

SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND LATINX VOTER TURNOUT:
A MIXED METHODS STUDY FROM TEXAS, USA

by

John Ponstingel, B.A., M.A.

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Committee Members:

Russell Weaver, Co-Chair

Jennifer Devine, Co-Chair

Yongmei Lu

John Frazier

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ABSTRACT

The Latinx population is the second largest ethnic group in the United States. In Texas, nearly two-fifths of the population is classified as Latinx, and Latinx persons make up over 28 percent of the state's eligible voters. Yet, both in Texas and nationwide, Latinx voter turnout is consistently and disproportionately low compared to other ethnic groups. Consequently, Latinx persons are often viewed, collectively, as a "sleeping giant" in American politics – the group's weighty presence in the population has yet to make its full imprint on the ballot box. This dissertation first unpacks the borderland histories and political institutions that have contributed to Latinx voter disenfranchisement today. Second, it demonstrates that the contemporary presence of social institutions such as, community and civil rights organizations, positively influences Latinx electoral engagement, yet argues the impact of social institutions on voter turnout is understudied. Third, then, this research demonstrates how social institutions influence Latinx voters to become politically active in Texas, as well as identifies specific types of institutions and their activities that increase political participation. Finally, I argue that elections are a form of commons that require collective governance mechanisms to ensure a democratic and egalitarian electoral process for all American voters. These findings have important implications for policy and research, as they suggest potential leverage points for increasing Latinx, and by extension minority turnout, in future elections.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1: SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND VOTING BEHAVIOR

The Latinx population is the second largest Diaspora in the U.S., behind White persons, and has continued to grow nationwide by about two percent every year since 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).¹ In Texas, the Latinx population constitutes slightly over 40 percent (~11.3 million) of the state's total population (~28 million) (U.S. Census 2019 5-Year ACS). Despite the significant proportion of Latinx persons in Texas, voter turnout rates among Texas's Latinx population lag significantly behind other groups, especially Whites (Ura and Murphy 2017). For example, since 2004, Latinx voter turnout in Texas has hovered around just 40 percent in presidential elections, compared to consistent rates around (and in most cases, above) 60 percent for non-Hispanic White and non-Hispanic African American persons nation- and state-wide (Ura and Murphy 2017). In (dis)proportional terms, during the 2016 presidential election, despite accounting for over 28 percent of eligible voters, Latinx Texans made up only around 20 percent of ballots cast in their home state (Ura and Murphy 2017). At the time of this writing (January 2021), data for the 2020 presidential election are not available, but analysis from 2016 (chapter 4) provide further evidence of low Latinx turnout in Texas.

On this backdrop of low Latinx voter turnout vis-à-vis growing population numbers, and growing numbers of seemingly eligible voters, an important research question emerges to address this paradox of comparatively lower Latinx voter turnout: *what factors influence Latinx voting behavior?* For decades, electoral geographers and

¹ Latinx is a gender-neutral term used to encompass all persons of Latin origin (de Onis 2017).

scholars from various allied disciplines have asked a version of this question for voters in general (Johnston 1974; Gimpel et al. 2004) and for Latinx voters in particular (Arvizu and Garcia 2000; Shaw, de la Garza, and Lee 2000; Barreto 2011). Although evidence produced in these geographic (Leib and Quinton 2011) investigations does not unanimously support certain hypotheses over others, more often than not demographic and socioeconomic variables are found to be significant predictors of voter turnout. Specifically, compositional and contextual factors such as education, income, and homeownership are observed to vary systematically with voting behavior.

One consideration that tends to be overlooked in these analyses is the role of social institutions and their relationships to Latinx political participation (Cancela and Geys 2016). Social institutions are vehicles that support common cultural goals and objectives, perpetuate culture and ideas, and promote and/or protect the interest of one or more groups by shaping the life experiences of people in places (Frazier et al 2016). Crucially, whereas the roles and relevance of social institutions in influencing individual decision-making behaviors has been a question of longstanding interest to ethnic geographers (Frazier et al. 2016; Henry and Frazier 2017) and social scientists from other fields (e.g., Ostrom 1990), the link between institutions and patterns of voter turnout by race is underexplored in geography literature. In this dissertation, I aim to begin filling this gap. Informed by prior scholarship on the vital, yet poorly understood, role that social institutions play in influencing behavior for members of historically disempowered groups (Frisco et al 2004; Herron and Smith 2012), this dissertation synthesizes leading perspectives on group voting behavior (Barreto and Segura 2014) and social institutions (Frazier et al 2016; Henry and Frazier 2017) to examine the links between Latinx voter

turnout and participation in civic and social organizations. Leveraging the built-in diversity in these institutions (e.g., their structures, attributes, aims, and activities) and their influences on voter turnout, the dissertation draws on Ostrom's (1990) Nobel Prize-winning observations about what makes institutions effective at coordinating individual behavior to generate new knowledge about how and why certain social organizations can be the engines of overcoming an enduring inequality in the American electoral system and leverage points to achieve social justice.

1.2: RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Toward the ends noted above, this dissertation has four main objectives. First, it aims to develop a partial historical geography of political participation in Texas. Drawing on archival materials and existing literature, I identify examples of social institutions that were designed and implemented – in spatially and socially targeted ways – to demobilize and disenfranchise voters of color, especially Latinx voters, in Texas. This historical geographic exercise demonstrates how specific social institutions of the past and present emerged from within inequitable state and national electoral systems to negatively affect Latinx voter turnout. In other words, social institutions are at least partially responsible for historical and current turnout gaps between Latinx voters and voters from other ethnicities.

Second, I use secondary data and statistical analysis to test for an empirical association between contemporary Latinx voting behavior and the presence and density of selected social institutions in counties in the state of Texas. Specifically, following the spatial-analytic tradition in electoral geography (Leib and Quinton 2011), I generate

estimates for Latinx and White turnout, by county, throughout Texas for the 2016 U.S. Presidential election.² The results document and reaffirm the existence of a wide turnout gap between these two ethnic groups.

The third objective is to simultaneously examine and clarify (1) the extent to which established socioeconomic and demographic predictors of political participation differ for Latinx and White Americans, and (2) the association between voter turnout and the presence and density of certain social institutions, after controlling for those established predictors. Weighted regression models suggest that political participation for the two groups is influenced by different factors. Most importantly, the presence and density of selected social institutions is a strong, positive predictor of Latinx turnout, but not White turnout. In other words, social institutions may “matter” more for prospective Latinx voters compared to prospective White voters.

Finally, the dissertation seeks to identify specific design principles that may impact the efficacy of institutions with respect to influencing turnout among Latinx participants and members. To evaluate this objective, I relied on the set of institutions found to “matter” to voter turnout in my statistical analyses. Namely, I performed outreach to leaders at as many of those institutions as possible, requesting to interview representatives or leaders from those institutions. Ultimately, I collected primary data through interviews with key informants at 30 different institutions. Themes that emerged from those interviews pointed to features of institutional structure and design that tend to

² This dissertation and its research plan were designed and executed prior to the 2020 U.S. Presidential election. As of this writing, full data for the 2020 Presidential Election are still not available. Moreover, as it was conducted within a global pandemic, the 2020 Presidential Election saw much greater use of absentee (mail-in) balloting than at any time in modern history. For that reason, it may not adequately capture voter activity during “normal” (i.e., non-pandemic) times.

facilitate political engagement among members.

1.3: SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Taken together, the results from my (1) historical geographic research on voter participation in Texas (Ch. 3), (2) empirical analysis of voter turnout in the most recent Presidential Election (Ch. 4),³ and (3) interviews with key informants at 30 different social institutions (Ch. 5), sketch the outlines of the following narrative:

- Exclusionary social institutions have sought to disempower and disenfranchise non-White, and especially Latinx, voters in Texas since the state joined the union;
- Historical precedents of politically exclusive institutions (e.g., poll taxes, English language requirements, etc.) prefigured current institutional forms (e.g., strict ID requirements, gerrymandering, spatially mismatched polling stations) for lessening participation among Latinx voters;
- The cumulative effect of past and present institutional barriers to political participation for Latinx voters has produced a wide gap in voter turnout between Latinx and White voters in Texas;
- In light of the large degree of under-participation of Latinx voters, place-based, ethnic-serving, grassroots social institutions have emerged in Texas to create spaces for political engagement and encourage voter participation;
- However, these small-scale, often locally rooted institutions are embedded in state and national electoral systems that have been designed to reinforce existing power structures, by creating opportunities for power holders to set and administer

³ See footnote 2

electoral rules in ways that frequently marginalize relatively disempowered voting blocs (through, for example, drawing unfair electoral district boundaries, scaling back on convenience voting, and so forth);

- For this reason, while place-based social institutions appear to be a key leverage point for narrowing the turnout gap between Latinx and White voters in – and potentially beyond – Texas, the gap is unlikely to close without major structural reforms to state and national electoral systems in the United States.

To the extent that my findings support the preceding narrative, the key contribution of this dissertation is arguably that it suggests voter turnout is not simply a function of individual characteristics and socioeconomic status (e.g., education, income, etc.), as is often argued (Cancela and Geys 2016). Rather, especially for Latinx voters in Texas, turnout depends meaningfully and additionally on the interplay of suppressive territorial electoral rules and institutions, and supportive place-based social institutions. These findings have important implications for policies and practices from get-out-the-vote (GOTV) campaigns to large-scale structural reform in U.S. state and national elections. That said, I am a white-male and outsider from the institutions I have investigated in this research. I am not a native Spanish speaker, and therefore, rely heavily on predominantly Latinx institutional leaders for information regarding governance, activities and observations on participant discussions.

1.4: STRUCTURE OF DISSERTATION

The remainder of this dissertation contains six chapters. Chapter 2 reviews and synthesizes key literature on social institutions and political participation. These exercises

inform the theoretical framework and research plan of this dissertation. Chapter 3 demonstrates that key historical moments and institutions intersect in ways that continue to shape Latinx voter turnout in Texas today. Specifically, five historical institutions contribute to lower Latinx political participation: 1) *De jure* Voter Disenfranchisement (1845-1902); 2) Latinx Land Ownership and Dispossession (1809-1856); 3) Boss Rule and Voting Blocs (1848-1930); 4) The Texas Rangers and Juan Crow (1910-1965); and 5) Latinx Voter Advocacy and the Voting Rights Act (1965-2020).

Chapter 4 examines systematic differences of institutional density and voter turnout for Latinx and white Americans at the county level in Texas, and controls for popular socioeconomic covariates by using statistical techniques such as King's Ecological Inference (King 1997) and weighted least squares regression (see also Ponstingel and Weaver, 2021). Chapter 5 uses qualitative data obtained via key informant interviews to examine institutional characteristics, actions, and structures of 30 different institutions in order to: a) assess institutional efficacy in accordance with Ostrom's four relevant principles for this study (See table 1 in Chapter 2), and b) examine the impacts that these principles have on voter turnout. This project received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Texas State University (IRB Number 6982). As part of the data collection process—and to align with my qualitative data analysis—institutional leaders in this research were asked questions about institutional governance characteristics, partisanship, and degree of involvement in voting.

Chapter 6 argues that elections are a commons within a larger commons, that is, democracy. Reconceptualizing elections as a commons can facilitate a critical analysis of “conventional” notions of political participation, elections law, and political campaigns

and funding. Such an analysis has the potential to identify policy implications for strengthening a more participatory and active form of democracy in the United States. Finally, Chapter 7 is a conclusion that summarizes the overall findings from the research and provides direction for potential policy implications and future research.

1.5: STATEMENT ON THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 Pandemic has dramatically limited the scope of my research. The height of the pandemic struck at the same time I was collecting data. Due to fears of how contagious the virus is, most telephone interview requests were never answered because the vast majority of leaders were teleworking from home. This resulted in drawing conclusions from small sample size of 30 interviewees representing 30 different institutions. Further, surveys sent out to institutional participants remained largely unanswered, which further limited my ability to examine intra- and inter-group differences among institutional participants. Originally, this research proposed to conduct surveys and interviews and examine them in tandem to better understand the role social institutions play in voter turnout and political participation in Texas.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND

2.1: LATINX VOTER AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

2.1.1: Determinants of Voting Behavior

Since the 1970s, numerous theoretical developments have been put forward to explain minority voting behavior, including: 1) Socioeconomic status theory (Wrinkle et al. 1996; Conway, 1991; Kenny, 1992; Leighley 1990; Leighley and Nager 1992a, 1992b; Nie et al. 1988; Verba et al. 1993, 1995. 2) Psychological resource theory (Abramson and Alrich 1982; Alrich 1983; Conway, 1991; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993), 3) Group identity theory (Michelson 2003; Miller et al, 1981; Wilcox and Gomez 1990; Lien, 1994; Uhlaner, Cian, and Kiewet, 1989), 4) Group conflict theory (Tajfel and Turney, 1986; Sherif, 1965; Giles and Hertz, 1994) and, 5) Social connectedness theory (Hritzuk, N. Park, D. 2000; Putnam, 1995; Teixeira, 1992; Uslaner, 1995). For a relatively comprehensive and comparative overview of these contributions, see Vedlitz and Leighley (1999). Below, I briefly summarize the main features of these contributions in order to illustrate how my work contributes to these literatures in two important ways: 1) Advancing understandings about the role of social institutions in voter turnout, and 2) supporting or discrediting conventional theories of voter turnout.

2.1.2: Socioeconomic Status Theory

Socioeconomic status (SES) theory is perhaps the most common means for explaining political participation—as such, it acts as something of a foundation on which other theories emerge (Wrinkle et al.1996). The central hypothesis of the theory is that

SES is a (or *the*) leading predictor of voting behavior (Conway 1991). Because many SES variables are capable of being measured, countless empirical studies have supported this hypothesis (Wrinkle, et al 1996). Studies show that persons with higher levels of education, income, and occupational status tend to vote, contact, organize and campaign more than do those with low SES (Conway 1991; Kenny 1992; Leighley 1990; Leighley and Nager 1992; Avery 2015; Franko et al. 2016). However, important research has shown that SES indicators might not be *the* leading predictors of political participation for all racial and ethnic groups. For instance, Lein (1994) found that education is significantly related to participation for Mexican-Americans, but not for Asian Americans. Additionally, Harris (1994), Tate (1991), and Dawson et al. (1990) found that education and income are only occasionally related to participation among African Americans. These same socioeconomic variables have been found to be statistically significant indicators of Latinx political participation in some, but not all, cases (see Cancela and Geys 2016).

For the Latinx population, researchers have either focused on one Latinx subgroup (Barreto 2014), or the largest three in the U.S. (i.e. Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans and Cubans) (Garcia-Rios and Barreto 2016). Studies that have focused on the three largest groups have discovered important distinctions among them, concluding that electoral and political participation increases when socioeconomic status is high—but also that participation significantly increases when Latinx are affiliated with at least one institution (Hritzuk, N. Park, D. 2000; Diaz 1996). However, the latter is only true for Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans, but not Cubans, whom are deemed exceptions because of this group’s historically high socioeconomic status and political interests

(Frazier et al 2016; Garcia-Rios and Barreto 2016). I argue that SES theory is weaker than other theories, including participation in social institutions, regarding Latinx voter turnout. As such, psychological resources, such as, identity and political trust, have been discovered to play an important role in political participation among Latinx persons even after controlling for SES variables (Frisco, et al. 2004).

2.1.3: Psychological Resources Theory

Psychological resource theory was developed due to the inability of SES theory to account for a trend that has developed over the past four decades in the United States: namely, the overall level of voter turnout in the U.S. has decreased, while overall socioeconomic status has increased (Brody, 1978). Many proposed solutions to this paradox have emphasized the importance of an individual's psychological orientations, such as political efficacy, political interest, civic duty and trust in government (Abramson and Aldrich 1982; Aldrich 1983; Conway 1991; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). The most consistently significant predictors of political participation from this vantage point relate to political efficacy (trust in government) and electoral politics (candidate preference).

Both political efficacy and electoral politics are measured via qualitative methods such as, surveys and polls. When these psychological indicators have been applied in studies of minority groups (e.g., African Americans and Mexican-Americans), they tend to correlate directly with political activity (Dawson et al. 1990). Researchers studying African-American electoral participation, for example, most often include measures of an individual's identification with other African Americans as a psychological factor enhancing participation and exclude general orientations towards the political system (i.e.

political interest of efficacy). One might interpret this modeling strategy as an assumption that the focused, group-oriented attitudes are more relevant to Black participation than the general orientations typically employed in analyses of Anglo participation (Leighly and Vedlitz, 1999); however, Leighly and Vedlitz's (1999) analytical strategy can arguably be applied to see if the findings hold for other minority groups. While this dissertation is not aimed at studying links between group identity and political participation per se, by examining the association that membership in ethnic-serving institutions has with voting behavior, the dissertation provides insights into whether similar findings hold for Latinx voters (see below).

2.1.4: Social Connectedness Theory

Sociologists, social psychologists, and political scientists have theorized about the nature of an individual's relationship to the larger society and the sometimes negative, isolating consequences of life for individuals as they struggle to make their way in mass society (Wrinkle et al 1996). These discussions have included concepts such as anomie, alienation, trust, estrangement, prejudice, and apathy (Allport 1954; Durkheim 1964; Lane 1954; Pettigrew 1964; Reisman 1956). Teixeira (1992), Uslaner (1995), and Putnam (1995) argue that the decline in political participation over the past 20 years is directly related to the lack of connectedness between individual citizens and the larger political and social community. These scholars employ structural and behavioral factors such as organizational involvement, church attendance, marital status and home ownership as indicators of social connectedness in contrast to the earlier scholars from the 1950s and 1960s, who emphasized the psychological aspects of social connectedness.

Studies that have focused on individual ethnic groups found that social connectedness is quite relevant to political activity. For example, Tate (1991) found that home ownership is not associated with voting in presidential primary elections, and that Blacks who belong to a Black organization or a politicized church are more likely to vote in presidential primary elections. Combined, these findings suggest that ethnicity-based institutional resources may be more important for minorities than attachment to a larger community (Stolle and Rochon 1998). This finding coincides with the consistent findings that the Black church has played a critical role in mobilizing Black political participation (Harris, 1994; Vedlitz et al. 1980; Verba et al. 1993). Similarly, voluntary associations have been identified as important resources for mobilizing both African-American and Latinx turnout at the local level by providing candidate information and transportation to polling locations (Barker and Jones, 1994; Carton, 1984; Diaz, 1996; Hero 1992, Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Barreto et al 2011). Examining specific programs/activities of institutions and how such agendas shape and influence political participation—whether physically (transportation), individually (civic duty/candidate information), or collectively (group conflict/consciousness/civic duty)—are valuable contributions to both theory and practice (File 2018), insofar as social institutions may serve as leverage points for closing the substantial turnout gap between Latinx persons and other ethnic voting blocs (Barreto et al 2011). From the purview of social connectedness theory, the implication is arguably that social institutions might influence collective political participation due to their ability to efficaciously perpetuate group identity and solidarity among members. My work contributes to this theory by examining the specific activities that take place within institutions that influence voter turnout such

as, political dialogue and discussions among participants, even when dialogues are informal.

2.1.5: Group Identity/Consciousness Theory

Doubling down on the preceding theme, research in sociology, psychology and political science has also demonstrated the importance of group identity as a factor influencing individual political behavior (de la Garza et al 1992; Gurin, Miller, and Gurin 1980; Hardy-Fanta 1993; Jones and Vedlitz 1994; Shingles 1981; Tate 1991). The group consciousness theory of political participation is arguably more relevant as an explanation of minority behavior than of Anglo behavior (de la Garza et al 1992). Group consciousness has its intellectual origins in the early studies of differences in the participation levels of Black and Whites, which posited that Blacks participate more than Whites, controlling for their SES, because of their heightened level of consciousness (Leighley and Vedlitz, 1999). Similar to electoral influence theory (Fraga 2018), consciousness is defined as being aware of: 1) group size within a jurisdiction and 2) the potential electoral power that may result from such group size awareness.

More generally, the literature suggests that group consciousness is associated with higher participation for African Americans, women, and the working class (Miller et al, 1981). The concept of group consciousness relates to the extent of structural and social/psychological integration into the American system (Miller et al., 1981). Miller and colleagues (1981) found that these three conceptual components, when considered as a whole, were particularly useful to explain participation in a number of electoral and nonelectoral activities. However, Wilcox and Gomez's (1990) attempted to replicate

Miller and colleagues' (1981) claim regarding the multi-dimensional nature of group *consciousness* and its relationship to participation proved unsuccessful. Instead, Wilcox and Gomez (1990) found that group *identity* was influential on participation. Uncertain is whether the differences between the two sets of findings reflect sampling differences, question-wording differences, or changes in the nature of the group system since the time of the Miller team's study (Leighley and Vedlitz, 1999). Nonetheless, group identity is not consistently related to participation when estimated separately for other ethnic groups (Lien 1994; Uhlaner, Cain and Kiewiet 1989). My work contributes to social consciousness theory and finds that jurisdictional group size is a factor that influences voter turnout (Fraga 2018).

2.1.6: Group Conflict Theory

Group conflict theory developed within several social science disciplines and emphasizes that individuals, and the groups with which they identify, have historical and present-day relationships with other groups that influence voting behavior of these groups (Tajfel and Turner 1986). These intergroup interactions may be or may have been conflictual, either over the division of scarce resources, the application of political power, racism, or fundamental cultural values like religion (Sherif 1965). Several themes are central to group conflict theory, particularly competition for resources, in-group identification and out-group hostility—all of which are reflected in individuals' social, political, and economic behaviors (Leighley and Vedlitz, 1999).

Corresponding to group conflict theory is Blalock's (1967) argument that "an increase in minority percentage should result in an increase in discrimination both

because of heightened perceived competition and increased power threat” (Blalock 1967, 154). Regarding political behavior, Key (1949) observed this sort of “racial threat” dynamic in his book *Southern Politics*. Namely, Key (1949) found that as the size of the Black population increased in a given location, so did fear within the White community. These fears consisted of increasing Black political power (Key 1949), which in turn translated into other arenas such as, housing markets and jobs (Frazier et al 2016). White voters, in turn, became more likely to vote for ballot alternatives that went against the preferences of the Black community. Similarly, Matthews and Prothro (1966) found that as the proportion of Blacks in Southern counties increased, White support of Black’s right to vote decreased. Blalock’s (1967) power threat hypothesis has been adopted and confirmed in several studies by Giles and others (Giles and Evans, 1985, 1986; Giles and Hertz, 1994; Giles and Buckner 1993, 1996; Voss 1996a, 1996b).

While power theory has yielded important insights, it is limited in three respects. First, it applies group conflict theory as a narrow set of phenomena, specifically, *political* preferences between whites and Blacks. Second, it suggests that group conflict theory is relevant only for explaining dominant-group behavior (by contrast, social psychologists use this model to explain subordinate group behavior as well). Finally, the evidence relies heavily on aggregate level data, which introduces the possibility of committing an ecological fallacy when explaining individual-level behavior as conditioned by racial context (Leighley and Vidlitz, 1999).

2.1.7: Electoral Influence Theory

Electoral influence theory posits that voter turnout rates are higher when their

votes “matter”. In other words, when *groups* of voters, whether from the same ethnic group or not, perceive their influence in elections to be powerful, they turn out at higher rates, even after controlling for some of the socioeconomic variables mentioned above Fraga (2018). The theory of electoral influence indicates that when politicians engage the minority electorate, the power of the vote can win. However, demography is not destiny. It is up to politicians, parties, and citizens themselves to mobilize the potential of all Americans. Thus, electoral influence theory may be illustrated in conjunction with other factors such as, other theories of turnout or the role of social institutions. My work contributes to electoral influence theory, by adding a supportive evidence that activities within social institutions contribute to participant perception of electoral power.

2.1.8: How Theories of Turnout are Related to Social Institutions

All of the theories described above engage with social institutions in some way, and they implicate social institutions as an important variable in political participation. At the same time, these theories have tended to be developed for the overall population of voters and, where scholars have sought to identify differences in racial or ethnic group voting behavior, they have treated groups somewhat monolithically. On that note, whereas institutions are implicated in several theories of Latinx electoral participation (e.g., social connectedness theory implicates a relationship between presence in a social network and voting behavior), comparatively direct engagements with the intersection of social institutions and Latinx voting behavior feature more rarely in the literature as noted by Stolle and Rochon (1998). It is possible, therefore, that a better understanding of the complex relationship between institutional presence, membership, and political participation can provide a valuable new lens through which to view the seemingly low

voter turnout rates among Latinxs in the U.S. In order to realize that promise, however, it is necessary to define what a social institution is. Unfortunately, doing so is not a straightforward task, insofar as definitions of institutions vary from discipline-to-discipline—most readily because institutions are different in form and function and can vary from place to place (Frazier et al. 2016; Ostrom 1990). As such, the next subsection briefly explores definitions and theories of social institutions from relevant disciplines.

2.2: SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

2.2.1: What Are Social Institutions?

Social institutions maintain and perpetuate culture and ideas (Frazier et al. 2016). They promote and/or protect the interest of one or more groups because they play instrumental roles in life experiences and also the human geography of places. Scholars, such as Ogbu (1974), have coined the term “community forces”, which supports the idea of institutional formation. Community forces are the products of sociocultural adaptation embedded in an ethnic community, which entails specific beliefs, interpretations, and coping strategies that an ethnic group adopts in response to often hostile treatment (Ogbu 1974; Ogbu and Simon 1998). Frazier et al. (2016) and Henry and Frazier (2017) argue, further, that institutions govern life experiences for an individual’s total life-cycle, and there are many different types of institutions: 1) *educational*- our schools and their experiences; 2) *governmental*- branches of government are institutions, creating policies and administering cultural affairs and the military; 3) *political*- at all scales have shaped the right and privileges of all Americans including subcultures shaping some of the geographic settlement patterns and the political power of particular groups; 4) *market*-

based- lending and real estate bodies, with government assistance, have played important roles in shaping the racial distribution of metropolitan America; and 5) *socio-cultural-* includes institutions that function to sustain and support American ethnic groups and their rights. Further, institutions may be ideologically based, reflecting the beliefs of the hosts and/or minority cultures they represent. Social institutions help to create policy, which means a well-defined plan that refers to a course of action based on objectives to create desired outcomes (Frazier et al. 2016).

While the preceding definitions and examples showcase the diversity in institutions, Elinor Ostrom—arguably the leading authority on institutional analysis—explicated the common thread that runs through all social institutions. Namely, institutions are sets of working rules that are used to determine who is eligible to make decisions in some arena, what actions are allowed or constrained, what aggregation rules will be used, what procedures will be followed, what information must or must not be provided, and what payoffs will be assigned to individuals dependent on their actions (Ostrom 1986). Working rules are those actually used, monitored and enforced when individuals make choices about the actions they will take (Ostrom 1990). Further, these rules may impact both objective efficacy and forms of institutional participation.

2.2.2: Theories of Social Institutions Relevant to Ethnic Voting Behavior

Related to the concept of social institutions is Zhou and Kim's (2006) idea of ethnic social structures. These phenomena refer to common cultural heritages, along with given sets of shared values, beliefs, behavioral standards and coping strategies with which group members are generally identified. These include social institutions and

interpersonal networks that have been established, operated, and maintained by group members. Sometimes, members of a specific ethnic group, for example, Skop's [2012] work on Asian Indians in Phoenix, Arizona, have different ideologies than other group members, which can cause isolation, non-participation, and resentment among other co-ethnics (Skop 2012). This phenomenon can be classified as regionalism (strong topophilia among immigrants from the same country (i.e. India) but different regional attachments (South/North). Regionalism is not bound by the abstract, but remains visible in institutions, particularly in their material expressions (Skop 2012; Oberle 2015; Frazier et al 2016), governance structures (Ostrom 1990), and power relations (Massey 1991).

Some sociologists argue that economic institutions only arise out of direct need and are not formed automatically and inevitably by external circumstances (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Other sociologists, including Emile Durkheim (Durkheim 1973) and Max Weber (2019), regard economic action as a subordinate and special case of social action. There are two main accounts of why scholars have come to these conclusions: culturalism and functionalism (Granovetter, 1992). Culturalists argue that economic institutions arise from cultural beliefs that predispose a group to the observed behavior. Functionalists point to the characteristics of institutions as the reason why they must be present.

Regardless of how institutions originate, the accessibility to social institutions becomes shaped by the weak and strong ties within an ethnic group (Granovetter, 1973). Acquaintances, which are considered to be weak ties, are less likely to be socially involved with one another than friends bound by strong ties. Therefore, the set of people made up by an individual and their acquaintances comprise of a low-density network.

Meanwhile, the set of people made up by an individual and their close friends will be densely connected (strong ties) (Granovetter, 1973). Ties are also important for promoting or prohibiting institutional interaction. Crucially, such ties often manifest in space. Massey's (1991) concept of *place* is that it is a series of connections and relationships. That is, every *place* can be conceptualized as a series of connections and power relations (Massey 1991). However, not all relationships and connections are not equally important, and the historical connections (power relations) that have forged landscapes and significantly impacted society should be examined in order to understand present day manifestations. These ideas feature prominently throughout this dissertation, as discussed in more detail below.

To examine the interaction of local institutions and ethnicity in a particular place, the concept of institutional completeness developed by Raymond Breton (1964) is particularly informative. Breton defined institutional completeness as complex neighborhood-based formal institutions that sufficiently satisfy all the needs required of members, and measured the degree of social organization in an ethnic community on a continuum. Breton concluded that the presence of a wide range of institutions in an ethnic community has a powerful effect on keeping group members' social relations within ethnic boundaries and minimizing out-group contacts. He also discovered that the positive effect of institutional completeness on ethnic solidarity was irrelevant to a group's collective tendency toward mainstream or ethnic culture. Similar to other classical assimilation theorists, Breton summarized that the ethnic community and institutions would decline progressively, assuming low levels of international migration, because even with a high degree of institutional completeness, it would not block

members' eventual integration into the host society (Breton 1964; Zhou 2009).

2.2.3: Examining Institutional Governance and Efficacy

Institutions are diverse in their aims, activities, and organizational structures. Therefore, not all social institutions will produce gains in Latinx voter turnout. This dissertation examines that diversity—both in terms of institutional attributes and inter-institution relationships—to address and understand: 1) inequalities in Latinx voter turnout, and 2) how the governing characteristics of institutions can impact both objective efficacy and drive Latinx voter turnout. Elinor Ostrom's Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework is an instructive tool for this purpose, because it is a systematic method for organizing policy analysis activities that is compatible with a wide variety of more specialized analytic techniques used in the physical and social sciences (Polski and Ostrom 1994). The IAD framework provides a means to synthesize the work of multiple participants, including those who are directly involved in the policy situation (leadership), and helps scholars comprehend complex social situations and break them down into manageable sets of practical activities. While the IAD framework was originally developed to examine policy, it has since been adapted to study a variety of other fields such as, service-, common-pool-resource-, and government institutions (Polski and Ostrom 1994). Figure 1 below provides a conceptual model of the original IAD framework created by Ostrom, Gardner, and Walker (1994, 37), followed by a brief explanation of the elements contained in the figure.

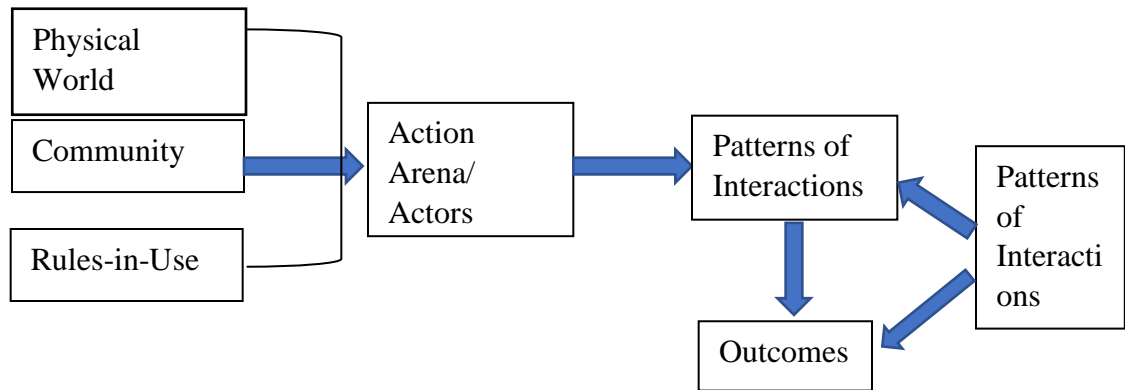


Figure 1: The Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) Framework

2.2.4: A Brief Explanation of the IAD Framework and Ostrom's Work

After defining a policy question or problem, the focus of the analysis is on behavior in the action arena, which includes the action situation, and individuals and groups who are routinely involved in the situation (actors). One objective of the analysis is to identify factors in each of three areas that influence the behavior of individuals and groups in the policy situation: physical and material conditions, community attributes (culture), and rules-in-use. Two other objectives are to identify and evaluate patterns of interaction that are logically associated with behavior in the action arena, and outcomes from these interactions (Polski and Ostrom 1994).

Prior to crafting IAD framework, Ostrom (1990) specified eight core design principles that are exhibited by long-standing, “successful” community-based resource institutions. Ostrom’s (1990) principles have since been generalized to examine institutional governance in an array of non-community-based resource institutional arrangements that include: neighborhood change and property values (Oakerson 2013); classroom and school efficacy (Wilson, Ostrom and Cox 2013); and how drug trafficking

influences governance in Central American protected areas (Wrathall et al 2020). The IAD framework, coupled with these design principles, offer a methodology for examining the properties and structures of institutions that make them effective mechanisms for coordinating and influencing individual decisions, including voting behavior.

Such a view of institutions as active, place-based shapers of social behavior represents an advance over existing institutional considerations in electoral studies, which tend to see institutions as static elements that exist in the background of elections (e.g., Reif and Schmitt 1980; Ansolabehere and Konisky 2006; Power 2009; Freitag and Stadelmann-Steffen 2010; Neiheisel and Burden 2012; Fowler 2013). In contrast to these perspectives, this project examines why some social institutions influence turnout while others do not, measured by the exhibition of Ostrom's principles that examine characteristics such as, polycentric governance, rules and levels of participation. Specifically, four of Ostrom's (1990) design principles are the most relevant to this study (See Table 1).

Table 1: Principles using IAD Framework on Effective Institutional Governance

	Ostrom's Four Relevant Design Principles For this Study
#1	Polycentric Governance- examines partnerships with other institutions that coordinate collective effort across space
#2	Participatory Governance, part 1: Institutions have effective dispute resolution structures.
#3	Participatory Governance, part 2: Institutional members participate in decision making and rule modification
#4	Institutions meet the local needs and conditions of participants.

2.2.5: Summary of Literature on Social Institutions and Latinx Voter Turnout

On that backdrop, it becomes clear that institutions affect integration and life experiences, including political participation, for different ethnic groups in different ways. As such, institutional analysis deserves a prominent position in ethnic and electoral geographers' toolkits. This statement is not to say that institutional studies are missing from ethnic geography, which is far from the case (e.g. Frazier et al. 2016; Skop 2012; Ponstingel 2017). However, much of the extant ethnic geographic research in this topical area focuses on the efficacy of specific institutions, absent considerations of the more general "design principles" that contribute to their (in)efficacy. In particular, considerations of institutional governance structures—one of the big questions addressed by Elinor Ostrom—are underexplored in geography literature.

Further, the relationship between ethnic groups (especially Latinxs), institutions, and voting behavior are not well developed. While the social theory of voter turnout focuses on conditional choice and does not specify individual differences among ethnic groups, other theories have aimed to explicitly explain the individual-level factors regarding how and why minorities vote (Rolfe 2012). However, much of the differences

in behavior have been interpreted through extant theoretical lenses (e.g., SES theory). Given the possibility that institutions affect individual [e.g., voting] behavior differently for members of different ethnic groups, however, there is ample opportunity to discover new insights in research explicitly aimed at describing, explaining, and understanding relationships between ethnicity, institutional presence, governance, membership, and political participation.

Perhaps more importantly, understanding the role social institutions play in increasing Latinx turnout might point to policy and practical approaches to increase this historically underrepresented demographic subgroup. This dissertation addresses these scholarly and social needs by examining the role social institutions play in Latinx political participation in the Texas. More precisely, this work aims to describe and explain the spatial patterns and determinants of Latinx voter turnout in Texas, by integrating and applying frameworks of institutional governance, theories of electoral behavior and scholarship on social institutions. This project answers the following leading questions: 1) What differences exist, if any, between voter turnout for Latinx and White Americans in Texas? 2) How does membership in social institutions influence voter turnout for Latinx Americans?

2.3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

2.3.1: Research Design

To address the research objectives enumerated in Chapter 1, this dissertation employed a mixed-methods approach, specifically utilizing a concurrent triangulation design (Creswell 2009). The purpose of the concurrent triangulation design is to develop

a more complete understanding of a topic or phenomenon. In this design, qualitative and quantitative data are collected separately in parallel phases. These data are analyzed separately and then compared and/or combined. For example, I collected interview data after collecting quantitative data and compared the results. This method is used to confirm, cross-validate or corroborate findings. Concurrent triangulation is used to overcome a weakness in one method with the strengths of another. It is also useful in expanding on quantitative data through collection of open-ended qualitative data.

The advantage of using a concurrent triangulation approach is that it provides well-validated and substantiated findings, and compared to sequential designs, data collection takes less time. However, there are some disadvantages in this design which are: 1) it requires great effort and expertise to adequately use two separate methods at the same time, 2) it can be difficult to compare the results of two analysis using data of different forms, and 3) it may be difficult to resolve discrepancies that arise while comparing the results. Fortunately, the above research questions are also designed to examine the applicability of voter-turnout theories of Latinx-political participation. With these objectives and questions in mind, the next sections briefly review and synthesize relevant literature from Latinx political participation and social institution scholarship.

This dissertation has three main questions, each with sub-questions. Table 2 provides a brief summary of research questions, methods and data sources.

Table 2: Summary of Research Questions, Methods and Data Sources

Research Questions	Methods	Data Sources
RQ1: What differences exist, if any, between voter turnout for Latinx and White Americans in Texas?	King's EI, Weighted Least Squares Regression	1) King's EI estimates, 2) IRS' Exempt Organization (EO) Masterfile, 3) The U.S. Census Bureau's CVAP Table, 4) County-level turnout data compiled by the Portland Herald Press
RQ2: How Does Membership in social institutions influence voter turnout for Latinx Americans?	Qualitative Data Acquisition	Key-informant interviews
RQ3: Do internal (organizational) structures and external contextual factors (sites and situations) of social institutions create spaces that influence voter turnout for Latinx Americans?	Qualitative Data Acquisition	Key-informant interviews

2.3.2: *Research Question 1:* What differences exist, if any, between voter turnout for Latinx and White Americans in Texas counties?

1A: What formal social and cultural institutions exist in Texas counties and where are they located?

1B: Does the presence of certain social institutions vary systematically with Latinx turnout, after controlling for socioeconomic status indicators? With White

turnout?

1C: To what extent do relationships between voter turnout and socioeconomic status indicators (e.g., unemployment rate, poverty rate, educational attainment, etc.) differ for Latinx and White Americans in Texas counties?

2.3.3: Data Collection for Research Question 1

Answering research question 1 involves quantitative data collection and analysis. First, to identify and locate formal social institutions in Texas, I drew on data from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The reason for focusing on formal institutions, while acknowledging that informal institutions can also affect political behavior, is that the former are tracked by the IRS – while the latter are largely unobservable without prior knowledge of or exposure to them. That being said, the IRS maintains and regularly updates an Exempt Organization (EO) Masterfile that enumerates social sector organizations across the United States. All organizations listed in the EO Masterfile are classified according to the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE). NTEE codes describe the broad nature of an organization.

For research question 1, I singled out four NTEE codes for quantitative analyses. First, insofar as minority voting rights are civil rights, I extracted all NTEE code R (“Civil Rights, Social Action, Advocacy”) organizations from the Texas EO Masterfile. Second, to the extent that place-based organizations focused on local community-building plausibly bring citizens together and sow the seeds of collective action (e.g., Holtkamp and Weaver 2018), I extracted all institutions with NTEE code S (“Community Improvement, Capacity Building”). Third, recognizing the recent roles that some

churches have played in encouraging political participation among members of underrepresented groups—see, for example, research on “souls to the polls” programs implemented in African- American churches (e.g., Herron and Smith 2014)—I extracted all institutions with NTEE code X (“Religion-Related, Spiritual Development”). Finally, according to scholarship on collective social capital (e.g., Putnam 2000; Rupasingha et al. 2006; Holtkamp and Weaver 2018), membership-based organizations bring people with similar interests together in ways that facilitate interactions and can increase civic participation. For that reason, I extracted organizations from the EO Masterfile with NTEE code Y (“Mutual/Membership Benefit Organizations, Other”). For all four of these organization types, I geocoded institutions using the Esri World Address Locator. The resultant (geocoded) dataset allowed me to answer research question 1A. To summarize the geographies of institutions for later regression analysis, I computed the number of institutions per person per square mile in each county in Texas to deal with marked “variability in area *and* population” (Cutter and Ji 1997, 328; emphasis added).

Next, to answer questions 1B and 1C, it is necessary to obtain turnout estimates, by ethnicity, by county. Because no estimates exist in the state of Texas by race and ethnicity, Gary King’s (1997) method of ecological inference (EI) was employed to estimate Latinx turnout by county. King’s EI was selected for several reasons: 1) There are no survey data available for this study, and (2) the State of Texas voter file does not track voter turnout by race or ethnicity; therefore, EI was adopted as a way to generate plausible, reliable estimates for these “missing” quantities. King’s EI is widely used in studies of racial and ethnic group voting behavior, and it is favored by federal judges in voting cases that deal with such matters (Withers 2001; Greiner 2007). Accordingly, it is

described as an “established method” for this type of research (Collett 2005). Apart from its place in court systems and voting research, though, King’s EI has also been identified by Johnston (2005) as an underutilized method in American electoral geography that can enable researchers to “test the assumption that similar people vote in the same way wherever they live” (p. 5). With EI-generated turnout estimates for each County, questions 1B and 1C were answered by modeling group turnout as a function of (1) established socioeconomic status and demographic indicators and (2) institutional presence and density variables. The former variables were collected from the U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS) five-year estimates for 2013-17 (the current ACS vintage at the time the research plan was proposed, accepted, and initiated). The latter variables were described above.

2.3.4: Methods for Research Question 1

For research question 1B and 1C, I followed the advice of King (1997, 290) and researchers who have used his EI method (e.g., Tolbert and Grummel 2003; Orey et al. 2011; Weaver 2015; Weaver and Bagchi-Sen 2015) by estimating weighted least squares (WLS) regressions that modeled two dependent turnout variables (Latinx turnout and White turnout) as functions of relevant socioeconomic and institutional variables. Given the uncertainty attached to EI estimates, each county-level observation in the dataset was weighted by the inverse of the standard error for its turnout estimate—i.e., I placed less weight on observations with relatively high uncertainty and more weight on observations with comparatively low uncertainty (e.g., Tolbert and Grummel 2003).

2.3.5: Research Question 2: How does membership in social institutions influence voter turnout for Latinx Americans?

2A: To which institutions do Latinx voters tend to claim membership or participation?

2B: How are the governance structures of these institutions arranged, and how do governing characteristics impact institutional efficacy concerning their objectives?

2C: What activities and programming take place at those institutions that motivate individual- (member-) level political activity?

2.3.6: Data Collection for Research Question 2

Primary data collection was required to answer research question 2. Specifically, I acquired data through key informant interviews with 30 individuals. Key-informant interviews consist of persons that hold leadership positions at their institutions. Because fostering civic participation is difficult to quantify or measure, qualitative methods are required to answer this question. The IRS data described above, alongside “snowball” data obtained during interviews, formed the foundation for answering research question 2. Beginning with the list of institutions from the four NTEE codes named above, I engaged in months of outreach that resulted in a total of 30 interviews with institutional leadership from the four types of institutions mentioned above, and also from civic engagement organizations in Texas.

2.3.7: Data Analysis for Research Question 2

I employed both computerized and manual text analysis to examine key findings

and patterns of interviews concerning institutional characteristics and manual text analysis responses to examine any associations between institutional membership/participation and voting behavior, as well as institutional actions taken with respect to voter education.

2.3.8: Research Question 3: Do internal (organizational) structures and external contextual factors (sites and situations) of social institutions create spaces that influence voter turnout for Latinx Americans?

2.3.9: Data Collection for Research Question 3

Similar to data collection for research question 2, primary data collection was required to answer research question 3. Specifically, I acquired data through key informant interviews with 30 individuals. Key-informant interviews consist of persons that hold leadership positions at their institutions. Because fostering civic participation is difficult to quantify or measure, qualitative methods are required to answer this question. Specifically, interviewees were asked questions about activities, governance, decision-making, forms of participation and working relationships with other institutions.

2.3.10: Data Analysis for Research Question 3

I used open coding to analyze interviewee responses for research question 3. Responses were coded according to rule making abilities of participations, if institutions had a board/committee or not, service provisions, and if they exhibited polycentric governance.

2.4: STUDY AREA—TEXAS COUNTIES

Part of this research examines institutional governance structures including their characteristics and activities, combined with theories, to try and explain the role social institutions play in Latinx voter turnout across Texas counties, including borderland counties. Texas borderlands are denoted as the counties of Texas that are within 240 miles of the Mexican border (Figure 2). This definition stems from historical geographies that describe numerous places within this boundary (Figure 2) as borderland counties (Villanueva 2017; Martinez 2018).

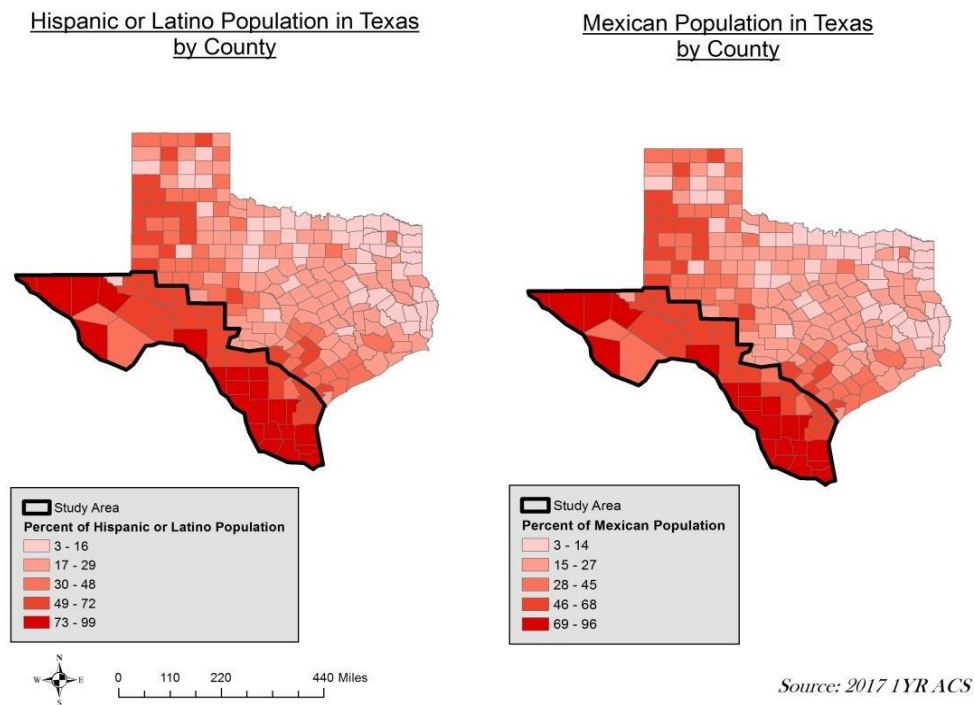


Figure 2: Percent of Hispanic/Latinx and Percent of Mexican Population in Texas by County

Note that Figure 2 illustrates a high concentration foreign- and native-born persons of Mexican ancestry in the borderland counties of Texas (ACS: Table B03001).

All of the borderland counties have Mexican populations of at least 28 percent, with the exception of Brewster County, and Jeff Davis County (15-27 percent), where Big Bend National Park is located. These two counties are sparsely populated, arid, rugged and contain the Chisos and the Davis Mountain ranges. Within these spaces, nearly all persons classified by the Census Bureau as “Hispanic or Latinx” have Mexican ancestry (2019 5-YR ACS).

Specifically, only around four percent of Latinx persons in these spaces are not of Mexican ancestry, meaning that the majority of voters that constitute “Latinx” voters, are in fact, Mexican-American voters. The Mexican-American population in the borderland counties is relatively young: ~22 percent of each borderland county’s population is under the age of 18 (Figure 3). In that sense, the voting eligible populations (VEP) in these counties are likely to experience meaningful increases in the coming years. If the presence and density of social institutions have the capacity to increase Latinx turnout, then these upcoming increases to the VEPs of borderland counties make the area highly suited for studying patterns of voting behavior and attempting to identify leverage points for closing existing turnout gaps.

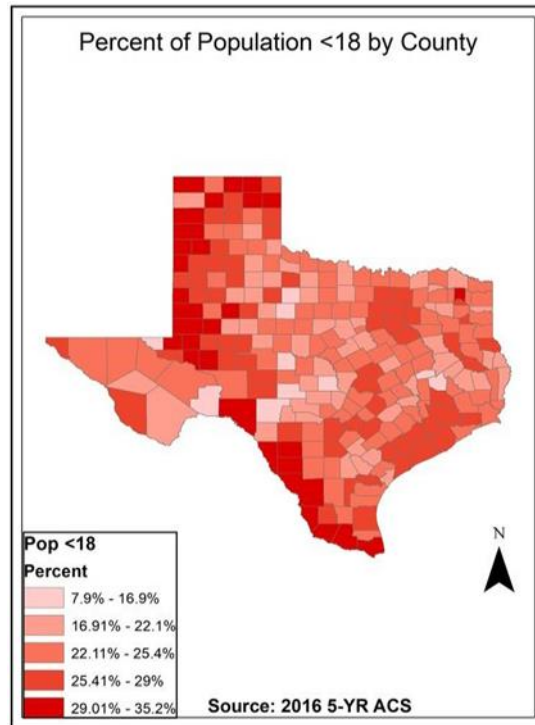


Figure 3: Percent of Population <18 by County

While this dissertation examines Latinx turnout both county and statewide, I focus on seven counties due to interviewee availability and responses to interview requests. Namely, these seven counties are: 1) El Paso, 2) Webb, 3) Travis, 4) Starr, 5) Hidalgo, 6) Cameron, and 7) Hays. The Texas borderland counties were given special attention here because they share unique histories of violence, discrimination and institutional action that directly affect both daily lived experiences and thus, the voter turnout rates of U.S. Latinx citizens, as I explore in the next chapter. Moreover, this dissertation does not treat Latinx voter turnout as a monolith.

CHAPTER 3: LATINX POLITICAL HISTORIES AND INSTITUTIONS

IN THE U.S.: 1845-2020

In order to understand the contemporary arena of Latinx political participation in Texas, historical-geographical legacies of discrimination, racism, violence and land dispossession need to be unearthed and analyzed. These histories exemplify how white supremacy is built into a variety of institutions. As such, this chapter illustrates how low levels of Latinx voter turnout is, in part, the result of systematic institutionalized voter suppression, land dispossession and violence.

It is important to analyze these histories of contested racialized violence, social discrimination, and political disenfranchisement in order to understand a) Latinx political participation today, or the lack thereof, and b) the historical roles social institutions played in suppressing and engendering Latinx political participation and voter turnout. In other words, these institutions and histories have created what I refer to as a disenfranchisement effect through acts of legislation and violence that continues to undermine Latinx participation and engagement in U.S. political institutions today. This chapter foregrounds five key historical institutions and their dynamics contributing to this disenfranchisement effect: 1) *De jure* Voter Disenfranchisement (1845-1902); 2) Latinx Land Ownership and Dispossession (1809-1856); 3) Boss Rule and Voting Blocs (1848-1930); 4) The Texas Rangers and Juan Crow (1910-1965); and 5) Latinx Voter Advocacy and the Voting Rights Act (1965-2020).

3.1: THE TEXAS CONSTITUTION AND LATINX VOTER DISENFRANCHISEMENT: 1845-1902

The 1845 Texas Constitutional convention inaugurated the formal disenfranchisement of Mexican-American voting rights in Texas. The convention debated whether or not the Mexican should be allowed the right to vote, and centered on whether the qualifying adjective “white” should be retained in the constitutional provisions that described the voters of the state (Montejano 2009). The Harris County representative argued that the qualifier “white” should be kept, which excluded Mexicans and Native Americans, as he feared the mass immigration of what he called “Mexican Indians”, which refers to non-U.S. citizens of Mexican ancestry (Montejano 2009). He attested that “Hordes of Mexican Indians.... will come moving in; they will come back in thousands to Bexar, in thousands to Goliad, perhaps to Nacogdoches, and what will be the consequence? Ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty thousand may come in here, and vanquish you at the ballot box though you are invincible in arms.” (quoted in Montejano 2009, 39). At the convention, traveler Frederick Olmsted observed that, if the Mexicans in San Antonio voted, they could elect a government of their own, “such a step,” he warned, “would be followed, however, by a summary revolution.”

Despite these concerns, in 1848, the U.S. government granted Mexican Americans “voting equality” on par with white Anglo-Americans with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was the first time in U.S. history that Mexican Americans were given the same legal recognition as “Whites”. Mexican Americans became eligible for U.S. citizenship, and hence the right to vote, as U.S. law dictated that only “Free White Men That Owned Land” could vote.

Where Mexicans did have the right to vote, protests and threats from Anglo-Americans were constant reminders of their second-class citizenship. For example, after the convention of 1845 and the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, Mexican Americans in certain districts were denied their vote or allowed only limited participation, due to English language requirements and violent intimidation (Villanueva 2017). Anglo-Americans felt threatened not only by the size of the Mexican and Mexican-American population in Texas, but also their powerful, political potential.

The signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 included the condition that only property owners could vote (Eskridge 2001). After 1848, both white Texas whites and the U.S. government used land dispossession (Montejano 2009), discrimination (Morán González 2009), and violence (Villanueva 2017) against Mexican Americans as a means to suppress Mexican and Mexican-American socioeconomic status and political participation, and to reinforce the ideals of Manifest Destiny and White supremacy. The Texas Constitution of 1869 and 1876 allowed the legislature to impose an annual “poll tax” of \$1 on all men between the ages of 21 and 60 (Stone 2019). The poll tax was used to fund free public schools and was not a prerequisite for voting. However, in 1902, the legislature made an amendment, subjecting anyone who wanted to vote to an annual poll tax of \$1.50 to \$1.75. This amendment largely impacted low-income voters, especially Mexican Americans (Smith 1964). Further, the 1776 voting rights qualifier, land ownership, excluded many Mexican-Americans from casting ballots.

3.2: *SHIFTING PROPERTY RIGHTS AND MEXICAN LAND DISPOSSESSION: 1809-1856*

Mexican-American land ownership played a significant role in Mexican-American political power. While a constitutional amendment removed the 1776 condition of land ownership as a precursor to voter eligibility among Free White Men, in 1856, a substantial amount of Mexican woman, now Mexican-American women, held land titles inherited through *herencias* (post-mortem inheritances), in Texas.

Mexican women's land ownership did not go unnoticed by Texan men. As early as 1809, The Married Women's Property Act indicated that a married woman's property could not be disposed of by her husband (Roybal 2017) but she still required his signature to make any changes to it such as a sale or lease. In their quest to incorporate newly ceded land into the service of a westward-expanding U.S. capitalist political economy, Anglo-American males saw Mexican-American women's position as landowners as a way to gain entry into property ownership and create an economic system that provided them with a tool for increasing their fixed assets, which specifically meant land acquisition (Roybal 2017). In other words, Anglo-Texan men married Mexican women as a strategy of social mobility, which subsequently resulted in further Mexican-American land dispossession (Richerson 2014).

It was common for Mexican women to acquire property through inheritance, which they could then pass down generationally. This placed women on more equal ground with their male counterparts in matters of property ownership (Rosen 2003, 360). Most women who inherited property on the deaths of their fathers and/or husbands did so

in the Mexican Era (Chávez-García 2004, 58). *Herencias* played a significant role in political power, co-ethnic marriages, and intermarriages. Often, Mexican women were “related by marriage or kinship to military and political leaders,” (Roybal 2017, 58). This fact is significant to women’s history, the history of property ownership, the political economy, and women’s rights and political standing during these times.

In addition to marriage, U.S. law between 1809 to 1856 systematically dispossessed Mexican men and women of property rights, and as such, created new forms of racialized and gendered inequality in land tenure as a social institution. Texas’s legal system targeted Mexican-American landowners and systematically dismantled Mexican-American land ownership throughout this time period. For instance, under the terms of statehood in 1845, Texas retained jurisdiction over all the land within its borders, it claimed to be exempted from the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (Montejano 2009).

Thus, Texas carried out its own deliberations concerning the status of the annexed Mexicans and their land grants. For example, Governor Peter H. Bell appointed William Bourland and James Miller to investigate the validity of Spanish and Mexican land titles. In Webb County, site of the first hearings, the Bourland-Miller Commission encountered opposition from Mexican landowners, who believed that the investigation was out to destroy rather than protect their rights (Tirres 2009). The impartiality of the proceedings and the prompt confirmation by the legislature of the commission’s recommendations removed “this unfounded prejudice” and secured the loyalty of the landed Mexican elite of the Laredo area. Other Mexican landowners beyond the Nueces were not as fortunate, and thus not as loyal, as the Laredo grantees to the new Anglo controlled state government.

In the 1881 Chihuahua Secession, an act that recognized Mexican owned land in north Texas prior to independence, only seven of the fourteen land grants kept their recognition Post-Bourland-Miller investigations. Of approximately 350 cases in the Tamaulipas and Coahuila secessions, “some two hundred” were confirmed by the legislature in 1852, and another 50 were subsequently confirmed by 1901. Many of the grants confirmed were already owned, in part or whole, by Whites (Montejano 2009). This is important because Anglo and Mexican land owners played a significant role in Mexican American voter turnout through the BOSS rule and the voting blocs it produced.

3.3: BOSS RULE, VOTING BLOCS AND ANGLO POLITICAL BATTLES: 1848-1930

The very hacienda system inherited from colonialism and racism toward nonwhite Mexicans, poor working conditions, the Porfiriato, and the expansion of cash crops, all contributed to the Mexican revolution and the resulting voting bloc system, known as “BOSS rule” in Texas. Landed-elite Whites and Mexican Americans had tremendous influence over the Mexican-American electorate in Texas, where Texas Mexicans, termed Tejanos, constituted a significant portion of the male vote (Montejano 2009). Tejano politicians among the Anglo settlers proceeded to instruct and organize the newly enfranchised voters following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. A common pattern was the controlled franchise, where Mexican Americans voted according to the dictates of the local patrón, or boss. This system was called, “BOSS” rule (Anders 1987). Because the majority of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in Texas worked in agriculture during this time, a significant proportion lived on haciendas. As social institutions, haciendas were large ranches that provided labor, living quarters and socialization among workers of different races, namely, Whites and Mexicans. The bosses (land owners) of these

haciendas provided shelter and medical care to their laborers. In return, bosses expected their laborers to cast ballots in accordance with their interests. This type of labor organization, social code and machine politics existed in Texas from the early 1890s until the early 1920s. Further, the Texas Rangers (discussed below), sometimes forced Mexican Americans to vote in their bosses' interests using threats of violence and coercion (Anders 1987). Since these political machines delivered sizable blocs of votes in state and national elections, the Anglo bosses acquired influence far beyond the usual rural county politicians.

Generally, the lower-level bosses within haciendas were members of the wealthy Mexican-American families entering new political arenas to maintain and defend their traditional status, as they had done in Brownsville, San Antonio, and El Paso (Rivera 2011). In the 1850s, the specific impacts of BOSS rule varied. Cameron County in the Lower Valley showed a nearly equal division of county commissioner positions between Whites and Mexican Americans. In Webb County, Whites ran the county while Mexican Americans ran the city of Laredo (Montejano 2009). In El Paso County, the pattern was reversed, and Whites ran the city while Mexican Americans ran the county (Anders 1987). Between 1848 and 1866 each aldermanic council included one or two Mexican American representatives. In all of these places where Mexican Americans controlled most offices, as in Starr and Zapata counties, the figure of an Anglo boss legitimized Mexican political involvement (Montejano 2009). However, not all counties in Texas were dominated by BOSS rule (Anders 1987). Specifically, South Texas held the notorious reputation for historical legacies of BOSS Rule. Jim B. Wells, an American

lawyer, and later significant Democratic party BOSS in Texas, explained the phenomenon of bloc voting that characterized South Texas politics:

“I suppose they [the King ranchers] control 500 votes, and they [the Mexican people] go to their major bosses, and they go to Mr. Caesar Kleberg, and to Robert Kleberg, and to Captain King-while he was living-and ask him whom they should vote for. The truth is, and very few people who don't live in that country know it, that it is the property owners and the intelligent people who in that way do really vote. The King people always protected their servants and helped them when they were sick and never let them go hungry, and they always feel grateful, and they naturally don't need any buying, or selling or any coercion-they went to those that helped them when they needed help. (quoted in Anders 1987 p 276).

BOSS rule dominated South Texas politics for decades. However, the Homestead Act of 1862 provided the groundwork for new coming whites to challenge the BOSS system. The Homestead Act gave white citizens or future citizens up to 160 acres of public land provided they live on it, improve it, and pay a small registration fee. The U.S. Government granted more than 270 million acres of land while the law was in effect (Williams 2000). In Texas, this act translated into political conflict between old-time white bosses and new coming whites. Although, new coming whites, termed Homesteaders, did not gain significant political ground in Texas until about 1910, this contest between new and old politicians, left Mexican-American voters left with few options. The Mexican American supported the old bosses, as one Mexican-American civic leader explained, because:

“What may the Mexican-American expect from the new Anglo-Saxon settler? He doesn’t understand him; he has scarcely visited his little old towns; he looks upon him as ignorant—perhaps Mexican. In fact, he fails to distinguish between Mexican citizens and Mexican-American citizens on the one hand, and also between classes of Mexicans.” (quoted in Montejano 2009 131). The problematic failure of U.S. politicians to distinguish inter- and intra- group differences among Latinx voters still persists today.

In contemporary U.S. politics, both Democratic and Republican candidates still attempt to capture Latinx voters by psychologically appealing to cultural and ethical values such as, religion and “hard work”, which become mirrored in policy debates such as, immigration, abortion, economics and healthcare (Galbraith and Callister 2020). It is within these contests, and their accompanying propaganda, that intra- and inter-group differences among the Latinx voters manifest themselves at the polls (Dovidio et al 2010; Flores-Saviaga and Savage 2019). While both parties achieve varying levels of success, contemporary democratic candidates have not openly demonized Latinx citizens, unlike several contemporary Republican candidates (Hooghe and Dassonneville 2018), including former President Trump. Such anti-Latinx rhetoric has resulted in the overwhelming support for democratic candidates by Latinx voters, with the significant exception of Cuban Americans (Dovidio et al 2010). In addition, whether old or new, republican or democrat, political opponents have long demonized one another. These verbal assault contests influence voter-partisanship and policy views, whether today or over a hundred years ago (Moore-Berg et al 2020). Further, anti-immigrant (anti-Latinx) rhetoric used as a mechanism to capture votes, and in particular, white votes, is not a new

phenomenon, and has been used, many times, by U.S. politicians as tools of exclusion, scapegoating and maintaining white supremacy (Wilson 1999; Pulido 2007).

For example, The Carrizo Springs Javelin, a newspaper in 1911, stated that: “Mexicans belonged to that class of foreigners who claim American citizenship but who are as ignorant of things American as the mule.” In a similar vein, University of Texas economist William Leonard, in a 1916 article entitled “Where Both Bullets and Ballots Are Dangerous,” characterized the Mexican voters as a “political menace,” for they “retain vestiges of the primitive man’s willingness to attach themselves as followers to anyone who may have shown them a kindness” (Montejano 2009 131).

In fact, from 1910-1930, ten significant political events occurred in South Texas, that: 1) reflect political struggles between newer arriving and already established whites (See Table 3), 2) marked the end to the Boss system, and 3) gave Latinx more voting power, even if it was manipulated by the bosses. In addition, these changing dynamics between old and new whites are important because they attest to how Latinx voters were treated by whites, as bystanders, in the power struggles over county governments. In other words, Latinx voters were viewed by whites (old and new) as either friend or foe, dependent on their partisanship.

Table 3: Major Political Events in South Texas Counties, 1910-1930

COUNTY	YEAR	EVENT
Cameron	1910	Old-timer Jim Wells loses Brownsville to “independent” Democrats and Republicans
Starr & Hidalgo	1911	Republican Ed C Lasater carves new county of Brooks from “Mexican County” of Starr.
Starr, Duval, & Zapata	1913	Independent Democrat D.W. Glasscock carves new county from Jim Hogg to “get away from Mexican domination.”
Kleberg	1913	King Ranch loses first county election to newcomers
Dimmit	1914	Newcomer farmers establish White Man’s Primary Association
Nueces	1915	Election scandal in Corpus Christi results in federal convictions of old-line politicians.
Duval	1911-1915	Independents and Republicans defeat old-timer Archie Parr’s attempts to divide Duval into 2 counties.
“Valley”	1919	State investigation of Senate race between Parr and Glasscock.
Cameron	1920	Jim Wells loses control of county
Hidalgo	1929	“Hidalgo County Rebellion” results in federal investigation and conviction of machine politicians.

Source: whites and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986

All of these events occurred at the county level. In many ways, the county government was the most important policy making unit of the national government during this time period (Lauderdale 2010). The county was the sole administrative body of government. The powers of tax assessment and collection, supervision of elections, and provision of public services were firmly in the hands of county officials (Montejano 2009). The federal and state governments exercised little administrative control over county functions (Montejano 2009). For example, up until 1931, Texas counties were not

required to file a copy of their annual budget with the state (Montejano 2009). Thus, New and Old Anglo political battles centered on county governments (Carroll 1942).

The result of these political struggle was twofold: 1) the number of counties in the region nearly doubled, from seven to thirteen, as ranch and farm areas were separated into distinct jurisdictional zones; and 2), where the new whites were victorious over the old Anglo bosses, Mexican Americans were disfranchised and/or the hacienda voting blocs were eliminated as an important political factor (Montejano 2009). The common explanation South Texas historians attribute to: 1) the creation of new counties, 2) the population increases, and 3) the subsequent need for more effective and accessible public services (Lea 1957), do not fully capture the racial inequalities in these changes.

Examining the governance structures of these new counties better illustrates the how whites, on both sides, viewed Mexican Americans as second-class citizens. For example, in 1904, the State Democratic Executive Committee approved the practice of the White Man's Primary Association by recommending that county committees require primary voters to affirm that "I am a white person and a Democrat." (Weeks 1930). In 1918, the State of Texas passed a law eliminating interpreters at the voting polls and stipulating that no naturalized citizens could receive assistance from the election judge, unless they had been citizens for 21 years (Barr, 1971). Reorganizing county governments, coupled with white primaries and the elimination of poll interpreters, further disenfranchised Mexican-American voters, as county governments had the authority to administer and adhere to federal and state election codes as they desired. At the same time Mexican Americans were disenfranchised by *de jure* legislation, the Texas Rangers targeted and inflicted

physical violence on Latinx communities in ways that further contributed lack of trust and faith in U.S. government institutions.

3.4: TERROR AND THE TEXAS RANGERS: 1910-1929

From 1915-1920, acts of violence, and threats of violence, by the Texas Rangers, played a significant role in reducing Mexican-American political participation. In order to understand how The Texas Rangers impacted Mexican-American voter turnout in South Texas, it is essential to first examine how their existence came to be and their purpose. In 1823, Stephen F. Austin founded the Texas Rangers with ten men to protect newly settled families in Texas after The Mexican War of Independence (Harris and Sadler 2007). Almost 90 years after their creation, Ranger membership continuously grew while economic and political instability began to plague Mexico causing a revolution in 1910 (Harris and Sadler 2007; Villanueva 2017). In 1902, U.S. Congress provided support for the expansion of citrus and cotton in Texas and Arizona, as well as sugar beet production in Colorado, Kansas, and Nebraska (Frazier et al 2016). This required additional, hard, low-cost labor at a time when Mexico's unstable political and economic conditions left millions of Mexicans in poverty (Frazier et al. 2016). As a result, Mexican immigration to the U.S. continued and increased substantially in the following decades (Frazier et al 2016). The Mexican revolution, caused tens of thousands of Mexican refugees to flee and cross the border into the U.S., specifically to Texas and California (Harris and Sadler 2007).

During the same time, U.S. media, as an institution, played a significant role in both Anglo-Mexican political and social relations. For example, as Mexican refugees

continued to immigrate to the U.S., Mexican revolutionary soldiers, derogatorily referred to as, “band-its/itos” began to raid Texas ranches for resources, but not in the significant numbers reported by the U.S. media at the time, which caused panic among Texas whites (Villanueva, 2017). Contemporary examples of how hysteria and fear of Latinx groups continue today. As recently as January 6th 2021, President Trump stated that caravans of migrants, “want to come in again and rip off our country” (Associated Press 2021). Shortly after President Trump’s statements, mobs of white Americans stormed the U.S. Capitol, which resulted in five deaths (Barret and Raju 2021). Media hysteria, coupled with lack of support from the U.S. government for ranch raids, led the state government of Texas to deploy the Texas Rangers to police the Texas/Mexico border.

The Texas Rangers, as an institution of border patrol, murdered thousands of Mexicans suspected of wrongdoing, by lynching and firing squads, which included Mexican Americans (Villanueva 2017; Martinez 2018). The murdering of thousands of both Mexican citizens and Mexican Americans was often done in a mob-style fashion, similar to the events of January 6th 2021, which sometimes included Texas-Anglo citizens-, police officers-, lawyers- and judges—with zero Anglo convictions (Villanueva 2017). The Rangers acted with impunity as the, “judge, jury, and executioner” (Villanueva, 2017). Figure 4 shows an Anglo-Post card of the Texas Rangers archived by Bullock Texas State History Museum. The 1915 postcard, titled, ‘Dead Mexican Bandits,’ shows three Texas Rangers on horseback, posed behind the bodies of four Tejanos who were killed, potentially at random, as retribution for a raid. These types of “retributions” were a common reason for Ranger violence. For example, after receiving reports of Mexican revolutionaries raiding Anglo ranches, the Texas Rangers went to the

town of Porvenir, Texas and killed almost all of the town's Mexican-American inhabitants (Martinez 2018). From 1910-1920, the Texas Rangers lynched an estimated 3,500-5,000 Mexican citizens, including some Mexican Americans, while only a handful of Anglo deaths occurred at the hands of Mexican revolutionists (Villanueva 2017).

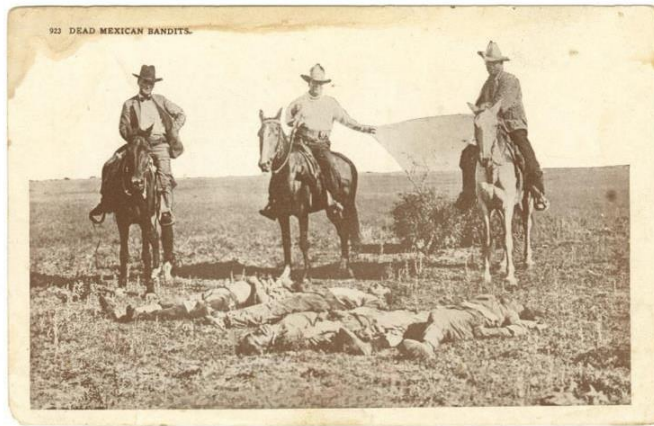


Figure 4: "Dead Mexican Bandits"

Source: Texas State Bullock Museum

In addition to violence and murder, both Mexican citizens and Mexican Americans faced political discrimination and voter suppression tactics. The Texas Rangers, in cooperation with land speculators and politicians enforced BOSS Rule, particularly in South Texas. The Tejano politicians (politicians) held land taxes to a minimum and lobbied for the deployment of the Texas Rangers to maintain order and intimidate the Mexican and Mexican-American masses, who had shown signs of rebelliousness against hacienda labor arrangements after homesteaders began gaining political ground (Anders 1982). The Texas Rangers traveled to small Mexican borderland villages, in Texas, where many Mexicans and Mexican Americans owned land, and massacred hundreds of unarmed, peaceful villagers and seized their lands (Martinez

2018). Sometimes the seizures were accompanied by the formality of signing bills of sale—at the point of a gun (Villanueva 2017). Media, Anglo stereotypes and fears of Mexican-American communities sanctioned these types violence committed by the Texas Rangers.

Geographer Kay J. Anderson illustrates how the U.S. media attempts to correlate components of cultural landscapes such as housing conditions, signage and socioeconomic indicators, to the people living in those places, as a mechanism to dehumanize them. Anderson calls these attempted associations “Race-Place Connections” (Anderson 1987). The conceptualization of the race-place connection (Anderson 1987) becomes clear as U.S. media depicted the settlements of poor Mexican refugees as deplorable and problematic (Martinez 2018). For example, in 1921, the term, “wetback” was introduced by the U.S. press, eventually becoming as common as the term “greaser” -- another negative connotation to describe Mexicans as dirty prior to and during the Mexican revolution (Frazier et al 2016). The term, with its sociopolitical references to Mexicans who avoided the immigration requirements for literacy tests and head taxes, referred to those Mexicans who crossed the Rio Grande at unregulated locations. These negative depictions, along with local and state politician’s approval, provided public support for Ranger violence against Mexican refugees (Montejano 2009; Villanueva 2017; Martinez 2018).

For example, in May of 1916, two Mexican revolutionaries, José Morin and Victoriano Ponce, were arrested in Kingsville on suspicion of plotting a ranch raid, and disappeared after Ranger Captain J. J. Saunders took custody of them (Montejano 2009). Disappearances of Mexican and Mexican American males was commonplace at the

hands of the Rangers, especially when males were suspected of “wrong doing”. Thomas Hook, a local Anglo attorney, helped Mexican and Mexican-American residents prepare a telegram to President Woodrow Wilson asking for federal intervention to safeguard both their civil and voting rights (Johnson 2003; Montejano 2009). Soon thereafter, Saunders pistol-whipped Hook in a courthouse hallway. The attempted telegram was prompted by both Ranger violence and their intimidating presence at voting polls.

However, the entry of the United States into World War I brought changes to the Ranger force that heightened this kind of retaliation against the exercise of political rights by Mexican Americans (Villanueva 2017). In South Texas, The Texas Rangers participated in an unprecedented assault on Mexican-American voting rights. For example, in the 1918 election, Rangers reduced the number of votes cast in Alice, Texas from some three hundred in an earlier primary to only sixty-five in the general election. “The former large number of Mexicans who have voted in previous elections was conspicuous by their absence,” noted one observer. “They did not congregate at the polls, but up town they gathered in small groups and discussed among themselves this new thing of being watched by the Rangers.” (Villanueva 2017; Martinez 2018).

Voting across South Texas plummeted when Rangers were deployed. Rangers also harassed, disarmed, and humiliated Mexican-American office holders such as Cameron County Deputy Sheriff Pedro Lerma. Rangers entered Lerma’s home while he was absent and, “frightened his wife and daughters to death.” Other Mexican Americans in similar positions were forcibly disarmed; one was hung by the neck twice (Martinez 2018).

Post-WWI, the lynching of and violence against Mexicans in Texas significantly declined for four main reasons. First, American's involvement in WWI transferred the suspicions and negative stereotypes of the borderland enemy from Mexicans to Germans in Texas (Villanueva 2017). Second, emerging political stability within Mexico made the border between Texas and Mexico far less a site of revolutionary violence (Villanueva 2017). Third, an investigation (1919) into the Texas Ranger violence against Mexicans by the Mexican-American lawyer Jose T Canales exposed the hidden crimes by Rangers against Mexicans and energized a nascent Mexican-American civil rights movement (Texas State Library and Archives Commission 2016). Lastly, Mexican-American veterans returning home after WWI in Texas were at the forefront of anti-ranger violence and civil rights organizations such as, The Knights of America—the first Mexican-American civil rights institution in 1927 (Montejano 2009). The legacies of Ranger violence continued to influence Mexican-American voter turnout, and discrimination intensified during the years of the Mexican revolution generating effects that lasted long after the revolution ended. These effects became manifested during the Juan (Jim) Crow in Texas.

3.5: JIM AND JUAN CROW ERA INSTITUTIONS AND LATINX VOTING IN TEXAS: 1929-1965

Jim Crow laws prohibited Latinx from entering public swimming pools, and Anglo business owners displayed signs that read, “No Dogs, No Negros, No Mexicans” (See Figure 5).

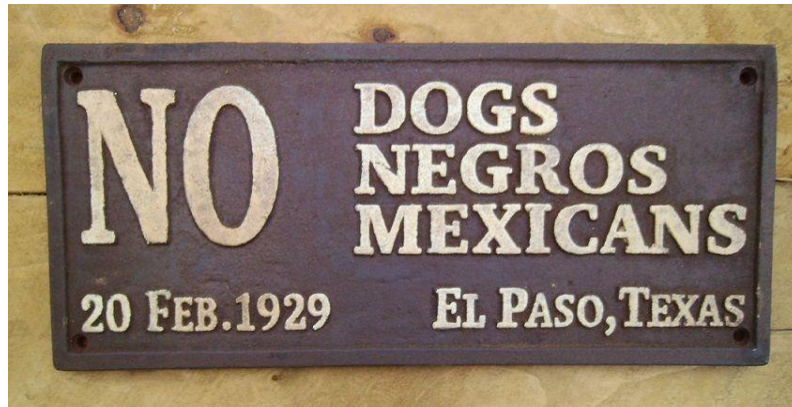


Figure 5: A Shop Sign Displaying “No Service to Dogs, Negros or Mexicans”

Source: DePaul University, Minnesota

Juan Crow was the name given to a series of laws in the Southwestern U.S. that restricted the liberties of those from Latin origin, including Mexicans and Mexican Americans (Scott 2017). These laws mirrored Jim Crow laws in the South and North U.S. (Scott 2017), and thus these two terms (Juan and Jim Crow) are used interchangeably and have the same meaning (Scott 2017). Jim Crow laws forced Latinx to be subservient in all aspects of everyday life. The Jim Crow style of segregation on those of Latin origin limited their voting and relegated most to segregated neighborhoods and schools (Scott 2017).

Mexican and Mexican American contestation of Jim Crow also galvanized a series of Mexican-American Civil Rights movements. Some Mexican-American leaders did not want these movements to be peaceful, while the vast majority did (Mahoney 2020). The course of these uprisings convinced some key Mexican Americans in South Texas that revolutionary era Mexican nationalism was a dead end, and that they were much better off seeking organizing themselves as American citizens with equal access to

rights and protections under the U.S. constitution (Mahoney 2020). To combat discrimination, Mexican Americans acted collectively by forming organizations that gave them agency.

In 1929, the three largest Mexican American organizations, The Knights of America, The Sons of America, and the League of Latin American Citizens, combined their constitutions and formed the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). LULAC members united protest against ethnic violence and advocated improved working conditions and better educational facilities for their children. LULAC adopted the American flag as its official flag and its official song was the George Washington Prayer. LULAC wanted their members to assimilate to dominant Anglo Culture because they saw assimilation as a defense mechanism (Montejano 2009; Martinez 2018). However, assimilation was an insufficient mechanism to increase ballot access.

As recent as 1950, both Blacks and Latinxs in Texas faced literacy tests and poll taxes designed to keep them away from the polls (Sawers 2017). Institutionalized language discrimination also existed in Texas schools in the same time period. For example, teachers publicly burned any work students had written in Spanish (Bacigalup 2019). However, the Texas Senate attempted to repeal the poll tax in 1949 and 1963 but failed both times. The state ended poll taxes for local and state elections with a 1966 resolution, but it didn't formally approve the amendment until 2009, when Rep. Alma Allen, a black Democrat from Houston, sponsored a resolution to ratify it (Sawers 2017). While poll taxes are no longer, they have had a lasting effect on turnout. Nearly 80 percent of the total voting age population — mostly white men — voted in 1896, according to the Texas Almanac, compared to the 46 percent who voted in the 2016

presidential election. “Voter participation went down after 1902 and has stayed down ever since,”. “We’ve never reached the percentage of voters who voted in the 1890s in Texas.” - Walter Buenger, a Texas history professor at The University of Texas at Austin and chief historian at the Texas State Historical Association.

The mechanisms that excluded Texas Latinxs from voting and discriminated against them socially, politically and economically, did not deter Tejanos from fighting for equality and social and political justice. In Texas, the discrimination and stereotypes of Latinx resulted in segregated schools until 1945. The Mendez v. Westminster decision in California, a judge ruled that segregation of Mexican children “Found no justification in the Laws of California and furthermore, was a clear denial of the ‘equal protection’ clause of the 14th amendment. The result was desegregated schools in California, and Mexican civil rights organizations in Texas used this decision to accelerate desegregation in Texas. Despite resistance by state and federal institutions, Mexican-American organizations continued fighting for civil and political rights. During Jim Crow, Latinx voter turnout would remain low, until the Voting Rights Act in 1965.

3.6: THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT AND VIOLATIONS IN TEXAS: 1965-2006

Perhaps no other piece of legislation protected U.S. Latinx voting rights more than the 1965 Voting Rights Act (VRA), although, Mexican Americans did not receive full protection until a decade later in 1975. The VRA of 1965 has been vital to guaranteeing minority voters access to the ballot in Texas. The enactment of the VRA in 1965 began a process of integrating Latinxs, African-Americans and, more recently, Asian-Americans into the political structures of Texas. A review of the minority voting

experiences in Texas since the 1982 VRA reauthorization indicates that this process remains unfinished (Perales, Figueroa and Rivas 2006). Infringements on minority voting rights persist, and noncompliance with the VRA continues at the state and local level (cite). Nonetheless, the VRA has proven to be an essential tool for enhancing minority inclusion in Texas (Perales, Figueroa and Rivas 2006).

Section 5 of the VRA, the preclearance requirement, was extended to Texas in 1975 due to the state's history of excluding Mexican-Americans (Perales, Figueroa and Rivas 2006). In other words, states wanting to redraw voting districts had to prove to the federal government that newly drawn districts did not impact minority voters (Schuit and Rogowski 2016). Section 5 was designed to ensure that voting changes in covered jurisdictions could not be implemented unless they received federal approval (Schuit and Rogowski 2016). According to the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), since 1982, Texas had the second highest number of Section 5 objections interposed by the DOJ—including at least 107 objections since 1982, ten of which were for statewide voting changes (Perales, Figueroa and Rivas 2006).

The language assistance provisions of the VRA, enacted in 1975, also played an important role in increasing Latinx and Asian-American voter access to the political process in Texas (Perales, Figueroa and Rivas 2006). These provisions require translated voting materials, public notice and assistance at the polls for Texas voters who are limited-English proficient (LEP). Texas's coverage under the language minority provisions addresses the historical discrimination that impeded Latinx voters from learning English and ensures that newly eligible Latinxs can vote (Ancheta 2006).

An assessment of the availability of translated voting materials and language assistance in Texas conducted by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) provides a blunt indicator of how county election officials failed to make voting accessible to LEP Texans (Perales, Figueroa and Rivas 2006). MALDEF also found that out of 101 counties investigated, 80% were unable to produce voter registration forms, official ballots, provisional ballots and their written voting instructions in Spanish; only one county was able to produce evidence of full compliance (Perales, Figueroa and Rivas 2006).

In 1982, the VRA was again extended, and amended (Section 206), to provide that a violation of the VRA's nondiscrimination section could be established "without having to prove discriminatory purpose." (Advisory Committees to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 2018). In other words, regardless of intent, if voting requirements of a particular jurisdiction are found to have a discriminatory impact, they may be found in violation of the VRA. The VRA's language minority provision, Section 203, states that counties are required to provide bilingual election information if more than five percent of the population, or 10,000 voting age citizens, belong to a single language minority, have depressed literacy rates, and do not speak English very well (Advisory Committees to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 2018). In Texas, there are 88 counties that fall under the provisions of Section 203—the most counties in any state in the nation.

The Voting Rights Act had a significant impact in Texas, due to Texas's growing Latinx voting population. According to the 1984 U.S. Census, in the 1984 presidential election, there were about 681,000 Latinx voters in Texas, representing about 11% of the state's total voters (U.S. Census Bureau: Table 2 1984). In the November 2004

presidential election, there were 1,533,000 Latinx voters, representing nearly 18% of the state's total voters (U.S. Census Bureau: Table 2 2010).

The VRA also has contributed to increased political representation for Latinx-, African-, and Asian-Americans and other under-represented minority groups in Texas. For example, in 1973, there were 565 Latinx elected officials in the state. By 1984, the number had grown to 1,427 (Montalvo and Estaville 2016). In 2005, the number had increased to 2,137 Latinx elected officials, nearly four times the number in 1973 (NAELO Educational Fund 2017). The growth of Latinx elected officials elected to Congress and to the Texas Legislature has been particularly significant. Between 1984 and 2003, the number of Latinx Members of Congress doubled from three to six, and the number of state-level elected officials increased from twenty-five to thirty-eight (Kessler 2016).

Notwithstanding these substantial gains, Latinxs continue to be vastly underrepresented at every level of federal, state and local government. This underrepresentation demonstrates that slow progress is being made (Perales, Figueroa and Rivas 2006). For example, in 1974 only 2.2 percent of all elected U.S. officials were Latinx (Casellas 2011). Almost thirty years later in 2003, 7.1 percent of elected officials were Latinx (Casellas 2011). However, although Latinx political representation is slowly increasing, so too are voting rights violations.

In 2005 and 2006, the DOJ filed Section 203 enforcement lawsuits against Hale County and Ector County, Texas (Perales, Figueroa and Rivas 2006). Ector County agreed that it had not fully complied with the language minority provisions of the VRA

and agreed to a consent decree. This decree required the county to immediately implement a Spanish language program for minority voters and to use federal observers during elections to monitor compliance (Perales, Figueroa and Rivas 2006).

On February 27, 2006, the United States filed a complaint, alleging that Hale County violated Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act by failing to provide an adequate number of bilingual poll workers trained to assist Spanish-speaking voters on Election Day and failing to effectively publicize election information in Spanish (Lozano 2019). 30 days later, Hale County conceded with a consent decree agreement, which allowed the DOJ to monitor future elections in Hale County and requires the County to increase the number of bilingual poll workers, employ a bilingual coordinator and establish a bilingual advisory group (Lozano 2019).

In 1993, Congress enacted the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), which was designed make it easier to for all Americans to register to vote and to maintain their registration (Advisory Committees to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 2018). The NVRA requires states to allow citizens to register to vote at the same time they apply for their driver's license or seek to renew their license; it also requires a range of social service agencies to offer voter registration in conjunction with their services (Advisory Committees to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 2018). The NVRA contains requirements concerning administration of voter registration by requiring states to implement procedures to maintain accurate and current voter registration lists and mandates the use and acceptance of a standardized voter registration form (Advisory Committees to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 2018).

3.7: SHELBY V HOLDER, VOTER SUPPRESSION, AND CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS IN TEXAS: 2013-2020

Despite VRA protections, a landmark decision by the U.S. Supreme court, *Shelby v Holder* in 2013, degraded section 5 of the VRA. *Shelby v. Holder*, removed required federal preclearance restrictions found in Section 5 of the VRA. Prior to *Shelby v Holder*, federal preclearance was required to redraw voting districts. Immediately after *Shelby v. Holder*, Texas has made a variety of changes to its voting and elections procedures at multiple levels of government, from the county-level to the Texas Legislature, with 15 approved, newly drawn voting districts (Texas Civil Rights Project 2017). Additionally, Texas, announced it would move forward with a law limiting the types of ID accepted at the polls. The Brennan Center for Justice, a nonpartisan law and policy institute, has tracked the case in Texas, along with other voting laws and lawsuits nationwide ahead of the 2020 Presidential election (Todd 2020).

In October of 2020, current Texas Governor Greg Abbott issued an executive order to limit ballot drop off mailboxes for mail-in voting during the COVID-19 pandemic to one mailbox per county (Kornfield and Sonmez 2020). Further, Abbot's executive order was upheld by the federal government, specifically, The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit (Hirczy de Mino 2020). Under normal circumstances and law, counties have several ballots drop off locations, and given both Texas's large population and metropolitan areas, this action limited the ability of voters (predominately Latinx and Black) to successfully drop off their ballots (Hirczy de Mino 2020). In fact, approximately 5.7 million Texans were registered but did not vote. It is unknown how many of them tried but could not (Harper 2020).

Despite the above discriminatory actions by state and federal institutions, both Latinx political representation and voter turnout is increasing. As of 2017, there were 6,600 Latinx elected officials nationwide (NALEO Education Fund 2017). What is more, the 2020 Presidential election broke records for voter turnout—it was the highest turnout rate in U.S. history. While a host of socio-, economic-, political- and pandemic-factors all influenced how and if voters casted a ballot, civic engagement organizations in Texas played a pivotal role in Latinx voter turnout.

For example, several of Texas’s largest civic engagement organizations registered tens of thousands of Texans to vote ahead of the 2020 election. Specifically, the majority of newly registered voters registered from 2019-2020. In addition, civic engagement organizations such as, JOLT, MOVE Texas, Texas Freedom Network, and the League of Women Voters, used text and call banking as Get Out the Vote (GOTV) initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic. While both civic organizations and politicians state that door-to-door canvassing is the most effective method to increase voter turnout, their digital outreach efforts were successful for the 2020 Presidential election. This success is measured by post-election turnout rates.

3.8: CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter examined historical, racist and discriminatory actions by state and federal institutions against Mexicans and Mexican Americans. The above-mentioned institutions have lasting legacies that may affect inhabitants—and potential voters—in Texas today. Similar to other racialized groups in the U.S. (i.e. African Americans), the lasting impacts of such institutional actions shape the daily lived experiences of Mexicans

and Mexican Americans in Texas, and also illuminates how white supremacy is built into political and social institutions, labor relations, property relations and electoral practices. These histories illustrate that low Latinx political participation and voting is the resulting legacy of widespread, systemic, and institutionalized violence, voter suppression, and land dispossession, which I call the disenfranchisement effect. While most of the histories examined in this chapter resulted in negative outcomes for Latinx voters, they also illustrate that social institutions such as, LULAC, are responsible for positive outcomes. Specifically, civic- and community-based organizations continue to fight for Latinx voting rights, register new voters, and increase Latinx voter turnout in Texas. In the next chapter, I employ quantitative methods to examine whether the presence and density of certain types of civic- and community-based institutions is systematically associated with increased voter turnout for different ethnic groups, namely, Latinx and white Texans.

CHAPTER 4: A PILOT ELECTORAL GEOGRAPHY STUDY OF LATINX VOTER TURNOUT IN TEXAS COUNTIES IN THE 2016 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

4.1: INTRODUCTION, RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

This chapter investigates the second objective of this dissertation, which aims to examine the extent to which established socioeconomic predictors and/or indicators of political participation differ for Latinx and White Americans. Socioeconomic variables have been deemed significant indicators of turnout for Latinxs in general throughout the electoral-participation literature (Cancela and Geys 2016). However, evidence exists to suggest that some of these relationships are either weaker for Latinx voters compared to White voters, or they may be affected by membership in social institutions. I aim to better understand the determinants of Latinx voting behavior in Texas counties—including institutional variables—in order to identify possible leverage points for closing persistent group turnout gaps. This chapter answers research question one and sub-questions 1A-B:

Research Question 1: What differences exist, if any, between voter turnout for Latinx and White Americans in Texas counties?

1A: What formal social and cultural institutions exist in Texas counties and where are they located?

1B: Does the presence of certain social institutions vary systematically with Latinx turnout, after controlling for socioeconomic status indicators? With White turnout?

1C: To what extent do relationships between voter turnout and socioeconomic status indicators (e.g., unemployment rate, poverty rate, educational attainment, etc.) differ for Latinx and White Americans in Texas counties?

4.2: LITERATURE OVERVIEW

In light of demographic shifts that have been underway in the United States since at least the year 2000 (Huber 2016; Flores 2017), multiple observers have dubbed the nation’s Latinx population the “sleeping giant” of American politics (Jackson 2011; Gamboa 2018). Nationwide, more than 27 million Hispanic/Latinx persons were estimated to be eligible to vote in the 2016 presidential election (Krogstad et al. 2016). These staggering numbers translate to roughly 12 percent of all Americans who seemingly met the requirements to cast a ballot in 2016—the largest share of the U.S. electorate claimed by the Latinx population in recent history. For that reason, Hispanic and Latinx persons seemed “poised to have a large impact on the 2016 presidential election” (Krogstad et al. 2016, 7).

Nevertheless, as has happened in virtually all national American elections since at least 1980 (Arvizu and Garcia 1996; Shaw, de la Garza, and Lee 2000; Krogstad et al. 2016; File 2018), estimated turnout among voting-eligible Latinx persons in 2016 lagged behind estimated turnout for voting-eligible members of all other ethnic groups tracked by the U.S. Census Bureau. Specifically, Hispanic turnout was estimated at 47.6 percent of eligible voters, compared to 65.3 percent for non-Hispanic whites, 59.6 percent for non-Hispanic African Americans, and 49.3 percent of non-Hispanic members of all other Census-designated racial groups (File 2018). Because of this relatively low group turnout

rate, Hispanic/Latinx share of the 2016 electorate was disproportionately low: Hispanic voters made up only 9.2 percent of ballots cast (File 2018), despite accounting for nearly 12 percent of the citizen voting-age population (Krogstad et al. 2016).

Clearly, then, the Hispanic/Latinx electorate has not grown proportionally with the demographic group's population (Krogstad et al. 2016). Latinx persons accounted for half of all U.S. population growth between 2000 and 2016—making Hispanic/Latinx persons collectively the second largest ethnic group in America behind only non-Hispanic whites (Flores 2017); but without concomitant gains in vote share. In the state of Texas, where in 2016 Latinx persons made up more than 39 percent of all people (Hernandez-Nieto and Gutierrez 2017) and more than 28 percent of the citizen voting age population (Krogstad et al. 2016), the group's "sleeping giant" status is arguably even more pronounced. Since 2004, Latinx voter turnout in Texas has hovered around a mere 40 percent, compared to consistent rates around (and in most cases, above) 60 percent for non-Hispanic white and non-Hispanic African American persons nation- and state-wide (Ura and Murphy 2017). In (dis)proportional terms, during the 2016 presidential election, despite accounting for over 28 percent of eligible voters, Hispanic/Latinx Texans made up only around 20 percent of ballots cast in their home state (Ura and Murphy 2017).

On this backdrop of stagnant Hispanic/Latinx voter turnout vis-à-vis growing population numbers (and growing numbers of eligible/citizen voters), an important, broad research question emerges: what factors influence Latinx voting behavior? For decades, electoral geographers and scholars from allied disciplines have asked such a question in one form or another for voters in general (Johnston 1974; Gimpel et al. 2004) and for Hispanic/Latinx voters in particular (Arvizu and Garcia 2000; Shaw, de la Garza, and Lee

2000; Barreto 2012). Although evidence produced in these “spatial-analytic” (Leib and Quinton 2011) investigations does not unanimously support certain hypotheses over others, more often than not demographic and socioeconomic variables are found to be significant predictors of voter turnout. Specifically, compositional and contextual factors (Johnston et al. 2001) such as local unemployment (Rosenstone 1982; Johnston et al. 2001), educational attainment (Tenn 2007), homeownership (Fischel 2001), income, gender, race/ethnicity, and age (Citrin, Schickler, and Sides 2003) are observed to vary systematically with voting behavior.

To the list of these and related “usual suspect” variables, this chapter considers the extent to which the presence and density of selected formal social institutions in a given area are associated with 2016 Hispanic/Latinx turnout. Whereas the roles and relevance of social institutions in influencing individual decision-making behaviors has been a question of longstanding interest to ethnic geographers (Frazier et al. 2016) and social scientists from other fields (e.g., Ostrom 1990), the link between institutions and patterns of voter turnout is underexplored in empirical electoral geography literature. Consequently, using the state of Texas as a study area, I undertake a quantitative electoral geography vote study, in the subfield’s “spatial-analytic” tradition (see Leib and Quinton 2011), to estimate county-level Hispanic/Latinx turnout as a function of institutional density and several control variables that recurrently feature in the literature. Importantly, as with most U.S. states, Texas does not “track voters by race and ethnicity”, meaning that there is “no way of knowing exactly how much of the turnout in [Texas] counties, particularly [counties] that [do not] have predominantly Hispanic populations, was made up of Hispanic voters” (McCullough and Ura 2016). Likewise, there are no state-level

survey datasets that would facilitate a representative investigation of individual-level voting behavior for Hispanic/Latinx residents in Texas. Because of these data challenges, prior to designing, calibrating, and estimating a county-level weighted least squares (WLS) regression model of turnout, I first estimate county-level Hispanic/Latinx using Gary King's (1997) method of Ecological Inference ("King's EI").

In adopting this turnout estimation method, I explicitly respond to a challenge issued by Johnston (2005, 581-582) to American electoral geographers in an earlier issue of this journal: to "test the assumption that similar people vote in the same way wherever they live" using King's EI, a method rarely "deployed...in studies of U.S. electoral geography". In that sense, the intended contributions of this paper are threefold: to (1) deploy a valuable but perhaps underutilized [at least in American electoral geography studies (Johnston, 2005)] method to estimate 2016 Hispanic/Latinx voter turnout in Texas counties, (2) identify statistically significant covariates of Hispanic/Latinx turnout and interpret the directions of those relationships, and (3) determine the extent to which the presence and density of selected types of formal social institutions covary with Hispanic/Latinx turnout after controlling for "usual suspect" variables from the literature. A WLS model reveals that, after controlling for relevant compositional and contextual factors, the presence and density of both "membership-based" and "community improvement" institutions vary positively and significantly with Hispanic/Latinx turnout in Texas counties. As a byproduct of the study, an analogous model shows that these institutional variables fail to register as meaningful covariates of white voter turnout. Taken together, the findings have timely and important implications for policy and research. Among other observations, the results of this analyses implicate a potential

leverage point (i.e., formal social sector institutions) for waking a “sleeping giant” (Jackson 2011; Gamboa 2018) in the 2020 and 2022 congressional elections. Furthermore, the findings pave the way for follow-up qualitative research aimed at understanding the “how” and “why” (in addition to the “which”) of the apparent link between formal social institutions and Hispanic/Latinx turnout.

4.3: DETERMINANTS OF VOTING BEHAVIOR

A large body of multidisciplinary literature has examined the manifold factors that bear on an individual’s decision to vote (Cancela and Geys 2016). In synthesizing key developments from this impressive stockpile of scholarship, Harder and Krosnick (2008) place predictors of voting into five categories of factors: (1) registration-related, (2) demographic, (3) social and psychological, (4) election-specific, and (5) political strategy (e.g., canvassing and polling). Quantitative, cross-sectional studies in electoral geography that aim to better understand spatial patterns of political behavior across relatively large-extent study areas (e.g., the U.S. state of Texas) tend to rely on aggregate outcomes, such as turnout or candidate vote share at the precinct- (e.g., Weaver and Bagchi-Sen 2015) or county- (e.g., Scala et al. 2015) level. One reason for this reliance on aggregate data is that much of the information relevant to studying the relationships between *person-level* voting behavior and the five categories of motivating factors named above is private (e.g., King 1997; Park, Hanmer, and Biggers 2014). That is, while voter registration lists and voter histories can be obtained via public records requests in many political jurisdictions (e.g., Gimpel et al. 2004), complementary individual-level data on a person’s demographics and social and psychological factors are not readily available in secondary datasets. Nevertheless, there is value in attempting to identify proxies for

important social and psychological drivers of voting behavior, which can then enter into empirical electoral geography studies.

As noted above, there is a preponderance of evidence that many indicators, particularly socioeconomic status indicators, influence voter turnout (Harder and Krosnick 2008). To augment that established list, I argue that the presence and density of certain formal civic and social institutions in a given place is likely to vary with turnout, even after controlling for the wide range of established covariates. I contend that this variable may act as a proxy for voluntary participation or civically engaged behavior, insofar as institutions can be outlets for participation. Broadly conceived, social institutions exist in many contexts, support members of groups, and can facilitate the accumulation of in-group social and cultural capital (Frazier et al. 2016). To date, the study of social institutions in electoral politics has focused largely on *mechanisms*—e.g., concurrent elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980), compulsory voting (Power 2009; Fowler 2013), the electoral system (Ladner and Milner 1999; Freitag and Stadelmann-Steffen 2010), and registration requirements (Ansolabehere, S. and Konisky, D. 2006; Neiheisel, J. and Burden, B. 2012)—as opposed to specific, place-based institutions and their potential associations with local electoral behavior (example institutions included in these analyses include rotary clubs, churches, neighborhood associations, and community development organizations). The analyses explore the potential role such institutions might play in closing the well-documented White-Latinx turnout gap.

4.4: SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS, ETHNICITY AND TURNOUT

Below I incorporate proxy institutional variables as predictors into models of Hispanic/Latinx and non-Hispanic white voter turnout in Texas counties during the 2016 presidential election. Given the consistent gap between the proportion of Hispanic/Latinx persons in the pool of eligible American voters, and their corresponding proportion in the universe of ballots cast in national elections (File 2018), new attempts to identify turnout determinants and leverage points for increasing Hispanic/Latinx participation are valuable contributions to theory and practice. With that in mind, I note that, according to literature on voluntary youth-serving associations (Frisco, Muller, and Dodson 2004), organization affiliation (Diaz 1996), mobilization efforts by associations (Michelson 2003), and organized labor unions (Barreto and Segura 2014), social institutions might be particularly meaningful spaces in which to distribute information or otherwise influence the decision-making processes of members of marginalized ethnic groups. This is especially the case for institutions where members are predominantly co-ethnics (Barreto and Segura 2014). Ethnic cues have been shown to facilitate trust regarding political information and candidate representation (Barreto and Segura 2014), and co-ethnicity has been shown to bolster voter's homophily perception and turnout intent (Yang, Erives, and Kang 2015). As such, while the presence and density of certain institutions in geographic areas—similar to education (Hillygus 2005) or income (Shingles 2014)—might be positively linked to electoral behavior and participation among all voters, we anticipate that they are likely to have even more relevance to underrepresented groups. Hence, although the primary aim of this paper is to better understand patterns of 2016 *Hispanic/Latinx* turnout in Texas, we explore the extent to which the institutional

variables covary with turnout rates for both Hispanic/Latinx *and* non-Hispanic white voters in order to also evaluate this expectation that institutions matter differently to different ethnic groups.

4.5: STUDY AREA, VARIABLES, DATA AND METHODS

4.5.1: Study Area Context

Fifty percent of the 254 counties in Texas have populations greater than 25 percent Hispanic, and 51 counties in Texas have populations that are over 50 percent Hispanic. Texan Hispanics are on track to outnumber non-Hispanic Texans by 2022 (Ura and Ahmed 2018). At the same time, while non-Hispanic whites constitute only 43 percent of Texas's population, they represented more than 65 percent of all the votes cast in 2016. Hispanic/Latinx voters, meanwhile, represented less than 40 percent of the electorate in 2016 (Ura and Murphy 2017). For these reasons, Texas is an opportune location in which to test the suppositions that (1) institutions matter to voter turnout, but (2) might matter more for marginalized ethnic groups than majority groups. Such findings would arguably create circumstantial evidence to suggest that certain types of social organizations might act as leverage points for narrowing gaps between Hispanic/Latinx turnout and the turnout rates of other ethnic groups in future elections.

4.5.2: Dependent Variables: Group Turnout

The main dependent variable in this study is Hispanic/Latinx turnout in Texas counties during the 2016 presidential election. Counties, while coarse units of analysis, often feature in empirical studies that aim to reveal broad spatial patterns of electoral behavior; for, in addition to the richness of data available at the county level, county

governments are responsible for elections administration. As such, county-level studies can reveal specific geographic units that might require policy intervention (e.g., Weaver 2015).

On that backdrop, county-level turnout by ethnicity is an unknown variable—i.e., data on voter ethnicity are not recorded in the state of Texas (McCullough and Ura 2016), as is the case with almost all other U.S. states (King 1997). Moreover, representative survey data for Texas voters that would allow for a test of the hypothesis that turnout is linked to institutional presence do not exist, nor did this project have a sufficient budget to commission a large-scale survey. Accordingly, following similarly motivated studies (e.g., Tolbert and Grummel 2003; Orey et al. 2011), observations of the dependent variable are derived from aggregate data using King’s (1997) method of ecological inference (King’s EI).

4.5.3: Data and Methods

King’s EI is widely used in studies of racial and ethnic group voting behavior, and it is favored by federal judges in voting cases that deal with such matters (Withers 2001; Greiner 2007). Accordingly, it is described as an “established method” for research that attempts to quantify measures from aggregate which cannot otherwise be obtained from existing sources (Collett 2005). Apart from its place in court systems and voting research, King’s EI was flagged by Johnston (2005) as an underused method in American electoral geography that can enable researchers to “test the assumption that similar people vote in the same way wherever they live”.

Following King (1997), a basic EI model for Latinx turnout requires three observable county-level values: (1) the total number of voters eligible to participate in the 2016 presidential election, N_i , often referred to as the citizen voting-age population (CVAP); (2) the fraction of N_i that cast ballots (i.e., turnout), T_i ; and (3) the fraction of N_i classified as Hispanic/Latinx, X_i ; where i is an index of counties. Using these quantities, the total share of ballots cast by eligible voters can be modeled as a function of (i) voters who are Hispanic/Latinx (β_i^{HL}) and (ii) voters of all other racial and ethnic groups (β_i^O):

$$T_i = \beta_i^{HL} \cdot X_i + \beta_i^O \cdot (1 - X_i) \quad (1)$$

For greater legibility, this ecological inference problem is summarized graphically in Table 4.

Table 4. The ecological inference problem for Hispanic/Latinx Turnout

Ethnicity	Voting Decision		CVAP^a
	Voted	Did Not Vote	
Hispanic/Latinx (HL)	β_i^{HL}	$1 - \beta_i^{HL}$	X_i
Other than Hispanic/Latinx (O)	β_i^O	$1 - \beta_i^O$	$1 - X_i$
	T_i		N_i

^a CVAP = Citizen Voting Age Population (also called “eligible” voters)

The row and column marginal quantities from Table 4 were obtained for each county from, respectively: (1) the U.S. Census Bureau’s Special Tabulation on CVAP, accessed through Social Explorer (<http://www.socialexplorer.com>); and (2) county-level turnout data compiled by the Portland Herald Press (Woodard 2017). Using these marginal values as inputs, King’s EI computes deterministic bounds for the unknown,

interior quantities from Table 1. It then employs a simultaneous maximum likelihood approach to estimate the locations of the parameters within these bounds—i.e., point estimates of turnout and accompanying standard errors can be derived from the likelihood function for each county (King 1997; Withers 2001).

The results from estimating the model are presented alongside summary statistics for the independent variables in Table 5 later in this section. The left panel of Figure 6 maps the county-level point estimates across the study area. The right panel shows estimates that were obtained for non-Hispanic white voters using analogous means. Importantly, observe that the statewide EI turnout estimates for Latinx and non-Hispanic white voters were 40.6 percent and 63.0 percent, respectively. These estimates are nearly identical to the U.S. Census Bureau’s turnout estimates for Texas, which were 40.5 percent for voting-eligible Hispanic persons and 62.9 percent for voting-eligible non-Hispanic white persons (U.S. Census Bureau 2017). This close correspondence inspires confidence in the EI estimates, beyond the method’s already “established” place in empirical group voting research (e.g., Collett 2005).

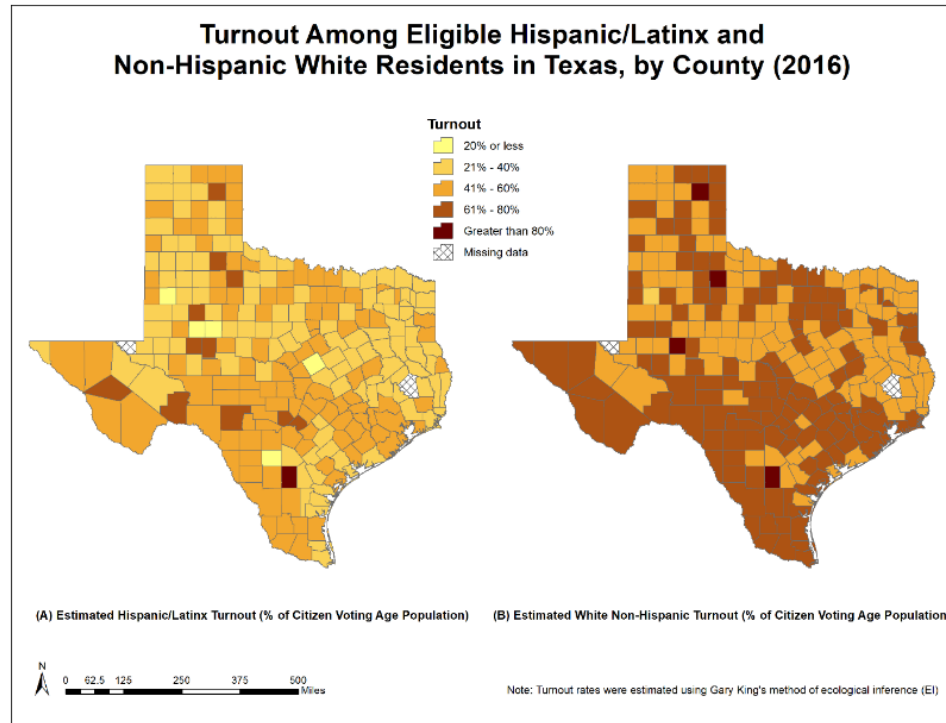


Figure 6: Estimated Voter Turnout by Ethnicity

4.5.4: Independent Variables and Hypothesized Relationship to Latinx Turnout

Scholarly literature on Hispanic/Latinx voting tends to draw on “established” of indicators—as they were referred to above—to study group turnout. I controlled for the most common of those indicators using data from the U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates (2012-2016). The specific predictors included in the models were:

- **Gender.** Research consistently demonstrates that women tend to vote at relatively higher rates than men, particularly in presidential elections (Center for American Women and Politics 2017). Accordingly, I incorporate the female proportion

of the Hispanic/Latinx voting-eligible population into the model as a predictor that is expected to vary positively with turnout.

- **Homeownership.** Owning a home is widely held to be a positive predictor of civic and political participation (Manturuk et al. 2009).

- **Education.** Historically assumed to be the principal determinant of political participation (Cancela and Geys 2016), education is somewhat of an enigma in the turnout literature. Many studies have found that higher levels of education are directly related with higher levels of political participation (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Mayer 2011; Verba et al. 1995; Hillygus 2005); others, however, suggest that the education-turnout link is misleading, and that education might instead be a stand-in for more meaningful variables such as access to information and resources (Huckfeldt 1979; Kam and Palmer 2008). Still, I incorporate it into the models using the percentage of adults with a college degree.

- **Poverty.** Another variable, low income is readily associated with lower political participation (Cancela and Geys 2016). These findings have held for underrepresented groups including African Americans (Shingles 2014), though evidence of this relationship for Hispanic-, Asian-, and white-Americans is more mixed (Dawson, Brown and Allen 1990; Tate 1991; Harris 1994). Here, I assume that the percentage of the population earning income below the poverty level will negatively affect turnout—though, as with education, the mixed evidence for this relationship when applied to specific ethnic groups gives us a healthy sense of skepticism. (NB: median income was

also considered as a measure of income; however, poverty proved to have greater importance in the regression model.)

- **Mobility.** Research has shown that mobility is directly associated with voting behavior (Cancela and Geys 2016). Here I use the fraction of commuters who drive themselves to work as a proxy for mobility. While past studies have relied on the number of vehicles available to a household as a mobility proxy (Haspell and Knotts 2005), the ACS does not tabulate vehicle ownership by the race or ethnicity of a householder. Commuting, however, is broken out by the ACS according to race/ethnicity, it is possible to know the fraction of Hispanic/Latinx workers who have the means to drive themselves to work, which is arguably an indicator that they may have the ability to drive themselves to other locations (such as a polling station).

- **Income Inequality.** Research shows that high-income inequality negatively affects turnout, much as it is said to negatively affect social cohesion (e.g., Holtkamp and Weaver 2018). A meta-analysis of 14 articles measuring the effects of income inequality on voter turnout revealed that around half the time, the expected negative relationship manifests and is statistically significant. In the remaining cases, however, the relationship is either absent or positive (Horn 2011; Stockemer and Scruggs 2012; Stockemer 2017). Thus, while I do expect the commonly claimed negative relationship between inequality (measured with the common Gini Index, obtained via Social Explorer) and turnout to hold in my models, I again note the need to remain somewhat agnostic here due to the inconclusiveness of extant empirical evidence.

- **Unemployment.** Cebula (2017) found that higher unemployment is linked to lower turnout—though this finding goes against the grain of other studies that suggest a positive relationship between unemployment and voter participation (Fiorina 1981; Lau 1982; Bartels 2008; Bartels 2010; Owen 2011). The latter finding is arguably evidence of economic voting (e.g., Linn et al. 2010). In adopting the same reasoning that I employed for inequality, I expect to see the arguably more common positive relationship between unemployment and turnout manifest in the model.

- **English Proficiency.** Given my interest in Hispanic/Latinx voters, it is important to reflect on language. In 1975, Section 203 was added to the federal Voting Rights Act (VRA) to help facilitate the voting rights of Latinxs with limited English proficiency, Asian Americans, American Indians and Alaska Natives, by requiring language assistance in certain jurisdictions (Sundaram 2015). Nevertheless, LEP is still regularly found to be an impedance to voter participation in the United States (Sundaram 2015), and, for that reason I expect that the fraction of persons who speak English “less than very well” (NB: this is the U.S. Census Bureau’s coding) will vary negatively with turnout.

- **Population Density.** In relatively rural or small town (e.g., stable and somewhat homogenous) environments, there is sometimes said to be a “personal” aspect of elections (Blank 1974) that lowers the information costs of voting, which can be expected to translate into higher turnout rates. These same features have been argued to represent important factors in individuals' attachment to a local community and sense of place, which also contribute positively to political participation (Wirth, 1938; Cancela and Geys 2016).

- **Selected Civic and Social Institutions.** Finally, as argued above, I posit that the presence/density of selected civic and social institutions might act as proxies for social and civic engagement—for, institutions can act as arenas in which community members interact and share information in ways that can influence behavior (Ostrom 1990). Social institutions can also be viewed as grounds where social networks are created/bolstered, and recent studies have illustrated that social networks influence voter turnout (Stewart et al. 2019). Whereas such institutions need not be formal incorporated entities (Frazier et al. 2016; Henry and Frazier 2017), the advantage of focusing on formal organizations in this cross-sectional exploratory analysis is that they are identifiable in secondary datasets. In particular, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) maintains and regularly updates an Exempt Organization (EO) Masterfile that enumerates social sector organizations across the United States. All organizations listed in the EO Masterfile are classified according to the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE).

NTEE codes describe the broad nature of an organization. I singled out four NTEE codes for this investigation. First, insofar as minority voting rights are civil rights, I extracted all NTEE code R (“Civil Rights, Social Action, Advocacy”) organizations from the Texas EO Masterfile. Second, to the extent that place-based organizations focused on local community-building plausibly bring citizens together and sow the seeds of collective action (e.g., Holtkamp and Weaver 2018), I extracted all institutions with NTEE code S (“Community Improvement, Capacity Building”). Third, recognizing the recent roles that some churches have played in encouraging political participation among members of underrepresented groups—see, for example, research on “souls to the polls”

programs implemented in African- American churches (e.g., Herron and Smith 2014)—I extracted all institutions with NTEE code X (“Religion-Related, Spiritual Development”). Finally, according to scholarship on collective social capital (e.g., Putnam 2000; Rupasingha et al. 2006; Holtkamp and Weaver 2018), membership-based organizations bring people with similar interests together in ways that facilitate interactions and can increase civic participation. For that reason, I extracted organizations from the EO Masterfile with NTEE code Y (“Mutual/Membership Benefit Organizations, Other”). For all four of these organization types, I computed the number of institutions per person per square mile in each county to deal with marked “variability in area *and* population” (Cutter and Ji 1997, 328; emphasis added). Following from my justifications for selecting these four institution types, I find that all density variables will relate positively to turnout. Further, recall from above that I suppose such relationships will manifest more prominently for Hispanic/Latinx voters than white voters. Table 5 summarizes descriptive statistics for the data described above.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics and data sources

	<i>Hispanic/Latinx^a</i>		<i>White (Non-Hispanic)^b</i>		
Variable	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Source
<i>Group-specific variables</i>					
Turnout (fraction of CVAP ^c)	0.406	0.018	0.630	0.012	King’s EI
Fraction of CVAP that is female	0.479	0.080	0.500	0.292	ACS ^d 2012-2016 CVAP Special Tabulation (via SE ^e)
Unemployment rate	0.071	0.053	0.051	0.028	ACS 2012-2016 (via SE)
Poverty rate	0.245	0.103	0.113	0.047	ACS 2012-2016 (via SE)

Drove alone to work (fraction of commuters 16 years or older)	0.767	0.104	0.816	0.066	ACS 2012-2016 (via SE)
College degree (fraction of adults 25 years or older)	0.072	0.052	0.244	0.091	ACS 2012-2016 (via SE)
Speaks English “less than very well” (fraction of persons 5 years or older)	0.266	0.118	0.010	0.022	ACS 2012-2016 (via SE)
Owner occupied units (fraction of occupied units)	0.643	0.133	0.755	0.081	ACS 2012-2016 (via SE)
<i>Area-based variables (same for both groups)</i>	Mean	SD			
Population density (persons per mi.²)	112.432	330.832	ACS 2012-2016 (via SE)		
Gini index of income inequality	0.457	0.035	ACS 2012-2016 (via SE)		
Civil rights institutions per person per mi.²	0.011	0.086	IRS EO ^f Masterfile		
Community improvement institutions per person per mi.²	0.183	0.300	IRS EO Masterfile		
Religious institutions per person per mi.²	0.444	0.444	IRS EO Masterfile		
Membership-based institutions per person per mi.²	0.108	0.190	IRS EO Masterfile		

^a Two of 254 counties had missing information on the group-specific variables listed here (i.e., n=252)

^b One of 254 counties had missing information on the group-specific variables listed here; however, for consistency, the same sample used for our model of non-Hispanic white turnout was set equal to the sample used to analyze Hispanic/Latinx turnout (n=252)

^c CVAP = Citizen Voting Age Population (also called “eligible” voters)

^d ACS = U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey

^e SE = Social Explorer

^f EO = Exempt Organization

With the above data, I followed the instructive examples of King (1997, p.290) and researchers who have used his EI method (e.g., Tolbert and Grummel 2003; Orey et al. 2011; Weaver and Bagchi-Sen 2015) by estimating weighted least squares (WLS) regressions that modeled the dependent turnout variable(s) as a function(s) of the aforementioned predictors. Given the uncertainty attached to EI estimates, each county-level observation in the dataset was weighted by the inverse of the standard error for its turnout estimate—i.e., I placed less weight on observations with relatively high uncertainty and more weight on observations with comparatively low uncertainty in order to increase the reliability of the results (e.g., Tolbert and Grummel 2003).

4.6: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

4.6.1. Research Question 1A

Figure 7 maps the results from geocoding all organizations from the Texas IRS EO Master File that were characterized by one of the four NTEE codes under investigation: (1) religious institutions; (2) membership-based institutions; (3) community improvement institutions; and (4) civil rights institutions (n=117,615 organizations across the four categories). Generally speaking, the geographies of these distributions follow the geographies of population – with more institutions present in the State’s major population centers.

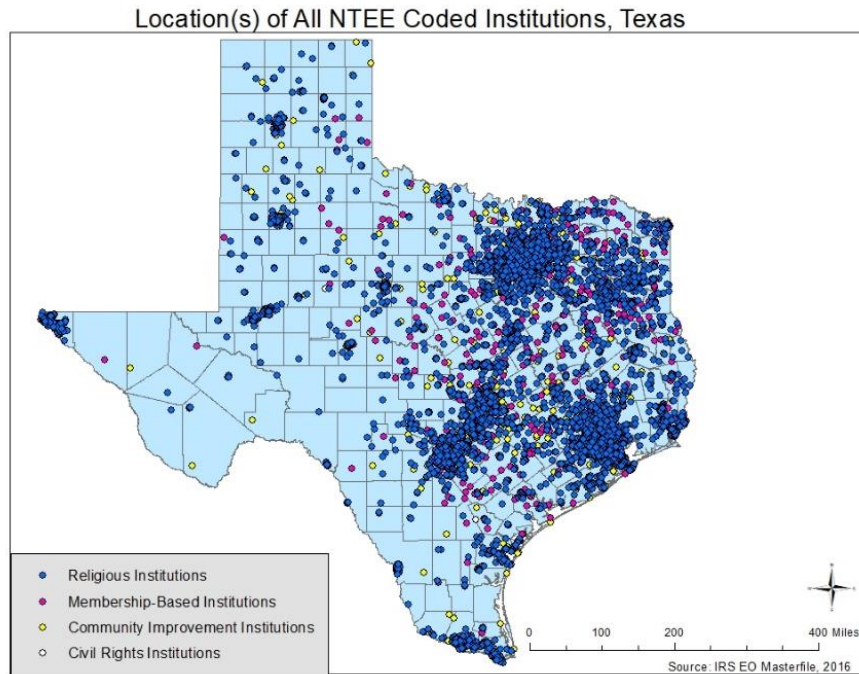


Figure 7: Location of Religious, Community-Improvement, Membership-Based and Civil Rights Institutions in Texas

Figures 8, 10, 11, and 12 illustrate break out the data from Figure 7 by NTEE code. To compare site factors such as, institutional density, to additional situational factors such as, Latinx voter eligibility, Figure 9 provides the Latinx voting eligible population by county in Texas. It is important to note that due to how the Census/ACS collects data, Latinx is not a selectable option for race and persons of Latin origin can only select, “Hispanic or Latino” for ethnicity, but not race categories.

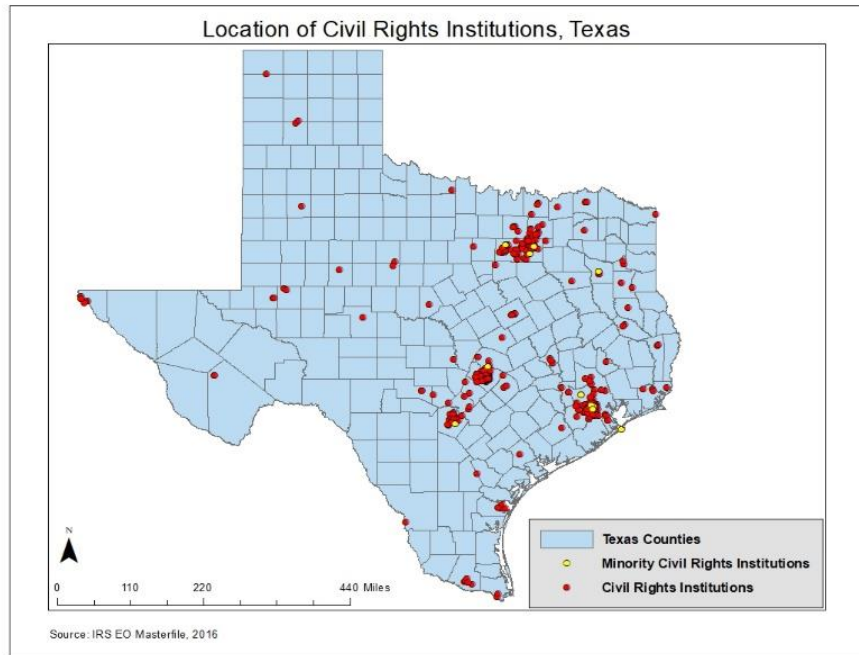


Figure 8: Location of Civil Rights Institutions in Texas

Figure 8 illustrates the locations of civil rights institutions (red) in Texas, including minority civil rights institutions (yellow). Minority civil rights institutions (yellow) are institutions that wore predominantly on civil rights for minority groups. Note that all minority civil rights institutions are located in Texas’s urban triangle—that is Houston, San Antonio, Austin, Dallas, Fort-Worth. Out of all institutions examined in this research, civil rights institutions are the least represented. Examine Figure 9 below, Latinx Voter Eligible Population (VEP) by County, and notice that despite some borderland’s counties constituting up to 14.4% of each county’s voter eligible population, few civil rights organizations exist in these counties. This can be problematic in Texas for two important reasons: 1) voting rights act violations are historically and presently plentiful in the state, and 2) civil rights organizations such as, ACLU, LULAC, and NAACP are usually at the forefront of fighting for voting equality.

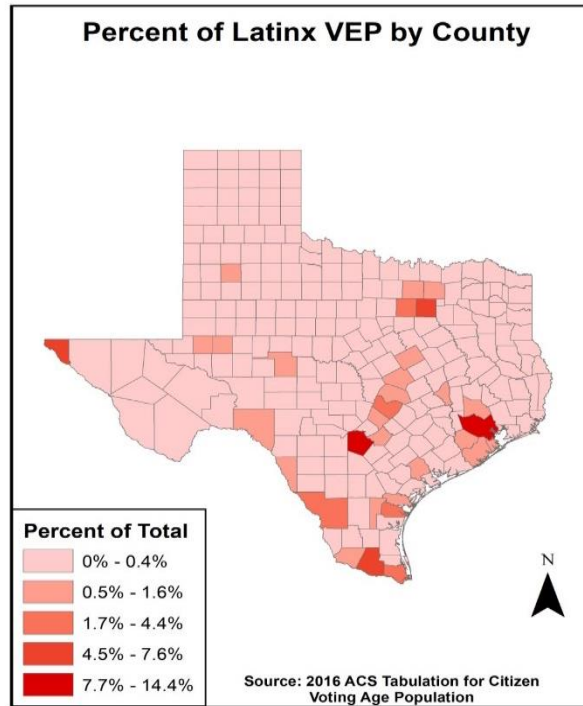


Figure 9: Latinx Voting Eligible Population by County

Figure 9 illustrates the Latinx voting eligible population (VEP) by county in Texas. Note that substantial Latinx settlement patterns are along the Texas-Mexico border and urban counties that contain Houston, San Antonio, Austin, Dallas and Fort Worth. When compared with the figures above, it becomes clear that counties along the Texas-Mexico border, with high Latinx VEPs, are an institutional desert when it comes to civil rights and membership-based institutions.

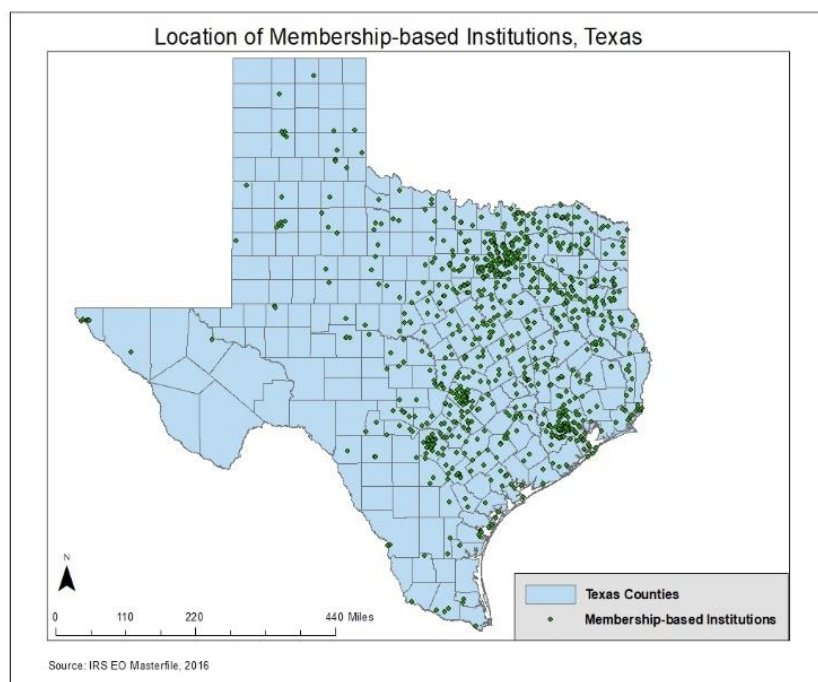


Figure 10: Location of Membership-based Institutions in Texas

Figure 10 illustrates the location of membership-based institutions in Texas. At a quick glance Figure 10 reveals two important findings: 1) civil rights and membership-based institutional deserts exist in the borderland's counties, despite the substantial, predominantly Latinx populations that reside there, and 2) community-based institutions are mostly in urban areas, similar to the same patterns exhibited by civil rights institutions in Figure 10.

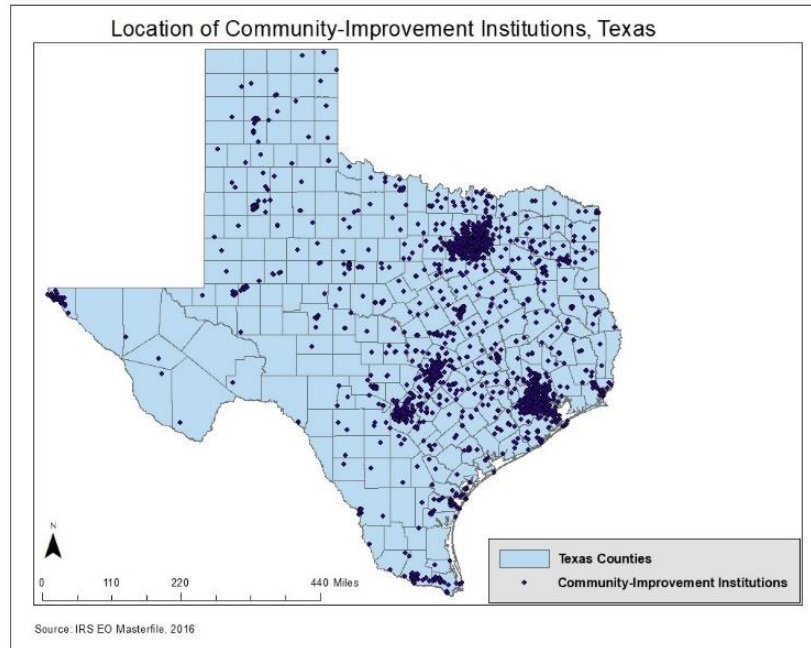


Figure 11: Location of Community-Improvement Institutions in Texas

Figure 11 illustrates the locations of community-improvement institutions in Texas. Community-improvement institutions are the second most abundant type of institution investigated in this research. Unlike civil rights and membership-based institutions, the density of community-improvement institutions along the Texas-Mexico border is at least double that of civil rights and membership-based institutions.

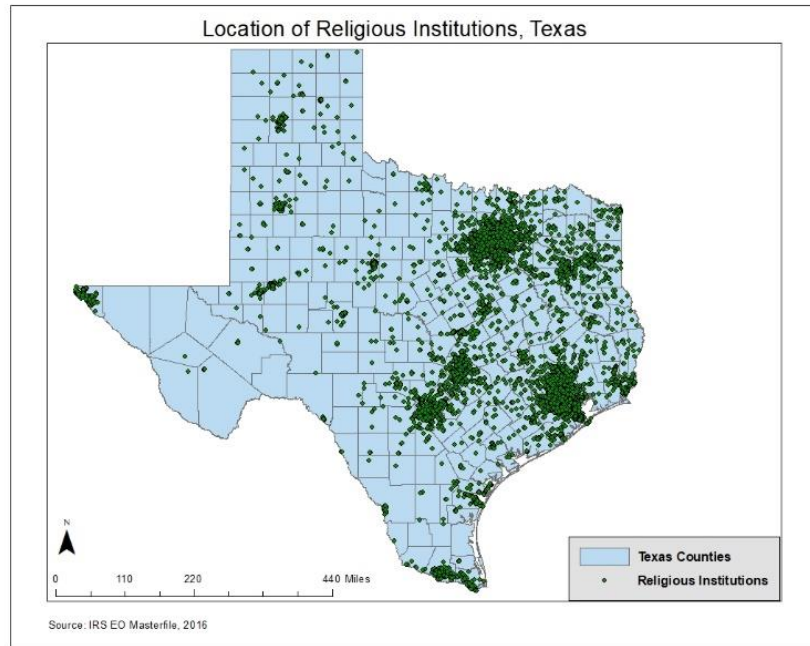


Figure 12: Location of Religious Institutions in Texas

Figure 12 illustrates the location of religious institutions across the state of Texas. Religious institutions, by far, are the most abundant represented in the IRS data set. Note that in addition to high densities of religious institutions in urban areas, there is also a high density of them in border counties. While chapter 3 found that religious institutions were not statistically significant in terms of voter turnout, these types of institutions should not be overlooked for their contributions in the political arena, especially site attributes such as, serving as polling locations during elections. Further, site characteristics are important for understanding how (or if) institutions meet the local needs and conditions (principle 4) of members/participants.

3.6.1: Research Questions 1B-C

The results of the WLS regression for Hispanic/Latinx turnout are presented in Table 6, alongside the results from the equivalent model for non-Hispanic white turnout.

Neither model exhibited signs of multicollinearity (see Appendix), nor did they display serious heteroskedasticity issues (null hypotheses in non-constant variance tests [Fox and Weisburg 2019] were not rejected at a 99 percent level of confidence in either model: for Hispanic/Latinx turnout, $\chi^2[1] = 2.39, p = 0.12$; and for non-Hispanic white turnout, $\chi^2[1] = 6.37, p = 0.01$). Further, the residuals of the focal Hispanic/Latinx turnout model showed no meaningful signs of spatial autocorrelation (Moran's $I=0.07, p=0.05$ [queen contiguity]; see Appendix). While the same was not strictly true for the non-Hispanic white turnout model ($I=0.116, p<0.01$ [queen contiguity]), the small magnitude of the Moran index, coupled with the interest in this model only for its ability to enrich the interpretation of the results from the focal Hispanic/Latinx model, led us to take no further corrective actions (e.g., a spatial regression specification). Instead, I simply disclose the potential spatial dependence issue so that readers know to approach the comparison (white turnout) model with caution.

Table 6. Weighted least squares regression results

Variable	Hispanic/Latinx		White (non-Hispanic)	
	Coefficient	Std. Err.	Coefficient	Std. Err.
Fraction of CVAP that is female	0.294***	0.009	0.435**	0.168
Unemployment rate	0.561**	0.117	-0.097	0.167
Poverty rate	-0.264***	0.072	-0.570***	0.105
Drove alone to work	0.018	0.066	-0.179**	0.070
College degree	0.499**	0.130	0.471***	0.061
Speaks English “less than very well”	0.141***	0.044	0.060	0.251
Owner occupied units	-0.042	0.053	0.117**	0.048
Population density	-4.0e-5*	2.1e-5	-5.2e-5***	1.3e-5
Gini index of income inequality	-0.145	0.168	-0.220*	0.113
Civil rights institutions per person per mi.²	-0.095	0.067	-0.079	0.058

Community improvement institutions per person per mi.²	0.089***	0.018	0.024	0.018
Religious institutions per person per mi.²	0.021	0.015	-0.015	0.011
Membership-based institutions per person per mi.²	0.076**	0.033	0.018	0.022
Constant	0.271	0.099	0.523	0.122
R²	0.308		0.524	
n	252		252	

***p<0.01 **p<0.05 *p<0.10

The relationships between turnout and the predictor variables are quite different for the two ethnic groups. With respect to the “established” variables described earlier, only gender, education (college degree or higher), income (poverty), and population density are universally significant and vary with group turnout in the expected directions. Namely, after controlling for the other variables in the model: (i) the fraction of eligible voters who are female and the fraction of adults with a college degree both vary directly with turnout; and (ii) population density and poverty both vary inversely with turnout. Two other common demographic and socioeconomic variables—homeownership and income inequality—are significant in the non-Hispanic white turnout model and take on their expected signs, with the former relating to turnout directly and the latter inversely. Meanwhile, supporting evidence that unemployment might encourage political participation (Linn et al. 2010), Hispanic/Latinx unemployment rates were found to vary positively and significantly with group turnout. Finally, the mobility proxy (fraction of commuters who drive themselves to work) was significant only in the non-Hispanic white turnout model—and its coefficient took the opposite sign (negative) of what I initially expected. Once again, because the white non-Hispanic model is presented for comparison

and is not the focal point of my research, here I merely note this anomaly and flag it as an area for future research.

Of primary interest, the variables that measure the presence and density of selected types of formal social institutions have markedly different relationships with Hispanic/Latinx turnout relative to white turnout. While only two institutional variables achieve statistical significance across the models, both of these significant relationships manifest in the model of Hispanic/Latinx turnout—and both are positive. In other words, the results from the models are consistent with both (1) the expectation that the presence and density of certain social sector institutions will exhibit direct and significant relationships with turnout, after controlling for “established” variables; and (2) the supposition that institutions might matter more for participation of members from marginalized ethnic groups relative to whites (e.g., Barreto and Segura 2014).

Note that the differing patterns of statistical significance here cannot be taken as conclusive evidence that the presence and density of formal social institutions necessarily boosts Hispanic/Latinx turnout and does not affect white turnout. However, it is undeniable that incorporating institutional proxy variables into the Hispanic/Latinx turnout model improves its explanatory power in a way that does not occur in the non-Hispanic white turnout model. To be sure, Figure 13 plots variable importance scores for each predictor for each of the two models. Variable importance is defined in the figure in terms of R-squared decompositions that are rescaled to sum to one. That is, each variable’s importance score is its proportional contribution to the given model’s overall R-squared value (Zuber and Strimmer 2011). By this measure, the *most important* variable in the Hispanic/Latinx turnout model is the number of community

improvement/capacity-building institutions per person per square mile. This variable accounts for roughly 25 percent of the model's overall R-squared value of 0.308. The membership-based organization variable accounts for another ~3 percent of the overall R-squared value. Thus, taken together, the two statistically significant institutional variables in the Hispanic/Latinx turnout model account for about 28 percent of the model's explanatory power, which is far from trivial. The religious institutions variable was not significant in either model but does have slightly higher variable importance in the Hispanic/Latinx model. While initially surprising, the non-significance of this variable is consistent with findings of Barreto and Segura (2014), who found "religiosity" for Hispanic/Latinx voters to be only two percentage points higher than Non-Hispanic white voters. In short, the availability of selected social sector institutions appears to matter more to Hispanic/Latinx turnout, than white turnout potentially even more so than many "usual suspect" demographic variables.

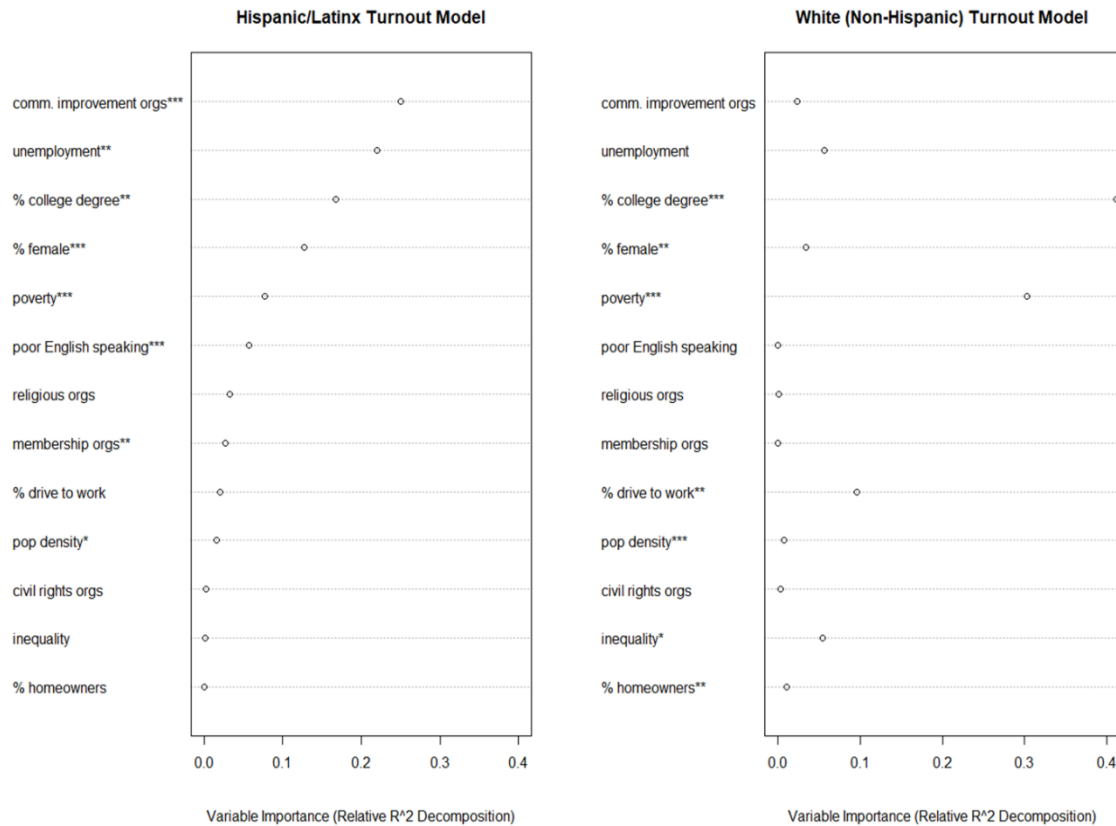


Figure 13: Variable Importance Scores

The preceding findings have valuable implications for research and practice. First, demographic and socioeconomic factors that repeatedly enter into studies of [group] voting behavior seem to be more important for explaining turnout for non-Hispanic white voters in Texas than for Hispanic/Latinx voters. For researchers, this result suggests dedicating more time and effort to identifying voting determinants (and barriers) that affect turnout decisions for Hispanic and Latinx persons rather than assuming that the same “usual suspects” are equally relevant for all types of voters. For example, polling place closures in Medina and Galveston, Texas, and other Texas cities with substantial Latinx populations, occurred during both the 2016 Presidential election and 2018

Presidential mid-term election (Salame 2020). These structural factors may be influencing Latinx voter turnout.

Barreto and colleagues (Barreto et al. 2011) have been at the forefront of research on Latinx voting, and these findings align closely with their observation that civic organizations can be venues for mobilizing Hispanic/Latinx turnout (Barreto et al. 2011, 312). Further studies, especially qualitative research, on how, why, and precisely which civic organizations appeal to and influence Hispanic/Latinx eligible voters will be an important next step in this line of inquiry. For future Get Out the Vote (GOTV) operations and other campaigns, these findings—especially when coupled with research by Barreto and colleagues (e.g., Barreto et al. 2011)—implicate social sector organizations as an important leverage point for increasing Hispanic/Latinx political participation. While personal contact (e.g., email and door-to-door visits) is not without its place, allocating additional resources to building relationships with key stakeholders in, and widely disseminating information through, Hispanic/Latinx-serving social sector institutions could be a winning strategy for narrowing the turnout gap between the two largest ethnic groups in Texas, and potentially in the U.S. as a whole. Beyond these matters, these findings sync up with an overarching policy implication. At present, public sector voter registration programs and turnout drives are somewhat universalizing and passive. Voter registration applications are widely available at government offices (e.g., Departments of Motor Vehicles) and online; and postcards are mailed to registered voters with reminders about election dates and polling place locations. But, other than that, registering and turning out voters in the U.S. is almost exclusively the domain of political campaigns and—arguably reflected in these results—social institutions. Given the

staggering sums of money that flow into American political campaigns, it is clear that monied interests (and the campaigns they support) have the upper hand in these processes of registration and turnout. Decades of evidence show that those influences have not led to even patterns of voting. Rather, there is a persistent and inequitable gap between white and Latinx vote share in U.S. (and Texan) elections. In order to begin closing these gaps, it is important know where social institutions exist in Texas.

4.7: CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 4 employed quantitative methods to systematically investigate the impacts of institutional density on Latinx and white turnout in Texas. It found that the presence of certain types of social institutions such as, community-improvement and membership-based institutions have greater impacts on Latinx turnout than white turnout in Texas, after controlling for popular covariates. In addition, this chapter provided the absolute locations of several different types of social institutions in Texas and revealed that counties with substantial Latinx populations lack ample social institutions such as, civil rights and membership-based institutions. The next chapter employs qualitative methods, in the form of key-informant interviews to examine how institutional governance, activities and participation impact Latinx turnout, and in turn, how both participation and governance create meso-level spaces of political engagement.

CHAPTER 5: INSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE AND IMPACTS ON VOTER TURNOUT

5.1: INTRODUCTION, RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

Chapter 3 demonstrated that certain types of social institutions are associated with increased Latinx voter turnout, but not white turnout, in Texas. This chapter aims to discover *why* these types of institutions positively impact Latinx voter turnout by identifying institutional characteristics such as, activities and governance structures that contribute to Latinx voter engagement. Pursuing this objective involves answering four-sub questions:

A: To which institutions do Latinx voters tend to claim membership or participation?

B: Do the governing characteristics of institutions affect their objective efficacy?

C: Do internal (organizational) structures and external contextual factors (sites and situations) of social institutions create spaces that influence voter turnout for Latinx Americans?

Institutions govern common-pool-resources that are essential to people's well-being and sustainment (e.g., water (Schroder 2018); food (Robinson and Farmer 2017); air (Hyde 2010); and forests (Pohjanmies et al 2017). However, institutions can also govern and facilitate socio-political activities such as, voting and elections (Perales, Figueroa and Rivas 2006). Therefore, institutions are diverse in their aims, activities, and organizational structures, and not all social institutions will produce gains in Latinx voter

turnout. Two terms are used to differentiate people that belong to institutions: 1) “Participants” are defined as volunteers or attendees that do not pay a monetary fee to belong to an institution such as a church or civic engagement institution. “Members” are defined as people who pay money to belong to membership-based institutions such as, museums or home owner associations.

Just as they operate on natural and physical resources, institutions also govern and organize actions and behaviors related to socio-political resources, including voting and elections (Perales, Figueroa and Rivas 2006). While an expansive constellation of institutions influence elections and electoral processes in democratic republics like the United States – and it is beyond the scope of this research to name and inventory them – one of the more prominent themes in the literature on voting behavior is that social institutions can have amplifying or suppressive effects on voter turnout, after controlling for individual level attributes such as socioeconomic status (Ponstingel and Weaver 2021). This phenomenon appears to be especially strong for socially marginalized or disempowered population subgroups, particularly voters of color (Abrams et al 2020). Chapter 3 corroborated this claim by revealing an empirical link between the presence and density of certain types of social institutions and Latinx voter turnout. That finding, based on cross-sectional data for Texas counties, supports earlier survey-based research which found that both voter participation in (Shaw et al 2000) and organizational programming of social institutions may positively affect Latinx voter participation (Barreto and Segura 2017).

That being said, marked diversity in their geographic sites and situations, aims, activities, and organizational structures imply that not all social institutions will have

[equal] influences on Latinx voter participation. Put another way, the intensity at which institutional members or participants become politically active at or through social institutions is likely to vary as a function of institutional characteristics (Herron and Smith 2012; LeRoux and Krawczyk 2014; Green and Gerber 2019). Drawing on the work of prominent social institutionalists and geographers (e.g., Hodgson 2006; Frazier et al 2016; Glückler et al 2018) two vectors of characteristics that might explain some of this variation are: 1) *internal* attributes, such as an institution's objectives, structural designs, and methods of engagement, among others; and 2) *external* attributes related to the institution's site and situation. With respect to the latter, different geographic contexts create different affordances for institutional designs and activities (Bollier and Helfrich 2019). That is, site and situation at least partially influence an institution's focal area of practice (e.g., rural poverty or urban segregation), as well as its tactics (e.g., door knocking campaigns in higher density places versus phone or mail outreach in more remote locations) and structural design (e.g., members are spatially concentrated in a spatial neighborhood or more widely dispersed and connected through technology). At the same time, institutions often self-select into certain areas because those areas afford institutions the opportunities to carry out their objectives in their areas of practice (e.g., a get-out-the-vote organization locates in a high population-low turnout neighborhood).

This dynamic relationship between an institution's internal (organizational) and external (site and situational) characteristics opens quite a wide door of possibilities for why and how some institutions are more or less effective than others at mobilizing their members and participants for electoral purposes (Baybeck and McClurg 2005; Baker et al 2006; Weaver 2014). Attempting to disentangle these webs of relationships and arrive at

precise answers to these questions would arguably require a separate volume compiled by a well-funded team of interdisciplinary researchers. As such, for present purposes, I focus on a small subset of internal and contextual attributes of selected Latinx-serving social institutions in Texas. I engage with how selected internal and external attributes overlay onto one another and, potentially, create spaces for political engagement among Latinx members and participants in the sampled institutions.

5.2: INTERNAL CHARACTERISTICS: A SELECTED ENGAGEMENT WITH OSTROM'S DESIGN PRINCIPLES

In her Nobel-Prize winning work on common-pool resources, Elinor Ostrom (1990) identified eight-core design principles that are exhibited by long-standing, “successful” community-based resource institutions (Table 7). Ostrom’s (1990) principles have since been used to examine institutional governance in an array of non-community-based resource institutional arrangements that include: neighborhood change and property values (Oakerson and Clifton 2017); classroom and school efficacy (Wilson, Ostrom and Cox 2013); and how drug trafficking influences governance in Central American protected areas (Wrathall et al 2020). Indeed, given the manifold collective action problems that face society in the Anthropocene (Gibson-Graham et al. 2019), researchers are increasingly learning that Ostrom’s design principles might offer a more general and flexible framework for studying intra-institutional phenomena and their impacts on collective action(s), beyond common-pool resource regimes (e.g., Wilson, Ostrom and Cox 2013; Atkins et al. 2019).

Table 7: Four design principles for this study

Principle	Description	Used in this Chapter?
#1	Polycentric Governance- examines partnerships with other institutions that coordinate collective effort across space	Yes
#2	Participatory Governance: Institutions have effective dispute resolution structures.	Yes
#3	Participatory Governance2: Institutional members participate in decision making and rule modification	Yes
#4	Institutions meet the local needs and conditions of participants.	Yes
#5	Define Clear Group Boundaries	No
#6	Use Graduated Sanctions for Rule Violators	No
#7	Develop a System, carried out by community members, for monitoring members' behavior	No
#8	Make sure the rule-making rights of community members are respected by outside authorities	No

Given the aims of this chapter, my inquiry draws on a subset of Ostrom's principles – the first four principles from Table 7 – that seems to relate most directly to internal organizational characteristics (design and governance structures) that make institutions effective at coordinating and influencing individual decisions, such as voter turnout (Table 7).

Of the four principles that inform my investigation, the first, polycentric governance, examines partnerships and collective arrangements (Ostrom 1990) that institutions have with one another, especially among institutions working toward a common goal (e.g., equity in voter participation and political power). These relationships

can span specific geographic areas to increase service provisions, and in turn, increase objective efficacy. Responsibility levels for executing objectives among institutions in polycentric relationships is dictated by resources such as, membership levels, funding and physical location(s). For example, civic engagement organizations, located across various regions in Texas working together to increase Latinx turnout may designate canvassing campaigns to institutions physically located in counties and neighborhoods targeted by these campaigns. Institutions located elsewhere may provide funding to support canvassing efforts. Interviewing leadership at institutions uncovers these arrangements and also serves as an effective method to examine governance diversity geographically including, leadership and participant diversity. Specifically, diversity is defined by the number and ethnicity of members, objectives, and ethnic and gender differences among leadership. For instance, research suggests that organizations led by women, and organizations with greater internal fiscal capacity are more likely to have greater participation by members (AbouAssi and Seung-Ho 2017). Participation is governed by institutional rules, which participants may view as ineffective or having negative impact. Therefore, one effective governance strategy is to employ low-cost dispute resolution mechanisms (Ostrom 1990) in order to retain membership, participation and efficacy.

Principle 2 suggests that participatory governance structures are effective when they have low-cost dispute resolution mechanisms and allow members to participate in decision making and rule modification. In relation to voter mobilization efforts, canvassers, phone bankers, and other institutional participants involved in Get Out The Vote (GOTV) initiatives, are subjected to their institution's rules, which dictate levels of interaction(s). In relation to GOTV activities, for instance, rules may dictate that

participants must remain non-partisan and stick to a pre-written script when talking to potential voters. Sometimes, these scripts may be ineffective at capturing voters, which participants may otherwise be able to capture if they were not governed by this rule. Thus, having an established dispute arena, where participants can voice their experiences and concerns is critical to both objective efficacy and membership retention. If institutional participants are included in rule making/modification, increased efficacy in achieving institutional goals, participant satisfaction and resource management may result.

Principle 3, institutional members participate in decision making and rule modification, is critical to the success of institutions and reduces the chances that disputes or membership losses occur (Ostrom 1990). This principle acts as a system of checks and balances to prevent one or a few individuals from dominating the decision-making process. When institutions do not allow members/participants to modify rules or change them, their efficacy may decrease and/or the institution itself may not exist as long as other institutions that employ this governing characteristic (Ostrom 1990). For example, institutional participants and members may perceive resources such as, funding for GOTV initiatives, to be allocated inefficiently. Therefore, in addition to dispute resolution mechanisms, members who can participate in decision and rulemaking can improve an institutions efficacy, and in turn, simultaneously empower members. That being said, when institutions exhibit both principle two and three, the chances of survival, growth, meeting the needs and conditions of participants increases (Ostrom 1990; Bernhard, Nordstrom and Reenock 2003).

Principle 4, institutions meet the local needs and conditions of members/participants is perhaps the single most important reason institutions exist in the first place. Institutions can govern important resources, either physical or social, and be responsible, sometimes solely responsible, for administering service provisions and tackling objectives. Institutional governance may either promote/restrict accessibility and/or participation for certain groups of people (Frazier et al 2016). For example, chapter 2 discussed how the State of Texas has historically excluded persons of color, specifically Latinx persons, from fundamental resources such as, elections. An election is a resource from which citizens seek to influence government in ways that fulfill their individual needs and desires. The people who use an access that resource are registered voters who are organized into various nested and overlapping electoral geographies (e.g., school districts, municipalities, states, legislative districts, etc.) and interest groups. And the rules that govern use of the resource include a complex system of written and unwritten rules, laws, regulations, norms, and practices regarding who can participate, when and where they can participate, and how participation gets aggregated and converted into outcomes, for example, such as casting ballots in elections. Therefore, investigating the extent to which Latinx-serving institutions exhibit these principles, including how these exhibitions vary geographically, is a critical step in determining how and where institutional governance might influence voter turnout.

5.3: EXTERNAL CHARACTERISTICS: SITE AND SITUATION

Here, site characteristics refer to the physical location(s) of institutions, and situational characteristics include socioeconomic indicators such as, income, race and ethnicity and informal networks within institutions. Because institutions are nested within

neighborhoods where participants/members live, block-group level data including race, ethnicity and income are required to examine neighborhood (situational) context. Informal networks are also viewed as forms of social capital found to influence political behavior (Baybeck and McClurg 2005; Johnston et al 2005), and their forms are investigated through interviews. These geospatial variables are well-cited in the literature for their role in political engagements (Weaver 2014). Geospatial factors are important in the formation of neighborhoods, and a GIS can be used to define neighborhood boundaries that account for the spatial factors influencing the natural flow and pattern of interactions (Foster and Hipp 2011). Examining site and situation contexts together improve our understanding(s) of why institutions locate themselves within certain neighborhoods (Foster and Hipp 2011; Weaver 2014), how they impact voting behavior (Johnston et al 2005), and how (or if) they meet the local needs of members/participants (Ostrom 1990). Further, neighborhoods have been found to explain significant portions of variability in the political behavior of sampled individuals (e.g., Johnston and Scott, 2004).

What is more, while previous studies either treat institutions as static elements existing in the background of elections (e.g., Reif and Schmitt 1980; Ansolabehere and Konisky 2006; Power 2009; Freitag and Stadelmann-Steffen 2010; Neiheisel and Burden 2012; Fowler 2013), or active influencers (Baybeck and Huckfeldt 2002a, b), few explain how intra- and inter-institutional governance and activities influence voter turnout (see Shaw et al 2000 and Leroux and Krawczyk 2014 for exceptions). However, exploring the role of social institutions in both individual and collective voter turnout is arguably incomplete without attention to: 1) site and situation context (Ethington and McDaniel

2007) and 2) institutional governance and activities (Leroux and Krawczyk 2014). Here, both internal (governance and activities) and external (site and situation) characteristics are examined in tandem as an exploratory exercise to identify contexts that are more (less) conducive to engage members in political activity.

5.4: STUDY AREA

Online and telephone-based outreach (due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I was unable to engage in planned fieldwork) to dozens of formal organizations yielded responses from leaders at 30 social institutions across seven Texas counties: 1) Travis County, 2) Webb County, 3) Cameron County, 4) El Paso County, 5) Starr County, 6) Hays County, and 7) Hidalgo County. Starr, Hidalgo, El Paso and Webb Counties are borderlands counties that have historically complex institutional issues related to voting (explained in chapter 3). Figure 14 illustrates the location(s) of each of the seven counties investigated in this research.

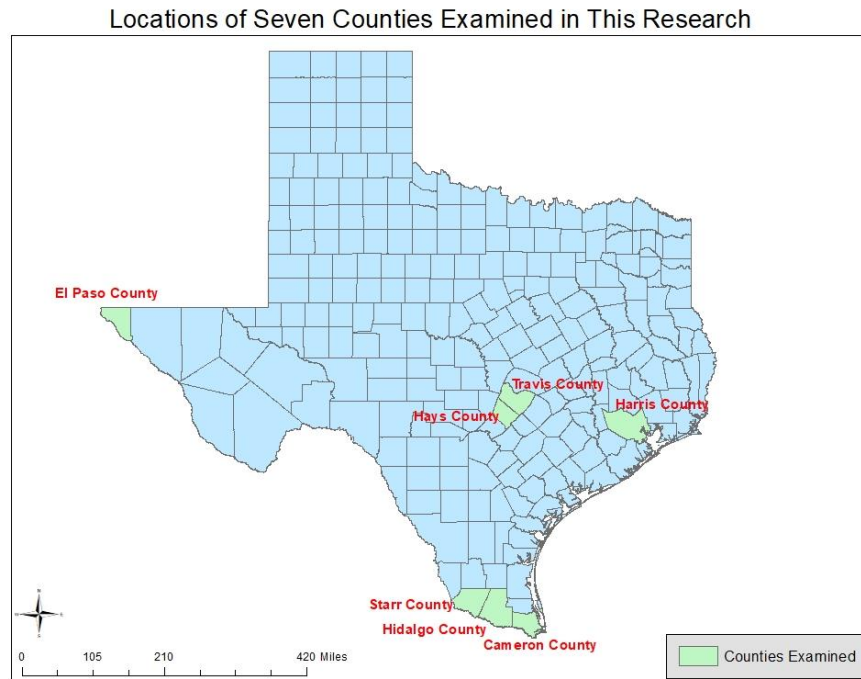


Figure 14: Location(s) of the Seven Counties Examined in this Research

5.5: DATA, METHODS, AND LIMITATIONS

5.5.1: Data

I interviewed thirty ($n=30$) institutional leaders across seven counties in the State of Texas in a semi-structured format. Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility in interviewee responses and permits them to elaborate on elements of questions they feel are important (DeJonckheere and Vaughn 2019). These institutional leaders were asked 14 questions about institutional-governance, participation, relationships, provisions and voter engagement activities. Interview questions were organized according to the four design principles above (Table 7). Tables 8-11 below organize interview questions by the four-design principle(s) used in this research. A complete list of all interview questions is included in the appendix. Certain questions may be assigned to more than one principle,

because some interviewees provided expansive responses, which applied to more than one principle. For anonymity, no interviewee or specific names of institutions are mentioned, but the types of institutions are disclosed. Leaders from five different types of institutions were selected for interviews including, the four types of NTEE institutions from chapter 3 (religious, community-improvement, civil-rights, membership-based institutions), and additionally, civic engagement institutions, due to their historical and significant impacts on voter engagement. It is important to note that six interviewees ran, unsuccessfully, for office during the 2020 congressional elections. These six interviewees, in addition to providing institutional insights, were able to attest to voter-related issues, barriers, and diversity, and state-citizen interactions.

Table 8: Questions about polycentric governance

Principle 1: Institutional Activities and Polycentric Governance
1. In what geographic areas does this institution provide services?
2. What services/resources does this institution provide to its members and the community?
3. Are there services/resources you would like to provide that you are unable to?
4. Does this institution provide any voting information or assistance such as, transportation to polls, polling locations, and/or candidate information?
5. Does this institution work with any other institutions to provide services to participants?

Table 9: Questions on participatory governance and dispute resolution mechanisms

Principle 2: Participatory Governance- Dispute Resolution Mechanisms
1. If participants are unhappy with how the organization is run or its rules, how can they voice their opinions?
2. Does this institution work with any other institutions to provide services to your members?
3. Who makes the rules at this institution and how can rules be modified/changed?
4. In your opinion, is it easy for members at this organization to vote why or why not?
5. What do you think the biggest ballot issues are for participants?
6. How do you determine if participants in this organization vote?

Table 10: Questions on participatory governance- rule making

Principle 3: Institutional members participate in decision making and rule modification
1. How are leadership positions elected or appointed at this institution?
2. Who makes the rules at this institution and how can rules be modified/changed?
3. If participants are unhappy with how the organization is run or its rules, how can they voice their opinions?

Table 11: Questions on local needs and conditions of institutional participants

Principle 4: Institutions meeting the local needs and conditions of participants
1. Can you briefly explain the origins of this institution?
2. How many members/participants belong to this institution?
3. Are the majority of participants at this institution a specific ethnicity?
4. What services/resources does this institution provide to its members and the community?

5. Does this institution provide any voting information or assistance such as, transportation to polls, polling locations, and/or candidate information?
6. Does this institution work with any other institutions to provide services to your members?
7. What do you think the biggest ballot issues are for participants?
8. Are there services/resources you would like to provide that you are unable to?

5.5.2: Methods and Limitations

This chapter employed qualitative methods in the forms of open coding to examine interviewee responses. Some benefits of open coding are: 1) identifying the intentions, focus or communication trends of an institution, 2) describe attitudinal and behavioral responses to questions, and 3) reveal patterns between and across responses (DeJonckheere and Vaughn 2019). Due to both the COVID-19 pandemic and leadership availability, not all five types of institutions are represented in this research equally (religious- 2, civil rights- 4, community improvement- 17, membership-based-3, and civic engagement- 4). GIS is employed to provide a description of site and situation variables at the block group level. GIS mapping is limited to the following variables: 1) physical location of institution(s) (site), and 2) surrounding neighborhood socioeconomic characteristics such as, race, ethnicity and per capita income by race (Latinx and white). The reason for only examining these variables is that other, popular, situation context variables such as, educational attainment, home ownership, and poverty (derived from the U.S. Census) are not readily available for institutions located in these 7 counties investigated from 2016 and onward.

5.6: EFFICACY AND GOVERNANCE OF SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

5.6.1: Meeting Local Needs and Conditions: To Which Institutions Do Latinx Persons Belong?

The primary reason people participate in social institutions is because they benefit in some way, shape or form (Peterson 2004; Gerbara 2013; Dhaese et al 2015). Stated differently, people participate in institutions because institutions meet their needs or demands. Regarding ethnicity, 18/30 leaders said the vast majority of both members and participants are Latinx. These 18 institutions included all five types under investigation in this research, but certain types were over-represented. For example, out of the 18 majority Latinx institutions, all four civic engagement institutions and 13 community improvement institutions are majorly participated in by Latinx persons. This is largely due to two factors: 1) community improvement institutions are physically located in predominantly large Latinx communities, and 2) the services offered by these institutions are sought out specifically by Latinx persons such as, legal help for immigration services, community assistance, food banks, and education assistance. Further, civic engagement personnel working on GOTV initiatives are predominantly Latinx.

Because leaders from different types of institutions were interviewed, the areas of service provisions varied. For example, all three membership-based institutions provided services only to the counties in which they were located. These three institutions were located in, El Paso, Starr and Hidalgo county, and service provisions included substance-abuse rehabilitation, healthcare, food banks, and home repairs including, training women

how to complete home repairs. One membership-based institution had several brick-and-mortar locations and also provided religious services statewide. The two religious' institutions in Harris county only provided services in their counties such as, food banks and rental assistance. The four civil rights organizations provide legal services statewide such as, immigration assistance, voting rights violations and fair housing. Although these institutions have offices in rural counties, the vast majority of their work occurs in Texas's urban areas.

Membership-based institutions were able to provide privileged services because they require members to pay fees in order to participate. For example, 16/18 of these institutions use membership fees to fund bi-monthly or annual events for social interaction and cultural exchange. The remaining membership-based institutions (2/18) used fees to pay full-time staff and fundraise towards certain objectives such as, renovating the institutions physical space or charitable donations. The four civic engagement institutions provided an array of services including scholarships, legal and voting assistance, and voting information. Interestingly, 29/30 institutional leaders stated that they would like to provide additional services but currently could not. For example, religious institutions wanted to expand their food bank initiatives but were limited by volunteers and funding. Leaders from community improvement institutions wanted to increase service frequencies but, similar to religious institutions, were limited by funding and personnel. Membership-based institution leaders expressed the desire to offer their services to additional areas, outside of the localities, and stated they had the participants to pursue this objective, but not the funding. Civil Rights institutions desired to expand physical office locations statewide, but were limited by funding.

Finally, civic engagements institutions wanted to provide more scholarships, increase canvassing efforts, and voter awareness including, candidate and polling location information. Civic leaders stated that, “a good amount” of their work happens in-person, but due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, their capacity was limited in 2020 for the majority of their activities. For example, every leader from civic engagement institutions expressed how powerful door-to-door canvassing is for their GOTV initiatives, but because of COVID-19, they were left with “less impactful” options such as, text and call banking. In sum, these five types of institutions provide different services and their provisions are largely determinant on volunteer efforts, with the exception of membership-based institutions. Almost every institutional leader stated that they desired to provide additional services in the areas they are active in, and also offer different types of services but were limited by resources. Further, 22/30 interviewees said they work with other institutions to provide services and work towards common objectives. Because almost all interviewees declared that their service provisions occur locally, it is important to examine the neighborhood context (site and situation) of institutions to get a better understanding of why institutions locate themselves within these contexts. Figures 15-21 illustrate the site and situation context locations for the 30 institutions across the seven counties at the block group level.

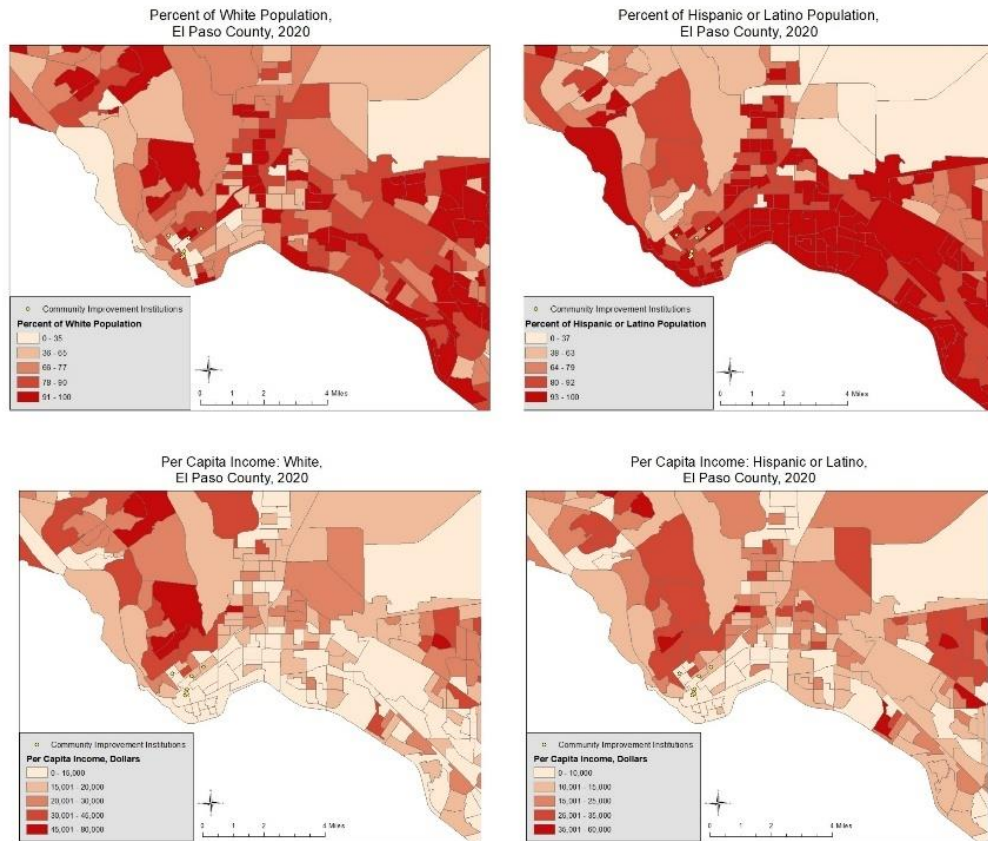


Figure 15: Percent of White and Latinx Population, and Per Capita Income by Block Group: El Paso County

Figure 15 shows that institutions examined in El Paso county are located in neighborhoods that are 64-100 percent Latinx. In contrast the white population in these same neighborhoods ranges from 0-66%. While the racial and ethnic compositions of these institution's neighborhoods vary significantly, per capita income does not. For example, both white and Latinx per capita income in neighborhoods community improvement institutions exist range from \$0-20,000. In accordance with their objectives and services (discussed above), these community improvement institutions choose to

locate themselves within these low-income neighborhoods to help alleviate hardships and reach their targeted areas of improvement.

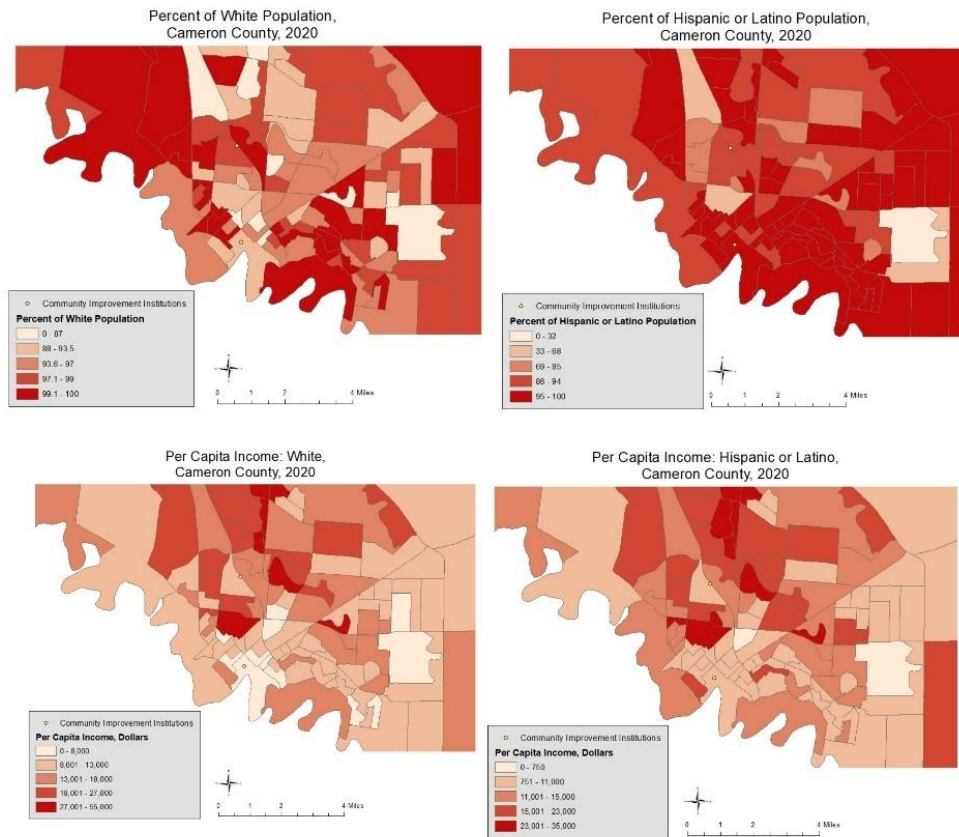


Figure 16: Percent of White and Latinx Population, and Per Capita Income by Block Group: Cameron County

Figure 16 illustrates the site and situation characteristics for two community improvement institutions in Cameron County. Note that the neighborhoods of both institutions have a Latinx population of at least 86%. Interestingly, the white population in these same neighborhoods is at least 88%. However, it is important to note that only 5% of the overall population of Cameron County is white non-Hispanic, and thus, the density of whites in Cameron County is negligible. Regarding income, overall, whites in

institutional neighborhoods have a per capita income of \$0-13,000. In contrast, Latinxs in the same neighborhoods earn \$751-11,000. These incomes suggest high rates of low-level income and poverty, and therefore, it is not surprising that these two community improvement institutions offer services such as rental assistance and food banks and try to meet local needs associated with impoverished neighborhoods.

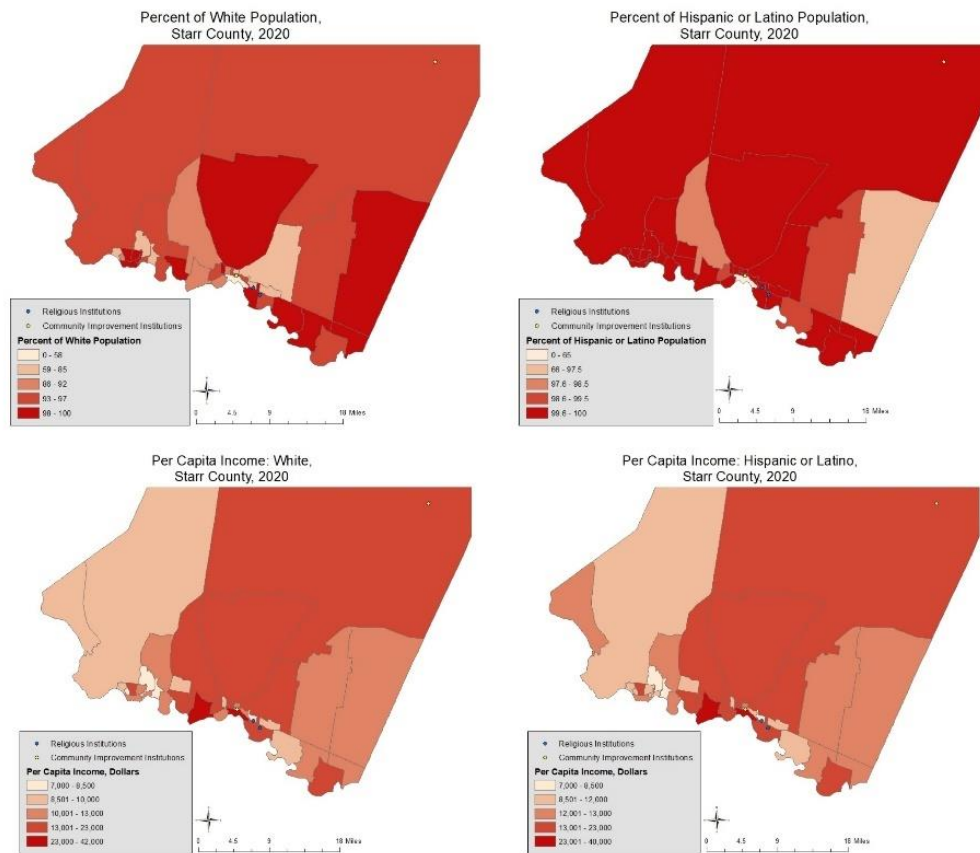


Figure 17: Percent of White and Latinx Population, and Per Capita Income by Block Group: Starr County

Figure 17 displays two types of institutions: religious and community-improvement. Similar to Cameron County (Figure 16), the proportion of the white population is negligible at slightly greater than 1 percent and the Latinx population is 99

percent. Therefore, white socioeconomic characteristics only help describe slightly more than 1 percent of the overall population in Starr County. Notice that neighborhoods where both religious and community improvement institutions are located, both white and Latinx per capita ranges from \$8,500-23,000. Similar to Cameron County, these Starr County institutions provide similar services based on income, race and ethnicity.

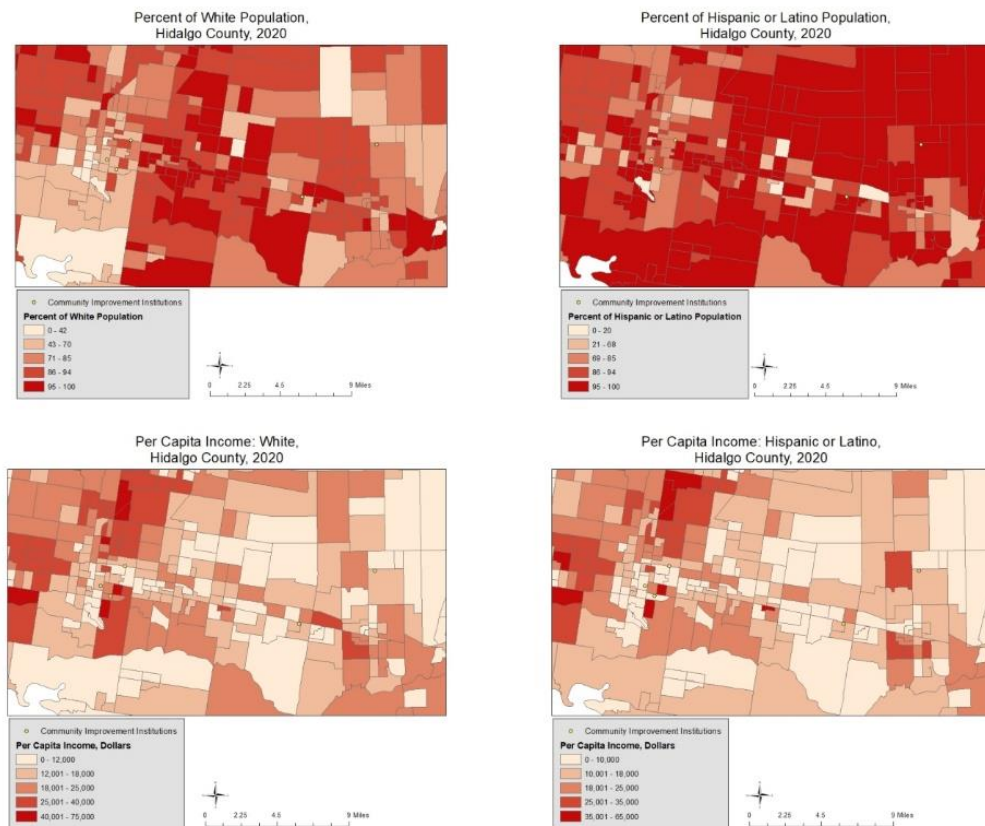


Figure 18: Percent of White and Latinx Population, and Per Capita Income by Block Group: Hidalgo County

Figure 18 illustrates that, similar to Starr, Hidalgo, and Cameron Counties, the major ethnicity in this county is Latinx. That being said, note that similar to Figures 8-10, community improvements institutions are located in low-income areas. For example,

white per capita income in neighborhoods where community improvement institutions exist ranges from \$0-25,000. Latinx per capita income in these same neighborhoods ranges from \$0-10,000. Similar to Starr County, Hidalgo County is almost 99% Latinx which means the remaining 1 percent of the population is either white or some other race(s). Note that 21-68% of neighborhoods surrounding Hidalgo county institutions, are predominantly Latinx and 43-70% white, respectively. Figure 18 also illustrates that only 2/5 institutions are in neighborhoods 95-100% Latinx. In other words, because of their location(s) I suspect most, if not all, participants in these institutions are Latinx. The information gleaned from Figures 15-18 is not surprising given: 1) they examine borderland counties, which are overwhelming Latinx, and 2) the services offered by community improvement institutions are aligned with the income levels in the neighborhoods where they are physically located. Moving away from the borderland's counties, the remaining three counties—Travis, Hays and Harris—show different patterns in terms of race, ethnicity and per capita income.

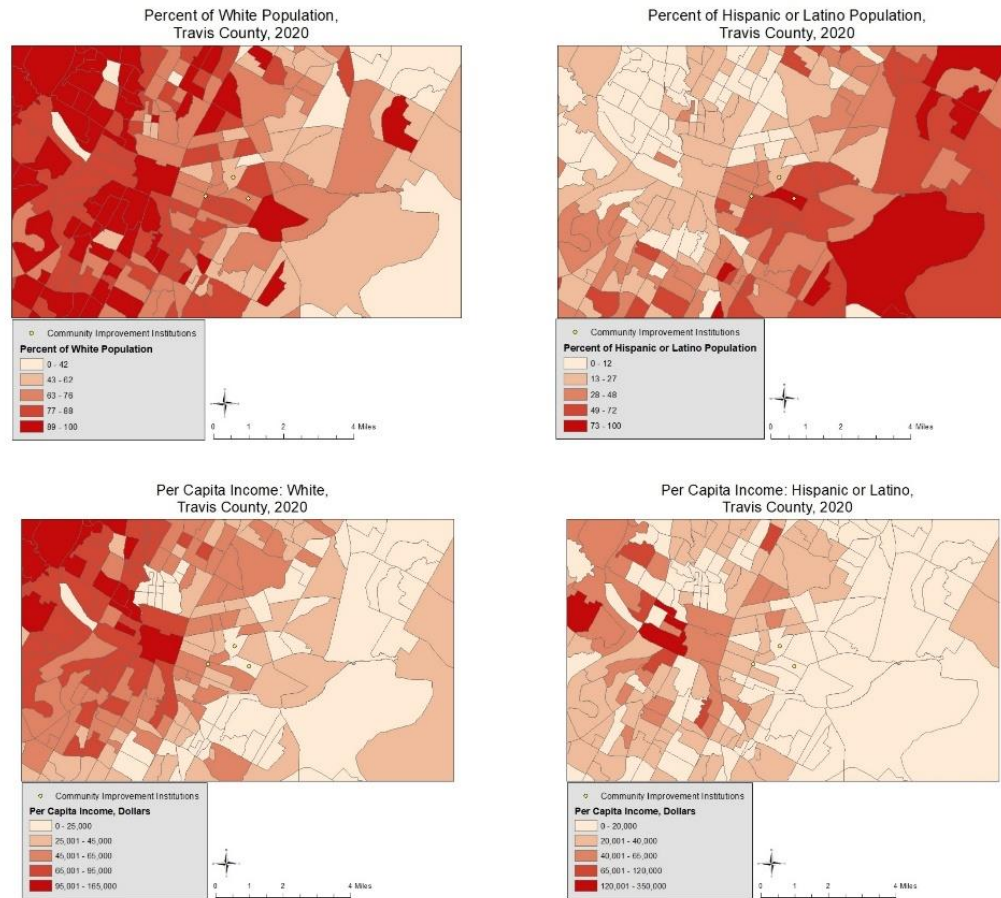


Figure 19: Percent of White and Latinx Population, and Per Capita Income by Block Group: Travis County

Figure 19 shows Travis County, which mostly comprises the city of Austin, TX. Note that the selected community-improvement institutions are located in neighborhoods shared by both whites (43-76%) and Latinx (13-100%) respectively. For per capita income, overall whites in community improvement institution neighborhoods earn slightly more (\$0-65,000) than their Latinx counterparts (\$0-20,000) respectively. Services offered by these institutions include food banks, community assistance and voter registration and mobilization.

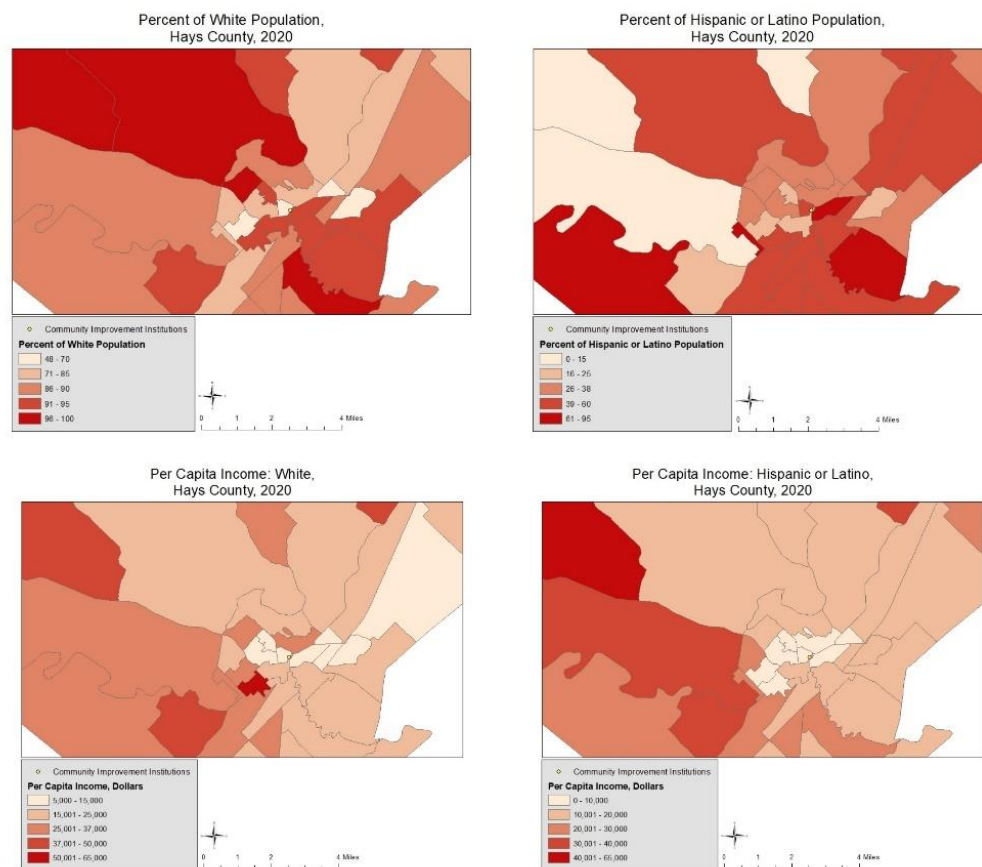


Figure 20: Percent of White and Latinx Population, and Per Capita Income by Block Group: Hays County

Figure 20 illustrates the socioeconomic characteristics of one neighborhood surrounding the one community improvement institution in Hays County. Hays County shares its northern border with Travis County (Figure 19). Note that 39-60% of the institution's neighborhood is Latinx, compared to 49-70% white. Overall, similar to borderlands counties, more Latinxs live in Hays county than whites. Both Latinx and white per capita income is \$0-10,000, suggesting high levels of poverty. Moreover, this institution only provides voter registration and information services. Therefore,

investigating neighborhoods contexts and services of other institutions in this area may provide better insights into how site and situation impact voters.

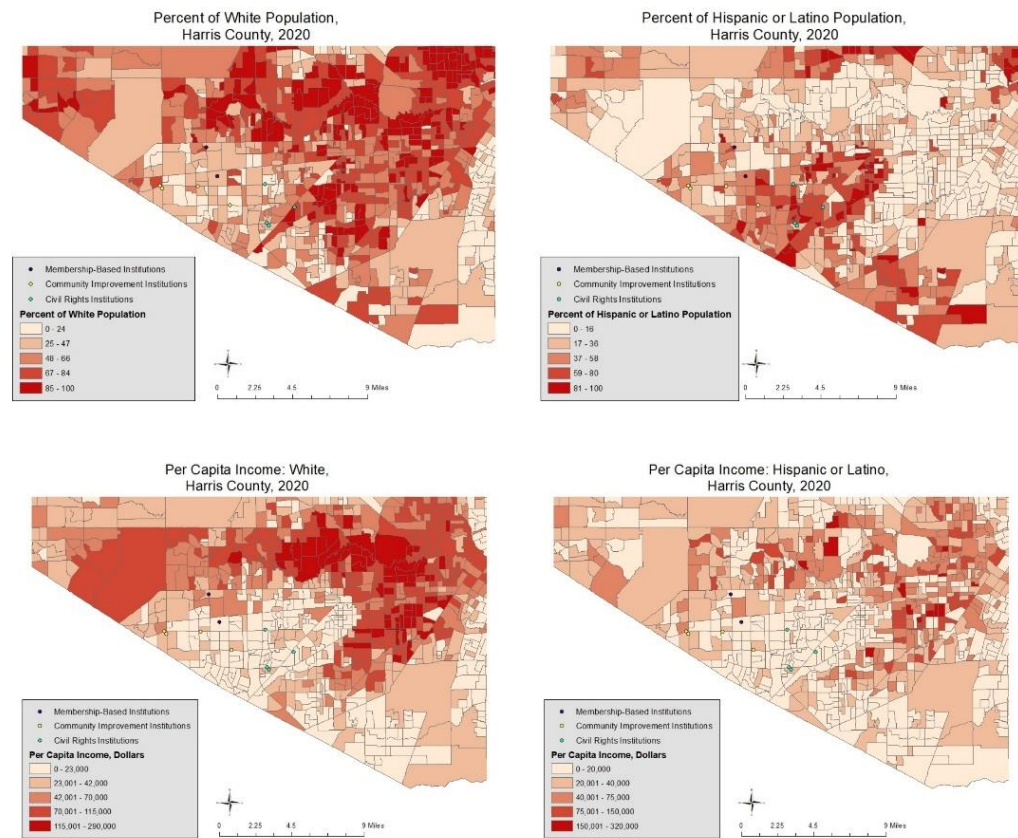


Figure 21: Percent of White and Latinx Population, and Per Capita Income by Block Group: Harris County

Figure 21 shows Harris County, the most populous and diverse county in the state of Texas, and also contains Houston, Texas’s largest city. Due to the county’s large population, diversity, and leadership availability, ten institutional leaders from Harris County institutions were interviewed, and thus contain 1/3 of all institutions investigated in this study. Notice the legend—unlike all other counties, three different types of institutions are represented in Harris County—religious, community improvement and

civil rights institutions. Recall from above that civil rights institutions provide services statewide, although headquartered in Harris County. In terms of site and situation neighborhood characteristics, white and Latinx per capita income surrounding civil rights institutions both ranges from \$0-23,000. Again, because civil rights institutions do not necessarily provide localized services, per capita income is not a strong indicator for neighborhood context. Similarly, white and Latinx per capita income surrounding community improvement institutions share the same per capita income range of \$0-40,000. Only when examining membership-based institutions, do visible differences emerge within the context of race, ethnicity and income among whites and Latinx. For example, white per capita income surrounding membership-based institutions ranges from \$0-42,000, but for Latinxs in the same neighborhoods, the per capita income ranges from \$0-20,000. One possible reason for this finding is that more whites live in neighborhoods where membership-based institutions exist than Latinxs. Remember that, because membership-based institutions charge fees to participate, the income gap between whites and Latinxs, in these neighborhoods, may mean that more whites participate in these institutions. Internal characteristics such as, polycentric governance, rulemaking and differences in institutional activities may contribute to racial/ethnic/income differences among participants/members across different geographic spaces.

5.6.2: Polycentric and Participatory Governance: Objectives, Rule Making and Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

Recall from section 4.6.1 that Latinx persons seek specific services from social institutions in Texas for such legal, community and educational assistance, food banks

and religious services. In turn, participation largely impacts how objectives are pursued. Furthermore, greater benefits are received when institutions govern their pursuit of objectives in polycentric governance arrangements (Ostrom 1990; Oakerson and Clifton 2017). Further, the rules-in-use at individual institutions govern forms of participation and impacts how objectives are achieved collectively. While 75% of civic engagement institutions share the same objective (increased voter turnout), they are limited by their internal governance. For example, leadership interviews revealed that when members engage with (potential) voters, they are limited in the topics they can discuss and the way they interact. For instance, members that phone or text bank in GOTV initiatives have to read a pre-written script upon initial contact with (potential) voters. This in turn, may immediately turn voters off or disinterest them, as scripts may not contain what is important to a (potential) voter. In order for members to change the script or increase the range of topics they are permitted to discuss; they must communicate with leadership using a dispute resolution mechanism. Dispute resolution mechanisms are arenas where members can voice concerns about the negative impacts of rules or governance (Ostrom 1990). The process of dispute mechanisms is one indicator that measures objective efficacy. For example, a dispute mechanism could be as straightforward as walking into a leader's office and telling them what is (is not) working. Other institutional leaders from community-based and community improvement institutions stated that they hold monthly meetings with members to discuss objective efficacy and other concerns participants/members may have. Only 4/30 institutions including both religious institutions, said they do not have dispute mechanisms and that rule and decision-making

is at the sole discretion of their committee. All four civic institutions interviewed in this research have dispute resolution mechanisms in the form of a board.

However, in order to institute changes, leadership is often required to meet with entire committees or a board, who then need to agree (or disagree) on suggested changes. In fact, all 30 institutions interviewed have a board of comprised of elected members who make rules that govern forms of participation, and in turn, efficacy. In other words, none of the institutions in this research allow members/participants to modify/change rules, but some have dispute resolution mechanisms to start a process of rule change/modification. More importantly, almost all interviewees expressed that very few disputes occur, because: 1) the rule-making board is comprised of elected members and participants do not have any dispute, or 2) members/participants respect the decisions made by leadership and seldom question them.

That being said, some leaders vocalized their frustration with rules because they believe rules impact efficacy. For example, the leader from a homeowner's association stated:

“We have a pretty solid system as are as people following the rules or codes, but sometimes, they just hold things up. Like if a homeowner wants to paint his house a different color, they need approval from the board. Sometimes board members can't make the monthly meeting, and it is a problem because a majority vote is needed to pass anything. So, if someone is waiting for a decision on something simple like the color of paint, it may take months and that's just wrong.”

While the color of paint might seem like an insignificant issue to some, this is just one example of how the rules within this homeowner's association have negatively impacted residents. For example, the same leader quoted above said:

“Whether it’s the color of a house or code enforcement for lawncare, everything goes through the board. One time, we had a bad storm, and someone’s trash got thrown all over neighbor’s yard. The neighbor called the association to complain, but the board did not meet till the following month. Her options were to clean it up herself or wait a month for the board to force her neighbor to clean it.”

These examples of ineffective dispute resolution mechanisms and rules from homeowner associations and civic engagement institutions provide insights into how governance can reduce collective efforts made by other institutions working towards the same objective. For example, community-improvement institutions, from outside service areas, are not permitted to physically assist in community development projects, largely to do contractor and licensing issues. However, even if a distant institution provides funding for objectives such as, community development, the rules on how funds are spent are largely determined by the receiving institution. Because funding has been stated by leadership to be a pre-existing issue, polycentric governance arrangements can complicate objective budgets and execution, which is mostly determined by institutions within a service area. For example, leadership from the civic engagement institution in Houston, which sent funds to a civic engagement institution in Laredo for canvassing efforts, expected the funds on canvassing. However, because the definition of canvassing had not been clearly established between these two institutions, the majority of canvassing funds went to online ads. While COVID-19 is the most probable reason for

the funds going to online ads, the Houston leader said his institution already had a robust online campaign, and if there had been better communication, money could have been saved.

Another example on how institutional governance impacts objective efficacy comes from several community improvement institutions in the Texas borderland counties. Several of these institutions were involved in a community-assistance program, where institutions provided rent relief and tuition assistance, including scholarships. Because leadership had agreed on a robust plan ahead of time, and there was strong, continuous communication between participants across institutions, it resulted in: 1) assisting more people in these communities, and 2) participant interest grew as a result of such effectiveness, which in turn, grew membership the following year.

Do the governing characteristics of institutions impact their institutional efficacy and objectives? Yes, and rule-making and dispute resolution mechanisms are at the forefront in determining efficacy, and in turn, forms of participation. Because all institutions interviewed in this research had a rule-making board, many also had dispute resolution mechanisms to begin the process of rule modification. Although, while some institutions have a board, participants/members do not have the ability to change rules. The same institutions where participants cannot modify the rules, are the same ones without a dispute resolution mechanism. Dispute resolution mechanisms impact institutional efficacy regarding how quickly institutions act to address participant grievances and negative outcomes. As evidenced above, participants' ability to change rules, rather than not, improves institutional efficacy because participant observations and feedback are viewed by some leaders as essential for long-term survival and prosperity

(Ostrom 1990). That said, the next section attempts to answer research question 1D: do internal (organizational) structures and external contextual factors (sites and situations) of social institutions create spaces that influence voter turnout for Latinx Americans?

5.6.3: Actions and Activities Contributing to Voter Turnout

While the above sections examined site and situation characteristics, their specific impacts on voter turnout need to be discussed. For example, while only two religious institutions were interviewed, the leaders stated two important details: One of these institutions served as a polling location for the 2020 Presidential election, and although both leaders stated their (religious) institutions were non-partisan, they did notice political discussions among members pre- and post-service. While both religious leaders could not attest to specific statements made by participants, they did recall hearing key policy words being circulated such as, abortion, healthcare, and socialism. Community-based institutional leaders said they too hear political discussions among members/participants in commons areas such as, reception halls, meeting rooms, and at social events. These types of political discussions among members also occur in membership-based institutions. For example, membership-based leader said that although their institution focuses on alcohol rehabilitation, members come early and stay late to socialize, and it is during these times that she hears candidate names being thrown around. The same observation was made by another membership-based leader:

“Because our work relies heavily on membership fees, some members feel obliged to voice their person political opinions during a task at hand, even if that task is largely a-political. For example, last summer we went to El Paso for a fundraising event,

and in the field some members were just going on and on about politics. So, in that sense, political talks do occur because of our institution, but it is not sanctioned or encouraged by us (leadership). I have seen this kind of thing happen in other organizations too.”

Several community-based institution leaders said that events such as, annual socializers or fundraisers are well-attended by members of other institutions involved in their polycentric governance arrangement. For instance, three community-based leaders said because they believe the biggest ballot issues for participants center around healthcare and immigration, they use institution sponsored events to have informal political discussions hoping to sway other participants. Further, the two religious institutions in Harris county pool their funding together to tackle some of their objectives (discussed above), and informed their participants *where* they could vote, but maintained they do not tell or ask people to vote for a certain party.

All civil rights institutions declared that they do not provide any voting information and have always remained non-partisan, although, some of their work such as, policy, immigration and voting rights violations is certainly related to politics. Civic engagement institutions, perhaps by nature, provided the most voting information/assistance. Three out of four (3/4) of the civic engagement institutions interviewed work together towards two main objectives, voter registration and turnout, by pooling together funds, volunteers and continuous feedback. In addition, these leaders said they attempt to foster electoral participation during their points of contact. When canvassing, phone and/or text banking, 2/4 stated that they have follow up conversations with the potential voters. In other words, both leaders and volunteers at some civic engagement institutions have several communications with potential voters and

disseminate voting information such as, polling locations, registration information, including deadlines, and candidate's stance on policy in a polycentric effort to increase voter mobilization. The leader of the largest civic engagement institution in Texas said,

“It is our job to get people interested in what is happening in the world right now. We want people to care because the average person does not fully understand how government works and how decision makers can impact their daily lives.”

Similar to the above quote, people, and in particular Latinx citizens, may not attribute their participation/membership in an institution to casting a ballot. Service provisions, physical spaces and different forms of participation create different meso-level spaces within and between institutions that can influence voters. I find three different types of spaces created by differences in internal characteristics such as, governance and activities that impact both voter turnout and political ideology.

5.6.4: Spaces of Informal Engagement

Five out of twenty (5/20) institutions in this research are considered spaces of informal engagement. These types of spaces refer to exclusively to informal discussions among participants/members about political/policy issues within individual institutions. As evidenced above from leadership, these discussions occur prior to or after “official institutional time.” Official institutional time is defined as amount of time leadership designates to tackling objectives, and where informal discussions are discouraged. For example, the time a religious leader is performing a service in church, or the time scheduled for group meeting in alcoholic rehabilitation centers are periods that informal discussions do not occur. Similarly, the same can be said for other institutions when they

are operating on official institutional times. Further, spaces of low engagement provide evidence for psychological resource, group consciousness, and electoral influence theories. Because of their informal discussions with other participants/members, ideology about policy and candidates can change. For example, one leader, who also ran for office during the 2020 Congressional election stated:

“All you really need, at least in the rural areas anyway, is the word of mouth from a community-based institution. In rural areas, it is enough to get people to turn out, mostly because everyone knows each other. When you have unions coming in, like fireman or policemen, and telling people who to vote for, it really impacts these rural voters.”

Additionally, the number of members/participants of each institution varied by type and location. For example, because some community- and membership-based institutions are part of larger, nationwide institutions, the number of participants/members ranged from 10 to ~1,000. Because the majority of leaders attested that informal political discussions occur both on official and unofficial institutional time, supports the notion that these types of communication(s) are not isolated or anecdotal events, and warrant further investigation in future research. What is more, institutional leadership can also influence participants/members to vote.

5.6.5: Spaces of Information

The majority (21/30) of institutions in this research can be categorized as spaces of information. Spaces of information include the same characteristics as spaces of informal engagement, but also consider the role of leadership and physical spaces. For

example, when asked if their institutions provide any voting information/assistance, some leaders maintained that their institutions remained non-partisan and thus did not provide any voting information or assistance. However, community- and membership-based institutions exclaimed that although they are technically non-partisan, they did provide participants/members information on voter registration deadlines and polling locations. When leaders were asked why they provided this type of voting information, 15/20 stated that they felt the 2020 Presidential election was, “very important”. The remaining leaders from these two types of institutions (5/20), said they always provide these types of information during election years. Further, membership-based leaders expressed that political discussions/debates occur between members at social events, which are sponsored by membership fees. Several historically non-partisan institutions, entered the political arena for the first time in 2020, by providing basic or detailed voter information and assistance and/or participated in events sponsored by other institutions where voter information was disseminated.

Therefore, the rules-in-use that govern polycentric arrangements such as, sharing resources and coordinating socializing events, provide additional arenas where both informal discussions and leadership voter engagement can influence electoral behavior and ideology, among predominantly Latinx persons. Participant/membership numbers for these types of institutions ranged from 1,000-1,000,000+. Given these numbers, political actions taken by leadership, and the political discussions among participants/members the potential for these medium-level engagement institutions to impact voter turnout rates is substantial. Further the aforementioned provide supporting evidence that community-based institutions can act as non-elected neighborhood representatives (Levine 2016) and

contradicts the view(s) of institutions as static elements that exist in the background of elections (e.g., Reif and Schmitt 1980; Ansolabehere and Konisky 2006; Power 2009; Freitag and Stadelmann-Steffen 2010; Neiheisel and Burden 2012; Fowler 2013).

5.6.6: Spaces of Mobilization

Four out of twenty (4/20) institutions in this research can be categorized as spaces of high-level-engagement, which I refer to as spaces of mobilization. Spaces of high-level-engagement include the characteristics of both spaces of low- and medium-level engagement but pursue additional efforts to mobilize voters. Perhaps, not surprisingly, all four of these institutions are civic engagement institutions. Out of all types of institutions, civic engagements institutions have been found to have the largest impacts on voter turnout (Stole and Rochon 1998; Michelson 2003; Blais 2006; Green and Gerber 2015). The sole mission of civic engagement institutions and their members is to increase voter turnout. Civic engagement institutions have the highest degree of political influence and impact because they collectively provide copious amounts of voter-information/assistance, registration and mobilization efforts. For example, one civic engagement organization located in Houston, does not have its members/participants physically involved in canvassing efforts in Laredo. Instead, the Houston-based institution provides funding to their partnering institution in the Laredo area for physical canvassing. Moreover, 75% (3/4) of civic engagement institutions work together towards common objectives such as, voter registration and turnout. What is unique about spaces of high-level-engagement is that forms of participation vary depending on whether one is a member or not.

In other words, members at civic engagement institutions contact other (potential) voters to participate. Only the members (mobilizers) of civic engagement institutions travel to the institution's physical location for activities. These spaces of high-level engagements make their biggest impacts at various times of the day, dependent on (potential) voter's availability, via door-to-door canvassing, phone, text and email banking. Voter contact data provided by these four institutions suggest they contacted hundreds of thousands of (potential) voters ahead of the 2020 Presidential election. Moreover, at least 100,000 had Spanish surnames. Civic engagement leaders summarized the importance of having Latinx members canvass in GOTV initiatives by collectively stating: 1) identity and ethnicity instill a sense of trust in (potential) Latinx voters, 2) the ability to speak Spanish allows for greater clarity in Latinx communities, and 3) Latinx members are aware of Texas's long histories of Latinx voter discrimination and are passionate about voter engagement.

5.7: CHAPTER SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Institutional rules and dispute resolution mechanisms are critical to both institutional efficacy and participant/member satisfaction. Institutional leaders provided insights into an array of different service provisions and how they varied geographically due to absolute locations (sites). Further, site and situation neighborhood contexts such as, race, ethnicity and per capita income help us understand why certain institutions are located within specific contexts, and who participants/members are, including their socioeconomic characteristics.

Regarding the types of spaces of engagement institutions create (informality, information, and mobilization), politicians, their campaigns, scholars and policy makers should pay more attention to informal and informational spaces of engagement specifically for three important reasons. First, these spaces provide arenas and forums for political dialogue in both informal and formal settings and may be a significant contextual factor that influences voters, and in particular, Latinx voters to turnout. Second, informational-level spaces disseminate basic political information such as, polling locations, and voter registration deadlines, and use their physical space as either polling locations or registration sites, they should be viewed as powerful agents capable of facilitating social change, because participation/membership numbers, in some institutions, can constitute millions of people. Lastly, while spaces of mobilization put substantial resources into increasing voter turnout, they do not provide physical spaces where political dialogue occurs among familiar faces. Finally, the exact number of Latinx (potential) voters is unknown due to two important factors: 1) the state of Texas does not track voter ethnicity, and 2) there is no way to determine if a causal relationship exists between participation/membership and the informal networks and discussions in institutions and actually casting a ballot. Nevertheless, several historically non-partisan institutions, entered the political arena for the first time in 2020, by providing basic or detailed voter information and assistance, and/or providing space for members/participants to have informal political discussions. Therefore, the rules-in-use that govern polycentric arrangements such as, sharing resources and coordinating objectives, provide an arena to influence both electoral behavior and ideology, among

predominantly Latinx persons and should be considered in future research and models of political behavior/engagement.

CHAPTER 6: ELECTIONS AS COMMONS: RECONCEPTUALIZING THE U.S. ELECTORAL SYSTEM

6.1: INTRODUCTION

To this point, the dissertation has found evidence that: (1) suppressive social institutions have worked to disenfranchise and disempower Latinx voters in Texas since the State joined the union; and (2) the cumulative result of these suppressive social institutions is a persistent turnout gap between white and Latinx voters; but (3) supportive, place-based social institutions plausibly counteract these suppressive forces, creating opportunities and facilitating interactions, mostly through polycentric governance, that can narrow the turnout gap in some places. In this chapter, I argue that these latter – supportive, place-based, Latinx-serving – institutions are embedded in broader electoral systems that are essentially designed to reinforce existing power structures. That is, groups with territorial control over electoral geographies and discretion over electoral rule administration often make and enforce rules to keep themselves in power. Through activities such as strategically drawing electoral boundaries (“gerrymandering”) and locating polling stations in inconvenient spaces, rule makers and rule enforcers erect institutions that keep disenfranchised groups (e.g., Latinx voters) from accumulating meaningful political and electoral power (see Chapter 3 for a substantive historical geography of such institutions in Texas). In fact, 250 new electoral bills have been proposed across 43 states designed to limit mail, early in-person and election day voting (Gardener et al 2021). Therefore, examining the geographies of such inconsistent electoral rule-making advances our understanding about how electoral

pollution is produced, reproduced and for whom, and why polycentric governance is essential to counteracting such effects.

The implication is that, to strengthen the potential for supportive, place-based institutions to function as a leverage point for closing – once and for all – the persistent turnout gap between racial and ethnic voting groups, is unlikely to close without major structural reforms to state and national electoral systems in the United States. Toward those ends, this chapter puts forward a model of elections as a type of commons. Much like a spatially-based commons (e.g., the streetscapes and public rights of way in an urban neighborhood; [see: O’Brien 2016; Weaver 2015]), an election is a complex space characterized by numerous decision-makers (e.g., election administrators, legislators, grassroots social institutions, etc.) whose actions are interdependent. When a given actor (e.g., powerholders) make decisions that put their self-interests (e.g., desires to retain power) ahead of collective well-being, they undermine the functioning of the election commons and its ability to deliver benefits to everyone who has a stake in it. From this perspective, closing racial and ethnic turnout gaps, and perhaps distributing political and electoral power more broadly and equitably, involves solving collective action problems – analogous to coordinating community members’ actions in ways that manage geographically-based resources sustainably (Schroder 2018; Skovgaard 2019) or keep local neighborhoods safe and free of blight (Oakerson and Clifton 2017).

To build out and engage this model of an election commons, this chapter employs Ostrom’s (1990) principles of effective governance and Fung’s (2019) underwritings of democracy. These theoretical exercises grapple with the structural elements of existing electoral systems that give rise to politically suppressive social institutions, such as those

discussed in Chapter 3; and they implicate structural designs and social institutional forms that might facilitate more transparent and fair electoral processes characterized by greater social and spatial equity. In other words, a common and consistent form of electoral governance needs to be established across the democratic republic in order to begin remedying the aforementioned historical and continuous disenfranchisement effects.

6.2: OVERVIEW OF THE U.S. DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

According to Archon Fung (2019), democracy is a form of governance characterized by four formal procedural components and two kinds of legitimacy. Concerning the former, a democracy requires: (1) people, who in turn constitute a political association; (2) pluralism, meaning that members of the political association are characterized by heterogeneous interests and preferences that are often in conflict; (3) a *government*, which regulates the behaviors and interactions of members of the political association; and (4) mechanisms that guarantee the people of the political association *participate as political equals* in government (p. 11). To Fung, when these four procedural elements are in place, citizens in a democracy (i.e., members of the democratic political association) accept their government as a *procedurally legitimate* entity – insofar as citizens recognize their opportunities to participate as political equals in government – whose actions produce *legitimate outputs*. This latter type of legitimacy means that citizens collectively agree that their government acts only after “duly considering the interests and views of [its] citizens in electoral and deliberative processes” (Fung 2019, p. 11).

The question of whether the United States, whose governance system is generally described as a democratic republic (Stromberg 2011), lives up to Fung’s (2019) criteria has been under intense reexamination in recent years (e.g., Posner 2018; Castells 2019; Fung 2019; Milstein 2020). As just one reason for this heightened interest, Milstein (2020) argues that the 2016 election of Donald Trump to the U.S. Presidency is plausibly an indicator of a *legitimacy crisis* in U.S. democracy, given that Mr. Trump both lost the nation’s popular vote *and* was the first president on record to be inaugurated with a minority approval rating (p. 5).

Because the most fundamental relationship in a democracy is arguably that a government’s power to govern rests on the consent of its people to be governed (e.g., Moyer et al. 2001), a legitimacy crisis that undermines this basic precept is a threat to the sustainability of U.S. democracy and its core public institutions. Crucially, to the extent that all persons in a democratic society stand to benefit from that society’s public institutions, the observation that the (in)actions of some persons or groups have the potential to harm or delegitimize those institutions suggests that a democracy is a kind of commons (Fung 2019; Weaver 2020). A commons is a collective system in which there exists some sort of (1) *common pool of resource(s)* that is managed and used by (2) a *community of people* who follow (3) a *set of social protocols* and rules for using and accessing those resources (De Angelis 2017; Atkin et al. 2019). For Fung (2019), democracy lives up to this definition. The *resources* are the benefits we receive from democratic institutions on which “our very lives and fortunes [deeply] depend” (p. 10). The *community* of people is the political association, or residents of a nation (p. 11). And the *social protocols* are found in the complex, multiscalar network of regulations, “laws

and norms that work together to reinforce professional and civic behavior that sustains common-pool resources” (p. 11).

In a democratic republic like the United States, one of the most visible components of the set of social protocols for managing the democracy commons is the periodic election. While there are certainly qualifications that need to be expanded on below, in general, most adult citizens of a contemporary democratic republic are eligible to cast ballots in elections to voice their support for certain candidates for office, and/or for policy measures advanced via ballot initiatives (Panagopoulos and Weinschenk 2015). The crux of this chapter is that elections are not, however, mere social protocols that help define the democracy commons. Rather, to the extent that elections are collective arenas with their own *rules and protocols*, in which control over *resources* and policy is allocated in ways that affect the citizens of the election jurisdiction (*community*), they are commons within the democracy commons.

In other words, democracy is a sort of macro-commons that contains many embedded commons, among which are elections. Specifically, an election is a *resource* from which citizens seek to influence government in ways that fulfill their individual needs and desires. The *people* who use and access that resource are registered voters who are organized into various nested and overlapping electoral geographies (e.g., school districts, municipalities, states, legislative districts, etc.) and interest groups. And the *social protocols* that govern use of the resource include a complex system of written and unwritten rules, laws, regulations, norms, and practices regarding who can participate, when and where they can participate, and how participation gets aggregated and converted into outcomes. Just as Milstein’s (2020) example of the 2016 Trump election

suggests, individual actions and decisions that occur in elections – a commons within the larger democracy commons – can undermine the legitimacy of the election commons. Even so, electoral outcomes that seemingly go against the majority of both voters (evidence by the popular vote) and the people (evidenced by public opinion polls) are only one threat to the integrity of the election commons. Many other “polluting” (e.g., Fung 2019; Weaver 2020) forces exist that subtract from the quality and legitimacy of the electoral commons.

The next section spells out several of these forces and reveals how their presence and operation undermines the health and sustainability of elections and, by extension, the democracy commons in which they are embedded. From there, Part III introduces instructive work from key scholars on the commons (e.g., Ostrom 1990) and democracy (e.g., Fung 2019), and synthesizes lessons from that literature into a foundation for organizing and governing an election commons. Part IV explores other specific solutions and proposals from legislatures across the nation that are actively attempting to improve the sustainability of the election commons. Part V provides brief conclusions and implications of this work.

6.3: THREATS TO THE COMMONS: POLLUTION(S), ENCLOSURE(S), AND THEIR IMPACTS

Internal and external forces pollute (subtract from) electoral legitimacy and the quality of the election commons by seeking to establish enclosures. Consistent with the historical enclosure movement that privatized common land in England – a movement that colonized the globe – enclosures are mechanisms that create artificial or physical

barriers around an erstwhile open space in order to exclude users and prevent access (Short 2008). Election commons feature countless varieties of enclosures. As an example, state and local jurisdictional boundaries act as enclosures that restrict “use” of an election commons to eligible citizens living within those boundaries. For example, Governor Brian Kemp recently signed SB-202 into law (termed Jim Crow 2.0), which: 1) requires an ID number to apply for an absentee ballot, 2) cut off absentee ballot applications 11 days before an election, 3) limit the number of absentee ballot drop boxes, and 4) make it a misdemeanor to hand out food or water to voters in line. Other enclosures, which are explored more deeply throughout this article, include additional policies and practices designed to intentionally restrict ballot access to residents of electoral geographies – from minimum ages to voter identification laws, to inaccessible polling locations voter record purging and countless others.

Similar to capitalist property relations, various types of restrictive election policies or enclosures function to privatize as much of an election commons as possible. As privatization and enclosure increases, a commons ceases to be a healthy, sustainable system (Partelow et al 2019; Nightingale 2019; Liu et al 2020). Instead, what is left of that commons (i.e., what remains un-enclosed) tends to be a degraded system, drained of its capacity to supply benefits to the “commoners” by the polluting forces of “elite” self-interested enclosers who overuse it in pursuit of wealth and power (Kasymov and Thiel 2019; Brando et al 2019).

The remainder of this section identifies several forms of attempted enclosures on the election commons in the United States, and it unpacks the ways in which the actions of actual and would-be enclosers pollute the election commons and inhibit its healthy,

sustainable functioning, physical openness, efficacy, and integrity. Out of practicality, the list is far from exhaustive. It is also biased toward recent examples, as well as toward national elections, particularly the U.S. presidential Election. Efforts to continually identify and unpack threats to election commons at other scales and in other study areas will be valuable extensions to this project going forward.

6.3.1: Foreign attacks on the 2016 Presidential Election

One of the most visible threats to the election commons to date occurred in the form of foreign interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential Election, a threat to the commons that resulted in members of the winning candidate's (Donald Trump's) transition team and advisors receiving prison sentences. Persons in Trump's orbit were found guilty of acts such as: 1) lying to the FBI; 2) financial fraud; and 3) conspiracy to defraud the U.S. (BBC News 2019). Through their investigations of Trump's team and broader security threats, U.S. intelligence agencies concluded in 2016 that Russia was behind an effort to help Donald Trump win the 2016 presidential election, with a state-authorized campaign of cyber-attacks and disinformation stories planted on social media (BBC News 2019).

Cyber-attacks include hacking voting machines. Year after year, hacking conventions demonstrate how easy it is to hack a variety of voting machines used in the U.S. (Hartmann 2020). A 2018 clone of a Florida voting machine was hacked in less than 10 minutes by an 11-year-old child (Hartmann 2020). For these reasons among others, Ireland sold its U.S. bought voting machines after one election, which it paid \$80 million dollars for, as scrap metal for a mere \$79,000. Ireland stated that they refused the resell

U.S. voting machines, so that “no other country...[would] make the mistake of using them in an election.” (Hartmann 2020 p96.) While the complexity of public sector bidding and contracting for services is beyond the scope of this project, it is well-established that governments award contracts based on factors such as political connections to private firms and, especially, cost – with a strong preference for cost-minimization (Hartley 2017; Romero 2017). As hacking cases demonstrate, public contracting systems that call on profit-motivated, private sector firms to compete with one another on cost can result in services with compromised quality (not that the public sector could necessarily create “unhackable” technology; however, election systems that are fully embedded in the public sector would not operate with a profit imperative – there would be less incentive to compromise on quality) (Cheeseman and Klaas 2018; Zetter 2020). In that sense, neoliberal tendencies toward privatization of election technology and ballot collection work to create, similar to privatization of land, something of an enclosure. The spaces controlled by profit-motivated firms or otherwise self-interested agents are subject pollution, as enclosers seek to extract maximum value from the commons without regard for its long-term sustainability (Baggio et al 2016).

Perhaps a more nuanced and toxic threat, both foreign and domestic, in the recent U.S. presidential election is that of disinformation. Disinformation campaigns pollute the macro-democracy commons by creating crises of legitimacy that cause citizens to lose faith in their government and its core institutions (Jedidiah 2020). In fact, the events of January 6, 2021 provide a powerful example of how misinformation campaigns manifest in the real world. Ambiguously labeled by media outlets as, “protestors”, “rioters”, “demonstrators”, and “terrorists”, a group of no more than 10,000 (Doig 2021) of

President Trump loyalists stormed the U.S. Capitol building resulting in the death of five people. These terrorists widely cited conspiracy theories, touted by both President Trump and far right media outlets, as the reason for their actions—they bought into disinformation campaigns promulgating the idea that the election was “stolen” or “rigged”. From the lens of a commons, the objective of the group was to impede others’ ability to “use” the election commons for their purposes (i.e., duly electing a different President).

6.3.2: The Electoral College

Unique to the U.S., presidential elections are not direct elections. A candidate can win the popular vote without winning the majority of votes cast in the election. Somewhat paradoxical in the shadow of the preceding section, the electoral college was created to prevent a presidential candidate from winning an election if that candidate held the interests of a foreign government (Hartmann 2020). The 12th constitutional amendment, in 1804, allowed separate ballots to be cast, by a body of electors, to determine the President and Vice President of the U.S. Since 1804, five presidential candidates won the popular vote but lost the electoral college vote and thus lost the presidential election (Gaines 2001). The electoral college was also supported in 1804 because the U.S. was still expanding, and it was difficult for the general public to become familiar with a presidential candidate without mass communication and transportation (Hartmann 2020). This is certainly not the case today, yet the electoral college remains the omni-potent power that decides who wins the U.S. Presidency.

By design, the electoral college is a form of enclosure, giving power (and responsibility) only to selected individuals (electors) to nominate executive office holders. Evidence for this claim is supported further by The Enforcement Act of 1871, which placed administration of national elections under the control of the federal government and empowered federal judges and United States marshals to supervise local polling places (Swinney 1962). Because electors from each state (are supposed to) cast their votes for President in accordance with the state's popular vote, the average voter may assume that the electoral college protects citizens' interests. In U.S. presidential elections, each state is divided into several voting districts. The boundaries of voting districts provide two functions: 1) they represent only the eligible voters that live within them, and 2) eligible voters can only cast ballots within the district where they live. The problem with this, however, is that electoral districts are often drawn in heavily partisan directions, resulting in unequal ballot access and influence. Therefore, this well-documented form of enclosure, termed gerrymandering, precedes the power and influence of the electoral college.

6.3.3: Gerrymandering

Gerrymandering is the redrawing of a voting district to give particular advantage to one political party (Engstrom 2019). Historically, the practice has targeted minority-majority communities, where minorities *could* elect their preferred candidate, if fair, non-partisan, boundaries were drawn. Conceptually, gerrymandering is probably the most accredited form(s) of enclosure, by delineating boundaries designed to dilute the electoral influence of targeted groups – keeping such groups out of power (Fraga 2018).

In addition to theoretically enclosing the election commons, electoral boundaries have real world impacts on voters and their elected representatives. For example, a voter might only have one polling site in their district, and it may be difficult to reach given the distance or the time required, further increasing the cost of voting (Blais 2019). The result(s) may be that this voter and other voters facing similar situations (and many of them have been documented, see: Perelas et al 2006; Joslyn et al 2020), may decide that cost of voting is too high and not vote. In contrast, the effects of gerrymandering for elected officials are often positive. In gerrymandered districts, members of the U.S. House of Representatives are re-elected 97 percent of the time (Center for Responsive Politics 2018). And in the 2016 election, only 10 percent of the 435 House seats were considered competitive (Mascaro 2016). In sum, much like historic enclosures of the commons, the “elite” (i.e., elected powerholders) benefit from drawing boundaries that weaken “access” to the election commons (and, it follows, political power) for targeted groups.

6.3.4: Polling Site (En)-Closures

Closing or limiting the hours of polling sites usually occurs where a minority-majority exists. By limiting polling hours, voters have restricted access to the ballot box, and closing polling sites entirely results in no access. For example, from 2012-2018, the state of Texas closed hundreds of polling sites where the Black and Latinx populations were growing the fastest (South Texas), potentially benefitting Republicans (Salame 2020). Urban areas with large populations need an adequate number of polling sites to ensure both equal access and actual ballot casting. By and large, this has not been the

case. For instance, in the U.S. South from 2013-2019, over 1,200 polling places were closed, mostly in minority-majority districts. (Sullivan 2019).

The result(s) has been the political-, and by extension, social- and economic-disenfranchisement of minority groups, particularly for African Americans, Latinxs, and Indigenous peoples (Salame 2020). Site closures or limited hours not only restricts already unequal ballot access, but contributes to hopelessness, distrust and further pollution in the U.S. electoral system. A question that arises is, how are states, and by extension, politicians able to legally degrade the system using these mechanisms? Answering part of that question relies on investigating decisions made by the U.S. Supreme Court.

6.3.5: The U.S. Supreme Court and The Voting Rights Act

Following the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act (hereafter, VRA) of 1965 was a landmark piece of legislation that prohibited racial discrimination in voting (Fraga 2018). While there have been numerous court cases that exemplify VRA violations (Perelas et al 2006), the 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* decision by the Supreme Court greenlighted a frenzy of gerrymandering. Writing for the majority, Chief Justice John Roberts claimed that “[t]hings in the South have changed.” Given that minority participation rates had reached similar levels with whites, in the majority’s view, political discrimination was no longer the problem it had been previously and some of the VRA’s core protections were no longer needed, specifically section 4b (Aneja and Avenancio-Leon 2019). In contrast to Chief Roberts, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg declared that similar voting levels between whites and minorities may exist precisely

because of the VRA’s “prophylactic measures to prevent purposeful race discrimination.” (Aneja and Avenancio-Leon 2019). While this decision did not directly cause privatization or enclosure of election commons, it greenlighted and bolstered states’ abilities to gerrymander without question.

In other words, states no longer required federal approval to gerrymander their voting districts, or prove that newly drawn boundaries would disenfranchise minority populations (Aneja and Avenancio-Leon 2019). Not only did the U.S. Supreme Court sanction a form of electoral pollution, but historically restrictive states wasted no time adjusting their electoral governance strategies. Within 24 hours of the ruling, The State of Texas announced that a voter identification law that had been previously blocked would go into effect immediately (Liptak 2013; Brennan Center 2018). Two other states, Mississippi and Alabama, also began to enforce photo ID laws that had previously been barred because of federal preclearance. Two months after *Shelby v. Holder*, the state of North Carolina introduced HB-589, which instituted a strict photo ID requirement; curtailed early voting; eliminated same day registration; restricted pre-registration; ended annual voter registration drives; and eliminated the authority of county boards of elections to keep polls open for an additional hour (Brennan Center 2018). States have largely focused on Voter ID and registration laws as a panacea to combat fraud, disenfranchisement, eligibility and accessibility with mixed results.

6.3.6: Voter ID and Registration Laws

Thirty-six states have identification requirements at the polls. Seven states have strict photo ID laws, under which voters must present one of a limited set of forms of

government-issued photo ID in order to cast a regular ballot – no exceptions (ACLU 2020). According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2015), voter ID laws are estimated to reduce voter turnout by 2-3 percentage points or tens of thousands of votes lost in a single state.

Over 21 million U.S. citizens do not have government-issued photo identification (ACLU 2020). Reasons for this range from accessibility, cost, and travel requirements to obtain an ID (ACLU 2020). While scholars debate the effects of Voter ID requirements on voter turnout (Perez 2015; Highton 2017; Biggers and Hanmer 2017), the literature consistently finds that turnout *is* negatively affected where Latinx and Black populations are growing the fastest (Biggers and Hanmer 2017). In other words, Voter ID laws create electoral enclosures for over 21 million U.S. citizens. However, Atkeson et al (2014) demonstrates that although Voter ID laws exist, they are not implemented equally across states and they found little evidence that race, training, or partisanship matters. Instead, poll worker attitudes toward photo-identification policies and their educational attainment influences implementation of voter-identification laws (Atkeson et al 2014). Access to ballot boxes may depend on those tasked with monitoring polling locations. Nonetheless, Voter ID requirements are a restrictive voting measure, as they are required to determine voter eligibility and validate registration.

Restricting the terms and requirements of registration is one of the most common forms of voter suppression (ACLU 2020). Restrictions can include requiring documents to prove citizenship or identification, heavy penalties for voter registration drives, regaining voting rights for convicted felons, and limiting the window of time in which voters can register (Brennan Center 2019). All of these restrictions should be thought of

as forms of commons enclosure. Politicians often use false claims of voter fraud to try to justify such enclosure techniques. As recently as August 4, 2020, President Trump's campaign team filed a lawsuit against the state of Nevada over its plan to send absentee ballots to all active voters (Sutton 2020). However, the next day, August 5, 2020, President Trump rescinded his attacks on mail-in ballots, only in the State of Florida, where his campaign team believes restricting mail-in ballots would lower turnout for Trump in the 2020 presidential election (Parks 2020).

In sum, the literature consensus on voting registration restrictions is that such enclosures are enforced in a partisan way. In other words, GOP-controlled states have the strictest registration laws to counterbalance minority turnout, but democrat-controlled states allow registration restrictions, if they are viewed as being able to help the democratic party (Brennan Center 2019). Moreover, eligible voters that have provided correct ID and have successfully registered to vote may still end up being purged from voter polls.

6.3.7: Voter Purges

Refreshing voter rolls is a responsible part of election administration because many people move, die, or become ineligible to vote for other reasons (ACLU 2020). But sometimes, states use this process as a method of ballot privatization causing mass disenfranchisement, purging eligible voters from rolls for illegitimate reasons or based on inaccurate data, and often without adequate notice to the voters (ACLU 2020). A single purge can stop up to hundreds of thousands of people from voting (Brennan Center

2018). Commonly, voters only discover they have been purged when they show up to vote.

Voter purges have increased in recent years. A recent Brennan Center study (2018) found that almost 16 million voters were purged from the rolls between 2014 and 2016, and that jurisdictions with a history of racial discrimination, had significantly higher purge rates. The most common reasons state administrations provide for purging voter rolls are to filter out voters with address changes, voters who have died, or voters who have not voted in recent elections (Brennan Center 2018). States often purge voters using inaccurate data, deleting voters who do not belong in these targeted categories (ACLU 2020). In 2016, Arkansas purged thousands of voters for so-called felony convictions, even though some of the voters had never been convicted of a felony. In 2013, Virginia purged 39,000 voters based on data that was later found to have an error rate of up to 17 percent (Brennan Center 2018). Further, special interest actors may deploy copious amount of cash to incentivize both politicians and administrations to purge voters who they believe may vote against their own interests (Petracca 2019).

6.3.8: The Role of Money in Politics

Money has long plagued the U.S. electoral system by allowing wealthy Americans, with specific interests, to buy politicians. In fact, the Supreme Court's 1976 *Buckley v. Valeo* decision made it legal for wealthy people to own politicians and spend copious amounts of money to influence elections and policy (Hartmann 2020). The most common interests of wealthy politician buyers include cutbacks on government regulations related to fossil fuels and taxes (Skovgaard and Asselt 2019). Two obvious

problems result when billionaires influence elections: (1) their bought politicians advance legislation to promote their interests, and 2) the U.S. political system becomes enclosed and boundaries are forged to keep out other commoners (voters). For example, billionaire campaign donors have received tax cuts that have saved them each billions of dollars, while working-class Americans have received little to no tax relief (Saez and Sucman 2020). Moreover, billionaire tax cut legislation passed by Presidents Reagan, Trump and Bush have totaled over 20 trillion dollars since the 1970s (Hartmann 2020).

A more contemporary example, President Trump's 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act helped lower the mandatory corporate tax rate, allowing billionaires to save more money (Wagner et al 2018). As Senator Bernie Sanders tweeted, "If you paid the \$119.00 for a yearly Amazon Prime membership, you just paid more than Amazon did in taxes in 2017 and 2018." (Stampler 2020). The Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, a nonprofit think tank, analyzed SEC filings of Fortune 500 companies and identified 60 major corporations that did not report any federal income tax expenses in 2018 (Holmes 2019). The wealth gap between America's richest and poorer families has more than doubled from 1989 to 2016. Within that same time period, the wealth gap widened when between races and genders. For example, white women only earn 82 percent of what white men earn, and median black household income was 61 percent of median white household income in 2018 (Schaeffer 2020).

By itself, the extreme wealth gap stands to threaten U.S. democracy in three compelling ways. According to Hacker and Pierson (2020), extreme inequalities can lead to threats such as: 1) Unequal power- extreme concentrations of wealth can circumvent the necessary dispersal and process of political power by influencing political ideologies

and policies; 2) Diverging interests- democracy rests on the notion that even in large and diverse societies, where fundamental disagreements are inevitable, most citizens will come to reconcile economic interests. Extreme inequality makes it harder to reconcile those differences because the current U.S. economic structure funnels most gains to the super rich, and thus, improvements for the majority require challenging this system, and 3); Elites' fear- Elites are concerned that democracy is a weapon in the hands of the masses, wielded at the expense of a few. Therefore, elites may devote their resources to politics in order to maintain their grasps on political power and associated privileges. This is accomplished by spending large sums of money, which allows their preferred candidate(s) to mass advertise. In turn, the more a campaign spends, the more likely of a successful race.

In the process, however, wealthy campaign donors influence other arenas such as financial, educational and governmental institutions. Most U.S. billionaires have given large amounts of money – and many have engaged in intense activity – to advance unpopular, inequality-exacerbating, highly conservative economic policies. But they have done so very quietly, saying little or nothing in public about what they are doing or why. They have avoided political accountability (Page et al 2018), and no sanctions are placed on these wealthy individuals that employ their own resources to influence institutional governance.

Even when middle- and low-income Americans contribute more individual donations to political campaigns, it is still not enough to out-raise candidates that receive contributions from wealthy Americans. The overweighed influence of money in politics is one major reason that many Americans lack confidence that the democratic system

instantiates the commitment to political equality or that it will be responsive to popular interests (Fung 2019). Therefore, extreme inequality and money in politics pollutes both the electoral commons and U.S. democracy overall. To further illustrate the detriment of the above impacts, political experts have been surveyed to assess the current state of U.S. democracy in 2020.

6.3.9: Assessing Threats to the Commons in 2020: Experts' Opinions

Brightline Watch, an organization dedicated to evaluating threats to democracy, surveyed political scientists to assess the current state of U.S. democracy in August 2020 (Bright Line Watch 2020). Table 12 provides six findings from Brightline Watch's survey (n=766), that reflect the above threats to U.S. democracy:

Table 12: Experts' Opinions on the Current Performance of U.S. Democracy (2020)

1) ~70 percent think that elections are not fraud free and ~98 percent feel that there is some form of foreign influence.
2) ~98 percent think that voting rights are not fully equal among all voters and only ~5 percent think that all votes have equal impact.
3) ~98 percent think there are no sanctions and punishments for government misconduct, and only ~2 percent think that investigations into misconduct are not at all compromised.
4) ~2 percent think there is a high level of political participation.
5) ~95 percent think campaign contributions are not transparent and ~98 percent feel that these contributions influence policy to some degree.
6) Almost all experts think that voting districts are biased.

Table 12 indicates that experts feel foreign interference, district boundaries, campaign finance and transparency, and the actual value of votes are not equal within the U.S. political system. Present electoral and political management within the U.S. is disjointed, privatized, and set up for pollution. Make no mistake, the above threats continuously reproduce commons pollution in the forms of electoral enclosure, privatization and the overall degradation of the electoral system. However, if structural changes were made to both the U.S. electoral system, and democratic governance, the above threats would either cease to exist, or their impacts, at worst, would become insignificant.

6.4: THE ELECTION COMMONS WITHIN THE DEMOCRACY COMMONS: A SYNTHESIS

To this point, I have argued that, inasmuch as U.S. democracy can be viewed as macro-commons, one of a democracy's most visible and foundational institutions – the

election – is a commons within a commons. Namely, an election is a *resource* from which voters seek to influence government in ways that meet their needs and conditions. Voters are organized into various nested and overlapping electoral geographies (e.g., school districts, municipalities, states, legislative districts, etc.). And the *social protocols* that govern use of the resource include a complex system of written and unwritten rules, laws, regulations, norms, and practices regarding who can participate, when and where they can participate, and how participation gets aggregated and converted into outcomes. The threats of enclosure and pollution outlined in section II demonstrate how problematic the governance of these social protocols have been. These and related threats degrade the integrity of the election commons and, by extension, the functioning of the democratic macro-commons in which it is embedded.

Historically, solutions to commons tragedies have bought into Hardin's (1959) misguided views that top-down government control is necessary to prevent individuals from acting selfishly and depleting (enclosing) a common-pool-resource (the election). Similar to the weaknesses of this logic in other contexts (see Ostrom 1990 for a fuller treatment), top-down, command-and-control interventions have failed to rectify electoral tragedies. Rather, they arguably have played a role in exacerbating and normalizing the polluting, enclosing practices described above.

6.4.1: A New Concept for Electoral Governance

While there are no silver bullet solutions to address deeply rooted practices of enclosure in and the polluting forces on the election commons in the U.S., the literature on sustainably managed commons offers several possibilities for restoring its integrity

(and, as a result, the integrity of the macro- democracy commons). What follows is a thought exercise in restructuring the electoral commons, one heavily informed by Fung's (2019) five principles of democracy and Ostrom's (1990) design principles of community-based resource institutions.

Ostrom (1990) provides extensive evidence of successfully managed common-pool-resources through collective action. These successfully managed resources institutions, which include the actors responsible for their governance, have exhibited eight specific design principles of collective action. Table 13 includes these eight principles. Ostrom's (1990) principles of governance reflect characteristics of democratic collective action, but they are broad and require further specificity in order to govern election commons and sustain democracy. Specificity in governance recommendations will be informed by Fung's (2019) underwritings of democracy.

"Sets of ethical commitments by all entities involved in election commons, that is, politicians, voters and the media, need to be adopted to sustain democracy. The U.S. has powerful self-interested groups that pollute the commons of democratic procedures and their underlying conditions. These polluting activities are not wrong in the sense that they violate the liberty of others or violate structural democratic norms." (Fung 2019 p4).

It is important to note that Fung (2019), agrees that threats to democracy erode its quality, but not to the extent that they violate individual liberties or the structural norms themselves. By contrast, I argue these polluting activities do in fact violate the freedoms of others and structural democratic norms. As evidenced in Part II, the right(s) of U.S. citizens to vote and the structures that govern the current electoral system indeed violate

individual voting rights and illustrate a structurally selective and failing democratic system in the United States.

According to Fung (2019) voters accept their government as *procedurally legitimate* because they have enjoyed opportunities to participate in determining its policies as political equals. Second, voters regard the actions-- *the outputs*-- of their government as legitimate because the government acts after duly considering the interests and views of citizens in electoral and deliberative processes. The problem is, threats pollute legitimate procedural participation (democracy), which in turn, pollute electoral outputs (elections). I argue that Fung's (2019) concept of procedures and outputs in U.S. elections become illegitimate because of threats to democracy. However, Fung (2019) offers several underwriting conditions that must be met in order to sustain democracy.

Fung (2019) asks: how we can accelerate public conversation about what democracy requires? I attempt to provide a solution to Fung's question by proposing structural changes to U.S. electoral governance. The success of election commons cannot solely rely on the condition of collective action, unless *all* parties involved demand that elections are procedurally legitimate rather than a self-interested outcome (a preferred candidate or policy). This includes an active agenda by all involved in election commons to denounce and defend against threats to U.S. democracy. Below I detail how each of Ostrom's (1990) principles are related to Fung's (2019) underwritings (Table 13).

Table 13: Ostrom and Fung's Frameworks

Ostrom's Principles for Effective Governance	Fung's 5 Underwritings of Sustaining Democracy
1. Define clear group boundaries	(1) The Priority of Procedure: Commitment to Democratic Process over Partisan Outcomes
2. Match rules governing use of common goods to local needs and conditions.	(2) Social Cohesion- Voters must be able to appreciate the reasons offered by others and must be willing to alter their own views in light of those reasons.
3. Ensure that those affected by the rules can participate in modifying the rules.	(3) Governmental Responsiveness- Laws and policies grow from the participation of equal voters
4. Make sure the rule-making rights of community members are respected by outside authorities.	(4) The Spirit of Compromise- Without the skills or the will to reach agreements that overcome differences of principle and value, excessive discord paralyzes democracy.
5. Develop a system, carried out by community members, for monitoring members' behavior.	(5) Epistemic Integrity- Allows voters and officials to reach understanding about the world to exercise that instrumental rationality. Voters must be confident that experts are not propagandists.
6. Use graduated sanctions for rule violators.	
7. Provide accessible, low-cost means for dispute resolution.	
8. Build responsibility for governing the common resource in nested tiers from the lowest level up to the entire interconnected system.	

6.4.2: Defining Clear Group Boundaries

In common-pool-resource literature, group boundaries are the physical and social barriers that either promote or inhibit user participation (Ostrom 1990). Here, we should think of boundaries as voting districts, because voters cannot cast a ballot outside of the

district in which they live (Alexeev and Mixon 2019). Because legislatures decide these boundaries, commitments to the democratic process over partisan outcomes are flawed because current boundaries continuously reproduce electoral threats. Democracy requires citizens and officials to abide by democratic procedures even if they fail to elect their preferred candidates (Fung 2019). However, Fung (2019) takes for granted the threats that voters face and assumes that if collective action is not taken, only the voter is responsible.

As evidenced above, gerrymandering can disenfranchise select groups of voters, and due to the current political climate (2020), we suspect that the large degree of racial polarization in the U.S. will further provide empirical validation for the importance of social cohesion following the 2020 presidential election. While current boundaries reproduce electoral pollution, both the social cohesion and ethnic composition of a district matters in order to achieve a spirit of compromise. This can impede electoral fairness in two important ways. First, stereotypes of places are often associated with the groups who reside in them. Within voting districts, different neighborhoods constituting various racial, ethnic, ideological and partisan characteristics, can and has resulted in racial- and partisan- threat voting (Enos 2015). Second, a spirit of compromise requires forging agreements because without the skills or the will to reach agreements that overcome differences of principle and value, excessive discord and polarization paralyzes democracy (Fung 2019).

Federal government responsiveness to voting district boundaries has been non-existent post- *Shelby County v. Holder*. This lack of responsiveness removes federal level commitments and responsibilities to equality in both electoral procedure and output.

Finally, epistemic integrity, the idea that voters are confident that experts and politicians are not propagandists (Fung 2019), varies geographically between and within voting boundaries due to place-based actors such as media outlets and non-profit organizations. Further, politicians pump unequal amounts of campaign money to advertise in places with low social cohesion and compromise, with the goal of conveying their commitment(s) to epistemic integrity, and in turn, securing uncertain voters.

6.4.3: Rule Making and Participation

To summarize, principles 2, 3 and 4 include rules meeting the needs of voters (#2), voters having the ability to modify those rules (#3), and that such rules are respected outside of their jurisdiction (#4). We should think of these three principles as voting laws. Here, commitment to the process and non-partisan outcome has an important relationship with rule making. The process of voting must be inclusive of all eligible voters needs and their ability to participate in their modification, if needed. When these conditions are met, such rules can become laws and standardized in federal election processes. Social cohesion and a spirit of compromise are essential elements to ensure adherence voting laws, while government responsiveness has a duty to accept and respect state-wide voting laws crafted in response. Finally, epistemic integrity plays a vital role in ensuring that voting laws match local needs and conditions, commitments to the democratic process, and ensuring fair elections.

6.4.4: Monitoring and Sanctioning Electoral Processes and Providing Dispute Resolutions

Principle 5, create a monitoring system for voters' behavior, is related to the commitment to the process through establishing a monitoring system for ensuring electoral fairness and nonpartisan outcomes, and requires both social cohesion and a spirit of compromise, where rules and procedures are established and enforced in a non-partisan way, and needs to be respected by all levels of government. Further, principle 6, the power of monitors to sanction rule (law) violators should extend to all entities responsible for epistemic integrity. Monitors should employ their sanctioning abilities for a collective benefit instead of individual gains. Finally, all five of Fung's underwritings are a prerequisite for principle 7, a low-cost means for dispute resolution. If voters are unhappy with voting laws, or monitors are abusing their powers, a low-cost mechanism to voice concerns should be included within the election commons governance structure.

6.4.5: Polycentric Governance

Principle 8, build responsibility within institutions in nested tiers for governing the election commons, embodies all of Fung's (2019) underwritings. Because the governance structures used in local and state elections currently dictate a state's role in a federal election, it is important to examine how institutions at different levels (local, state and federal) contribute to electoral outcomes. Some institutions may be more salient or powerful in the electoral process than others. For example, outside of government institutions and mobilization campaigns, local community improvement and membership-based institutions have been found to increase Latinx voter turnout in Texas

(Ponstingel and Weaver 2020). While circumstantial, the role of different formal institutions and actors cannot be overlooked when considering their impacts on commitment to the process over partisan outcomes (voter mobilizations and registration campaigns), social cohesion (civility and like-mindedness), a spirit of compromise (acting collectively and being open-minded), government responsiveness (certain organizations can put pressure on governments to act in voters' interests such as, the Civil Rights-, Black Lives Matter-, and Me Too-movements) and epistemic integrity (the role of elites and media institutions in influencing the other four underwritings for personal gain). Further, it is important to examine the governance structures within such types of circumstantial institutions, as they may serve as models for collective action (Ponstingel and Weaver 2020).

In tandem, Ostrom (1990) and Fung (2019) provide a “new” framework for governing an election commons and can eliminate the reproduction of electoral pollution. Thus, the logical question of, “What is the governance structure of the election commons?” emerges.

6.4.6: Securing an Election Commons

Below, I provide four policy possibilities, rooted in Part III above, that include paths legislatures can take to create and govern a well-functioning election commons. Similar to Part III, we discuss how each of Ostrom's (1990) principles and Fung's (2019) five underwritings can be specifically reflected in the governance arrangement of election commons in order to reduce/eliminate threats to U.S. democracy.

Possibility #1: Non-Partisan Boundaries Promote Unity

Defining the boundaries of voting districts can have significant impacts on electoral outcomes. While voting districts may *always have* some degree of inequity, redrawing them in non-partisan way would substantially reduce electoral pollution. For example, non-partisan commissions have been tasked with redrawing Iowa's voting districts, and while far from perfect, this commitment to the process ensures a fairer election in Iowa. Further, non-partisan boundaries can promote social cohesion, a spirit of compromise and epistemic integrity. If voters know that their districts have equal (or very close to equal) value, individual and group voters may: 1) perceive greater influence in electoral outcomes and feel empowered, 2) engage others to vote, and 3) reduce the adverse effects elite actors and media have on elections while simultaneously incentivizing epistemic integrity.

Possibility #2: Ensuring Fair Electoral Rules and Increasing Government

Responsiveness

Elections should have laws that are inclusive of all eligible voters. Creating these laws should include a collective (polycentric) effort by local, state and federal law makers, in order to account for the current threats that vary geographically. Voters should be able to participate in both creating and modifying these laws. This type of user participation in making electoral rules ensures government responsiveness, because non-responsiveness may result in elected officials losing their seats. Securing this type of polycentric governance between voters and different levels of government not only promotes responsiveness, but also equal voting access and value, a reduced cost of

voting, and epistemic integrity, social cohesion and a spirit of compromise. If voters have a fundamental right to modifying rules that govern elections, both voter turnout and trusting the U.S. political system may increase. A byproduct of such a governance arrangement may be increased social cohesion and spirits of compromise, which can help reduce the extent of current racial polarization.

Possibility #3: Ensure Electoral Monitoring and Security to Increase Epistemic Integrity

Monitoring should occur in a polycentric governance arrangement. Monitors should be diverse in their backgrounds and ethnicities to further reduce collective bias, increase social cohesion and a spirit of compromise. Voters require power to hold their elected officials accountable. One way to accomplish this is through sanctioning rule violators. Voters should demand a real-time power system to report and correct voting law violations and immediately sanction the violators. In other words, voters need a system to monitor the behavior of institutions, elite actors and media outlets. This system could increase both government responsiveness and epistemic integrity. Media outlets do abide by a code of journalistic ethics, by trying to report accurate information.

However, social media companies do not have the same epistemic integrity ethics that journalists self-ascribe to, largely because they are not required. Social media companies need to be monitored for the information reported on their platforms. While social media platforms mainly constitute user-created content, the political information disseminated across platforms currently has no monitoring system. In other words, there is no accountability for whether the information social media users disseminate is factual

or not. This is problematic because social media has become a valued source of political information for voters, and it can have profound effects on voters' political opinions and actions (Haenschen 2016). Such a lack of monitoring on social media platforms can have significant impacts, outside of elections too. Users are able to self-select information they receive on social media, which can further reinforce their beliefs and values, and further degrade a spirit of compromise, social cohesion, and commitment to the process over partisan outcomes. By creating a system to hold social media companies accountable for the accuracy of information on their platforms, users will be prompted to reflect on whether or not they will ascribe to any information labeled as false. This can increase both a spirit of compromise and epistemic integrity.

Indeed, epistemic integrity extends to the security of the U.S. electoral system, which needs to be strengthened. Poll workers, from different levels of government, are currently tasked with supervising polling sites. Both foreign influence and voting machine hacking have been documented in recent presidential elections (Hartmann 2020). Paper ballots or electronic receipts need to become a requirement to ensure electoral fairness. Further, software companies should be transparent with their proprietary voting machine software. Companies that craft voting software are currently not required, by law, to disclose their proprietary software. This disclosure ensures no in-house foul play, and upholds the integrity of U.S. democracy. In order for elections to be shielded from foreign influence and hacking, multiple institutions, at different levels of government, should work together to ensure national elections are fraud free. In fact, former director of national intelligence, Dan Coats, urged the U.S. Congress to create,

“A supremely high-level bipartisan and non-partisan commission to oversee the [2020] election. This commission would not circumvent existing electoral reporting systems or those that tabulate, evaluate or certify the results. But it would monitor those mechanisms and confirm for the public that the laws and regulations governing them have been scrupulously and expeditiously followed — or that violations have been exposed and dealt with — without political prejudice and without regard to political interests of either party" (Cole 2020).

In other words, some officials are already calling for an election commons governance structure. Mr. Coats also suggests that these types of governance arrangements would increase citizen’s trust, as they promote government responsiveness.

Finally, if any entity involved in the electoral law-making process is negatively affected by such laws, or institutions, a low-cost dispute resolution mechanism needs to be a part of the election commons governance structure. Both voters and officials should be mandated to attend periodic public meetings, where citizens can directly voice their concerns and vice versa. While this does occur locally, in the form of town hall or public meetings, it is absent from the federal level. Providing this type of dispute resolution mechanism(s) ensures the sustainment of democracy.

Possibility #4: Polycentric Governance for Sustaining Democracy

When we, as a society, implement this “new” governance framework, polycentric governance must become the omni-precursor in order to sustain and strengthen democracy. Polycentric governance is the key to promoting equality, inclusivity,

diversity, electoral security, reciprocal trust between citizens and their government, and democracy.

When groups of voters within a state agree to vote collectively, they are illustrating collective action. However, this same group of voters may face barriers or restrictions to voting, or a high cost. Therefore, in direct contrast to Fung (2019), if collective action fails, it may not be the voter's fault, but the system itself may be responsible for inhibiting collective efforts. If we created a system where people who were governed by it could directly participate in its modification and rulemaking, the overall efficacy (success) would dramatically increase, because government responsiveness, a spirit of compromise and epistemic integrity would also grow.

Institutional, polycentric governance objectives such as, electoral fairness, should be organized by institutional resources, but pursuit of these objectives should be subject to monitoring, sanctioning and dispute by other participating institutions. Polycentricity ensures greater participation in and value(s) of democracy, largely because more individuals, actors and institutions would have more powerful, but equal, voices in decision-making processes. At minimum, without polycentric governance, there are other decisions U.S. legislatures could implement to promote an election commons.

6.5: NEARER TERM INTERVENTIONS FOR A HEALTHIER ELECTION COMMONS

Admittedly, enacting the preceding possibilities would be a long-term, transformational project. Nearer term reforms for improving the health of the election commons, by reducing threats of enclosure and polluting forces, include the following (non-exhaustive) options.

6.5.1: Make Election Day A National Holiday

Vast amounts of literature confirm that the cost of voting is too high (Li et al 2018; Blais et al 2019): when voting districts are convoluted, polling hours are during work hours, or the time to travel to a polling location, which may close spontaneously, discourage ballot casting. However, if Election Day were a national holiday, more voters may turn out to vote because of the reduced cost. This still does not solve numerous threats such as, gerrymandered districts, media and elite actors, and foreign interference.

6.5.2: Ending the Electoral College

The electoral college must go. If we, as a society, want a non-partisan commitment to the process, government responsiveness, epistemic integrity and social cohesion to increase, then we must change election laws. The United States is one of the only countries on earth where a presidential candidate can win the popular vote, but still lose an election. In its current form, the U.S. electoral system does not reflect the will of its citizens, but rather the will of a select group of individuals. Moreover, a stronger sanctioning system is required, if electors choose not to pledge their votes in accordance with the popular vote (Hartmann 2020). While a group of states created a pact to pledge their electors vote in accordance with the popular vote, no significant consequences exist for an unfaithful elector.

6.5.3: Compulsory Voting

One way to ensure greater levels of participation in elections is compulsory voting, where eligible voters are required to vote. Failure to vote results in some type of sanction, usually a small monetary fee. Any fees collected could be allocated to electoral

security, monitoring and sanctioning. Other countries around the world such as Australia, have implemented compulsory voting, and their voter turnout rates rarely fall under 90 percent (Hartmann 2020).

6.5.4: Allow Mail-in Ballots and Extend Early Voting

Due to COVID-19, mail-in ballots have never been so hotly debated in U.S. history. Mail-in ballots are a way to both reduce the cost of voting, while simultaneously staying healthy. However, the Trump administration has acted hostile to the concept of mail-in-voting, going as far to demand that the U.S. Postal Service remove a plethora of mailboxes from around the country for fear of mass-voter-fraud (Wedell et al 2020). However, mail-in-voting has not yet resulted in an increase in voter fraud, which is already much less than 1 percent.

Early voting is a viable method to ensure that voters have more time to cast their ballots, instead of only one day. In addition, it may help to reduce the cost of voting, as well as allow more time for voters to become familiar with candidates and their policies, which in turn, may increase electoral participation.

6.5.5: A Ranked-Choice System

Even with the deletion of the electoral college, the U.S. Congress will still be gridlocked between democrats and republicans. This is due in part because the U.S. uses a first-past-the-post-election system, which is winner takes all (Hartmann 2020). Implementing a ranked-choice or instant runoff system addresses the issue of representative pollution, that is, more political parties and candidates could be represented in the U.S. political system.

The way the ranked-choice system works is simple: instead of voting for one candidate, voters rank the candidates, using first-, second-choice, etc. Only the voter's first choices are counted in the first round. If one candidate in the first round wins a

majority, the race is over. However, if no one wins in the first round, then candidates who finish last are eliminated. When those candidates are eliminated in the second round, their voters still get a voice, because their second choice is counted. This cycle repeats until there are only two candidates left, and the candidate with the most voters out of these two (the majority) wins (Hartmann 2020).

6.6: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter has made the case that elections are a commons within a larger commons (a democracy). These commons face threats, both internally and externally. In order to protect and strengthen these commons, threats can be dealt with by implementing structural changes aimed at promoting greater agency, collective action and transparency in the U.S. electoral system. Previous works, by Ostrom (1990) and Fung (2019) inform these structural changes and ensure democracy, its associated characteristics and collective action become staples in a “new” electoral governance framework. Employing this framework provides a foundation to transform U.S. politics and ensure that the American republic meet the needs and conditions of its citizens, and ensuring balanced—power to the masses. Further, scholars can replicate this framework to undertake case- and comparative- studies that explore: 1) the feasibility and effects of some of the above proposed policy changes, wherever they have been attempted, and 2) the impacts of threats, pollution(s) and privatization on other commons (democracies). Through this lens, examining the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election is an important area for future research.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Because Latinx voter turnout is significantly lower than white voter turnout in Texas, this dissertation began to unearth how and why social institutions can (positively) impact Latinx voter turnout in Texas. Using a concurrent triangulation design and a mixed-methods approach, this research answered the following research questions: 1) what differences exist, if any, between voter turnout for Latinx and white Americans in Texas counties?, 2) how does membership in social institutions influence voter turnout for Latinx Americans?, and 3) Do internal (organizational) structures and external contextual factors (sites and situations) of social institutions create spaces that influence voter turnout for Latinx Americans?

In addition, this dissertation examined: 1) a vast amount of literature on theories of voter turnout, including Latinx political participation, social institutions, and institutional governance (chapter 2); historical institutions and their continuous impact on Latinx voter turnout in Texas (chapter 3); associations between the presence of certain types of social institutions and Latinx voter turnout (chapter 4); and how internal and external characteristics of institutions create different spaces of voter engagement for Latinx persons (chapter 5); and how could the U.S. realize an election commons, including policy recommendations and governing characteristics (chapter 6).

In other words, I argue that social institutions are composed of a unique set of actors, activities that are influenced by sit and situational contexts (chapter 5). Social institutions have in Texas have differences in histories and their impacts on Latinx voters, and their actions still continue to impact Latinx voters today (chapter 3). To support the

idea that site and situation contexts, I provide circumstantial evidence that the density of community-based and membership-based institutions can be considered positive predictors of Latinx turnout. Finally, because site and situational contexts matter, so too do the place-based policies that enable/restrict the abilities of local institutions to combat negative, pollutive effects (created by politicians) to maintain turnout gaps, and by extension, their grasp of power. In order to account for and remedy the negative impacts of different place-based policies, structural electoral reforms are required to promote political representation and ballot box equity (chapter 6). The following sections of this chapter (6.1-6.5) summarize each chapter's main arguments and findings.

7.1: CHAPTER 1

Chapter 1 introduced the research problem, objectives, and provided a summary of key findings, including the structure of the dissertation overall. Notably, Latinx political participation lacks significantly behind whites, despite Latinx persons constituting the second largest group in the U.S. While a host of socioeconomic variables and theories attempt to explain these turnout gaps, one theory, participation in social institutions, is understudied in the geographic literature. This research attempted to contribute to and advance knowledge about how social institutions can impact Latinx, and by extension, minority voters nationwide

7.2: CHAPTER 2

Chapter 2 introduced several research questions and objectives and covered extensive literature on theories of: 1) Latinx voter turnout, 2) general voter turnout, and 3) social institutions. Further, Chapter 1 covered literature on governing common pool

resources (Ostrom 1990) and explained its applicability in this research for examining the role of social institutions in Latinx voting in Texas. In addition, chapter 1 detailed methods, data and limitations for this mixed-methods study. Finally, while geographers regularly appeal to Ostrom's seminal work that conceptualized social-ecological systems (e.g., Cote and Nightingale 2012), they are less visible in this emerging line of research interested in solving collective action problems that are necessarily *place-based*. Along those lines, future research needs to synthesize key contributions from Ostrom's vita—as well as from the voluminous bodies of interdisciplinary research that have been inspired by her contributions—in a way that shows their relevance to geography and geographers. In doing so, geography scholars should focus on three different aspects of Ostrom's work that can advance geographic scholarship. First is her analysis of collective action problems and the conditions under which people in local, place-based communities have devised rules and institutions to solve those dilemmas to conserve resources (Acheson 2011). Second are Ostrom's design principles of “successful” institutions and how institutions have (not) employed these principles for resource management and the outcomes. Third is the flexibility and generalizability of these principles and what that means for research in human geography, particularly in the Anthropocene. Further, this chapter explained the research design, which was a concurrent triangulation using mixed methods. Quantitative data were collected and examined parallel to qualitative data to provide comprehensive and substantiated findings. Finally, Chapter 2 introduced the study area, Texas counties and justified their selections.

7.3: CHAPTER 3

Chapter 3 argued that land tenure dynamics, state and federal policies, violence against Latinxs, and hacienda labor arrangements, arguably had the largest political impacts on Texas's Latinx population. It also explained how the contemporary arena of Latinx and Mexican-American political participation in Texas has been continuously shaped by historical-geographical legacies of discrimination, racism, mobilization, violence and land dispossession. These histories exemplify how white supremacy is built into a variety of institutions. As such, this chapter illustrated how low levels of Latinx voter turnout is the result of systematic institutionalized voter suppression, land dispossession and violence. Specifically, institutional actors, events, and power relations are most pertinent to understanding political participation and representation today.

7.4: CHAPTER 4

Chapter 4 examined statistical associations between the presence of certain types of social institutions and Latinx voter turnout. Specifically, for each additional membership-based organization per square mile, Latinx voter turnout increases 7.5 percent. Further, for each additional community-improvement institution per square mile, Latinx voter turnout increases 8.5% across the state of Texas.

7.5: CHAPTER 5

Chapter 5 examined 30 institutions of five different types including community-improvement, membership-based, religious, civic engagement and civil rights institutions, across seven counties in Texas. Internal and external characteristics of these selected institutions were investigated and included physical location (site) and

situational contexts such as race, ethnicity, per capita income (at the block group level) and informal networks within institutions. This chapter revealed two important findings: 1) increased objective efficacy occurs when institutions exhibit certain principles such as, polycentric governance, members/participants can modify and dispute rule making, and when local needs of participants/members are met, and 2) differences in governance structures and activities yielded the creation of different types of political engagement among members/participants. Specifically, depending on the activity's institutions engage in determined if they provided spaces of informality—places of dialogue, spaces of information- places of voter information, including registration and using their site as a registered polling location, and spaces of mobilization- when institutions register, and mobilize voters, in addition to providing information such as, polling locations, hours and candidate campaigns.

7.6: CHAPTER 6

Chapter 6 provides an open-access concept of an “election commons” to remedy institutional barriers, racism, discrimination, violence and threats to U.S. democracy in the arena of elections and voting. It examines current threats to democracy and provides solutions on how to reduce these threats or eliminate them entirely by asking U.S. legislatures to reconsider the current format and procedures of the current electoral system. This reconsideration includes following a “new” framework crafted from literature on good governance practices in economics (Ostrom 1990) and healthy democracy (Fung 2019) in political science, in order to outline specific steps legislatures can take to secure an election common or even an election-like commons.

7.7: Real-World Implications

This research goes beyond filling gaps in the literature. By contributing to the understudied impacts social institutions can have on Latinx voters, it reveals how important institutions are for positive social change. Social institutions can be leverage points that increase Latinx, and by extension, other minority groups' representation at the ballot box. These leverage points can be used as launchpads to begin remedying electoral inequities by valuing the diversity of context-dependent programming and activities found to impact Latinx voters. Decision makers, political campaigns, and media outlets should pay extra attention to these institutions and their activities/programming in their quests for social justice and increasing voter awareness and identities. What is more, the methodology in this research can be replicated to examine other minority groups' electoral participation, including forms and differing ideologies and socioeconomic statuses among voters. Doing so requires a collective effort by community leaders, institutions, researchers, and voters.

7.8: Limitations and Future Research

This research has several limitations. First, the COVID-19 pandemic disabled the chance to conduct in-person interviews, which may have yielded different responses or additional information not examined in this research, and resulted in potential interviewees not responding to interview requests. Second, both the pandemic and lack of funding forced me to work with a small sample size of interviewees (n=30). Third, I relied on imperfect data on formal institutions. Therefore, a caveat of this research is that it only examined formal institutional relations, and therefore the findings may not hold or

be applicable to informal institutions. Fourth, I only had the ability and time to examine data for the 2016 Presidential election, and data for the 2020 Presidential election are not yet available at the time of writing. Finally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I was unable to secure sufficient survey responses from institutional participants. Gathering a sufficient survey sample would allow me to investigate intra-group differences among institutional participants including, socioeconomic status, voting patterns, and forms of participation.

Because this work is far from finished, there are ample opportunities for future research. For example, regarding the impacts of Texas's historical institutions on Latinx political participation, future research should examine archival and oral histories, if possible, as the borderlands in particular contain a rich, complex and largely untold history of institutional violence, discrimination and connections to present day systematic voting, especially in states with legacies of voter discrimination and large minority populations.

Concerning the spatial associations between institutional density and voter turnout, my statistical analysis only provides circumstantial evidence, and future research in this area should employ qualitative open coding variables in models, and use a stepwise function to accommodate human-led activities such as governance structures and activities.

Further research on institutional governance and voter turnout should focus on spaces of informality and spaces of information as indicators and agents of political engagement to add coexisting empirical evidence that such spaces, including the types of

institutions that create them, are worthwhile for policy makers, political campaigns and funders to consider in their decision-making processes regarding social justice and inequalities. Further, surveying institutional participants to account for their intra-group socioeconomic differences, including political ideologies, will provide valuable insights about how the impacts of programming/activities on voters may differ according to varying site and situation contexts.

Finally, research in geography regarding electoral governance, structure and reform should consider the application and extension of the election commons framework, including other disciplines interested in solving collective action problems in democratic republics or full democracies.

APPENDIX SECTION

Appendix A

Complete list of Interview Questions

1. Can you briefly explain the origins of this institution?
2. In what geographic areas does this institution provide services?
3. How many members/participants belong to this institution?
4. Are the majority of participants at this institution a specific ethnicity?
5. What services/resources does this institution provide to its members and the community?
6. Are there services/resources you would like to provide that you are unable to?
7. Does this institution work with any other institutions to provide services to your members?
8. Does this institution provide any voting information or assistance such as, transportation to polls, polling locations, and/or candidate information?
9. What do you think the biggest ballot issues are for participants?
10. How are leadership positions elected or appointed at this institution?
11. Who makes the rules at this institution and how can rules be modified/changed?
12. If participants are unhappy with how the organization is run or its rules, how can they voice their opinions?
13. How do you determine if participants in this organization vote?
14. In your opinion, is it easy for members at this organization to vote why or why not?

Appendix B

Interview Recruitment Script (IRB Approval #6982)

John Ponstingel, a graduate student at Texas State University, is conducting a research study the role social institutions play in Latinx voting behavior. You are being asked to complete this interview because you are considered a member/participant/key informant at this institution. Participation is voluntary. Your participation in this research is highly valued. Participating in this interview sheds light on determinants of Latinx voting behavior, as well as illustrate and important characteristics that social institutions exhibit concerning voting behavior.

We ask that you try to answer all questions; however, if there are any items that make you uncomfortable or that you would prefer to skip, please feel free to not answer. It will take about 20-30 minutes to answer the questions. The survey will be anonymous meaning no names will be collected or recorded.

If interviewed, your responses will be audio recorded, upon your approval, for accurate reporting of statements, and any translation services that may be required. Your responses are anonymous, unless you wish your name to appear in a future academic publication. The interviews are semi-structured and do not have a time limit to allow in-depth discussion.

If you have any questions or concerns feel free to contact John Ponstingel or his faculty advisor.

John Ponstingel, graduate student Dr. Russel Weaver, Professor

Academic Department, Geography Academic Department, Geography

Phone number 862-505-8613 Phone number 512-245-3903

Jmp282@txstate.edu rcweaver@txstate.edu

If you choose to be interviewed over the phone, please indicate if you agree with your answers being recorded, and you wish your name to appear in a future academic publication.

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