

# LATINO VOTER ATTITUDES ON JOBS AND THE ECONOMY: A FLORIDA PERSPECTIVE

## The Latino Experience in the Low-Wage Recovery

Like all Americans, the majority of Latino\* voters place jobs and the economy as their [top concerns this election season](#). With the Latino unemployment rate near 10% compared to 8% among the general population, it is not surprising that Latino voters are looking to elected officials for solutions to accelerate economic growth and create jobs. However, given that the vast majority of Latino adults are working, it is unlikely that unemployment is the sole driver of voters' anxiety about jobs. In fact, Latinos are overrepresented in several major industries that have posted strong employment growth since the end of the recession; for example, [warehousing and storage](#) (28% Latino), [accommodation and food services](#) (22% Latino), and [home health services](#) (16% Latino). Recent studies show that the same industries driving the economic recovery also rely heavily on low-wage workers. In fact, [58% of the jobs added since the recession pay low wages](#); by contrast, only 21% of the jobs lost during the recession were low-wage jobs.

These trends call into question how Latinos—who make up the backbone of several essential American industries and a critical segment of the voting-age population—perceive the employment situation in the country today. In order to better understand Latino voters' priorities and attitudes about jobs in the post-recession economy, the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) convened focus groups with registered Latino voters in Florida in July 2012. Lake Research Partners, Inc. conducted four focus groups with low-income Latino voters in Miami and Orlando.<sup>†</sup> Through a set of exploratory, open-ended questions about the state of the economy and personal experiences on the job, NCLR listened to voters' aspirations and concerns about employment.

### Latino Voters' Priorities for Jobs and the Economy

- ✓ **Keeping the jobs they have or finding jobs that they can keep.**
- ✓ **Getting paid for the work that they do.**
- ✓ **Earning enough to pay bills and raise a healthy family.**
- ✓ **Holding elected officials accountable for creating good jobs.**

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\* The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race.

<sup>†</sup> Men's and women's groups met separately. Groups represented the diversity of Florida's Latino community and included individuals born in the U.S. and abroad of varying ages, occupations, and backgrounds. Both of the women's groups and one of the men's groups were conducted in Spanish and one men's group was conducted in English.

## Keeping the Jobs They Have or Finding Jobs that They Can Keep

In this economy, stable and secure employment is a major priority for Latino voters. Once employed, many workers feel that sustainable employment is tied directly to the fate of their employers. Latinos in low-wage sectors also express an increasing sense of vulnerability on the job. Given the shortage of jobs compared to the number of qualified individuals looking for work, they feel afraid of being fired at the whim of an employer for non-offenses or for raising complaints about violations of basic rights, such as unpaid overtime. This marked a change from the past for many workers, who remember days when loyalty was strong between employers and employees.

“They open a big company, you’ll just think, will the company be here tomorrow? Will it be here next week? That gives you...safety.” —Latino male, Orlando

“And with so many people out there, I mean it’s the 21st century workplace because the employer can abuse you, can use you because you’re scared to lose your job. You lose your job, they fire you, they’ll get somebody else or two other people.”  
—Latina female, Miami

## Getting Paid for the Work That They Do

Most individuals in the focus groups have personal stories of stolen or unpaid wages. These Latino voters believe that paying employees for the hours they work is a basic form of respect and reciprocity. Failure to pay minimum wage, overtime pay, or manipulating time logs to dock pay are seen as a form of betrayal by employers who already demand immense sacrifices from their employees.

“If you stay more than 40 [hours per week] they don’t want to pay you overtime and it’s mandatory. It’s not optional. You have to stay without getting paid.”  
—Latina female, Miami

“They said...if you don’t make sales then you don’t make any money and that is not the truth. You have to...give me either commission or you have to give me a minimum salary so they didn’t know that and, and I told them that. And then they called me, the boss came...they called the leader and they fired me.”  
—Latina female, Orlando

“The thing is, is that in my case, you know it’s always good for your job to be good for your kids, because in my case imagine if I did have a wife and kids and I was getting screwed over 30 hours on my paycheck. Where’s the food for my kids? Where’s the light bill for that month? Where’s my car payment?”  
—Latino male, Miami

## Earning Enough to Pay Bills and Raise a Healthy Family

In Orlando and Florida, Latino men and women are equally anxious about stagnant wages in the midst of rising costs of living. Among women, there is strong support for pay equal to their male counterparts in the same occupation. Both men and women felt strongly that employer-based health insurance is a fault line that determines whether a family gets ahead or falls behind. Higher wages are seen as one way to be able to afford health care as

employers cut back on health benefits and more workers are forced to take part-time jobs that do not offer benefits.

“Because cost of life is going up, gas goes up, all the expenses at home goes up, food goes up, everything goes up, but the salaries do not go up.”

—Latina female, Orlando

“Equality will be apples to apples, that...they will pay me for what I’m doing, for the type of work that I am doing whether I am a woman or a man.”

—Latina female, Orlando

## Holding Elected Officials Accountable for Creating Good Jobs

In today’s highly competitive labor market, Latino voters express a strong desire for political leaders to advance policies to preserve the dignity of work. They expressed support for specific policies such as raising the federal minimum wage and requiring employers to allow employees to earn paid sick days. They especially wanted to hear where their local elected officials stood on these policies. A sense of empowerment through political action was shared by nearly all of the focus group participants.

“Demonstrations, things that are going on in Spain. I mean you’re seeing that they’re...cutting their jobs, laying people off and people go out into the street and they...protest...to let the government know and to the employers that we can’t take it anymore.” —Latina female, Miami

“...We are human beings. We can get sick any time, as well as our families.”

—Latino male, Orlando

“We have to get involved with our fear in order to affect change. Nothing can happen without our voices being heard. We still live in a free country but we have a right to be heard.” —Latina female, Miami