

+ Broken Ladder: Latino working families fight for economic stability

Findings on the Economic Experiences and Aspirations of Latino Working-Class Families

Latino working-class families sit at the center of America's economy yet face barriers to stability, dignity and prosperity. [Nearly 80% of Latino adults are part of the working class](#) and they make up one in five of all workers. Latinos contribute [\\$4.4 trillion to the U.S. economy](#) and power essential industries including construction, agriculture, transportation and manufacturing. With Latinos projected to account for [78% of net-new workers this decade](#), the nation's future economic prosperity is increasingly tied to the economic prosperity of Latino families.

To better understand their economic experiences, priorities and aspirations, UnidosUS commissioned BSP Research to survey 2,700 Latino working-class adults nationwide, among whom 1,955 are registered voters. The survey builds on the [UnidosUS Economic Prosperity Agenda](#) which is a framework for understanding and expressing the economic challenges facing Latino working-class families. The Agenda was developed with input from the Latino community and is a tool to advance the aspirations and goals of working-class Hispanic families. The survey was informed by the Agenda and explores how families currently experience today's economy, what prosperity means to them and their views on solutions aimed at making prosperity more attainable.

The Economic Reality



Latinos are powering the American economy, but their paychecks are not keeping pace with their contributions. [Working-class Latinos remain concentrated in jobs](#) that often provide low wages, limited benefits, unpredictable hours and greater risks of workplace injury.

Our survey shows how these challenges intersect with the rising costs of everyday life.

- Only 12% of respondents say they live comfortably.
- 61% say they either just meet their expenses or have trouble meeting them.
- 40% say their economic situation has gotten worse over the past year, compared with just 14% who say it has improved.

Respondents identify the cost of living as their leading economic concern, and many report difficulty affording groceries, utilities, healthcare, transportation and housing. Among respondents whose economic situation worsened over the past year:

- 76% point to higher prices for everyday goods and services.
- 48% point to higher housing costs as the biggest reason for their worsening situation.
- A majority of respondents lack a financial cushion to absorb those costs with 51% unable to cover an unexpected \$1,000 expense without borrowing money.

Families are cutting back on expenses and delaying payments for basic needs in response to these economic pressures.

- Over the past year, 43% bought less food or switched to cheaper groceries.
- 38% used their savings.
- 31% delayed paying a bill.
- 22% increased credit-card debt or borrowed money.

Additionally, 18% of respondents took another job or worked additional hours to make ends meet. Healthcare costs have also forced difficult choices with 21% of respondents sharing they skipped a doctor's appointment, 15% did not fill a prescription and 10% cut pills in half or skipped doses of medicine due to cost.

These experiences help explain a deeper frustration captured by the survey. Latino working-class adults overwhelmingly associate being working class with working hard to provide for themselves and their families, yet many also associate it with living paycheck to paycheck. Sixty-eight percent agree that Latino working-class families are working hard yet falling behind, that hard work is no longer a guarantee to a better life and that the ladder of upward mobility feels broken.

Despite these frustrations, respondents have not abandoned their aspirations to achieve prosperity. Forty percent expect their family's financial situation to improve over the next year, compared with 26% who expect it to worsen. Fifty-five percent say a vision of prosperity that includes a good job, economic security, affordable necessities and time to care for family feels achievable for their family today. And 82% say the idea that "when working-class families thrive, everyone thrives" aligns with their personal values.

The findings point to a tension at the heart of the working-class Latino economic experience: Families continue to work hard and aspire to a better future, but no longer feel that hard work alone guarantees economic security or upward mobility.

Key Findings

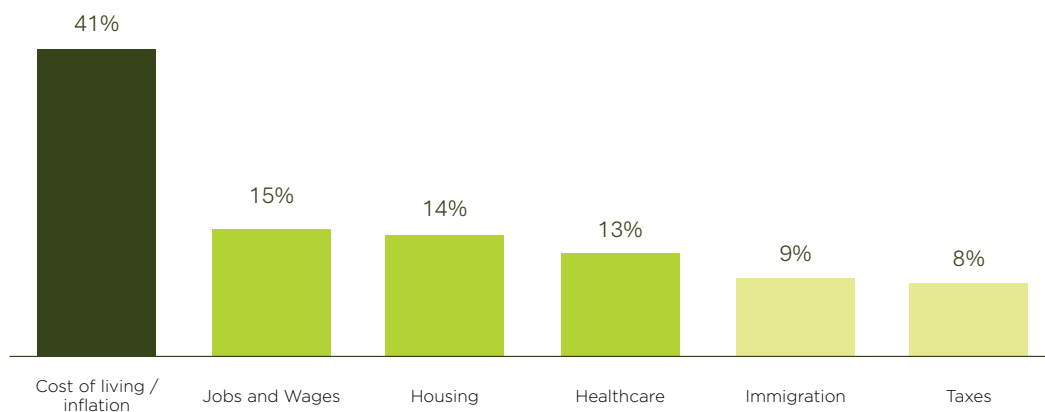
Affordability challenges

The cost of everyday life has become the defining economic challenge for many Latino working-class families. Respondents report financial pressure across food, housing, utilities, healthcare and transportation, while many lack the savings needed to absorb unexpected expenses.

Most respondents identify the cost of living as their leading economic concern, far ahead of jobs, housing or healthcare. A majority report struggling to afford everyday necessities, and many say their financial situation has worsened during the past year. Among those whose finances have deteriorated, rising prices for everyday goods and services are by far the most commonly cited reasons.

Q: What are the economic issues that you worry about the most at this moment?

Rank your top three concerns.



Cost of living and inflation is the top economic concern, cited by 41% of respondents followed by jobs and wages (15%), housing (14%) and healthcare (13%).

- 1. Most families say the cost of living and jobs are their top concerns.** Forty-one percent of respondents say the cost of living is their top concern followed by jobs and wages at 15%, housing at 14% and healthcare at 13%.
- 2. A significant majority of families struggle to afford basic necessities.** Seventy percent of respondents struggle to afford gas prices, 65% struggle to pay their utility bills, 65% struggle with healthcare costs and 62% struggle to afford groceries.
- 3. Many families say their economic situation has deteriorated.** Forty percent say they are worse off economically than they were a year ago, compared with 14% who say they are better off. Among those who are worse off, 76% cite higher prices for everyday goods and services, 48% higher housing costs and 33% higher healthcare costs.

78% of respondents cut back on spending or took on more work to make ends meet.

- 4. Rising costs are forcing families to make difficult tradeoffs.** In the past year, 43% bought less food or switched to cheaper groceries, 38% used savings, 31% delayed paying a bill, 23% received financial help from family or friends and 22% increased credit card debt or borrowed money. Eighteen percent took another job or worked additional hours to cover rising costs.
- 5. Nearly half say corporate price increases are driving higher costs.** Forty-six percent of respondents say companies raising prices higher than they should are a main reason for the rising cost of living, followed by high taxes (43%), too much government spending (42%), low wages (39%) and overseas conflicts (35%).

The pressures are forcing difficult tradeoffs. Families report buying less food, using savings, delaying bill payments and taking on additional debt, despite working hard and consistently participating in the workforce.

Hard work remains a core value, but the path to prosperity feels less secure

Respondents continue to value hard work, family and economic mobility. At the same time, many question whether the economy rewards that work with the security and opportunity needed to get ahead.

Nearly seven in ten respondents say that the description of Latino working-class families as working hard but falling behind, struggling with rising costs and facing a broken ladder of upward mobility accurately reflects today's economic reality.

- 1. Hard work defines what it means to be working class.** When asked what they most associate with being working class, 44% select working hard to provide for themselves or their family, while 40% select living paycheck to paycheck or having little money left after expenses.
- 2. Many respondents recognize a breakdown in hard work and upward mobility.** Sixty-eight percent say working-class Latino families are working hard but still falling further behind, squeezed by housing and healthcare costs, leaving them to face a broken ladder of upward mobility.
- 3. Prosperity still feels within reach for a majority but not for everyone.** Fifty-five percent say a vision of prosperity centered on a good job, paying rent without panic, affording groceries and healthcare and having time to care for family feels achievable. Thirty-six percent say it does not.

4. **Shared prosperity and good jobs resonate strongly.** Eighty-two percent say the statement “when working-class families thrive, everyone thrives” closely reflects their values. An even larger 87% say a vision of labor and workforce prosperity built around fair pay, one job being enough, safe working conditions and a voice in the workplace aligns with their values.

This suggests that while belief in hard work remains strong, confidence that hard work alone can secure prosperity has weakened.

Support for policies aimed at strengthening economic security

Respondents’ policy preferences largely reflect the pressures they describe in their own lives, such as wages that stretch further, affordable essentials, greater security at work and a more attainable path to homeownership and wealth-building.



1. **Higher wages receive broad support.** Seventy-seven percent support raising the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$25 per hour over several years and then adjusting it with the cost of living. Good wages also rank as the most important characteristic of a good job, selected by 70% of respondents.
2. **Respondents support policies aimed at helping families manage major household costs.** Eighty percent support universal public childcare and early education, while 83% support federal funding to lower families’ monthly energy bills through energy-saving improvements. Seventy-five percent support financial assistance for low- and middle-income families to reduce monthly health-insurance costs.
3. **Respondents support greater economic security at work.** Large majorities support a national paid family and medical leave program, a federal retirement savings program for workers without employer-sponsored retirement plans and increased funding for registered apprenticeships and other earn-and-learn programs.

- 4. Housing policy solutions receive broad support.** Eighty-one percent support providing up to \$20,000 in down-payment and closing-cost assistance to prospective homebuyers. Seventy-six percent support tax incentives to encourage construction of 500,000 affordable homes, and 76% support making underused public land available for affordable housing development.

Hispanic working-class voters are a growing part of the electorate, yet many report little or no outreach

Hispanic voters are an increasingly important part of the U.S. electorate, [comprising an estimated 16% of eligible voters nationwide in 2026](#). They are also overwhelmingly working class with nearly 80% of Hispanic eligible voters lacking a bachelor's degree, one common measure used to understand the working-class electorate. Despite their growing share of the electorate, Hispanic working-class registered voters in our survey report little or no outreach about participating in the 2026 midterm elections.

- 1. Nearly three in five registered voters report no outreach.** Fifty-five percent say no political party, campaign or other organization has contacted them about registering or voting in the 2026 election.
- 2. Many registered voters report a strong intention to participate.** Forty-five percent say they are 100% certain they will vote, another 15% say they are almost certain and 12% say they are very likely to vote.
- 3. Democrats are more trusted by working class Latino voters to advance their interests, but a large share don't trust either party.** When asked which party does more to advance the interests and needs of working people like them, 49% select the Democratic Party, 19% the Republican Party, 20% neither, 4% both and 9% say they do not know.

A Path to Shared Prosperity

The survey reveals both the economic challenges that Hispanic working-class families experience as well as their aspirations for a better future. Respondents define prosperity in practical and personal terms: a good job that pays enough to support a family, affordable necessities, financial security and the ability to care for loved ones without constant stress. While many question whether hard work alone still leads to a better life and economic security, they continue to believe that prosperity is achievable and express broad support for solutions that would improve the economic circumstances of themselves and the entire country.

These findings reinforce the vision behind the UnidosUS Economic Prosperity Agenda. The Agenda responds to the challenges and aspirations identified in this survey and seeks to advance a vision in which working families can earn a fair wage, afford basic necessities, build wealth and care for their families. The survey provides new evidence of the barriers that prevent families from achieving that vision as well as the solutions that Latino working-class families believe could help make prosperity more attainable.

Methodology *On behalf of UnidosUS, BSP Research conducted a poll of 2,700 working-class Latinos in the United States. The study was in the field August 28 through September 17, 2026. The overall margin of error is ± 1.9 percentage points.*

The study includes oversamples in four states: Arizona (N=500), California (N=500), Florida (N=500), and Texas (N=500). Each state sample carries a margin of error of ± 4.4 percentage points. State oversamples were weighted to their proportion of the national population for all national estimates. The survey also includes 1,955 registered voters or over 70% of the total sample. The survey was offered in English or Spanish, based on respondent preference. Respondents were reached via live telephone interviews, text-message invitations, and online panels.

Working-class respondents were identified based on household income and education. The sample was weighted to align with the most recent U.S. Census estimates for the Latino working-class population by age, education, nativity, Hispanic subgroup, gender, and state.

About UnidosUS

UnidosUS is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that serves as the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Since 1968, we have built a stronger America by creating opportunities for Latinos and breaking down barriers to expand economic and social progress for all. UnidosUS partners with an Affiliate Network of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico.

For more information on UnidosUS, visit www.unidosus.org, or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Threads](#) and [X](#).

About BSP Research

BSP Research is a Latino-owned polling, research, and analytics firm headquartered in Los Angeles, California. Founded in 2021 by Matt Barreto and Gary Segura, who have more than two decades of experience in national polling and research, BSP Research is a leading research and analytic firm with expertise on the political and social views of the American population and beyond. BSP has industry-leading expertise in culturally competent research on communities of color and other forms of disadvantage, and extensive experience in bilingual polling and data gathering from all varieties of communities.

This research brief was made possible with the support of the following collaborators: Santiago Sueiro, senior economic policy analyst of economic policy and advocacy; Cristy Villalobos-Hauser, housing policy advisor; Ana Hageage, senior advisor, workforce development; Lisette Orellana Engel, director of economic policy and advocacy; Roger Figueroa, director of operations, programs; Kim Marshall, director of integrated communications; Clarissa Martinez, vice president, Latino Vote Initiative; Laura Arce, senior vice president, Economic Initiatives; and Mauricio Garcia, senior vice president of programs.