



## Summary of Findings From Surveys Taken at Pláticas NOVEMBER 2018

In 2018 as part of its 10th anniversary, the Latino Policy Forum initiated a series of conversations, or Pláticas, held around the state. These Pláticas were designed to elicit a broad cross-section of views and opinions of Illinois’ Latino community leaders. A total of 15 Pláticas were conducted and the findings reported here reflect the feedback of more than 375 community leaders surveyed.

### STATE OF ILLINOIS: OVERALL SENSE OF DIRECTION

As Graph 1 shows, most respondents, approximately two-thirds, believe that, in general, things in Illinois are headed in the wrong direction. Although, 21 percent of all respondents stated that they believe things in Illinois are headed in the right direction; and, 13 percent of respondents had no opinion.

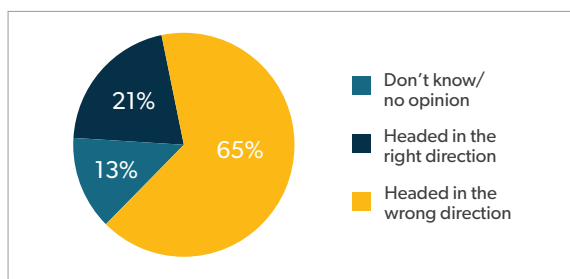
**One respondent who viewed the state as heading in the right direction noted that it was “...because the population is growing and thriving.”**

It should be noted that without Latino population growth, in Illinois the state would have had a negative population growth. Due to the 42 percent increase in Illinois’ Latino population between 2000 and 2016, the state’s total population grew by 3.3 percent.

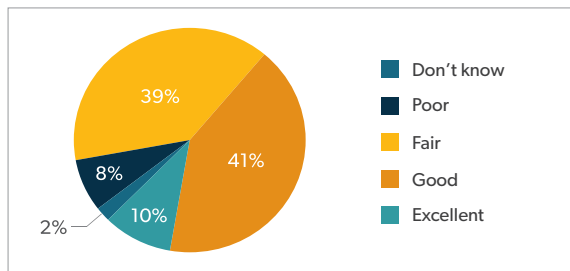
### PERSONAL ECONOMIC CONDITION

A large majority (80 percent) of the respondents do not see their own economic situation as dire or as stellar. Rather, they assess their own economic situation to be fair or good, with 10 percent of respondents evaluating their economic situation as excellent and 8 percent describing it as poor. These data are shown in Graph 2.

GRAPH 1 Aggregated total of responses by participants in the Pláticas to the question: **Generally speaking, in Illinois are things headed in the right or wrong direction?**



GRAPH 2 Aggregated total of responses by participants in the Pláticas to the question: **How would you rate your own economic situation?**



**PERSONAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

**Respondents noted that there was significant respect for community-based organizations and that taking time to help those organizations “... makes one feel proud.”**

Approximately 42 percent of respondents noted that monetary and/or volunteer support they personally provided over the last two years went to community based or non-profit organizations. What is interesting to note is that 24 percent of respondents stated that the organizations supported were Latino groups. Respondents also reported supporting churches (17 percent), political parties (11 percent), and, to a somewhat lesser degree (8 percent), Parent Teacher Associations or other school groups.

**When discussing civic engagement one respondent stated: “...for Latinos we are lacking a civic education, young people don’t know their political power and how to get involved.”**

**One of the reasons living in a community with other Latinos is a priority is summed up by a respondent who noted that being in an area with the presence of other Latinos produces “feelings of belonging and foods that remind one of culture.”**

In addition, 13 percent believe that Latinos are looking for communities/neighborhoods with access to community resources (e.g., grocery stores, community centers, churches/places of worship). At the same time, 15 percent thought access to quality schools and proximity to jobs were priorities.

**EDUCATION**

Seventy-eight percent of respondents believe that Illinois teachers are unprepared to teach students whose first language is not English, while only 9 percent believe teachers are well prepared to do so. These data are illustrated in Graph 4.

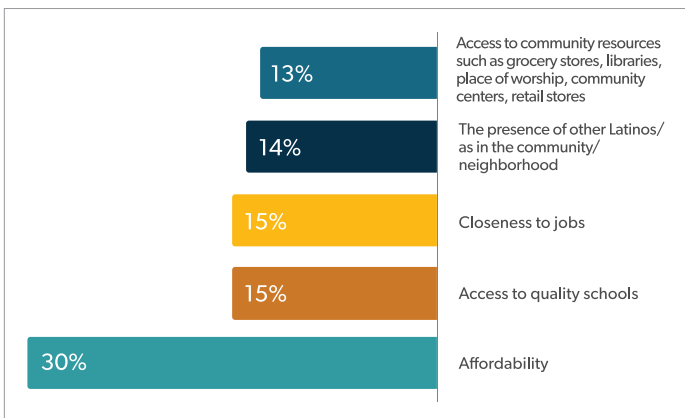
**HOUSING CONSIDERATIONS**

Respondents were asked to identify what they saw as the three most important considerations for Latino families in deciding where they want to live and Graph 3 illustrates these findings. They believe the priorities for Latino families include finding a community/neighborhood where there is access to affordable housing (20 percent), and a discernible presence of other Latinos (13 percent).

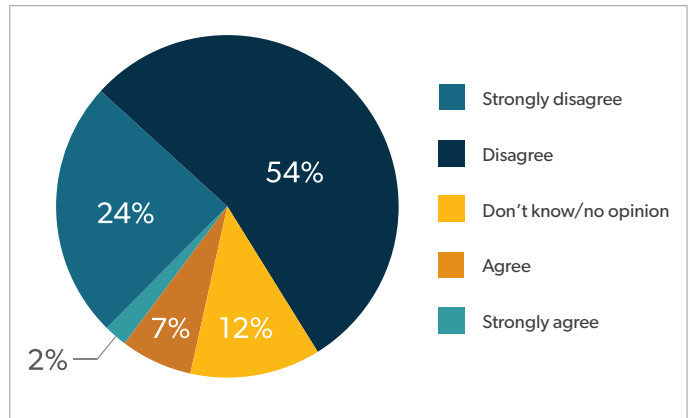
**One respondent, acknowledging there is a problem with having the requisite number of appropriately trained and educated teachers for students whose first language is not English, astutely noted that we should be looking at reforming higher education because that is “... where we train the teachers.”**

**While another respondent noted that “[c]ultural knowledge is just as important as language.”**

**GRAPH 3** Aggregated total of responses\* by participants in the Pláticas to the question: **From the list below, please choose what you believe are the 3 most important considerations for Latino families in deciding where to live.**



**GRAPH 4** Aggregated total of responses by participants in the Pláticas to the question: **In Illinois, teachers are well prepared to teach children whose first language is not English.**



**AN IMMIGRATION RELATED ISSUE**

As the data in Graph 5 document, the overwhelming majority (92 percent) of our respondents believe that the fear or threat of increased ICE enforcement is having deleterious consequences. These threats and fears are functioning as a barrier to Latinos seeking necessary services such as health care, education, and assistance from the police, respondents noted in discussions.

**One attendee who works at a health care organization recalled “seeing fear in the patients in health care especially around privacy of information in the system.”**

**A chilling account was provided by another Plática participant: “Parents had their children drop out of school because one of their cousins was taken by ICE.”**

**Even a rumor of ICE action has personal and economic consequences as one respondent reported: “Rumor of {the} raid went viral, kept people home, impacted business, business loss.”**

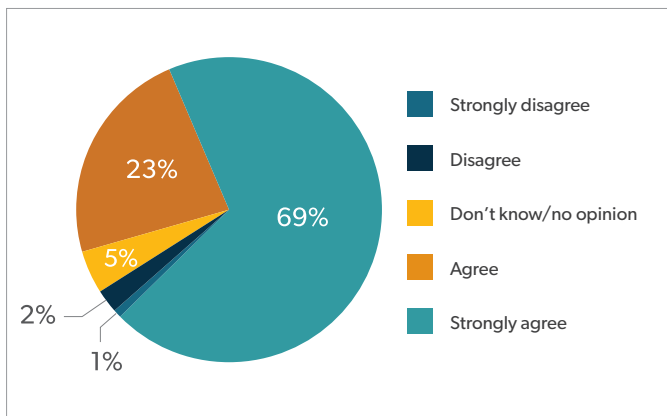
**Finally, an increase in ICE activities, according to one respondent, is influencing where people move. Rather than move to the suburbs “...more {Latinos} stay in the city because it is a sanctuary city.”**

**While another attendee suggested service agencies working in Latino communities should create “...a committee of staff who discuss and respond to immigration issues...”**

**STATE FOCUSED PRIORITIES THAT WILL STRENGTHEN BOTH THE LATINO COMMUNITY IN ILLINOIS AND THE STATE OF ILLINOIS**

It is clear from the responses that Plática participants strongly believe listening, cooperating, and working together is a necessary condition for solving the problems within the state generally and within the Latino community specifically.

**GRAPH 5** Aggregated total of responses by participants in the Pláticas to the question: **The fear or threat of increased ICE enforcement is inhibiting Latinos/as from seeking necessary services (e.g., health care, education, police assistance).**



One respondent succinctly articulated what others hinted at with their answers, namely: “[c]ommunication and listening to each other is a huge problem in the state.” And because of this problem real issues are not being tackled but when they are pointed out the real causes are not understood or given the necessary attention.

Plática attendees were asked two open-ended questions:

- 1 What is the most important issue facing the State of Illinois that you think the governor and state officials should address?**
- 2 What is the most important issue facing Latino/as in Illinois that you think the governor and state officials should address?**

There are significant convergences in the answers to these two questions. For those attending the Pláticas, this overlap can be seen as an indicator that respondents see an interdependent link between the success of the Latino community and the success of the state of Illinois.

A striking but not at all surprising finding from our respondents was that Latinos, like all previous immigrant groups, see education as essential to the success of their families and communities.

According to a majority of respondents, whether you are talking about the Latino community specifically or the state of Illinois generally, elected officials should prioritize ‘kitchen table’ issues (e.g., jobs, health care access and cost, pensions, housing, education – early childhood through college, taxes of all kinds). In addition, respondents thought there should be a focus on economic inequality, the integrity of government officials, policing, the opioid epidemic, gun violence, the state budget, poverty, as well as incentives for creating more businesses, and hence more jobs. Finally, respondents noted that encouraging and supporting civic engagement of Latinos as well as fair and equitable representation of Latinos in elected positions and government jobs were priorities that needed to be addressed. As one participant noted attention needs to be focused on the drawing of Congressional districts. Specifically, that person said:

**“Gerrymandering {is very important} because redistricting skews the data and community assessments.”**

The overlap of concerns and priorities between what the state generally is facing and what is confronting the Latino community specifically underscores that those who attended the Pláticas understand that what is good for Latinos is good for Illinois. In short, the respondents fully agreed the idea that the future of Illinois is tied to the future success of Latinos.

## DISCUSSION

One reaffirming finding from the Plática surveys was that the most important priorities for Illinois to address are the same priorities of the Latino Policy Forum. Specifically, and shown in Graph 6, the survey results strongly speak to the need of continuing to have state officials focus on bilingual education, early education, just immigration policies, and accessible affordable housing.

Respondents also pointed out the importance of the state focusing on redistricting, voting, and relationships with the African American community, all areas in which the Forum works.

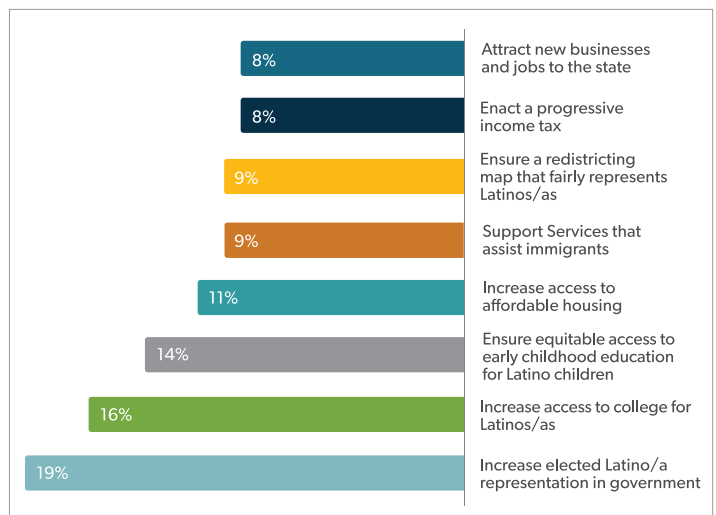
In addition to highlighting the continued importance of the areas in which the Forum works, the participants had a number of concerns they believed should be high on the state’s agenda including employment, health care, support for entrepreneurs, making higher education more accessible and affordable, as well as improving k-12 educational outcomes, greater Latino representation at all levels of state government, and violence.

As part of each Plática, attendees participated in discussions that examined three broad and wide-ranging questions.

The first question asked: ‘How do we know that success has come to the Latino community in Illinois? Answers to this question focused internally on what members of the Latino community need to do, such as reaching 70 percent in Latino voting in Illinois, having a unified agenda and embracing emerging leaders to embolden the community.

**Cutting to the chase, one respondent said: “We need more Latino representation in leaders and politicians. We need to begin to speak for ourselves. That is how change for our community will come.” While another respondent reiterated: “Latinos need to prepare and educate themselves on issues and get involved.”**

**GRAPH 6** Aggregated total of responses by participants in the Pláticas to the question: **There are several challenges facing state government. From the list below, please pick the 3 that you believe should be addressed in order to strengthen the Latino community within Illinois\*.**



\*Listed in this graph are the top 8 responses to the question.

The second question asked: ‘What is stopping us from being successful? The barriers to success are seen, primarily, as being imposed from outside of the community. The barriers most noted include the criminalization of the Latino community, ICE apprehensions, and the threats to DACA. Also noted in the answer to this question was anti-Blackness; in this context that seems to be an internal and an external created barrier.

In speaking to the external barriers to success, one respondent solidified one important and albeit horrific sense of how discrimination acts as a barrier to success:

**“Self-esteem – the image society projects of us is negative and portrays {us} as drug addicts and criminals. That effects how we view ourselves.”**

Answers to the first two questions strongly suggest that success and breaking down barriers requires assessment, self-reflection, holding others, especially the previous generation, accountable, and that actions by members of the Latino community as well as members of the larger society must be examined and challenged.

In contemplating what needs to be done and how the community can improve, a participant noted:

**“There was a movement which we lost. We were organizing. “...that has a lot to do with the lack of leadership.”**

They further ask:

**“...what are we doing for the young people? ...{we need to} challenge the generation before us.”**

One of the respondents offered a question that requires an answer and has implications for thinking about how to support and build on community strength:

**“People tell you to get out of the hoods, but what does mean for the neighborhoods?”**

And finally, respondents answered the question, ‘What strategies should we use to get there (be successful)? In answering this question respondents came full circle back to supporting education for Latinos. Specifically, they noted that there should be ongoing support for first generation college students. This priority supports the idea that success

and the future is tied to education and developing the next generation. The second strategy focused on a two prong approach to civic engagement: Supporting voter blocks and recognizing that more civic engagement at the community level is required.

**In summation, one participant adroitly noted: “The problem is that many my age [young people] do not vote because we do not believe in the system. It starts with education first. If I see my parents vote, which I did, then I am encouraged to vote and understand the system and find change within it. I have so many cousins my age who were born and raised here and don’t vote. I try to get them to come out but they don’t.... Black and Latinos need to come together for unity and build alliances, this is the only way we will become more. They pin us against each other and that’s why we do not see eye to eye. We have more in common than not.”**

## ADDENDUM

The Latino Policy Forum made the decision to expand and experiment with the venues holding/hosting the Pláticas. On October 17, 2018, the Forum hosted a webinar Plática. Any and all were invited to attend and participate. The information presented and questions posed to participants were identical to the information and questions given to participants in the non-internet based Pláticas.

The responses from the webinar Plática and the face-to-face Pláticas showed a similar pattern. A summary of the data from the webinar is as follows:

□ All respondents believed that things in the state of Illinois are headed in the wrong direction.

□ When asked what are the most important issues facing Latinos in Illinois that elected officials should focus on, respondents noted the issues to be removing President Trump from office, ensuring access to education, investing in early childhood education, and enacting a progressive income tax. When asked what are the most important issues facing everyone in Illinois that elected officials should focus on, respondents noted the issues to be poverty, income inequality, immigration reform, access to jobs that pay a living wage, food insecurity, and access to wealth building opportunities.

□ Turning to special policy priorities, when asked to identify the three policy priorities that elected officials in Illinois should address in order to strengthen Illinois’ Latino community, respondents answered as follows:

- ▷ Thirty percent think the state should ensure that Latino children have access to early childhood education.
- ▷ Twenty percent believe the state should increase access to affordable housing.
- ▷ Fifteen percent said a progressive income tax should be enacted.

- The following were also identified as priorities by at least 10 percent of respondents:

- Attract new businesses and jobs to the state
- Increase Latino representation in government
- Ensure a redistricting map that fairly represents Latinos
- Five percent of the webinar Plática participants thought increasing access to college for Latino/as should be a priority for the elected officials in state government.

□ All respondents believed that teachers in Illinois are unprepared to teach children whose first language is not English.

□ While 92 percent of respondents believed the fear or threat of ICE enforcement is inhibiting Latino/as from seeking services.

□ When respondents were asked: In the past two years where have you donated your time and/or money, 30 percent noted it was to Latino-based community organizations, 26 percent to community or non-profit organizations, and 17 percent gave to churches.

□ When it comes to the most important factors for Latino families in deciding where to live these respondents mirror the choices and priorities noted by respondents who participated in the face-to-face Pláticas. Both sets of respondents see Latinos deciding where to live based on securing affordable housing in a stable community with community resources and an obviously noticeable population of other Latino/as; in addition, it is thought that relatively easy access to jobs and schools are important considerations. In this context, Latino families are not different from other racial and ethnic groups.

▷ Twenty-four percent of respondents said the number one issue was affordability, while 23 percent said it was access to community resources such as grocery stores, community centers, libraries, places of worship and retail stores, 13 percent said it was access to transportation or access to quality schools while 10 percent chose closeness to jobs or the presence of other Latinos as important primary considerations.

□ Webinar participants were a bit more optimistic about their own economic well-being compared those in the face-to-face Pláticas. While no respondent thought their economic situation was excellent, neither did any note that it was poor. Rather, 63 percent thought their economic situation was fair and 38 percent thought it was good.

The Forum is committed to continuing finding new ways to engage as many members of the Latino community.

**ABOUT PODER**

PODER is a series of periodic briefs that offers Latino-specific policy analysis to developments in housing, immigration, education, and other sectors, offering recommendations to promote equity and access for the Latino community and, in turn, enhancing opportunity for our society as a whole.

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The organizations include:

- Aspira Inc. of Illinois
- Centro de Informacion
- Chicago Latinos in Philanthropy
- Erie Neighborhood House
- Family Focus
- The Illinois Association of Agencies and Community Organizations for Migrant Advocacy (IAACOMA)
- Illinois Latino Agenda and Latino Unity Day
- League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
- SGA Youth & Family Services

Spanish Community Center of Joliet

The Village of Hanover Park

The Forum’s Immigration Acuerdo, Housing Acuerdo and Education Acuerdo

The views expressed in this report are explicitly those of the Latino Policy Forum and should not be taken to represent the views of any of our contributors, volunteers, committee members, or their affiliated organizations.

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