino Protestants, though, there exists a wide range of opinion. While seven in ten (70 percent) evangelical Latinos say abortion should be mostly or entirely illegal, only 46 percent of mainline Protestants agree with that sentiment.⁷⁶

In interpreting their opposition to abortion, John Bartkowski and his colleagues argue that these conservative Protestant Latinos have transposed religious schemas from broader evangelicalism in the United States.⁷⁷ That is, while both white and Latino Catholics seem more prone to selectively embracing Vatican judgments regarding social issues like abortion, both white and Latino evangelicals demonstrate strong opposition to abortion. Beyond that, it may be the case that Latino evangelicals embrace the antiabortion positioning of white evangelicals in order to negotiate their double marginality: “Strong opposition to abortion situates evangelical Latinos squarely within the broader universe of conservative Protestantism. At the same time, these convictions distinguish them from the ‘lukewarm’ commitment to Christian principles exhibited by their Catholic peers.”⁷⁸ Of course, such a stance by Latino evangelicals should not simply be interpreted as cynical political maneuvering. However, it should be noted that such attitudes regarding abortion might have the latent function of creating alliances with white evangelicals.

Attitudes Regarding Gender Roles

Compared to the overall U.S. population, Latinos in the United States resist embracing traditional gender roles related to marriage and the family. In fact, the vast majority (79 percent) express a preference for having both wife and husband working and sharing child care and house management as opposed to a more traditional arrangement where the husband functions as sole provider (supported by only 18 percent). In that way, Latinos articulate a predilection for traditional gender and family life at a rate less than the general population of the United States (given that 62 percent indicated support for traditional family structures).⁷⁹

Among Latinos, though, a discrepancy in attitudes regarding family and marriage patterns emerges when examined through the filter of religion. Whereas 26 percent of Latino Protestants expressed support for more traditional roles, only 15 percent of Latino Catholics agreed. Among Latino Protestants, evangelicals emerged as more traditional in this regard than mainline Protestants (29 percent versus 19 percent). In teasing out this idea further, Pew asked “whether a husband should have the final say in family matters.”⁸⁰ Overall, about six in ten (63 percent) of Latinos rejected the statement. A religious breakdown, however, proved insightful. Unaffiliated Latinos led the way in disagreeing with the statement at a rate of 74 percent, followed by Catholics at 67 percent. Among Protestant Latinos, 55 percent of those in the mainline rejected while only 43 percent of evangelicals did the same. In other words, evangelicals were the only religious tradition among Latinos in the United States to have a majority (53 percent) completely or mostly agree with the statement, “a husband should have the final say in family matters.”⁸¹ The theme of gender dynamics within Latino communities also emerged in other studies. Instead of examining gender roles in marriage, a 2009 Pew study queried about gender based *religious* roles within families. When asked whether “men have a duty to serve as religious leaders in the marriage and family,” the majority of Protestant Latinos (70 percent) agreed with that sentiment while Catholic Latinos remained split (50 percent). However, evangelical Latinos expressed a higher level of enthusiasm (75 percent supported) than did mainline Latinos (55 percent).⁸²

VIEWS ON ECONOMICS AND POVERTY

Beyond family and gender issues, studies on Latino Protestants yield interesting insights on their views regarding economic issues. Based on their more conservative leanings demonstrated thus far, perhaps it should not be surprising to learn that Latino Protestants, when compared to their Catholic counterparts, are less likely to indicate that the poor face hardship because of a dearth of government interventions. Although there is danger in oversimplifying the nuances of how individuals think about the sources of poverty, it remains instructive to note that the dialogue traditionally has two dominant camps: (1) those who argue that poverty results largely from structural causes and (2) those who claim that the attitudes, behaviors, skills, and talents of individuals delineate who will be poor in the opportunity-filled United States.⁸³ With that dichotomy in mind, studies indicate that devout (frequent attenders of worship services) evangelical Latinos are 55 percent less likely than devout Latino Catholics to articulate a sense that the poor face difficulty because of a lack of government recourses. In other words, evangelical Latinos express less sympathy toward the poor than Catholic Latinos.

These divergent attitudes toward the poor are consistent with trends seen among other racial demographics in the United States and the manner in which religious identity influences attitudes toward the poor. It seems that the idiosyncratic nature of Catholic and Protestant ethics remain robust in spite of a racial or ethnic distinction: the “Catholic ethic emphasizing sharing and material generosity” and the “conservative Protestant ethic being much more individualistic and moralistic with regard to material wealth.”⁸⁴

The fact that evangelical Latinos look similar to white evangelicals when explaining the sources of poverty, though, fails to translate into a wholesale endorsement of identical social and political attitudes within the religious tradition. For instance, Latino evangelicals and white evangelicals look very different when pulling the ballot box lever. The Pew Research Center found that white evangelicals supported Mitt Romney’s 2012 presidential bid at a rate of almost three out of four (74 percent) while only four out of ten (39 percent) of evangelical Latinos did the same.⁸⁵

Of course, in the United States economic issues tend to be entwined with issues of race. In their landmark tome about race and religion in the United States, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*, sociologists Michael Emerson and Christian Smith noted that many white evangelicals embraced a “miracle motif” regarding racial reconciliation in the United States. That is, white evangelicals tended to assume that as more and more individuals converted to the Christian faith, racial alienation would decrease. In a seeming test of the miracle motif regarding all social ills, Pew asked Latinos if they agreed with the statement, “If enough people were brought to Christ, social ills would take care of themselves.”⁸⁶ Perhaps not surprisingly—since Emerson and Smith identified the miracle motif as a uniquely evangelical manifestation—we see a discrepancy in whether Protestant Latinos would endorse such a statement. While about two-thirds (65 percent) of evangelical Latinos agreed with the statement, only about half (51 percent) of mainline Protestants concurred.⁸⁷ Thus we see that the evangelical “cultural tool kit” identified by Emerson and Smith transcends some racial boundaries.

PROVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES BY LATINO PROTESTANT CONGREGATIONS

Amount and Types of Social Service Delivery

Social engagement, of course, means more than social positions and politics. Congregations of all religious orientations and racial backgrounds have entered into social service delivery, and Latino Protestants are no different in that regard. In fact, Gastón Espinosa has argued that “Latino Protestant churches are more likely to provide social services than their Catholic counterparts” in many measures of social action.⁸⁸ Individually, about one-third (32 percent) of Latino Protestants volunteer with a neighborhood organization, a business, or a youth agency. Evangelical Latinos (34 percent) do so just slightly more than mainline Protestant Latinos (29 percent). For both sets of Protestants, though, the amount of volunteering declines when the engagement changes focus to tutoring or school programs (23 percent for evangelicals and 25 percent for mainline Protestants).⁸⁹

Of course, churches engage in social service delivery in multiple ways. A Hudson Institute national survey of 452 Latino Protestant congregations found that 72 percent offered social service programs.⁹⁰ Beyond that, the CLCS found that *every* one of the Latino religious leaders they interviewed indicated that their congregations provided some sort of health care–related service delivery to their respective communities in Chicago. However, Latino Protestants tend to offer interventions like health services less frequently than their Catholic counterparts—an interesting phenomenon because a higher percentage of Latino Catholics (61 percent) agree that guaranteeing health care for all citizen's should be the government's responsibility compared to Latino mainline Protestants (53 percent) and evangelicals (50 percent).⁹¹ While Catholic churches average over five different types of health service, Latino mainline Protestants (3.38), evangelicals (3.56), and Pentecostals (2.61) all offer less. The authors attribute the stark contrast between Catholics and Pentecostals especially as explained by the fact that Catholic churches tend to be much larger than their Pentecostal counterparts and, thus, have more resources and capacities for health-related services.⁹²

The percentage of health services programming among Latino Protestant churches also varies among the mainline, evangelicals, and Pentecostals depending on the health service being delivered. The report considers five areas of health services: Alcoholics Anonymous, sex education, diabetes screening, nutrition information, and blood pressure screenings. Except for the area of sex education, a higher percentage of Catholic congregations offered health services when compared to the Latino Protestant congregations in the study. Beyond Catholic-Protestant distinctions, however, it should be noted that discrepancies exist among evangelical, mainline, and Pentecostal congregations as well. For instance, evangelicals (35 percent) are more likely to offer sex education than mainline (24 percent) or Pentecostal (27 percent) congregations. Evangelical congregations also lead the way (31 percent) on offering nutrition information (mainline: 19 percent and Pentecostal: 13 percent). On the other hand, mainline churches offer more (33 percent) opportunities for blood pressure screenings than those of the evangelical (31 percent) or Pentecostal (24 percent) traditions.

Of course, in all these instance of health services rendered by Latino Protestant congregations it should be noted that the vast majority of

these programs are largely informal structures that lack robust organization.⁹³ At the same, though, it could be argued that these congregations possess invaluable knowledge of networks and neighborhoods that might allow for more incisive health care delivery that targets the needs of the population. In the end, the strand of religious tradition within Protestantism has significant influence on how these Latinos engage the larger community in terms of health services programming.

Latino Pentecostalism and Community Engagement

With all this evidence, it does seem clear that different strains of Latino Protestantism have different concerns, priorities, and behaviors when it comes to social and civic engagement. How do we account for this heterogeneity? Some have argued that Pentecostalism, especially, stands out among other faith traditions within Latino Protestantism. Gastón Espinosa, in his comprehensive tome, *Latino Pentecostals in America: Faith and Politics in Action*, claims that Latino Pentecostals, in particular, avoid the traditional evangelical and mainline tendency to decouple evangelism and social justice.⁹⁴ In other words, Latino Pentecostals meld an evangelistic social work that assumes an outreach that demonstrates “the love and saving grace of Jesus Christ to a broken and suffering world.”⁹⁵ It seems that Latino Pentecostals reject notions of the Social Gospel and Liberation Theology as they see both movements as “not Christ-centered enough.”⁹⁶ Indeed, among some Latino Protestant congregations there seems to be a strong sense that social engagement is not necessarily a political act. In our ethnographic research of a Latino Protestant church in the Bay Area of California, we heard attenders/leaders tell us, “Feeding the poor is not a political act.” In other words, that particular congregation simply understood social engagement as the church being the church—they did not see it as a political statement.

Ruano argues that a significant number of Latino Pentecostal congregations find themselves located in neighborhoods plagued by poverty and other attendant social problems. Because of that context, it becomes “imperative to understand the types of civic skills and civic engagement opportunities afforded to the congregants and whether they translate into engagement outside of the church, and if so, under what circumstances.”⁹⁷ While Pentecostalism has long been assumed to be a

faith that fosters closed, inward-facing communities, congregations like Pastor Rene Molina's Restauracion Los Angeles hear messages that encourage attenders to become active in political and social issues. Molina states that anyone who has citizenship has a responsibility to vote, and if they cannot do that, they should be in marches that seek to change restrictive immigration laws. Molina does not counsel his congregation to turn inward—in fact, he actively engages the broader community of Los Angeles by organizing with local African American pastors on issues of racial reconciliation.⁹⁸

While those congregations organize around racial reconciliation, other congregations coalesce around other issues. For example, Victory Outreach (highlighted earlier in the chapter), a coalition of six hundred churches worldwide, finds focus in building “a tightly knit community among recovering gang members.”⁹⁹ Sociologist Edward Flores describes Victory Outreach as an “evangelical-Pentecostal” network that emphasizes a hard rupture with old communities and intensive involvement with the church—including evenings, weekends, and holidays—as a method of “un-becoming a homie and joining the non-gang society.”¹⁰⁰ Other scholars have described Victory Outreach as an “emotional rescue ministry.”¹⁰¹ Church leaders encourage members to forgo relationships, hobbies, and jobs that might interfere with participation in congregational worship and events. Moreover, Victory Church mimics the Pentecostal church's decentralized hierarchies and rigid religious boundaries to promote what Flores describes as a “segregated redemption” for former gang members.¹⁰² Though Victory Outreach churches might stand as an outlier with their singular and aggressive focus on gang rehabilitation, it does represent the energy that Latino Pentecostal congregations have developed for certain issues.

In the end, numerous studies have indicated that most congregations tend to provide some type of social service program—if not multiple programs. Latino Protestant churches are no different. However, it is also clear that among Latino Protestants the rationales for and modes of community engagement differ markedly based on religious tradition and context.

LATINO PROTESTANTS AND LOCAL PARACHURCH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Of course, not all of Latino Protestant social and political life occurs under the auspices of church. Instead, we see that they have crafted other institutions and organizations “whose very purpose is to provide some type of social service for the community they serve.”¹⁰³ These faith-based organizations (FBOs) maintain religious foundations, but because of Internal Revenue Service regulations, they are required to eschew proselytizing while providing a social service. Catherine Wilson closely examined two of the largest Latino Protestant FBOs. The first, the Latino Pastoral Action Center (LPAC), is located in the South Bronx in New York and is led by a Pentecostal minister, Reverend Raymond Rivera. The second, Nueva Esperanza, is located in North Philadelphia and is led by an evangelical pastor, Reverend Luis Cortés Jr. Consideration of these FBOs proves instructive because they allude to the scope and diversity of Latino Protestant social and political engagement—they help to extrapolate the values, culture, and beliefs of these faith communities. As Wilson contends, “along with congregations, FBOs help the Latino community to mediate its religious sensibilities and, in doing so, prepare this community for social and political involvement.”¹⁰⁴ In other words, along with congregations, FBOs have become integral organizing institutions for focusing Latino Protestant social engagement in the United States.

Wilson, in her study of Latino FBOs, claims that these organizations tend to emphasize “the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God on earth, and personal salvation at the end of one’s earthly journey.”¹⁰⁵ Despite the doctrinal differences that have divided the Latino communities over the years, Wilson argues that especially in cities, “social, political, and economic injustices” have caused various strands of Protestants and Catholics to ally. Wilson goes on to note that Justo González, a United Methodist and prolific theological author, has argued that the best path forward for urban Latinos in the United States includes Protestants and Catholics aligning to “[walk] the same path.”¹⁰⁶

The aforementioned LPAC includes a local network of over three hundred clergy and a mailing list that boasts over two thousand clergy addresses. The FBO focuses on intentionally grooming indigenous

leaders. Wilson claims that the theological underpinnings of LPAC can be found in “the Pentecostal worldview.”¹⁰⁷ That is, the flexibility and spontaneity associated with Pentecostalism leads directly to the informal and adaptive responses of LPAC to the old and new social issues of the South Bronx. While Pentecostalism has often been described as “otherworldly,” LPAC directly addresses current socioeconomic issues. Wilson notes that Rivera, the founder and director, has stated that his job is not confined to saving sinners but also “to do something about the problems in the neighborhood.”¹⁰⁸ LPAC’s programming includes job readiness workshops, gang prevention, English-as-a-second-language classes, alternative late-night entertainment for youth, recreational opportunities, and collaborating with local agencies on the issues of at-risk youth. LPAC’s collaborators in these initiatives have ranged from the New York City Department of Probation to Quaker Friends to Buddhist temples. In other words, LPAC has demonstrated a robust emphasis on community partnership formation that undermines assumptions about a more insular Pentecostal community. These partnerships, though, all have to align with LPAC’s focus on the “whole person” and to help them transform their lives. In the end, Wilson describes LPAC as a “ministry of personal outreach.”¹⁰⁹

In somewhat of a contrast, Wilson portrays Nueva Esperanza as a ministry of institutional development. In fact, Nueva’s mission rests on a “commitment to the creation of Hispanic-owned and operating institutions that serve the economic and spiritual well-being of the community.”¹¹⁰ Yet both FBOs find similarity in a deeply rooted belief in the transformative power of the Christian message. Nueva has grown from a \$60,000 one-year grant in 1987 to cohosting President George W. Bush at the first National Hispanic Prayer Breakfast in 2002. Indeed, there remains little doubt that Nueva stands as a high-profile example of Latino Protestant social and political engagement. As further evidence, Wilson also notes that a January 2005 issue of *Time* magazine declared Cortés held a position among the “25 Most Influential Evangelicals” in the United States.

At least a portion of their fledgling influence should be traced to the FBOs’ strategic political maneuvering. Indeed, Nueva has been decidedly nonpartisan in its governmental alliances. Cortés has described his political affiliations: “I’m not red, and I’m not blue. I’m brown.”¹¹¹ In essence, Cortés, in making such a proclamation declares himself a sup-

porter of those who would advance the cause of Latinos in the United States. To that end, Nueva has hosted high-profile politicians ranging from Hillary Clinton to John McCain. Nueva refuses to limit itself with any type of partisan affiliations.¹¹²

The organization ultimately wants to spend political and social capital in ways that holistically benefit Latino communities and individuals. Nueva understands that “the Latino community struggles simultaneously with both material and spiritual needs.”¹¹³ With that in mind, the institutional development catalyzed by the FBO assumes that material conditions of extreme want must be addressed before there can be a resolution of spiritual issues.¹¹⁴ Wilson contends that since it views its ministry as a business, “Nueva is a model of faith-based entrepreneurship.”¹¹⁵

To that end, Nueva engages in educational, health, and social issues. Tangible examples of these efforts include Laundromats, housing units (including one project that consisted of fourteen units and cost \$1.6 million that reflected a Spanish Revival-style architecture desired by the inhabitants), and the establishment of the Career Link Center (for job training and work readiness).¹¹⁶ In all these multifaceted efforts, Nueva sees itself as a ministry primarily of institutional development.

At a national level, Nueva has been a vocal advocate for comprehensive immigration reform. Cortés himself, in fact, testified in July of 2006 before the Senate Judiciary Committee against a bill that included uncompromising language regarding any individual who “assists, encourages, or induces a[n] [undocumented] person to reside in or remain in the United States.”¹¹⁷ Wilson notes that Cortés asserted that “such a provision amounted to the criminalization of all Hispanic clergy and non-Hispanic clergy aiding the undocumented.”¹¹⁸ In multiple ways, then, Nueva exceeds what some might assume an evangelical FBO would focus on.

Nueva and LPAC offer a glimpse of the breadth and range of Latino Protestant social engagement. Though outsiders might discern negligible differences in the theological foundations of the two FBOs, they actually manifest in starkly different orientations to community social service provision. While LPAC operates, as we might expect, from an evangelical orientation—a focus on the individual and relationships—we see that Nueva operates somewhat counterintuitively: still an evan-

gelical organization, but with a strong emphasis on institutions and structures.

NATIONAL PROFILE LATINO PROTESTANT ORGANIZATIONS

Local FBOs, though, are not the only forms of parachurch organizations that Latino Protestants have formed. The nonpartisan posture assumed by Nueva has also been adopted by the aforementioned National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference (NHCLC) and the National Latino Evangelical Coalition (NaLEC). As evidence, the NHCLC makes frequent use of a metaphor that they follow not the “donkey” (the Democratic Party) or the “elephant” (the Republican Party), but the lamb (a symbol of Jesus Christ). Led by the charismatic Reverend Samuel Rodriguez, the NHCLC claims to be “America’s largest Hispanic Christian Evangelical organization, representing more than 100 million evangelical Latinos who worship in more than 40,000 congregations throughout the United States.”¹¹⁹ In addition, the NHCLC reports that it represents seventy-five denominations and faith-based organizations.¹²⁰ The organization’s website declares the intention “to reconcile Evangelist Billy Graham’s message of salvation through Christ with Dr. Martin Luther King’s march of prophetic activism.”¹²¹ In other words, NHCLC positions itself as similar to traditional evangelicalism in the United States—but with a social edge that pushes harder for issues of reconciliation. Indeed, language from the organization’s promotional documents demonstrates a desire to exceed the traditional evangelical emphasis on gaining conversions to Christianity. The vision statement asserts that NHCLC seeks to “engage and reform the culture by engaging, empowering and equipping Hispanic Christ following born again men and women to emerge as key influencers in all spheres of society and the marketplace.” And in the event that outsiders disregard the organization as another predictably conservative organization, the NHCLC distances itself by noting their efforts to “enrich the narrative of American Evangelicalism by replacing the media exacerbated image of angry white evangelicals who oppose everything to a convicted yet compassionate multi-ethnic kingdom culture community committed to sharing truth with love.” Yet NHCLC remains a

decidedly evangelical organization when they refer to their emphases on rejecting “moral relativism,” “spiritual apathy,” and “cultural decadence” while “elevating biblical marriage” and striving to “champion life.”¹²² Such terms likely function as codes that nod to the more typical white evangelical social concerns.

As a burgeoning player in national politics, news organizations will frequently seek NHCLC’s opinion on issues and politicians as representative of evangelical Latinos. In fact, during the prologue to the 2016 U.S. presidential election, Rodriguez served as a prominent voice, representing evangelical Latinos and how they might respond to the candidates. A Reuters article quoted Rodriguez discussing Ted Cruz’s seeming lack of appeal for Latino voters: “At times, Senator Cruz finds it difficult to identify or engage with his Latino heritage.”¹²³ The article also described NHCLC as a “key conservative group” in the United States. As further evidence of the political clout of the NHCLC, it should be noted that President Barack Obama’s administration “regularly contacted” its leaders “about their Latino, Evangelical, and faith-friendly policies.”¹²⁴ Moreover, as the Obama administration regularly sought the counsel of Rodriguez, they have broadened the scope of the relationship to the point that they have also discussed religious liberty, marriage, immigration, and health care.¹²⁵

Though not as large as the NHCLC, the NaLEC, led by Gabriel Salguero, has also attained a rather high profile as well. The NaLEC has similarly positioned itself as a “nonpartisan voice” for evangelical Latinos and Latinas “committed to the common good and justice in the public sphere.” In fact, when Tony Campolo and Shane Claiborne (two progressive white evangelical leaders) offered their assessment of the 2016 presidential election in the pages of the *New York Times*, they insisted that the future of evangelical Christianity no longer resided with whites. Instead, they identified Salguero and the NaLEC by name and asserted that such leaders and organizations represented the future of evangelicalism in the United States.¹²⁶ Salguero has also served in an advisory role to President Obama and is regularly sought by journalists for quotes on policy issues. The NaLEC displayed some of the breadth of their policy concerns in early 2015 when Salguero announced the coalition’s plan to organize around issues of childhood poverty, to support body cameras as “a necessity” for all police, and to announce their opposition to the death penalty.¹²⁷ In the end, both the NaLEC and the

NHCLC stand as only two examples of the nascent civic and social engagement of Latino Protestants.

A STORY OF IMMIGRATION IN A LATINO PROTESTANT CHURCH

At a Latino Protestant church in Texas, we heard a testimonial from a prominent lay pastor, Antonio—a sixty-two-year-old of Salvadoran descent. He related how he had been riding in a car with a friend driving when police stopped the vehicle for tailgating. During the procedure, the officer eventually asked for documentation. Neither man having any, the officer arrested both Antonio and his friend and they would be transferred and detained at a large immigration center in Pearson, Texas, for a month. As Antonio related his story to the rest of the congregation, he described his stay at the detention center as “marvelous.” Through the filter of his religious tool kit, Antonio reframed an experience that sounded less than marvelous as miraculous and abounding with signs of God’s provision.

Antonio explained in detail being forced to take off all his clothes and remain undressed except for his undergarments for at least an hour in a cold cell. He recalled being able to hear men crying out loud in cells next to him. Once he received his uniform, he described to the congregation that his minimalist meals included one packet of crackers and a small juice—once a day. Ultimately, Antonio tells the congregation not to feel sorry for him: through his suffering he garnered the strength to comfort others and preach the gospel to them. More than that, Antonio expresses his gratitude that the church held enchilada sales to hire lawyers who crafted the paperwork that allowed him to be released. At multiple points, Antonio mentions that his lawyers indicated that his past criminal history made it likely that he would be deported. However, because of the character references and testimonials of the church leadership and pastors, Antonio received an atypical release. With a dramatic conclusion, Antonio announced that God had the last word on his detainment and decided to release him. Claps and shouts of “Hallelujah” and “Amen” fill the sanctuary as Antonio returns to his seat.

The church provided Antonio a platform to share his story and a receptive audience by which he could humanize his experience as an unauthorized migrant. Additionally, the religious framing allowed him to highlight the conditions of others at this center in a public way. While Antonio likely would not describe it as political, the message indeed carried policy implications. Indeed, in his role as a pastor of the church, he remained in communication with the families of other detainees. Moreover, he continues to do religiously motivated activist work with the detention center.

Antonio's case demonstrates how some Latino Protestant congregations function as sites of civic activism. Many of these churches do not have the luxury of choosing their "mission" or how they might consider socially engaging their community. Instead, as larger social issues like immigration embroil congregational attenders, the church has no choice but to become to some degree social activists. In these moments, though, church leaders and attenders use their faith to frame the situation and offer hope for future resolution.

In other instances, Latino Protestant churches have started to offer proactive programs related to immigration. A congregation our research team observed in Fresno, California, has initiated a number of programs to allow members to remain in the United States. The church understands serving the spiritual and economic needs of undocumented Latino immigrants as one of its primary ministries. On a personal level, the pastor writes letters of recommendation to be used for "deferred action programs" or to apply for local jobs. Collectively, the congregation raises money for farm laborers and undocumented families who struggle financially. In implementing these efforts, the church intentionally stays within the framework of U.S. laws. When our research team asked the pastor what boundaries he might push, for instance, to reunite a family, he resolutely responded, "I don't work against the laws of the U.S. This is my country, and I respect the law." We found in this and other congregations that though the church empathized with undocumented Latinos, they established limits to intervention.

In effect, for undocumented church members who experience the daily threat of deportation in Fresno, the leaders of the church affirm the law by telling members to "stay put" and not attempt to reenter the country illegally. In addition, the church encourages undocumented

members to obtain Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITIN) from the Internal Revenue Service so that they may declare their tax liability. The leadership describes the practice as a method for establishing a “good record” that will be rewarded when immigration policy reform eventually grants them legal status or citizenship.

THE MANY CONCERNS OF LATINO PROTESTANT CONGREGATIONS

The many attitudes, behaviors, and organizations of Latino Protestants undermine sweeping assessments.¹²⁸ The population growth and dispersal of Latino Protestants has contextually influenced how they choose to engage. For instance, while immigration policy may be at the forefront for many Latino Protestants, it certainly does not stand as the *only* issue for which they demonstrate concern. Context matters. And even within the same region, one church may feel pressed by gang issues among their youth while another attempts to cope with gentrification. Moreover, theology matters. Religious traditions *within* Latino Protestant populations have also led to various political attitudes and social activities. Scale matters as well: Latino Protestant engagement includes everything from highly localized congregations to national organizations that make news with press releases and have the ear of the president of the United States. In the end, the bulk of social science evidence clearly demonstrates a complexity in how Latino Protestants engage in community and public life that remains to be fully disentangled.