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BRIDGING THE GAP:
AN EXPLORATION OF WOMEN AS THE DRIVING FORCE OF POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION WITHIN THE LATINO POPULATION IN CENTRAL FLORIDA

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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ABSTRACT

With minorities expected to become the majority in the U.S. by 2050, it is important to consider the impact of diverse groups as political influencers and decision-makers. Despite an ever-growing population, levels of political participation in the form of voter turnout remain low among Latinos. As a matter of public policy, political participation is essential to groups who are under-represented in political structures. Puerto Ricans within Central Florida represent one of the largest concentrations of Latinos in the state of Florida, a population which in recent years has demonstrated a greater interest in political participation. This brings into question the relevancy of political participation among Latinos Puerto Ricans in Central Florida. Existing literature indicates that Latinas are influencers and drivers of change within their communities and may be the key to increasing political participation for the greater Latino community. Through a series of 12 interviews and 2 focus groups with Latinas of Puerto Rican origin, this study explored the relevancy of political participation among the Latino community in Central Florida, the factors that influence their participation, and their perceptions on how to improve both the quantity and quality of political participation. This study found these Latinas represent civically minded, socially connected, and actively engaged women who care about supporting the Puerto Rican community within Central Florida through political participation. Their heritage and cultural upbringing have motivated them to be politically active and in turn motivate others in their community towards political participation to address significant issue. Furthermore, Latinas, by leveraging the power of their social capital in the form of social network associations, have the potential to influence the broader community to increase the quantity and quality of their political participation.

For my Dad, my biggest fan, my cheerleader, my counselor, and my best friend. Even in spirit, you've been with me on every step of this journey.

For my Mom, the definition of a driven, hard-working woman. You are my example for everything in life. I hope I can be like you when I grow up.

For my Husband, you've lived this journey just as much as I have. There were so many times when you told me to "never give up". I didn't. We made it. I love you.

For my children Cristian and Evie, you are my motivation, you are my joy, you are my calm in the storm. Don't ever let anyone tell you that you can't do anything you set your mind and heart on. Mommy proved that you can.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Within the state of Florida exists a variety of racial and ethnic groups of differing cultures and origins. These groups both clash and meld with one another, resulting in an unusual mix of social interests and opinions, cultural and religious beliefs, and socioeconomic differences. Being socially and politically motivated by a variety of factors, every group seeks to have their voice heard, concerns addressed, or issues resolved; competing for the attention, resources, and support of community leaders, political leaders, and their governments. They all have the potential to influence change relevant to their interests through various modes of political participation. The exercise of political participation allows citizens to have a place, and a voice within their communities (Flanagan, 2004).

The Latino population within the state of Florida has the potential to be a significant social and political influence due to its size and eligible voting population (Vargas-Ramos, 2016), but their voices are not always represented and heard. “The Latino population has traditionally been referred to as a “sleeping giant” that has all the potential to influence politics, but does not have the supporting force or motivation to make any real political change” (Bejarano, 2014, p.143). This is due in part, to a lack of political participation which prevents them from having a seat at the table. “Latinos remain political outsiders. Latino voices remain muted, their concerns poorly understood, their priorities largely absent from policy agendas, their interests often unrecognized or ignored” (Wilson, 2017, p.3). The lack of participation begs some questions: *Why isn't the Latino community as*

engaged as it could be? What are the motivators and barriers that influence their engagement? Are they politically active in ways they feel are more relevant? Which in turn leads one to ask, how can participation be increased for these communities in ways that will help them address their needs?

The Central Florida region was specifically selected because it has one of the largest concentrations of Latinos within the state of Florida; the Puerto Rican population. The unique experiences of this population including their relationship with and assimilation into the United States have primed them to become a key social and political player in U.S. politics and have in recent years been drivers of political influence. “The 2012 U.S. presidential election reminded both political parties and political researchers about the electoral impact of racial/ethnic minorities and women” (Bejarano, 2014, p.1). President Obama won re-election in 2012 with the help of 75% support among Latinos (ImpreMedia/Latino Decisions, 2012) and 55% support among women (CNN). By having a fundamental understanding of the social and political drivers and behaviors of this group, the relevant findings of the exploration can potentially be used to understand the motivations of Latinos as a whole. Berger (2011) suggest that the promotion of political participation at the local level can pave the way for engagement at the national level. Political participation matters because the more involved a community is in its own interests and issues, the greater the potential they have to make the impact they need. “High levels of social capital are associated with high-performing democratic institutions” (Lowndes, 2004, p.213-214).

Some scholars argue that social capital and specifically, network associations are key to driving political participation. “Social interaction has a value-added effect that helps

us better understand when personal characteristics and resources contribute to involvement” (McClurg, 2003, p.449). Furthermore, current research demonstrates that Latinas in particular have the potential to be drivers of social and political influence. Latinas are leaders within their communities and the core of their family units, they form social network associations to represent and support their communities, drive decision-making and influence thinking and behavior within Latino communities. “The political participation rates for U.S. racial/ethnic minority females, Latinas in particular, have dramatically increased in the last 10 years, even exceeding the rates for their male counterparts” (Bejarano, 2014, p.4). As the overall Latino population increases, so does the population of eligible voters within the community including Latinas. Projections show that by 2060 Latinas are expected to make up nearly one third of the female population of the United States (Gandara, 2015), making them an increasingly significant group with the potential to engage civically and drive change.

One area where this study differs compared to prior research is that much of the previous research on Latino politics has focused on voter turnout (Shaw, De la Garza, & Lee, 2000). While this study proposes that Latinos are failing to be heard and represented through voting, one of the most significant ways in which they could make an impact, this study also proposes that voter turnout as political behavior is just one element of political participation. “Whether cast at the individual level or in the aggregate, discussion of voting participation has been mainly devoted to a single dimension of participation, the amount. The focus on whether and under what conditions there is more or less voter turnout to be profitable, but it does not begin to tap the richness of the more general concept of political participation” (Salisbury, 1975, p.324). Voting is a formal political process and just one

way to measure political participation, but it may not be the most relevant or valuable to the Latino population and is treated as such here.

1.2 Study Significance

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the Hispanic population estimate in 2019 was nearly 60 million, or just over 18% of the total population of the United States. According to the PEW Research Center, the number of eligible Latino voters continues to increase as the overall population increases. In 2016, the number of eligible voters was 27.3 million, up 4 million from the prior 2012 election. During the last few presidential elections, they have continued to come out to vote in increasing numbers at both the state and national levels. In 2016, only 11% of eligible Hispanic voters participated in the presidential election, up only slightly from 10% in the previous election year, and 8% in 2008. As previously noted, Latinos have the potential to be a significant political force. “Latinos have had growing political influence in the last couple of presidential elections. Therefore, it is important to learn more about the complex dynamics involved in Latino political behavior in the United States. The shifts in the political behaviors and attitudes of Latinos can have significant electoral consequences” (Bejarano, 2014, p.3) There remains however, a significant discrepancy between the size of the population, the number of eligible voters, and the number of actual voters. As a result, these weak levels of engagement can affect political decision-making and policy making, thereby lowering the chances that the group’s interests are being adequately addressed and represented by the government.

These changes in population growth have been observed not only at the national level but at the state level as well. As recently as the 2012 presidential election, some scholars have posited a correlation between population growth and political influence. “The state’s growing non-Cuban population—especially growth in the Puerto Rican population in Central Florida—contributed to the president’s improved showing among Latino voters” (Lopez & Taylor, 2012, p.4). The state’s population has continued to increase at a significant rate annually. As of 2019, the U.S. Census Bureau’s Quick Facts reported that the Hispanic segment in the state of Florida was just over 5.5 million or just over 26% of the general population. The state of Florida is also among the top 10 states with significant percentage of eligible Hispanic voters. According to the PEW Hispanic Research Center, as of the last election in 2016, there were 2.6 million Hispanic eligible voters in Florida—the third largest Hispanic statewide eligible voter population nationally.

Despite this, Latinos are still not as politically engaged as they have the potential to be given their ever-increasing population. Studies have shown that compared to other races/ethnicities/origins, the community has on multiple levels, historically failed to engage in politics and participate (i.e. vote) in the electoral process more than any other non-Latino ethnic groups (PEW Research Center). “Latinos lag in their rates of participation at every level of the process: the voting rate based on the voting-age population, the voting rate based on the voting-age citizen population, and the voting rate based only on registered voters” (Perlmutter, p.249).

There could be a number of reasons for this lack of participation. Apparent confusion stemming from a lack of education and understanding around the electoral process, distrust or a lack of connection with social and political leaders or other such challenges

could be barriers to participation. There could also be a lack of information; not understanding the significance that voting and other means of political participation have on the ability to create change. Finally, this may boil down to an issue of cultural competency; community leaders may not know how to best engage with the Latino community in an authentic and relevant way. Some or all of these factors may be relevant influencers of political participation within the Latino community. Which ones have the most influence will be determined through the aforementioned interview process.

With the exponential growth of the Latino community in Florida over time, the face of U.S. demographics will continue to change and with that, the social and political dynamics and influence of minority populations. Given this fact, it is essential to determine the extent to which Latinos could influence society and the how they will or will not engage in politics in order to allow them to have the voice and representation the community needs through the means they deem are most relevant and impactful.

1.3 Research Questions

This study aims to address the following research questions, with respect to political participation among Latinos (Puerto Ricans) within the state of Florida and the role of Latinas to influence said political participation:

- (1) What does political participation mean to Latinas in the Puerto Rican community in Central Florida?
- (2) What are the factors that influence political participation among Latinas in the Central Florida region?

- (3) If political participation is valuable to the Puerto Rican community in Central Florida, what are the perceptions among Latinas in the given communities about strategies for increasing political participation?
- (4) How does Latina's social capital influence their political participation?

1.4 Defining the Study Population

Despite relating to distinct groups, the terms Latino and Hispanic are often used interchangeably. The use of homogenous terms however, can misrepresent any assessments of the population because they don't account for potentially significant variations among each group. Debate continues both in scholarly research and among the population itself, about the relevant use of these terms. Adding to the confusion are "official" definitions created with the intention of grouping individuals into homogenous categories for ease of Census and statistical tracking. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the terms can be defined as follows: "People who identify with the terms "Latino" or "Hispanic" are those who classify themselves in one of the specific Latino or Hispanic categories listed on the census questionnaire and various Census Bureau survey questionnaires – "Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano" or "Puerto Rican" or "Cuban" – as well as those who indicate that they are "another Latino, Hispanic, or Spanish person's ancestors before their arrival in the United States. People who identify their origin as Latino, Hispanic, or Spanish may be of any race" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Individuals are forced to self-select themselves into a generic "one-size-fits-all" category which takes for granted the varying origins and cultures that make up a population. It also assumes

that everyone that potentially fits these categories will select into them rather than choosing alternate options or not defining themselves by these categories at all.

In reality, the term “Hispanic” refers to individuals who originate from countries where the primary spoken language is Spanish (U.S. Public Law 94-311). While the term “Latino” encompasses people from Latin American countries – Central and South America as well as the Caribbean (Oquendo,1995). As such, an individual from Spain would be considered Hispanic since the primary spoken language is Spanish; someone from Brazil would be considered Latino only since they are from a Latin American country but not one where the primary spoken language is Spanish; and someone from Puerto Rico could be considered both Hispanic and Latino since the primary spoken language in the country is Spanish and the country itself is located in the Caribbean. As such, this study identifies the study population based on origin, focusing on the term “Latino” since it is more inclusive than the term “Hispanic”. The term “Hispanic” will only be used when directly cited in source materials or in verbatim quotes from the study participants.

Since this study will specifically focus on Latinas as the study sample, the term “Latinx” does not apply here. Although the term does relate to origin, it refers primarily to gender. Per Merriam-Webster, “Latinx” is defined as “of, relating to, or marked by Latin American heritage – used as a gender-neutral alternative to Latino or Latina.” Finally, the term “Latino community” used here refers to the collective of both Latinos and Latinas in the overall population. There are also times when “Latino” is used but as related to gender, and that is specified in this study as needed.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

This study will explore the topic of Latino political participation by specifically focusing on Latinas and their social capital, with the goal of determining whether they can be a driving force for increasing overall Latino political participation. Three theories are the foundation from which the research stems: Political Socialization Theory, Social Choice Theory, and the Social Role Theory. These theories complement one another in that they all focus on the relationship between individuals and their community, and at their core, how individuals are shaped by and within their communities towards political action and behavior.

The theory of Political Socialization suggests that there are factors which influence and shape an individual's personal development and informs the formulation of their political beliefs, behavior, and that also influence their propensity towards political engagement (Glass,1986). This theory focuses specifically on the way in one's social environment including family, educational system, peer groups, mass media and other social network associations all play a role in the development of political attitudes. This theory will be explored here to aid in understanding the potential factors from the community that influence political attitudes and behavior among Latinas in Central Florida.

Social Choice Theory studies an individual's interests and values at an aggregate level and measures their impact on (collective) social decision-making (Arrow, 1951). Social Choice Theory is explored within this study as it relates to the behavior of individual Latinas and their impact on greater Latino community.

Previous literature posits that women's roles in politics are different than that of men. The Social Role Theory suggest that these differences between men and women are their "gender roles" (Eagly, 1987). These roles are assumptions that have developed into cultural norms and define the ways in which men and women should behave in a given society. The Social Role Theory will be explored here to determine whether assumptions about Latinas social roles in the Central Florida community have any impact on their relationships with political participation.

Finally, the influence of social capital on political participation is an underexplored subject that this study will focus on as related to Latinas. There is little research that investigates the importance of interpersonal networks of association and the social relationships and interactions within them (McClurg, 2003). This study seeks to further explore social capital in the form of social network associations to determine whether they influence political participation within the Latino community.

1.6 Methods

The nature of the inquiry of this study called for a qualitative approach to explore and understand the study problem. Qualitative researchers typically rely on four primary methods for gathering information: (1) participating in the study setting, (2) direct observation, (3) in depth interviewing, and (4) analysis of documents and materials culture (Marshall, & Rossman, 2011). Since gathering first-hand accounts and impressions from the study sample were essential to this study, semi-structured interviews were the ideal approach to initial data collection. Qualitative interviewing is based on conversation (Kvale, 1996), with the emphasis on researchers asking questions and listening, and

respondents answering (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). In-depth interviews and focus groups were conducted to answer the guiding research questions of this study. The interviews were designed to address the first 2 questions: *What does political participation mean to Latinas in the Puerto Rican community in Central Florida?* and *What are the factors that influence political participation among Latinas in the Central Florida region?*

Between June and October 2018, 10 Latinas of Puerto Rican origin living in Central Florida were interviewed to determine their perceptions of political participation – whether they perceived it as valuable, and if so, the forms of participation that were most relevant to them. Interviewees were also asked to identify the factors that motivated or prevented their political participation. An additional 2 participants were interviewed between November 2019 and January 2020 after the researcher determined that there was insufficient representation by the participants across all age groups. In October of 2018, focus groups were formed from the original interview pool. 6 participants were taken and divided into 2 groups, consisting of 4 and 2 participants respectively. The focus groups were designed to address the remaining research questions: *If political participation is valuable to the Puerto Rican community, what are the perceptions among Latinas in the given communities about strategies for increasing political participation?* and *How does Latina's participation influence their political participation?* Through semi-structured “deep-dive” discussions, the researcher explored the study sample’s proposed strategies and potential solutions for increasing the quality and quantity of Latino political participation. Through a semi-structured approach, the “interview can be shaped by the interviewee's own understandings as well as the researcher's interests, and unexpected themes can emerge” (Mason, 2011).

The interview and focus group data were analyzed through Thematic Analysis, a semi-structured approach to analyzing qualitative data that allowed the researcher to make connections and identify general themes extracted from the data (Patton 2002). With this data, the researcher developed an overall narrative about the study sample's relationship with political participation. The findings of these interviews and focus groups are discussed in detail in Chapter 4. It should be noted that sample here is too small to generalize about the application of the results to the broader population. It cannot be assumed that the study sample is fully representative of the Latina or Puerto Rican community in Central Florida. What this study has done is, start with a set of theories and literature on this topic and research questions to guide the overall approach. Next, the researcher took the data from the interviews and focus groups, linked it through those theoretical perspectives and prior research to determine where they could be useful, or potentially useful in analyzing political participation among Latinas.

It should be noted that although the interviews and focus groups were formed between the summer and fall of 2018, this was approximately 8 months after Hurricane Maria impacted the island of Puerto Rico. The majority of the participants in this study represent a group of Latinas who had come from Puerto Rico at some point in the lives and settled in Central Florida. They are "established" in the community, having spent several years in the mainland United States. This was not purposefully done; it was a result of selection from the list of potential participants that was developed by the community partner. The additional 2 participants included in this study were recent arrivals to the Central Florida from Puerto Rico who have arrived within the last 2 years after Hurricane Maria. It became apparent that Hurricane Maria had influenced their

perceptions of and motivations towards political participation. However, there was not enough data collected to draw conclusions about whether their experiences and relationship with political participation could be generalized to the broader population of Puerto Ricans who had also been impacted by Hurricane Maria on the island. The impact of Hurricane Maria on Puerto Rican political participation does merit further research, but it was not a focus or goal here. Recommendations on future research in this area will be discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The following chapter presents a review of the literature on Latino political participation focused on women, Latinas, and Puerto Ricans. To provide a basis for understanding the literature, the first section of the literature review focuses on the historical development and applications of the concept of political participation, and the construct of social capital. This is followed by a review of literature on women in politics, Latinas in politics, and Puerto Rican political participation.

2.1 Historical Development of Political Participation

There is no singular consensus about what political participation means and what forms of civic, social, or political activity or behavior they include. "Participation is understood to involve several quite different types of activity and of activists, and also to vary according to the institutional setting in which it occurs" (Salisbury, 1975, p.323). Ben Berger (2011) developed the foundations for the debate about political participation, civic engagement and argued that it is often assumed that the concepts encompass the same behaviors, when in fact they are entirely different terms encompassing different forms of social and political behaviors. The terms civic engagement and political participation have faced the same challenge in that they have become catch-all terms. In recent years, it has been used "as a buzzword, to cover everything from voting in elections to giving money to charity, or from bowling in leagues to participate in political rallies and marches" (Berger 2009, p.335). If the definitions of concepts are stretched so broadly to encompass many different elements, they become essentially meaningless and more confusing than

they are informative and useful. As a result, it has been argued that “civic engagement” in particular has lost its relevancy as a concept “Civic engagement as it is currently used includes political, social, and moral components, or the entire “kitchen sink” of public and private goods” (Berger, 2011, p.3). Instead, the terms should be defined in a way that encompass relevant behavior without focusing on too many activities or behaviors. Table 1 below displays the chronological development of the term from its earliest beginnings to modern day interpretations.

Table 1: Historical Development of Political Participation

Year	Scholar	Definition
1840	Alexis de Tocqueville	A combination of attention and activity, an investment in mental focus and physical energy that are closely related instrumentally valuable resources for effective democratic governance.
1956	Easton	What makes a particular act of participation <i>political</i> is the act's relation to the authoritative allocation of values for a society.
1968	McClosky	First, political participation entails action: observable behavior undertaken by individuals; Second, those individuals are non-elites; Third, the action is directed by an intention to influence – to assert demands; The willingness to affect decision taken by someone else; The target of the act is any political outcome, that is, any decision over the authoritative allocation of values for society.
1970	Massialas	Political participation refers to either expected or actual involvement in political activity such as in discussions or political rallies and meetings.
1970	Verba & Nie	Political participation refers to those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take.
1971	Verba, Nie & Kim	Defines participation through four modes: "voting, campaign activity, communal activity, and particularized contacts.
1972	Verba & Nie	Includes behavior designed to affect the choice of governmental personnel and/or policies. Excludes passive forms, civil disobedience and political violence, efforts to change or maintain the form of government, behavior outside the sphere of government, behavior mobilized by the government, and unintended political outcomes.
1975	Salisbury	Participation is understood to involve several quite different types of activity and of activists, and also to vary according to the institutional setting in which it occurs.

Year	Scholar	Definition
1976	Huntington & Nelson	The concept of political participation is nothing more than an umbrella concept which accommodates very different forms of action constituting differentiated phenomena, and for which it is necessary to look for explanations of different nature.
1979	Barnes, Kaase, et al.	All voluntary activities by individual citizens intended to influence either directly or indirectly political choices at various levels of the political system.
1979	Nelson	Action by private citizens intended to influence the actions or the composition of national or local governments.
1979	Seligson, Booth, eds.	Behavior influencing or attempting to influence the distribution of public goods.
1988	Conge	Individual or collective action at the national or local level that supports or opposes state structures, authorities, and/or decisions regarding allocation of public goods. Three aspects of the definition should be emphasized. First, the action can be verbal or written. Second, it can be violent or nonviolent. Third, it can be of any intensity.
1999	Brady	Action by ordinary citizens directed toward influencing some political outcomes.
2007	Weber & Mills	Political engagement means activity and attention relating to the political processes and political institutions of local, regional, or national government. It can include voting, seeking or holding public office, attending town hall meetings, circulating a petition - any engagement whose purpose is to influence state actors and political outcomes.
2008	Deth	There are 5 modes of political participation: voting, party activity, consumer participation, and protest activity.
2011	Berger	Civic engagement as it is currently used includes political, social, and moral components or the entire "kitchen sink" of public and private goods.
2011	Quintelier and Hooghe	While some forms of participation involve active interaction with others, other forms of participation are usually performed in an individual manner.
2015	Muller	The domain of collective political participation is broad and includes many forms of extraordinary or unconventional behavior: participating in illegal strikes, seizing public buildings, battling with police or with demonstrators, becoming involved with a group that wants to dislodge the government by violent means.

As noted above, the foundations of political participation were developed by Alexis De Tocqueville (1840), who initially referred to the concept as political engagement. He argued that the individual will of the people is not enough to sustain a democracy, that

the collective energy of society fosters individuals towards action and political change, which he defined as political engagement.

Over time, scholars have adapted the term to meet their own needs. Most original definitions are broad in nature, failing to define one particular mode of action or behavior (Salisbury, 1975; Huntington & Nelson, 1976; Barnes, Kaase et al, 1979). There have also been differences in the scope of political participation; who performs it (individuals versus collective groups, networks, or communities), how they perform it (any and all politically-related action versus specific actions), and the “recipients” of the behavior (government, local or state leaders, or other individuals). Other scholars have chosen to narrow the focus and scope rather than building on broader perspectives. In the 1970’s the term seemed to be at the center of social science debate as several scholars (McClosky, 1968; Massialas, 1970; Verba & Nie, 1970) attempted to place parameters around the behaviors they felt encompassed political participation. Within these individual classifications one can find similarities including the idea of political action influencing decision-making. Many modern definitions also have consensus in that voting, participation in a political party, or holding a position of public office all amount to political participation (Weber & Mills, 2007; Deth 2008). Within these definitions, motivations, behaviors and actions may differ, but they are all considered to be “political participation” as long as they are done with the intention of driving political change.

Beyond the discussion of what encompasses political participation, there are also debates around the utility of political participation. The earliest advocates asserted that political engagement is an “instrumental good for citizens of representative democracies or an intrinsic good for human beings” (Tocqueville 1969, p.12). Advocates also value

participation as their voice to those responsible for decision-making. Democratic processes give citizens the ability to participate in governmental processes. "Through participation, citizens voice their grievances and make their demands heard to the larger public; they also make governments accountable and politicians responsive" (Deth, Chapter 13, p.334). Furthermore, they argue, a lack of participation could ultimately be a threat to social and political balance "...liberal democracies' top priorities should be preventing radical disengagement, which threatens a variety of undesirable consequences, and promoting political engagement among those citizens whose disengagement most harms their own interests..." (Berger, 2011, p. 123).

The utility of participation is also questionable because most definitions fail to include behavior and actions that are more social and informal in nature; where there is no defined process in place, but the actions are still intended to influence political and governmental systems (Seligson & Booth, 1976). Salisbury (1975) argues that all behavior intended to influence public decision-making must be included in any definition of political participation. It stands to reason then, that existing definitions of political participation may to some extent be incomplete. Just because a particular form of action or behavior does not have a measurable impact (like voting) does not mean that the type of political participation is irrelevant or impactful. Even more importantly, governments and political leaders can be influenced by all types of political participation so they should not be automatically discounted if they don't fit assumptions about what is meaningful.

Given the varying definitions of political participation, it cannot be assumed that the activities and behavior that are relevant to one community or population will be the same for all. In addition, the needs of a given population or community can change over

time, a factor that must be taken into consideration when exploring ways in which to engage with said community. Therefore, rather than focusing on standard or pre-existing definitions of political participation, the researcher allowed the study participants to define political participation as they felt was relevant within their communities.

2.2 Social Capital & Political Participation

According to Robert Putnam who first proposed the concept of social capital (1993) there are several factors that make up a community's social capital. The first factor is the community's size; specifically, the number of individuals that make up that community. The second is referred to as collective action or, the group behavior that often influences individual behavior. The third factor is the collection of norms and values shared by members of a given community. These norms include collectively held beliefs based on shared relationships, environmental influencers that come from living in the same physical community, and the impact of being an audience to the same social issues and concerns. The final factors are social network associations, which amount to the relationships of trust and tolerance that exist between community members. The idea behind social capital is that interaction between and among individuals enables them to come together to build stronger and more civically minded communities. Social interaction can be of benefit at the individual and collective level (Putnam 1993, 2001).

Portes (2000) further defines social capital as a series of social relationships with benefits. Within each relationship there are 3 dimensions that influence the development of these benefits: the structure of the relationships, interpersonal dynamics that exist within the structure, and common context and language of the individuals in the structure.

There has been a debate over the importance of social capital and its ability to determine the propensity of an individual to become politically engaged. Traditional research on political participation has focused attention on individual characteristics and resources associated with participation (McClurg, 2003). These factors however, present a limited view of individuals, and do not account for other potential influence. A recent shift shows that the focus on the individual level is not enough and should instead include an exploration of the broader scope of influence in the form of environmental factors including social network memberships and associations. “Models of participation that do not account for informal social interaction will be theoretically underspecified...such interactions play a crucial role in explicating the role of *other* factors that predict participation such as group membership and individual resources” (p.1). A number of scholars have sought explanations for the relationship between social engagement and political involvement. Putnam (2001) suggests that active membership stimulates a collective interest in politics and that group engagement offers a type of education, a gaining of knowledge that in turn empowers individuals and makes political participation less complicated (Verba et al.,1995).

There are arguments for and against the use of social capital as part of a study of political participation. The argument for social capital is that the formation of network associations actually aides and enables communities to work together to collectively address issues rather than against one another. In terms of the potential influences on political participation, social capital and social network associations in particular are thought to be one of the best ways to increase political participation. “Multiple institutions nurture the habits and values that give rise to social capital, including community and

other voluntary associations, families, church organizations, and cultural patterns” (Brehm & Rahn, 1997, p.1000). Furthermore, connections within social networks help individuals acquire political information more easily than they would be able to on their own (Huckfeldt, 2001; Mutz, 2002). and persuade others to vote (Bond et al., 2012). Networks even influence how individuals think about politics (Beck, 2002; McPhee et al., 1963) and political discussion in social networks helps explain individual levels of political participation (McClurg, 2003).

Perhaps most importantly, social networks bridge individuals and their communities. Lyons Reilly (2017) focuses on the behavior of socially connected (and isolated) individuals; investigates the role that an individual’s contextual social environment plays on political attitudes and behaviors of connected and isolated individuals; and seeks to determine whether an individual’s community influences the political choices of those that are both socially connected and disconnected. Lyons Reilly concludes that there are few differences between socially connected and socially isolated individuals in terms of their attitudes, opinions and ideology. He notes however, that there are significant differences in political behavior, with socially isolated individuals being less likely to participate in political activities and behavior including voting, campaign donations, or even discussing politics.

McClurg (2003) argues that any model of political participation should include social capital and social interaction or they will fail to fully understand all of the ways in which political participation can be influenced and subsequently changed. He posits that the dynamics of social networks and the interaction and resources within them have a very strong influence on political thought and behavior. He also finds that it is the social

interaction aspect of social networks that allows individuals to gather enough information about politics for them to be sufficiently educated and empowered to take political action and make politically-driven decisions not just for themselves but as representatives of their communities. He concludes that future research into the topic should focus on exactly how social capital influences action and the underlying factors that motivate interest and active engagement in politics.

Among those that question the utility of social capital, some argue that social connectedness is not always beneficial because levels of connectedness are not equal across individuals or communities. "Social communication is the main avenue by which the opinions of those around us reach us, yet...the social networks that allow this communication to happen do not evenly connect everyone in a population or location. There is noteworthy variance among the connectedness of citizens" (Lyons Reilly, 2017, p.2). Durlauf (1999) further questions the validity and value of social capital and argues against the importance that some scholars have attributed to the concept and instead proposes several reasons why social capital can actually do more harm than good. As with political participation he posits, social capital is a concept with a history of ambiguous and sometimes divided definitions. It can lead to undesirable behaviors especially when communities think and behave as groups potentially pitting diverse social groups against one another for the greater good of their own groups.

There are some gaps in social capital research focused specifically on the influence of gender on social capital. "There has in fact been little interest in gender within the social capital debate, and a simultaneous reluctance among those concerned with women and politics to engage with social capital models" (Lowndes, 2004, p.4). Even

seminal research on social capital such as Putnam's *Making Democracy Work* (1993), fail to explore the impact of gender on social capital.

The study sample here was purposefully selected to include Latinas who are already active in social network associations. This study aims to first, explore the utility of social capital and in particular through the form of social networking associations, to determine if they have the potential to influence political participation. Furthermore, this study aims to fill gaps in the literature by exploring whether women, and Latinas in particular, can leverage their social capital to drive political participation.

2.3 Women & Political Participation

Women make up just more than half of the total world population and they represent a majority of the U.S. population. They contribute to the social, economic, and political development of societies but unlike men, women have historically been excluded from the conversation of political and democratic processes. Most studies either focus on men as leaders and drivers of political action, or they fail to distinguish women as individuals, including them as part of a community or group. "Women are often rendered invisible as leaders in community studies simply by the authors' ignoring that they are women" (Hardy-Fanta, 1995, p.223).

Traditional social science literature has not accounted for differences between men and women in terms of voting behavior (Campbell et al., 1976). Kelly Dittmar explains that there are substantial differences in voting based on gender and suggests the importance of studying these differences so as to amplify women's political clout and to refine social and political strategies aimed at women. "Strategies to harness women's

political power often rely on adopting a monolithic category of “women voters”, differences in voting behavior and preferences persist *among* women and between women and men” (Kreider & Baldino, 2016, Chapter 6, p.100). As such, rather than viewing them as a singular entity, they should be approached as individual from men. “Women voters’ higher turnout would have less significance if they shared the same preferences and cast the same votes as their male counterparts, but they do not. Data on men’s and women’s vote choice demonstrate that when women vote, they make different choices than men” (p. 109). As such, women should be studied taking into consideration their unique social and political behavior as compared to men.

The lack of interest in social and political gender differences has created a bias towards the behavior, thoughts, and actions of males resulting in women becoming “invisible”. From a social science perspective, it is essential to study the influence of gender differences on society. “The overall phenomenon of the gender gap now demonstrates that women can have distinctly different political attitudes and opinions than men, which can include electoral participation, non-electoral participation, political ideology and partisanship, and public opinion” (Bejarano, 2013, p.4). Furthermore, gender-related thoughts, feelings, perceptions, are constantly being influenced by factors from within and around an individual’s environment (Eagly & Wood, 2012).

The literature suggests that the historic exclusion of women from politics and political processes may influence their political participation. Their rights to participate and roles have developed over time, creating a unique experience that causes them to behave differently as compared to men. “When women enter politics within this patriarchal context of modern democracies, they are unable to play a role to radically change the sexual

politics, rather they largely play political roles on male's terms. The fundamental assumption in liberal democracies needs to be changed in order to create genuine political space for women within" (Bari, 2005). Given that women have distinct voices as compared to men, they have the opportunity to be heard in social and political arenas and break out beyond the historical limits that have been placed on them.

As such, where traditional literature has assumed that women fail to influence or engage in the political process, the women in the study will be treated as distinct participants with the potential to not only highly engage in, but also significantly influence politics through political participation. This study will build on prior literature and aim to explore the impact of gender differences in the study sample's political thoughts, actions, and behavior as compared to men in the community. Participants will also be asked to share their perceptions of gender roles and differences in the community, their perceptions of how they feel the community treats them as political actors, and whether all of this influences their political participation.

2.4 Political Participation and Latino Politics

Research focused on Latino politics often treats Latinos as a singular entity, and fails to make distinctions between individual Latino sub-groups (Seligson & Booth, 1976). They also make assumptions about the population's relationship with political participation (Vargas-Ramos, 2012). Historically, existing literature primarily uses voter turnout data to explain overall trends in political participation. Michelson (2005) explores the impact of voter mobilization strategies in four California communities to address the issue of lagging Latino political participation rates in the form of voter turnout. However, this analysis fails

to explore the relevancy of other types of political participation among Latinos or the potential of other mobilization strategies to improve political participation.

While voting is a key indicator of political participation, there are other forms of participation that may be more relevant within Latino communities. Verba, Scholzman, et. al (1993) argues that voting differs from other forms of participation in many ways. The first being that the process of voting allows for only one input, i.e. a singular vote. Whereas other forms of participation don't require a similar equality of inputs. "Individuals may make as many phone calls to public officials, spend as many hours campaigning for as many candidates, and attend as many demonstrations as their time and inclination permit" (p. 304). Furthermore, some actions and forms of political participation carry with them a weight and pressure that may influence leaders to respond or act. Finally, in terms of being a method of communication and representation, a vote has a "narrow scope"; you cast your vote for what you desire or need without other messages being attached. On the other hand, other types of participation including letter-writing, conversations between community members and political leaders, or participating in town hall community meetings all allow for individuals to voice their opinions and transmit messages much more clearly than just voting is able to do. This suggests that voting is not the only effective means of political participation.

That is not to say that voting is not relevant or should be dismissed entirely in favor of other forms of participation. Lopez, Motel, and Patten (2012) explore trends in Latino voter participation and the impact of low voter turnout among Latinos in U.S. presidential elections, drawing attention to the fact that despite the number of eligible voters within the population, the turnout rate is consistently lower than the turnout rates among other ethnic

groups as well as Whites and Blacks. They argue that simply because Latinos are the largest minority in the world, they *should* have a large eligible voting population that shows up to vote in elections. In other words, the larger the population, the greater the potential for political influence in the form of voter turnout. This lack of participation could again, result in issues not being heard or concerns addressed. Since it is one of the most common forms in which individuals engage politically in the United States it should continue to serve as a significant form of political participation. However, it's importance should not overshadow other forms of participation. Especially if a given community finds that methods of participation beyond voting or more relevant.

One study that digs deeper into the study of Latino of political participation is Louis DeSipio's *Latino Civic and Political Participation* (2006). In his report, DeSipio explores the idea of "the Latino vote" and posits that the concept of Latino influence in politics is misunderstood. According to DeSipio, the potential influence that the Latino community could have in the political realm should be focused less on getting more Latinos to vote, and more on understanding how the Latino community actually thinks, and how they view themselves as a group when it comes to political decision-making as opposed to how other view them and make assumptions about them. He also suggests that gaining the acceptance of the Latino community is about more than winning a numbers game. Without a greater understanding of the community, outreach aimed at "winning the Latino vote" is pointless and only makes a short-term impact.

Up to this point, the previous social science theories and scholarly works discussed here have assumed that individual Latino participation is significant and necessary for creating positive change for the greater Latino population. DeSipio also turns some of

these ideas on their head and actually questions whether Latinos are as influential a group as they are given credit for. Due to the amount of significance that political leaders have placed on the Latino community, he cautions that they may never truly be able to reach the standards that the political community has placed on them, and that the level of influence that Latinos will impart on U.S. politics will continue to increase over time, but not as suddenly as political leaders believe will or should occur. This study is useful in that it calls into question assumptions about Latinos in politics, putting into perspective the true impact of Latino political participation.

The sources discussed above serve as a starting point for understanding Latino political participation. This study theorizes that political participation is a potential way to create positive and desired change for the Latino community. It will differ from previous literature however in that it will not assume that voting is the best or only relevant form of political participation. Furthermore, Latinos are treated as a group of relevant political and social decision-makers with the potential to impact their communities. It also allows the study sample to determine the elements of political participation that are important to them, rather than making assumptions about what they should or should not be doing with their political engagement.

2.5 Latinas in Politics

If the role of women in politics has been downplayed, the influence of Latinas has been downplayed even more significantly. Studies of political participation have traditionally not only focused primarily on men over the significant role of women, they also tend to focus on political behavior from the perspective of white women voters without

exploring the gender gap from a diverse racial/ethnic perspective. We have little information on how this political gender gap is displayed in the racial/ethnic-minority groups in the United States (Bejarano, 2014).

Furthermore, Latinas have not only been discounted in the political sphere, but also as leaders in their own communities with many studies instead focusing on their assumed gender-based (reproductive and social) roles. In fact, some argue that women's motivations and their subsequent political engagement are not relevant and are not significant drivers of political participation. "Women's activism in arenas that reflect their concern for their children, their families, and their neighborhoods is identified as "community activism" at best or "disorderly" at worst, but rarely is it identified as political leadership to the same degree as male-focused activities" (Hardy-Fanta, 1995, p.223). As such, Latinas have not been viewed as relevant actors in social or political processes or decision-making. Social scientists have also discounted or neglected Latina leadership and participation in and formal (voting) and community politics. Montoya, Hardy-Fanta, and Garcia (2000) explore Latino gender research in mass political participation and public opinion, in community politics, and in elite politics. They note that most studies of political participation that do account for gender, do not consider the role or impact of minority or non-white women and that there is a gap in relevant research and that Latina women have failed to be accounted for or have been accounted for only minimally.

This lack of study on Latina political action also stems from the perception that their actions are irrelevant because they are not as "visible" as other forms of participation. In general, scholarly research has been conducted with a focus on direct actions like voting, elections, and political leadership. "One of the major flaws in much of the literature on

political leadership stems from the assumption that leadership is somehow derived from or equivalent to official positions, whether elected office, appointed office, or as head of a formal organization” (Hardy-Fanta, 1995, p.222). Many of these positions have belonged to men. Even though women have over time become highly active in these roles as elected and appointed public leaders, there is still less discussion of Latinas in these roles. “Although Latinas have gained visibility in the national political arena and have clearly demonstrated leadership in American national politics, very few studies document their accomplishments” (Garcia, Marquez, 2001, p.113).

Latinas were selected as a focus of this study because as some scholars note, they do have the potential to make significant strides as social and political leaders, and even more so, as drivers of Latino political participation. “Latinas are leaders and participants in all aspects of community politics as agents of social change, activists seeking improvements in neighborhood services, and mobilizers in Latino election campaigns” (Montoya, Hardy-Fanta & Garcia, 2000, p.558). Given their potential influence, Latinas may hold the key to closing the political participation gap between the Latino community and other ethnic and racial groups, “it is necessary to begin to acknowledge Latinas as political leaders, to recognize their contribution to Latino political participation, and to learn from their experiences as candidates, community activists, and political mobilizers” (Hardy-Fanta, 2002, p.205).

Despite misconceptions over the relevancy of Latina participation and their roles in politics, these motivations could actually help them serve as drivers of influence over a household, a community, or even for the Latino population as a whole. Hardy-Fanta (1993) concludes that Latinas have a vision of politics and political participation “as making

connections” rather than focusing on how to solely drive their personal ambitions or interests, Latinas seek to make an impact to better the lives of their families and communities; for the greater good as opposed to interests that would only benefit themselves. The neighborhood and community levels that Latinas are able to tap into is “the level at which Latinos who see the need for jobs, safety, financial security, health care, and access to high-quality education can become mobilized to participate in electoral or community politics” (Hardy-Fanta, 1995, p.205).

This study contributes to the literature on this topic in that it aims to fill gaps relevant to Latina political participation. While some research fails to acknowledge the roles of Latinas in politics, this study treats Latinas as relevant political participants, and also seeks to explore the potential of women to drive political participation.

2.6 Puerto Rican Political Participation

As with the Latino population as a whole, the Puerto Rican population in particular has the potential to become a significant social and political driver due to its size. The population in Florida has grown exponentially over time with one out of every 5 Latinos in Florida being Puerto Rican. “In 2014, for the first time, the Puerto Rican population exceeded one million in Florida. The Puerto Rican population grew from 3% of the Florida population in 2000 to 5.1% in 2014” (Duany & Rodríguez, 2006, p.1). Florida is the only state besides New York that has more than one million Puerto Ricans. This population’s unique origin and culture may be driving rates of political participation and an exploration of this community could potentially assist in determining how other Latino communities

can be mobilized towards increasing their political participation. Puerto Ricans are the second largest Latino subgroup in the United States, behind Cubans.

The Puerto Rican population has a unique relationship with the United States and Central Florida that continues to this day. Their history of migration to the United States mainland dates back several decades with the first large-scale movement of Puerto Ricans to the Central Florida began its earliest migration from the island to the mainland starting in the 1940's and 1960's with the peak occurring in the 1980's. "The earliest recorded movement of Puerto Ricans to Florida consisted of a small number of agricultural business owners who settled in the Miami area in the 1940s" (Duany & Rodríguez, 2006, p.2). The Puerto Rican diaspora to Central Florida began in the late 1960s with the greatest surge of migration from both the island and mainland starting in the mid-1980s. This migration has continued over the last 30 years.

Historically, Puerto Ricans in the United States have been highly politically active although not as active compared to other Latino sub-groups. "According to research conducted by the Hispanic Trends Research Center, 52.8% of Puerto Ricans voted in the 2012 elections. Even though this was lower than the Cuban (67.2%) and the Central/South American (57.1%) voter turnout, it was higher than the overall Latino turnout (48%)" (Gonzalez-Barrera, & Lopez 2013, p.3). Although a significant level of political participation among Latinos, it still remains lower than that of other Latino groups.

A number of factors could contribute to differences in participation and engagement between Latino populations. Determining why participation lags in these communities and what can potentially be done to increase levels of political participation among the Latino community are goals of this study. Based on the size of the population, the Puerto Rican

community in the state of Florida could be significant in terms of political participation due to the potential power they could hold as a social community and political voting bloc. "By 2012, Latinos accounted for 16% of the eligible voters in Florida and Puerto Ricans accounted for almost a third (28%) of eligible Latino voters in the state (Motel and Patten, 2012). Puerto Ricans are now in a position to challenge the traditional Cuban electorate in Florida.

What is perhaps most interesting about the Puerto Rican community and their history in the United States has to do with their citizenship status. The uniqueness of which has set the tone for how they are able to engage in U.S. politics and social issues. The political and voting processes between Puerto Rico and the mainland United States differ significantly and Puerto Ricans' political power changes depending on whether they live on the island or the mainland. Since Puerto Rico is an unincorporated territory of the United States, Puerto Ricans are not able to vote in federal elections. This changes however, when they arrive on the mainland and establish residency. This allows them to receive the full citizenship and voting rights generally available to U.S. citizens. This continues to be an issue for the Puerto Rican community as they are not accustomed to voting regularly on the island and it can be a culture shock when they arrive. Despite multiples attempts over the years to change the island's status to statehood, the effort has been rejected with the island remaining autonomous.

Duany and Rodriguez (2006) explore the Puerto Rican diaspora through the United States through New York and Chicago and cover their migration and settlement within the state of Florida, accounting for their settlement in the Central Florida area, primarily based on recent census data and identifies the socioeconomic characteristics, race,

identity, political affiliations, and cultural practices of the demographic. The authors suggest that the Puerto Rican population in Central Florida has become significant in terms of economic and political impact and as such, they have the potential to be a highly influential community. "Puerto Ricans in Central Florida have become a swing vote that could decide local, state, and even presidential elections" (Duany & Rodriguez, 2006, p.41). Despite the significant population size however, their influence is not apparent across all political realms, and their power has not fully translated into political action. The thought is that over time, the population will continue to acclimate to the community, becoming familiar with social and political norms, establishing roots, and becoming more civically engaged.

There is little research that specifically focuses on Puerto Rican political participation. Studies that do, tend to focus on voting as the primary form of participation (Arvizu & Garcia, 1996). Carlos Vargas-Ramos (2016) studies Puerto Rican political participation through voting, studying turnout during presidential and congressional elections. He concludes that the gap in voter turnout among Puerto Ricans has continued to narrow over time in recent elections. He also suggests that the reason Puerto Ricans still continue to lag in their turnout as compared to other groups, is due to the fact that much of their eligible voting population is not registered to vote and that they need to be mobilized to turn out. He briefly acknowledges that there are other known barriers to participation including socioeconomic factors and institutional barriers, but continues to suggest that increasing voter registration within this population will serve to empower them to become engaged voters. In terms suggested methods for increasing participation, he recommends mobilization efforts that focus on voter registration. This study narrowly

focuses on one element of political participation through voting, without considering other relevant forms of participation. It also makes an assumption that mobilizing efforts through registration will lead to increased turnout as if it was the most significant barrier that exists to political participation. Vargas-Ramos also briefly mentions that voluntary associations “are an avenue for potential mobilization of the community in the absence or neglect of political institutions to do so” (p.5) but largely dismisses the option as a relevant one for this population, and notes here as well as in a similar previous study (2012) that Puerto Ricans generally do not demonstrate high levels of membership in voluntary associations. This is as an overly-narrowly view of the utility of social capital through the form of social networking or voluntary associations. They only consider this form of participation as related to a measurement of membership rather than active participation. As previously discussed, prior literature suggests that individuals need to be actively engaged in these associations rather than just members. It should not be assumed, as in these studies, that membership alone will lead to political participation.

After reviewing literature on political participation, Latinas, and the Puerto Rican population, this study will seek to contribute to existing literature by furthering the research and addressing gaps. This study’s contributions include seeking to understand Puerto Rican political participation within the Latino community in Central Florida; exploring the potential role of Latinas of Puerto Rican origin as drivers of political participation; and exploring the role of social capital in the mobilization of Latinas. A summary of previous research as well as the contributions of this study can be found in Figure 1.

Topic	Previous Studies: What They've Done	My Study: What I've Contributed
Latino political participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treating Latinos as one entity • Making assumptions about relevant participation • Making assumptions that barriers/motivators are the same for all Latinos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treating Latino subgroups as distinct entities • Definition of participation emerges from community members • Asking community to define motivators/barriers to participation
Social capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps in understanding the impact of social capital on gender • Gaps in understanding the influence of interpersonal networks and relationships on political participation; narrowly focused on membership as a measure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring the relationship between gender, social capital • Exploring the influence of social networking associations on political participation; beyond membership
Women in politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are nearly invisible • Not treated as actors • Assumptions about roles in politics • Broadly explores political participation among Latinos without considering influence of gender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treating women as individual actors and influencers • Not assuming gender roles • Exploring relationship between gender and political participation • Exploring whether assumed gender roles influence political participation
Latinas in politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assumptions about roles in politics • Not treated as individual political actors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treated as individual political actors • Exploring Latinas as potential drivers of political participation
Puerto Rican political participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not treated as an individual subgroup, instead grouped with other Latinos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treating Puerto Ricans as an individual subgroup of political actors and influencers • Exploring whether they have the potential to drive political participation for Latinos
Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative approach (quantitative surveys, voter turnout data) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative approach; Interviews and Focus Groups

Figure 1 : Summary of Prior Research & Study Contributions

2.7 Theories

Three theories serve as the foundation from which this study stems. These theories are complementary to one another in that they each focus on the relationships between individuals and their communities; how they influence and impact one another. Figure 2 below summarizes the relationship between these theories.

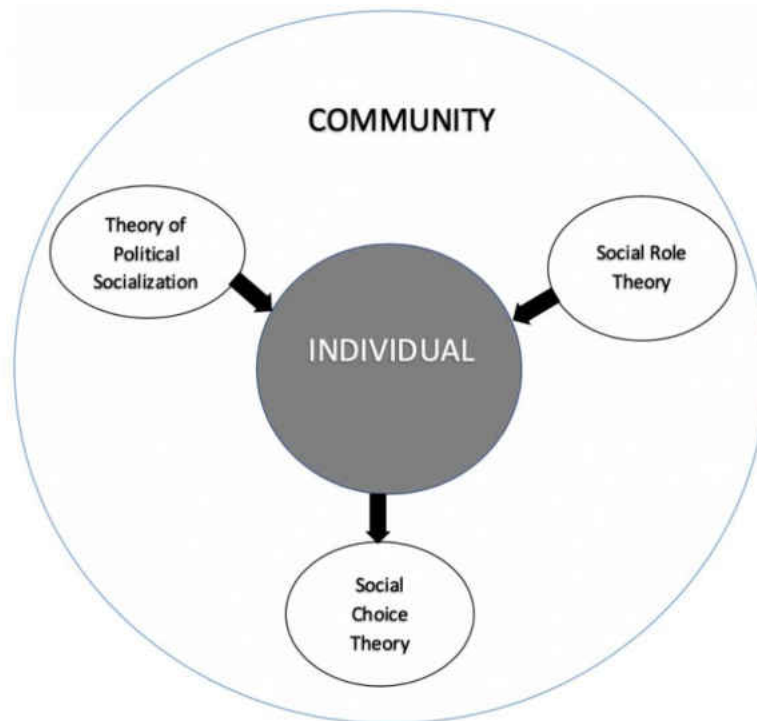


Figure 2 : Theoretical Framework

2.7.1 Political Socialization

Political Socialization posits that there are factors which influence individuals and shape the way in which they formulate political beliefs, behavior, and their propensity to be politically active (Glass, 1986). Aligned with the theory of Political Socialization, Bronfenbrenner's *The Ecology of Human Development (1979)*, suggests that an individual's development is impacted by the elements within their environment. There are

4 “systems”, noted in Table 2 below, within that environment that could influence social and political development.

Table 2: Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory

System	Framework
The Microsystem	Refers to the individual level of relationships and encompasses personal relationships among peers, family, friends, and religious associations such as churches.
The Mesosystem	Focuses on associations between individuals and their network associations.
The Exo-System	Includes external elements that despite the individual having no control over, could still impact their overall development. This includes the economy, government, mass media, and social organizations.
The Macro-System	Includes the ideologies, values, and social norms of the given society in which the individual exists.
The Chrono-System	Includes the greater environment of the social culture in which the individual lives. More specifically, environmental changes that individuals have no control over but can still impact their lives and thereby influence their social behavior.

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems is useful in that it creates a foundation to understand the various levels of social interaction that have the potential to influence individual behavior. Individuals are driven to act based upon where they live, who lives in their same community, who they interact with, and even the greater social issues that drive their communities. Bronfenbrenner also posits that cycles of influence could potentially continue onto other family members and within social and political spheres in a given community.

Massialas (1970) takes this one step further to specify four ways in which social environments may be related to the political system. He posits that one’s environment can influence political and social beliefs and behavior through (a) children and youth; (b)

selection, recruitment, and training of political leaders; (c) politically integration of a community or society; and (d) through the organization of special interest groups which attempt to influence political decisions.

Quintelier and Hooghe (2011) present arguments against socialization theory. First, they argue that most research in this area has focused on the relationship between membership in voluntary associations and the development of generalized trust. Second, research on group process does not support the claim that interaction with like-minded others would automatically serve to develop pre-existing attitudes, in line with the general consensus within the group. They argue instead this does not occur spontaneously. In other words, rather than influence from network associations to become civically minded and politically engaged, it is more likely that a self-selection effect occurs. They further posit that individuals need at least some minimal level of political knowledge in order to get involved in politics.

This theory as applied within this study will look from the community to the individual. It will aid in determining the external, personal, and interpersonal factors that influence political thoughts, behaviors, and action among the study sample within the Central Florida community.

2.7.2 Social Choice Theory

Another theory which may aid in creating an understanding of political behavior within Florida's Latino community is the Social Choice Theory; which studies an individual's interests and values at an aggregate level and measures their impact on collective decision-making.

Kenneth Arrow (1951) generally regarded as the father of modern Social Choice Theory, proposes that decision-making at the community level should be viewed in its entirety, as a “collective decision” that will lead to change within their communities. These decisions are typically made by weighing a number of factors. Arrow suggests that in some cases, social decisions are sometimes made by individuals, small groups and at other times through collectives who agree on the social choices and norms guide behavior. This theory has been pivotal in studies of communities because it not only focuses on institutions or organizations as a means of measuring the need for change, Arrow’s focus on the individual, reinforces the idea that collective thoughts and choices can be truly representative of what communities actually desire.

Once you consider how an individual and their political behaviors and thoughts are established, say through Political Socialization factors, the Social Choice Theory can be used to look at how their aggregate actions collectively impact social decision-making in their community. So, this looks from the individual to the community. This is relevant to this study in that the researcher is exploring how Latinas have the potential to influence the overall community.

2.7.3 Social Role Theory

Scholars that have investigated the sources of gender-based differences seek an explanation for why men and women’s political preferences and behavior are significantly different. The Social Role Theory proposed by Eagly (1987) suggests that on a basic level, men and women are different based on the social roles (i.e. gendered labor roles) they hold in society. Gender roles are defined as those shared assumptions (about

appropriate qualities and good behaviors) that apply to individuals on the basis of their socially identified gender. These gender role assumptions in turn represent people's perceptions of men's and women's roles in the societies in which they live (Eagly & Wood, 2012). This theory could potentially be used to explain why men and women differ in terms of their political participation and more specifically political behavior in the form of voter turnout. Due to these apparent divisions, there are expectations for what political participation should look like based on gender alone.

The roles of women in society and politics differ as compared to men and are worth exploring. While men often act based on their individual needs and motivations, women are more active at the community level, focused on meeting the needs of those around them. "Community participation is one avenue through which women engage in political service work for the betterment of themselves, their families, and their communities" (Abrahams, 1996, p.768). As such, they play many roles beyond the assumed gender roles society has placed on them and can motivate change within their communities.

This theory looks at the influence of the community on the individual. Since a core part of this study focuses on gender, on Latinas and their actions, the Social Role Theory, can be used to understand perceptions of Latinas and their potential to drive political participation. As applied here, the researcher will explore through the perspective of the study sample, what they perceive the community's assumptions are about their gender roles as related to political involvement.

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a 3-step process for collecting and analyzing data from multiple sources. The first was to create an interview pool from the local Latino population to study their experiences with political participation. Through the interview process, the researcher took an exploratory approach, by listening and observing the interviewees and finding the “meaning” behind their narratives and storytelling rather than setting a defined, pre-determined path to collect data. These interviews focused on Latinas in Central Florida provided insight into what political participation means to them within their respective communities. This step was intended to answer the following research questions: *What does political participation mean to Latinas in the Puerto Rican community in Central Florida?* and *What are the factors that influence political participation among Latinas in the Central Florida region?* To that end, rather than making assumptions about the types of actions and behaviors that amount to participation, the interviewees were given the freedom to determine what political participation looks like to them, and share how they choose to engage in, influence, and make an impact within their communities through the participation they deemed most relevant to them. “Interview participants are more likely to be viewed as meaning makers, not passive conduits for retrieving information from an existing vessel of answers” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p.83).

Utilizing the primary data taken from these initial interview groups, the next step was to explore potential solutions for increasing the forms of political participation that were noted as relevant to the respective participants. To that end, focus groups were formed

as a subset of the original interview groups with the purpose of answering the final research questions: *If political participation is valuable to the Latino community, what are the perceptions among Latinas in the given communities about strategies for increasing said political participation?; and How does Latina's social capital influence their political participation?* Again, rather than making assumptions about what the respective communities felt was relevant in terms of political participation and how to increase that participation, the focus groups were questioned through an exploratory approach and general prompts (see Appendices J and K), and asked to provide recommendations as to how they felt Latinos can be empowered, to become influential and impactful within their communities. Both interview and focus group data were analyzed through a Thematic Analysis.

3.1 Study Sample

3.1.1 Interviews

The selection of Central Florida as a case for this study was based on an interest in determining the relationship between the Latino community and political participation¹. The geographic area was carefully selected due to its population makeup and size. The geographic parameters of this study included counties within Central Florida with the highest concentration of Latinos and Puerto Ricans. There are 17 counties that make up the region known as Central Florida (Lamme & Oldakowski, 2007) three (3) – Orange,

1 With a focus on human participants, this study was submitted for and received approval from the University of Central Florida's Institutional Review Board (IRB) on April 2, 2018 (SBE-18-13858). The relevant approval letter can be found in Appendix A. With a second recruitment of study participants, the researcher requested IRB approval for the additional step in the process. During the second IRB review, this study was found to be exempt on January 10, 2020 (STUDY00001169). The determination of exemption letter can be found in Appendix B.

Osceola, and Polk counties - were selected for this study due to their population makeup being significantly Latino (U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts); and more specifically Puerto Rican. The Puerto Rican community is the largest subgroup of Latinos within Central Florida (U.S. Census Bureau).

For the creation of a relevant study sample, the researcher sought assistance from the local community. Within her career as a Community Relations Specialist at Walt Disney World Resort, the researcher has developed professional connections with key Central Florida nonprofit organizations and community leaders. The researcher reached out to the leaders of local Latino community organizations to request their assistance with this study, and more specifically to assist in connecting with members of the local community for the interviews and focus groups. Eva Pagan-Hill, past-president of the Hispanic American Professional Business Women's Association (HAPBWA) and current member of the HAPBWA Foundation, agreed to support this study process by connecting the researcher to potential participants from the Central Florida community (see Appendix C). HAPBWA is a certified 501c3 nonprofit organization that was created to support the professional, personal, and educational advancement of all women. It operates in the Central Florida community and supports local women across the region. Through her community connections, Ms. Pagan-Hill created a list of potential participants from the Central Florida community.

Wanting to study a specific subgroup of the community that met specific criteria, the researcher followed a purposive sampling strategy. "The purposive sampling technique, also called judgment sampling, is the deliberate choice of an informant due to the qualities the informant possesses" (Tongco, 2006, p. 147). In this case, participants needed to be

Latinas of Puerto Rican origin, living in Central Florida (Osceola, Polk, or Orange Counties). In order to ensure that there was some diversity in perspectives, participants could be from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds (age, employment, education, income). "Asking who can provide a different perspective on a topic by nature of their roles can be just as important as asking how many people are needed to answer the question" (ibid). Given that this study assumes that social capital through engagement in social network associations has an influence related to political participation, the researcher wanted to explore this relationship through women that were already civically minded and engaged in their communities. As such, potential participants were also members of at least one local social network association.

In order to facilitate the recruitment of potential interview participants, the researcher created a summary for Ms. Pagan-Hill to distribute to potential participants. The summary, which can be found in the appendix of this study (See Appendices D and E), was intended to share with participants, the purpose of the study, research goals, intended methodology and an overview of their expected involvement. Also included was a brief description of the type of information that would be collected through the in-depth interviews and focus groups. In order to remain sensitive to the cultural needs of potential participants, the summary was shared in both English and Spanish.

While the sampling was purposive, the selection was random, with all potential participants having a chance at being selected. In early 2018, Ms. Pagan-Hill created a list of 25 potential participants was developed, the researcher randomly selected 10 Latinas for the interview process as a starting point with a potential to add additional participants if necessary. The diversity achieved through the random selection process

served as a benefit in that it allowed for various perspectives and histories to be represented, adding a depth to the conversations that would not have been apparent had there been too many similarities between the participants.

The 10 interviews took place from June to October 2018. Upon initial completion, the researcher felt that a point of saturation had been reached given that individual responses collectively aligned and there was little differentiation between them. At that point, the researcher felt that additional interviews would not present significantly new or different data. However, despite this saturation, the researcher recruited an additional 2 participants using the same sampling methods, within a specific demographic. Although all age categories were represented by the study sample (see Table 7), upon completion of the interviews, the researcher observed greater representation in some demographic groups than others, and as a result decided to increase the number of interview participants. Therefore, the total interview participants increased from 10 to 12, and an additional 2 participants between the ages of 18 and 29 were interviewed from November 2019 to January 2020. It should be noted that the additional participants did not significantly alter the overall data, and their responses aligned with that of the other participants. These details are further discussed in Chapter 4.

3.1.2 Focus Groups

Based on their responses to the interview questions, 6 of the interview participants were selected to join the focus groups. Both focus groups took place in October 2018, on different days. There were 2 participants in the first focus group. All participants were between the ages of 45-59 and shared similar socioeconomic backgrounds in terms of

income and higher education. The second focus group had 2 participants. Originally, the researcher to have an even number of participants in each group for better comparative purposes. However, 2 members of the second focus group canceled due to scheduling conflicts. The members of the second focus group were between the ages of 30-44 and 45-59 respectively, and also of similar socioeconomic backgrounds including both being employed by the local government. Given that each focus group took place on different days, the researcher was not able to combine both groups into a single focus group which would have been more convenient from a process perspective.

During the interviews, all participants were asked to state whether they felt that Latinos were active in terms of their political participation. Individuals that said no, or that improvement was needed were later asked to further discuss their sentiments in the focus groups. The data collected from these groups served to dig deeper and propose strategies for increasing and improving up political participation in their communities. The researcher also sought to determine whether social capital was a relevant drive of political participation among Latinas, addressing the final research question.

3.2 Instruments

Interview questions (see Appendices H and I) and focus group questions (see Appendices J and K) were developed using the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), a national data repository for data sets as a reference source. The ICPSR houses interviews and surveys of Latino populations on topics that include political behavior, attitudes, demographic distinctions, policy preferences as well

as social indicators and experiences. ICPSR interviews are compiled into the Latino National Survey (LNS). ICPSR surveys, and a study by Fraga et al (2006) in particular served primarily as a reference from which to select interview and focus group questions and prompts as well as for the development of demographic surveys. In general, “the qualitative interview uses three kinds of questions primary questions that begin and steer the conversation, probing questions to clarify answers or request additional information, and follow-up questions that pursue the implications of responses to the primary (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p.86). In addition to the interview guide, the researcher developed a survey designed to gather demographic data about each participant.

3.3 Procedure

3.3.1 Interviews

Prior to participating in the interview, the researcher asked participants to complete a brief survey to capture relevant socioeconomic and demographic data in order to give context to the study sample. Although not a primary focus of this study, the SES backgrounds of the study participants could be used to explain why they were (able to be) highly engaged within their communities. all were actively engaged in at least one social network association if not several. Research has found links between socioeconomic status and political participation. For example, by analyzing data based on trends exhibited by sampling of ethnic behavior, one can more accurately forecast how an entire segment of the population might feel about certain issues and more importantly, how they are likely to engage in their communities or vote as a group. Milbrath and Goel (1977)

explore this relationship, finding that those with higher class status and income are more likely to engage politically as a result of having access to greater resources, greater opportunity, and social norms which encourage such behavior. Walsh, Jennings, and Stoker (2004) specifically examine links between class identification and political participation across several decades, and find that individuals of working-class status consistently display significantly lower levels of political engagement than those in the middle-class. Similarly, the connection between educational attainment and higher levels of overall participation is also well-established. Milbrath and Goel (1977) assert that greater awareness of government activities, advanced opinions, and greater confidence in one's ability to influence government is a result of higher education. In this case, one of the goals of capturing this information was also to determine if there was any relationship between the participants' socioeconomic backgrounds and their political participation.

After capturing this initial data, the researcher proceeded with the interviews. Each interview was no more than one hour in length. The primary goal of this process was to have the interviewees answer the overarching questions that drive this study. The researcher did not expect every question to be answered or to be answered in a specific way. In order to drive the conversation but ensure that it remained on topic, the researcher also used prompts, but left the ultimate response to the interviewee so as to avoid bias. Equally important to having a specific plan organized through specific questions is the ability to remain flexible and attentive to the conversation, deriving from it meaning instead of just focusing on having every question answered.

It was intended that all interviews take place in person at locations that were mutually convenient for the interview participants and researcher. As an alternate plan if participants were not able to meet in-person, the researcher planned for virtual interviews through FaceTime or Skype as necessary. A phone conversation was a last resort only if no other option was convenient for the interviewee. Phone interviews have the disadvantage of not being able to see the interviewee face to face. This method prevents the observation of social cues and body language that are more readily observed in person. It is also more difficult to interpret tone without the benefit of observing facial expressions. Methods of video conferencing provide the benefit of directly seeing the interviewee, but still lack direct interaction. Finally, even in-person conversations have potential disadvantages in that being face-to-face with the interviewer may make participants feel uncomfortable if they interpret the method as being overly structured and formal. Within this study, 9 interviews were facilitated in person, and the remaining 3 were facilitated by phone.

Given that the interview participants were of Latino origin, the researcher was sensitive to cultural differences and language. Being sensitive to language is key in social science research studies since cross-language situations where the interviewer speaks a different language than the interviewee can cause challenges. Therefore, all recruitment materials (Appendices D and E), communications, and interview and focus group guides were shared in both English and Spanish. The researcher is Puerto Rican, and having learned Spanish as a first language, is capable of fluently speaking, reading, and writing in Spanish. Given that the researcher has a cultural background similar to that of the interviewee participants, this provided the researcher with needed knowledge and cultural

context to properly interact with the participants in the language they preferred, and interpret the interview data as needed. Understanding the nuances of language and culture is key to proper interpretation and translation. “A translator who fully understands the participants’ culture and language will reduce potential threats to the validity of the data” (Choi & Kushner, et al, 2012). In order to ensure accurate translation and interpretation of the data, the researcher had a second reviewer who was also fluent in Spanish and English and had no direct role, influence, or stake in this study of review all translated content as needed.

All interviews were recorded, using audio only, to allow the researcher to be fully engaged with each participant, and ensure all details of the conversation were captured for subsequent translation and analysis. All participants were informed of their interviews being recorded in advance and consented to it as part of the recruitment process. The data captured from these individual interviews has been summarized and analyzed in Chapter 4 of this study.

3.3.2 Focus Groups

Six Participants from the original interviews were selected to form 2 focus groups; the first discussion with 4 participants, and the second with 2. Focus groups serve several purposes as part of a larger research design and can be used for generation of ideas, interpretation of results, or even to explore and explain patterns in data. In this case, discussions in the focus groups were designed to answer the remaining research questions focused on strategies for increasing political participation among the Latino community and determining the influence of social capital on Latina political participation.

As with the interview process, the locations of the focus groups were selected based on mutual convenience for the researcher and participants. Both focus group discussions took place in private conference rooms located in the places of employment for 2 of the participants on different days. A last-minute schedule change on the day of the second focus group resulted in one participant joining the discussion via conference call rather than in person. Each discussion was one hour in duration. The researcher served as the moderator of the focus group. The first focus group was conducted in English, while participants in the second group requested it be conducted in Spanish.

There are a number of approaches that the researcher could have followed to facilitate the discussion. These approaches are known as *nominal group*, *directive approach*, and *nondirective approach*. The essential differences between these approaches are the varying degrees of control that the researcher has over the group and the discussion. Stewart and Shamdasani (2007) detail potential approaches to facilitating focus group discussions:

- *Nominal Group*: The researcher exercises the greatest amount of control over the group. There is only minimal interchange between the moderator and members of the group; and the interviewer exercises tight control over the agenda for discussion.
- *Directive Approach*: Allows for a deeper dive into topics of interest but sacrifices group synergy and spontaneity.
- *Nondirective Approach*: Provides the greatest opportunity for group interaction, discovery, and individual points of view to emerge rather

For purposes of this study, the researcher took a nondirective approach which allowed for the free flow of discussion and significant interaction between the researcher and all members of the focus group. Each focus group discussion began by asking the participants to identify potential tactics or options they felt could be used to increase the quantity and quality of political participation. Next, questions were asked about social network associations – why they joined them, and whether they found them to be valuable tools for community engagement. Finally, each group was asked to give their opinions on Latino gender roles in the community; their perceived differences between Latino and Latina political participations, and the community’s assumptions about perceived and actual gender roles.

The researcher allowed the participants to individually provide their input but also listen and react to each other’s opinions and stories. The conversation was semi-structured in that the conversation kept moving to ensure the general questions were addressed, but it was free-flowing enough to allow for spontaneity, unscripted and unprompted conversation between the participants.

Using audio-recording on a laptop, the researcher captured the conversation of the focus group so as to assist with the transcription, interpretation, and analysis of the data. In traditional focus groups, transcription transforms verbal conversation into a written text. The transcription process permits further analysis and provides a record of the interviews (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2007). Already being familiar the participants and the conversation, it was ideal for the researcher to be the sole individual to translate and transcribe the data. It is suggested that researchers or moderators transcribe their own group discussions. These discussions each have within them both social and emotional

nuances relevant to the participants or the interview situation and the transcription allows for those elements to be captured accurately (Liamputtong, 2011).

3.4 Data Analysis

After the interview and focus group conversations were transcribed, a thorough thematic analysis was conducted of each conversation in order to capture the stories and perspectives the participants had to tell. In the process, the researcher aimed to maintain as much of the character of the participants through their discussion. “Because one goal of focus group interviewing is to learn how respondents think and talk about a particular issue, too much editing and cleaning tends to censor ideas and information, often based on the [researchers’] preconceived ideas” (Liamputtong, 2011, p. 167).

The qualitative data collected within this study was analyzed through an inductive approach; usually defined as “working from the data of specific cases to a more general conclusion” (Schwandt, 2011, p.147) The purpose of analytic induction is to generate theories derived from empirical observation, allowing the data to “speak for itself.” Inductive reasoning starts with a question and then moves to the collection of data. The data is then explored to discover themes, and patterns “Rather than looking to confirm a preordained hypothesis, you remain open to various possibilities (often called grounded theory generation). In the end, the goal is to put forth findings and even theories that help explain what’s really going on” (O’Leary, 2007, p.56). Aligning well with inductive reasoning, Thematic Analysis is a method that identifies, analyzes and reports significant, patterns, or common themes, within the data.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process for Thematic Analysis was used to analyze, code, and find meaning within the collected data in this study:

(1) Familiarizing yourself with your data – extensive immersion through several readings of the transcriptions with the goal of gaining a full understanding of the data.

(2) Generating initial codes – Initial codes should be produced to note key information across the data set. This information can fall into common themes or patterns, anomalies and points of interest that stray from the main themes. Coding can be manual or through software. All coded data should be compiled into a list for ease of review.

(3) Searching for themes – The coded list should be sorted into potential themes, determining how the various pieces of the data fit together into a cohesive story.

(4) Reviewing themes – Refinement of themes by determining their relevancy, commonalities and differences; narrowing down to key overarching themes.

(5) Defining and naming themes – Identify the core of each theme and determine which aspect of the data the themes capture; supporting with specific verbatims. A detailed analysis is performed for each individual theme, determining the relationship between individual themes into an overarching narrative.

(6) Producing the report – Telling the overall story of the data and demonstrating the validity of the analysis. Sufficient evidence of the themes within the data must be presented in support of the story being told. Specific examples and quotes should be extracted from the data into a persuasive account that makes an argument in relation to your guiding research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.16-23).

Both the interview and focus group data were analyzed at the individual level. Although focus group data is collected at the group level, the focus of the analysis remained at the individual level. There are a number of voices within a focus group discussion, each seeking to be heard and each with something to contribute to the topic at hand. Therefore, the best way to capture what the group as a whole has to say is by first exploring the individual stories that are told and differences that are present among the participants. Barbour (2011) contends that focusing on individual voices in a focus group, is helpful in determining the collective perspective of the group.

One caveat to this approach that the researcher kept in mind was to remain aware of differences in the voices of the individual versus the group voice. Singular opinions were identified in the interview process, but they were also differentiated from that of the collective focus groups since it would not be truly representative of the shared group reality. “The main issue of analysis in focus groups should not be on what each participant says in a group context, but more on the discourses or themes that are produced within the group context” (Smithson, 2008, p. 365).

Group interaction, more than just conversation, is also a key part of a focus group analysis, which was taken into consideration in this study. The nature of the topic at hand—the quantity and quality of Latino political participation—demands that both context and content are taken into consideration. How the individuals and group participants alike interact, explore each other’s realities, relate to one another’s stories and react to each other – are all essential to creating context around the discussions taking place while also developing content and themes to be explored. “It is necessary to pay attention to the forms and scopes of expressions (both verbal and non-verbal), the interactive nature of

the discussion, the context in which interaction occurs, and the contents which are produced by the group. This way reveals not only the dynamics of the discussion which can inform the strength of perspectives held by the participants and the level of agreement or disagreement in the groups, but also how the agreement or disagreement is derived” (Liamputtong, 2011).

CHAPTER 4 –FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The following is a presentation of the relevant findings of this study as obtained through a three-step methodology of in-person interviews, focus groups, and thematic analysis. Also included is a discussion on how the findings relate back to the aforementioned guiding research questions, literature and theoretical framework that represent the foundation of this study.

The interviews with 12 Latinas were designed to address the first 2 guiding research questions of this study:

- *What does political participation mean to Latinas in the Puerto Rican community in Central Florida?*
- *What are the factors that influence political participation among Latinas in the Central Florida region?*

The second section of this chapter, looks at 2 focus groups, consisting of 6 total participants were created to address the remaining research questions of this study:

- *If political participation is valuable to Puerto Ricans in the Central Florida community, what are the perceptions among Latinas about strategies for increasing said political participation?*
- *How does Latina's social capital influence their political participation?*

One of the goals of this study was to hear the Puerto Rican community's "story" of their relationship, perspectives and experiences with political participation in Central Florida. The interviews needed to be conducted in a way that did not lead with assumptions, but instead developed organically through open and flexible in-depth

conversations with each participant. Semi-structured interviews are defined by a flexible and fluid structure as opposed to a formal, structured process wherein an interviewer presents each interviewee with a standardized, scripted set of questions.

4.1 Participant Demographics

The 12 participants within this study were purposively sampled from the population, but randomly selected. Below is a summary of all key demographics and background characteristics that add context about the study sample as a collective group. This chapter also presents a full breakdown and discussion of these characteristics and demographics.

Table 3: Participant Demographic Summary

Demographic Variables and Participant Backgrounds	
County of Residence	
Demographic	Response (n)
Orange	7
Osceola	4
Polk	1
Time Spent in the United States	
Years	Response (n)
0-5 Years	2
5-10 Years	1
10-15 Years	2
15-20 Years	2
20+ Years	5
Age	
Demographic	Response (n)
18-29	3
30-44	2
45-59	5
60+	2
Current Employment Status	
Demographic	Response (n)
Employed	11
Retired	1

Demographic Variables and Participant Backgrounds	
Current Employment	
Employment Category	Response (n)
Local Government	4
Private employment	6
Food Industry/Student	1
Retired	1
Annual Household Income	
Demographic	Response (n)
\$20,000 to \$34,999	2
\$35,000 to \$49,999	1
\$50,000 to \$74,999	4
\$75,000 to \$99,999	2
\$100,000 to \$149,999	2

In addition to being Latinas of Puerto Rican origin, selection criteria required that all participants live in Central Florida within one of 3 counties with the greatest concentration of Latinos; namely Orange, Osceola, or Polk counties. Table 4 below notes the distribution of selected participants across these counties.

Table 4: Central Florida Participants by County.

N=12	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
Orange County	7
Osceola County	4
Polk County	1

The majority (7) of participants live in Orange County, followed by Osceola County (4) and only one participant represented Polk County. Ideally, the representation of each county would have been more evenly distributed. However, given that the overall perspectives of the collective group did not vary significantly, there does not appear to be a correlation between the participant's county of residence and their perspectives on

political participation for this particular study sample. This could of course vary for a large study group. Future research in this area should include a larger study sample taken from the broader population.

The following is a summary of the survey that all participants were asked to complete prior to being interviewed. Although the questions and relevant responses are presented in brief below, the full survey can be found in Appendices F and G of this report. Including a survey as part of this process provided valuable initial insights into the personal backgrounds of each participant. Understanding the individual context of their life experiences helped form a socioeconomic picture of the small sampling of the Latina (Puerto Rican) community in Central Florida.

4.1.1 Ethnicity/Origin and Citizenship Status

Participants were first asked to identify their origin. Even though all interviewees were of the same ethnic background – Latina, of Puerto Rican origin – there were some differences in their responses related to their self-identification. As seen in Table 4, while the majority identified themselves as Puerto Rican, some identified themselves as Hispanic specifically. There was one participant that failed to respond to the question.

Table 5: Survey Question 1– Origin.

Question: <i>How do you identify your origin?</i>	
N= 11	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
Puerto Rican	8
Hispanic	3

Participants were also asked about their (self-identified) citizenship. Their responses are summarized in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Survey Questions 2 and 3 - Citizenship Identification

Question: <i>Are you a U.S. citizen, naturalized citizen, or born in another country?</i>	
N= 12	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
U.S. citizen	11
Naturalized citizen	1
<i>If you were born in another country, what would you say is the main reason you came to the United States?</i>	

All participants identified themselves as U.S. citizens with the exception of one participant who identified herself as a “naturalized citizen”, but also of Puerto Rican origin. Despite slight differences in self-identification among participants, there was sufficient consensus to conclude that participants viewed themselves as U.S. citizens of Puerto Rican origin.

4.1.2 Time Spent in the United States

The next question asked participants how long they had lived in the continental United States. The majority indicated having lived in the United States for over 20 years. The remainder indicated they have lived in the United States between at least 10-20 years. Two participants, indicated they had lived in the United States for less than 5 years, having moved to Central Florida from Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria. Table 6 on the following page summarizes the responses to this question.

Table 7: Survey Question 4 – Length of time lived in the United States

Question: <i>How long have you lived in the continental United States?</i>	
N= 12	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
0-5 Years	2
5-10 Years	1
10-15 Years	2
15-20 Years	2
20+ Years	5

The fact that the majority of participants have spent over 20 years in the mainland United States follows trends in migration of the overall Puerto Rican community. Puerto Ricans have been migrating to the state of Florida since the 1940’s and their numbers across the country have continued to grow exponentially. They have started new lives for themselves and their families, and subsequent generations have continued to leave the island to make the continental United States and Central Florida in particular their home.

4.1.3 Generational Differences

Even with all participants being of the same origin, there were some points of distinction in socio-economic backgrounds between them, including generational differences. Table 8 summarizes these results.

Table 8: Survey Question 5 – Age

Question: <i>What is Your Age?</i>	
N = 12	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
18-29	3
30-44	2
45-59	5
60+	2

Approximately one quarter of all participants fell between the 18-29 category, 2 participants fell between 30-44, nearly half of the participants indicated their age as falling between the range of 45-59; and the final 2 indicated their age as 60+. Within this small sample population, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z were all represented. This served to ensure a variety of perspectives were represented in the gathered data. It should be noted that while there was a variety of ages and demographic backgrounds spread across each representative age group, saturation was not fully achieved for each individual age group.

4.1.4 Socioeconomic Status & Political Participation

Every participant indicated they had achieved higher levels of education, with all having earned at minimum, a university/college equivalent education and 3 participants having achieved graduate level education or greater. Every participant indicated they had achieved higher levels of education. The majority (9 participants) had achieved a university degree or college equivalent while the remaining 3 individuals had achieved a Masters level education.

Table 9: Survey Question 6 – Level of Education

Question: <i>What is the highest level of education you have completed?</i>	
N = 12	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
University or College equivalent	9
Other – Masters	3

Participants were also asked to indicate whether they were currently employed. As seen in Table 10, all participants were employed, with the exception of one individual who had retired. One participant, in addition to being employed, was also a student. Another specified that outside of her professional employment, she was also focused on community outreach and volunteerism and further mentioned that she is the founder of a nonprofit organization. Table 11 summarizes the job type or industry in which each participant was employed.

Table 10: Survey Question 7 – Employment Status.

Question : <i>Current employment status</i>	
N = 12	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
Employed	11
Retired	1

Table 11: Survey Question 8 – Current Employment.

Question: <i>If currently employed, what do you do for employment?</i>	
N=12	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
Local Government	4
Private employment	6
Food Industry/Student	1
Retired	1

The majority of participants were privately employed as follows: one for a private insurance firm serving the Hispanic community; another as an entrepreneur with her own marketing/branding firm; another as an Assistant VP/Store Manager at TD Bank; one

participant was employed by AARP as a community outreach and engagement specialist, one participant was employed a community organizer and a radio host; while another participant was employed as a radio host and a publicist. One third of participants were employed by the government in the following areas respectively: Orange County Housing Assistance, the City of Orlando, Orange County Community Centers, and the City of Orlando: Hispanic Office for Local Assistance (HOLA). The final participant was employed in food service and also currently enrolled as a college student working towards her degree. Those that indicated they were currently employed were also asked to identify their current total annual household income, as noted in Table 12.

Table 12: Survey Question 9 – Household Income.

Question: <i>What is your total annual household income?</i>	
N=11	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
\$20,000 to \$34,999	2
\$35,000 to \$49,999	1
\$50,000 to \$74,999	4
\$75,000 to \$99,999	2
\$100,000 to \$149,999	2

All participants indicated earning an annual income no lower than between \$20,000 - \$35,000 and a maximum of \$150,000. Three participants fell within the salary ranges of \$20,000 to \$50,000. Four participants earned between \$50,000 and \$75,000. Two participants earned between \$75,000 and \$100,000. The final two participants fell within the highest salary range of \$100,000 to \$150,000. Due to her retirement, the final participant indicated she was not currently earning a professional income. Interestingly,

the majority of participants within this sample earned significantly more than the median income level in Central Florida which according to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey, is approximately \$53,267 annually.

4.1.5 Social Capital and Political Participation

Since a primary focus of this study was to determine the influence of social capital on political participation, all participants were asked to state the social network associations in which they were currently active. Participants were members of or actively involved in a variety of organizations, with some commonalities noted. Table 13 below details the number of organizations each participant noted being active in as well as the specific names of each organization.

Table 13: Survey Question 10 – Social Network Associations

Interview Prompt/Question: <i>What social network associations are you a part of? (Number of Organizations cited by participants)</i>	
N=12	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
1	1
2	3
3	1
4	3
5	2
6	-
7	1
<i>Organization Names</i>	
Organization Name	Participant Response (n)
HAPBWA	6
HCCMO	5
HAPBWA Foundation	3

Interview Prompt/Question: <i>What social network associations are you a part of? (Number of Organizations cited by participants)</i>	
Organization Name	Participant Response (n)
Working Together Coalition (Trabajando Juntos)	3
Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce	2
Central Florida LEADS Group	1
Costa del Sol HOA	1
City of Orlando Hispanic Heritage Month Committee	1
National Latino Peace Officers Assoc. of Central Florida	1
Assoc. of Latino Professionals for America	1
The 12 Ladies of East Orlando	1
East Orlando Chamber of Commerce	1
Women's Network	1
Board of Florida Community Development Assoc.	1
Local Community Book Club	1
Board of United Arts of CFL	1
Committee for Diversity & Inclusion at the Univ. of CFL	1
HCCMO Supplier Diversity Council	1
Board of SOS by Urbander	1
Abrazo Boricua Coalition	1
Gateway Orlando	1
Alianza for Progress	1
Vamos4PR	1
For our Future	1
Hispanic Federation	1
Iniciativa Acción Puertorriqueña	1
La Mesa Boricua	1
Borisquad	1
Jevas Combativas	1

Each participant indicated active membership and participation in at least one social network association or organization, where they perform community outreach,

engagement and service, or volunteer efforts. The majority were involved in multiple organizations. One participant, was a member of only one organization and mentioned that her inability to participate in more community efforts was due to her time being divided between academic priorities as a college student and her employment. This same participant stated that once she completed school, it was her goal to join additional networks and associations to be further involved in her community.

As is noted in the table above, there were 4 organizations where there was some or significant overlap in participation among participants: the Hispanic American Professional Business Women's Association (HAPBWA), the HAPBWA Foundation, the Working Together Coalition and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Metro Orlando. Since the potential participants were selected by the former past-president of HAPBWA, it is logical that the HAPBWA Foundation and HAPBWA Association would represent the greatest amount of membership/participation. Through discussion with the participants during their interviews, the researcher discovered that the Working Together Coalition shares many of the same members as the HAPBWA Foundation and Association because it was created by former and current HAPBWA members. As the largest Hispanic business-centric organization in Central Florida, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Metro Orlando has become a hub for Hispanics in Central Florida to grow their businesses, develop partnerships, and build community networks. As such, it has over the last 20 years, created a common membership base with many individuals from HAPBWA and other key Hispanic community organizations.

There were also a number of individual organizations that participants were engaged in. While distinct, these organizations shared common goals: the advancement

of Latinos, women, or the greater Latino community. The remaining organizations represented the participant's passion projects or personal interests including book clubs, neighborhood associations, and community nonprofits.

The participants within this study are highly educated, middle-income earning women whose socioeconomic status has likely enabled and empowered them to become active in their communities through political participation. These factors could also allow their participation to be greater than that of individuals with a lower socio-economic status. Despite the differences between them including age, income, and other socioeconomic factors, the study sample shared one primary commonality that was observable even from the initial survey. As a group, they were representative of a highly active community that is driven to be civically, socially, and politically engaged, with the goals of improving the quality of life for the Latino community.

4.2 Interview Findings

Interviews began with a question to gauge each participants' overall interest in politics and social issues, including the factors that motivated and continued to drive their participation. Every participant indicated an interest in politics and social issues.

Table 14: Interview Question/Prompt - Interest in Politics and Social Issues

Question/Prompt: <i>Are you interested in politics and social issues?</i>	
N=12	
Response	Participant Response (n)
Yes	12
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
Motivated by issues that impact their lives	8
Interest driven by cultural heritage	6
Motivated by family to be active	5
More involved in politics after arriving on mainland	6
Interested in politics, but there are significant differences between political experience in Puerto Rico versus mainland United States	4
Intrinsic to their nature to be active in politics	2
Prefers to take charge rather than let others drive action	1

One point that repeatedly arose amongst these Latinas is that they attributed their active engagement in the Central Florida community and their interest in politics and social issues to their Puerto Rican heritage. Their personal backgrounds including culture, families, and personal values developed from their upbringing as Puerto Rican women, motivated them to be active and engaged from a young age. “It started with my grandfather. He was the one that instilled in me the idea that I needed to have an awareness of what was happening in the political world” (Interview 11, November 2019). These examples of activism had in turn inspired in them a desire to be engaged in their

communities. “Since I was in Puerto Rico, my mother was very involved. Very involved in politics...I think it starts at home...they see their parents are interested in politics. I was in politics since I was very, very young” (Interview 4, July 2018).

Another participant indicated that growing up as a Latina was enough to motivate her to become engaged in politics and social issues. “It’s very important for me as a Latina to be involved in politics because there are many issues that directly impact the Latino community. I’ve always been active. I registered to vote when I was 18 in Puerto Rico. It’s always been a part of my family to vote” (Interview 9, September 2018).

This sentiment of the intrinsic nature of political participation continued with discussions on the influence of family. When asked how her family influenced her to become active, one participant stated “My family was always politically active. I would go with (them) to political events, and I’ve always been involved in some way shape or form in politics because that’s how I grew up” (Interview 2, July 2018). For another participant, her upbringing was a direct influence on political participation. “At the beginning, it was part of my family culture. As I became more mature my political views differed from my family but I was motivated to be engaged to make sure that the government supported the causes that mattered most to me to make sure that my needs were truly addressed. But it all started with my family” (Interview 4, July 2018).

Another common theme discussed by half of the participants was the significant difference in their political experiences in Puerto Rico prior to moving to the mainland United States and once they relocated. Some participants mentioned a lack of engagement in Puerto Rico. “In Puerto Rico I wasn’t as involved in politics and social organizations because my focus was on other priorities. When I moved to the mainland

and I learned about all of the opportunities for Hispanics, especially for women, I became more interested in politics and social issues” (Interview 7, October 2018). Another attributed personal differences in community engagement to a change in perspective upon arriving to the United States; a perspective that drove her to become involved in new ways. “When I moved, my life was changed completely and my eyes were opened. I saw what was happening around me, and that the community had needs to be addressed. Especially Latinos who didn’t have the support and services they needed. I immediately started getting involved in public service, church, giving back to the community, teaching others ESOL classes, helping at a food bank. These were things that I had never been involved in back in Puerto Rico” (Interview 2, July 2018).

Two other participants also indicated a difference in their methods of political participation in Puerto Rico and after they left the country, noting that there were greater opportunities within the United States that allowed them to become more involved. “When I lived in Puerto Rico I wasn’t as involved in politics and social organizations because my focus was on other priorities. When I moved to the United States and learned about all of the opportunities for Hispanics, especially for women, I became more interested in politics and social issues” (Interview 7, September 2018). It was access to these opportunities that continued to drive some of the participants to get involved in the issues that mattered the most to them. “We (in Puerto Rico) can’t vote... when I got here I thought ‘nothing is going to stop me now, or prevent me from taking action and getting involved in this world that I have always been interested in, but couldn’t be a part of (before)’” (Interview 11, November 2019). For this same participant, her motivations further stemmed from an impactful event in event that both changed her perspective on politics and motivated her

engagement. “I was never involved in politics (in Puerto Rico), never affiliated with a political party, and was not part of any community-focused organizations. But when I got here, I was displaced from Hurricane Maria and it was like a “switch” that happened. I decided I had to work to make change for my people, so the first projects I was involved with had to do with supporting people like me (who came to the United States after Hurricane Maria)” (Interview 11, November 2019).

A majority of participants expressed being motivated by concerns over the social issues that directly impacted their lives and the lives of the Latino community. “I feel an obligation to serve as a citizen in any capacity I can. I’m concerned about the Hispanic community and their emerging needs” (Interview 4, July 2018). Some indicated feeling having a stake in political and social decision-making that affected their daily lives. As a result, they felt it necessary to be active and engaged to influence the relevant outcomes. “It concerns me because it will affect me somehow if I don’t take part in it. I think it is my responsibility as a citizen” (Interview 1, June 2018). Another participant also expressed a concern over potential outcomes and decisions that impacted her life and motivated her participation. “Presently, I’m afraid for the future. It used to be that if you went to school and got a good job, you were set. Now, we’re not doing enough...the country is regressing. With everything going on in the world, I feel I must stay involved” (Interview 5, July 2018). The youngest participant of the group expressed concerns for the future and like others, felt a sense of personal sense of obligation. “I haven’t always been involved or interested in politics but, I feel as I get older it’s something that my generation needs to take interest in. (What’s happening now) is going to impact the future” (Interview 6, July 2018). Another participant’s concern compelled her to proactively take action in order to address issues

rather than letting others activate on a response. “Whenever I see a need in the community, I feel like it’s my role to jump-start and activate things from scratch to meet immediate needs” (Interview 8, September 2018).

Active in the Community

Having determined that the participants were not only interested in politics, but that they also perceived political participation to be highly relevant, the researcher next asked the participants about the roles they played in their communities as well as their motivations for being active. Table 15 below summarizes the responses.

Table 15: Interview Question Prompt – Active in the Community.

Interview Question/Prompt:	
<i>What roles do you play in your community?</i>	
N=12	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
Active in the community	12
Active, but limited by profession	4
Supplemental Responses	
<i>Motivations for Being Active</i>	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
Community Needs	12
Professional Role Drives Activism	6
Personal Interests Drive Activism	2
Interview Question/Prompt	
<i>How are you active in your community?</i>	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
Voting	12
Membership in social network association	12
Leadership role in social network association	3
Political Campaigning	1

All participants confirmed that they were first and foremost active voters and further indicated they were involved in their community in various ways whether as members of a volunteer organization, social network associations, or by supporting local community programs or initiatives.

Just over one third of all participants, though actively involved in their community, perceived their involvement to be limited due to the nature of their professions. Interestingly, these participants were all employed by local (city and county) governmental entities. “Because of my role working with the city of Orlando government, I feel that what I can do is limited, but I still try to participate and be active as much as I can in ways that don’t create a conflict” (Interview 1, June 2018). Despite being limited, these participants still shared the desire to remain actively engaged. “There are certain things and issues happening in the world today, I want to be involved. But I’m limited because of my job” (Interview 2, July 2018). One participant stated that her job affected also affected her personal political affiliations. “My job with the government demands that I maintain a more neutral role so I can be more focused on social issues, but not very outspoken or take sides (on) political issues” (Interview 2, July 2018). Although these participants noted that they were limited because of their professional roles, some actually mentioned that their jobs actually empowered them to be more actively and effectively engaged within their communities. “Through my job I’m very involved in local community centers, providing resources that the community needs, and also connecting small business owners to the tools and resources they need in the community” (Interview 3, July 2018).

Two participants specifically mentioned that their career paths were influenced and driven by their desire to support the Latino community. “I’ve been active as an employee

since 1982, involved in Hispanic outreach focused on engagement (for over 30 years). The work has brought me closer to the community, to constituents, to the people that can be influenced by the type of work that I do” (Interview 9, October 2018). For this participant, there was a close relationship between her personal and professional interests. “I became involved in my professional role because I wanted to be socially and politically active in the community” (Interview 9, October 2018). The other noted that she initially became involved in order to support the community’s needs but her involvement also ended up becoming a part of her professional life. “It was happenstance that my interests changed... because of what I saw going on in the community. There were issues going on around me that impacted my business model and my personal interests changed to focus on diversity and inclusion and giving back to the Latino community through my business...” (Interview 8, September 2018).

Another 2 participants stated that the scope of their professions allowed them to add value to the community in ways that were meaningful both personally and professionally. “Professionally I’m very active. I’m able to engage in assisting the low-income community, disabled community, share housing support opportunities, and show them how they can take advantage of local programs” (Interview 4, July 2018). Another credited her employment for empowering her to be actively engaged in ways that she would not be able to on her own. “I work for a bank. I provide a lot of education and advice to my customers and people in the community. I’m a member of the HAPBWA organization, the Puerto Rican Chamber, the Hispanic Chamber...any organization that invites me to be a member or to serve as an advisor for their customers, I join them. So,

I'm very active in the community, providing those educational pieces" (Interview 10, October 2018).

It was interesting to observe how all participants shared the same core interest to support the community and were active even if their personal motivations and forms of participation they deemed relevant varied. One participant was driven by the needs of the community as well as her personal goals and aspirations. "Since I'm interested in social media and in helping the community, I'm involved in a group called *Las 12 Mujeres del Este de Orlando* (The 12 Women of East Orlando) that visits a different nonprofit organization every month. Then we support and promote that organization by telling their story through social media. I did this primarily because I'm focused on social media in my academic career. It also supports and promotes the nonprofit organization to the community at large, and we're able to connect those different nonprofit organizations to the local community centers, opportunities and resources that I support through my professional role" (Interview 3, August 2018). This same participant was also motivated to be active in ways that supported her family. "I'm a teacher of small children through my community church in a program called Royal Rangers, its similar to Boy Scouts but with religious teachings like Sunday School or bible camp. I became interested in this locally because my son was in the Royal Rangers when he was a child in Puerto Rico and I carried that interest with me here" (Interview 3, August 2018).

Another was motivated by what she interpreted as a significant need - the lack of information and support needed by newcomers arriving to Central Florida to help them assimilate and acculturate to life in their new communities. "I've created seminars to help

people understand the challenges (you face) when you move here from other countries including Puerto Rico” (Interview 4, July 2018).

The youngest participant of the group noted that because of her current academic obligations, she was in a different place in her life as compared to other members of the community and therefore, felt her current participation was different than what she expected it to be in the future. “I’m currently a member of HAPBWA with my mother who is also in the organization and got me involved. I plan to continue my engagement with the organization after I graduate school. I want to be more active as my academic career finishes and I can focus on other things in the community” (Interview 6, July 2018).

Given that all participants in this study were required to be active members of local social network associations, every participant spoke to their relevant. “My primary role has been as an active member of HAPBWA and President of the HAPBWA Foundation. I work with women, professionals, students, (and) homemakers. We provide them support and developmental opportunities so they can be successful” (Interview 7, September 2018). Another participant was motivated to act in order to fill perceived gaps in community leadership. “I feel an obligation to serve...I’m concerned about the growth of the community and their emerging needs. I feel that many organizations don’t have the capacity to address the community’s needs” (Interview 4, July 2018).

Voting – Registration and Turnout

Since voting is a tool that is frequently utilized to influence and drive change within the United States, the researcher specifically asked the participants about their voting behavior in order to determine whether they felt it was relevant as a form of political

participation. Table 16 summarizes their relationships with the voting process, including motivations for registering and continuing to vote.

Table 16: Interview Question/Prompt – Voting

Interview Question/Prompt: <i>Are you currently registered to vote?</i>	
N=10	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
Registered to vote	12
Interview Question/Prompt: <i>Have you ever voted in a presidential election?</i>	
N=12	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
Yes	12
Supplemental Response <i>Motivations for registering to vote and actively voting</i>	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
Voting is a duty/right/obligation	12
Culture, family	5
Voting is intrinsic to personal nature	2
Voting is key for women	1
Voting is a right/duty but I'm otherwise not motivated	1

Every participant acknowledged that they were registered to vote and that they had actively voted in presidential elections. “Yes, of course (I’m registered) I’ve always been registered to vote. If you don’t vote, you can’t blame the government or leaders or anyone unless you participated” (Interview 5, July 2018). Nearly half of the participants noted feeling a personal duty to register to vote as part of their cultural upbringing and ties to family. “Since I was 18, I registered to vote in Puerto Rico. It was something my

family did with me and when my kids turned 18, I took them to register to vote. It's always been a part of my family and culture and something I will always continue to do" (Interview 9, October 2018). Two participants shared that for them, registering to vote was not a choice but rather an action that they knew they would always take. "I registered as soon as I turned 18 in Puerto Rico and when I moved to the United States. My family has always motivated me to be active, saying that I needed to have a seat at the table, to speak up, because if not then you are part of the problem" (Interview 8, September 2018). One associated her decision to register and vote to her personal identity. "I decided to register because it was 'automatic', its second nature. When I arrived in the United States, I didn't even know who the mayor was in her new community where I moved to, but you register to vote anyway. It's part of who I am" (Interview 4, July 2018). Another participant also indicated her desire to vote due to the influence of her family and upbringing and indicated that although she desired to be more active, she understood that voting was a valuable form of participation and driving change. "Although I'm not currently as active as I'd like to be, I know the importance of being active. I'm trying to do as much as I can now to be a part of it. I was very much influenced by my mom who shared with me the importance of voting" (Interview 6, July 2018).

All participants felt that registering to vote and actively voting was their duty and obligation and they took advantage of the opportunity as their right. "I have always been registered to vote. If you don't vote, you can't blame the government or leaders or anyone unless you have participated" (Interview 5, July 2018). One participant was also motivated by the potential impact that voting could have on her life. "I'm registered to vote because I feel it's the right of every citizen and also because the impact of voting or not voting can

have. It is a trickle-down effect and decisions that are made by voting will impact me and my family so I need to be a part of the process” (Interview 1, June 2018). Another noted that although she had always been motivated to vote, the need to be politically involved was even more apparent due to current issues facing the Latino community. “You have to and need to be registered and vote. In the past, the reason I would vote was to keep the rights or resources we already had... But now, I want to change the current situation. I want to do more because of everything that is happening in our country. I want to give my opinions, inform decision-making and help” (Interview 2, July 2018).

One comment stood out from the rest of the interviews from a participant who felt that voting was not only her civic duty as a citizen, but as a woman. “I am registered to vote, and I registered because it is a right. I also think about a time when women did not have the right to vote. I want to take advantage of that because I want to honor those women and how they paved the way for other women” (Interview 2, August, 2018).

Another standout comment from the group was from a participant who shared that she votes out of a sense of personal obligation and civic duty, but *not* because she is motivated by political candidates and leaders. “I do go and vote but to be honest... I look at the candidates and I don’t get very (inspired). I vote because I know have the right and it’s important to demonstrate that I care...but I wish that I had either better people or people that have connected with us” (Interview 10, September 2018). In other words, for this participant, perceiving true concern and authentic engagement from political leaders towards Latinos was a motivator influenced her political participation.

For one participant, a recent arrival from Puerto Rico post-Hurricane Maria, voting took on a special meaning and represented an opportunity to become engaged in new

ways. “I found out I could get my license and register at the same time, and that was the first step. It was like I felt empowered; I knew I could vote in the next elections. We’ve lived all of our lives as colonists, under the rule of these people (in the continental United States) and now I could finally have my voice heard and I could vote. As soon as I got here in October 2017, I went through the midterm elections and I voted in the primaries” (Interview 11, November 2019). This same participant was motivated by what she perceived was an apparent lack of participation within her community. As a result, she felt the need to educate others about the importance of being socially and politically engaged. “There’s a lot of work that happens to educate people in the community. But this is such a big issue. People have so much going on, they’re working, they don’t connect with others...so there’s a lot to do to educate people. So, I do what I can to educate people on my own, and they spread the information to others. I do it on my own to do what I can, and I feel like I’m making a difference” (Interview 11, November 2019).

Influence – Motivators of Political Participation, Influence on Community

Once the significance of political participation among the sample population was established, and in order to address the second research question, participants were asked who or what influenced their political participation. Table 17 summarizes the results.

Table 17: Interview Question/Prompt – Influence

Interview Question/Prompt	
<i>Thinking about the reasons why you are politically active, who or what do you feel influences you to be active?</i>	
N=12	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
Community issues and interests	7
Family values	2
Politics and Political leaders	2
Social media	1
Interview Question/Prompt	
<i>Do you feel you have influence over anyone's political behavior?</i>	
N=12	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
Yes	10
No	2
Interview Question/Prompt	
<i>If yes, who?</i>	
N=10	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
Children and Family	5
Overall community	4
Students	1
<i>If yes, how do you feel you influence them?</i>	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
Being vocal, standing up for values	1
Sharing importance of voting/modeling behavior	5
<i>For those that felt they had no influence over others...</i>	
N=2	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
No room for influence, people have made up their minds	1
My influence doesn't seem relevant because I am active in different ways than most	1

The majority of participants noted that community issues and interests influenced and motivated their political participation. “The needs in the community, and issues that are going on right now are motivating me to be more active and involved” (Interview 2, July 2018). These participants also noted a feeling of self-motivation, and a sense of obligation to participate because of the needs of their community. “It is my responsibility. I feel strongly about the issues that are going on and I feel strongly about being involved in the community. I feel I can contribute by taking the first step to get involved” (Interview 1, June 2018). One participant mentioned that beyond self-motivation, she was driven by participation that brought her personal satisfaction. “I’m motivated to do something better for the country or the place where my children are (being) raised. And anything that makes me happy. That motivates me. If I enjoy something, it motivates me. If I’m around people that make me happy and people that I know that are doing good things...that makes me happy so I get involved” (Interview 10, October 2018). Another community interest that influenced some was the desire to help the Puerto Rican community on the island. This interest was particularly relevant for participants who had recently come from the island and relocated to Central Florida. “I’ve always been an advocate for Puerto Rico and seeing what’s happened (and is happening) there and even though there are some good political leaders there who are trying to change things for Puerto Rico, I learned that the real power lies with people in the United States. When it comes to how much aid Puerto Rico receives, we don’t decide that. Nobody on the island does, it’s here. That’s what motivates to vote and be active (Interview 12, January 2020). They not only wanted to help Latinos in their Central Florida communities, but saw engagement in the U.S. political system as a tool to support the ongoing needs of Puerto Ricans on the island who face

their own political and social turmoil. “I was just (in Puerto Rico) and in reality, things are not alright. People are speaking really positively, there are a lot of campaigns promoting positivity (and happiness) ...but actual daily life...it’s not ok. You see destruction...and that’s why I tell myself I have to keep going, because what future does my family have if this situation continues? So, they’re my motivation, to start focusing on legislation that favors us so they have a better Puerto Rico” (Interview 11, November 2019).

Two participants mentioned active political participation as a way of carrying on the values taught to them by their families. “My family instilled it in me at a young age. They told me it was my right to be involved and to vote” (Interview 7, September 2018). One participant felt inspired by her family values and her religious faith. “Growing up in a tight-knit community, my faith has motivated me, forced me to live up to the ideal of ‘do unto others’. It’s my responsibility. My family influenced me from the start and I want to carry on their legacy and not be a bystander” (Interview 8, September 2018).

One unique response was from a Generation Z participant who mentioned that social media in particular was a driving factor that motivated her participation. “Social media as an information sharing platform has been a big influence because I’ve been able to see what’s going on in the world. Based on what I see people sharing, talking about and debating, I feel I can get enough information to form my own opinion and perspective about current issues” (Interview 6, July 2018).

Two participants specifically attributed their political participation to the influence of politics and political leaders. “I’ve seen how politics can negatively or positively impact citizens...I’ve even seen it at the local commission level and how every candidate will support certain issues and their decisions impact the community” (Interview 3, July 2018).

A second participant shared similar sentiments about being active in order to influence governmental decision-making. "...what (motivates) me is the desire to make sure that the government supports the causes that matter to me most and that they truly address needs in the community" (Interview 4, July 2018).

When asked if they felt they personally influenced anyone's political participation, all but 2 participants felt they had influence over the political actions and behavior of others. Of these, half primarily felt they influenced their children and families. "I've empowered them to be vocal, to stand up for injustices and not be afraid...I feel my biggest burden is to instill Latino values – the collective comes before the individual – and teach them to carry (those values) on" (Interview 8, September 2018). One participant specified the type of influence she imparted on her children. "I influence them to vote and be involved. I tell them to voice what's in their heart" (Interview 2, July 2018).

Speaking once again to the idea of political activism being inherent to Puerto Rican culture, one participant discussed why she felt so strongly about passing on the importance of participation to her family. "I motivate my husband and my family to vote. My children are young voters and I feel it's important for them to be involved. I motivate them because my family instilled it in me at a young age, they told me it was my right to be involved and vote. So, I passed it on to my family so they can exercise their right to vote. Voting here is so easy and there are so many ways to do it. I feel it's important to let my family know all of the ways they can vote" (Interview 7, September 2018). One participant not only discussed the importance of participation, but also modeled political behavior for her children. "I've always engaged my children in (political) meetings and political opportunities. They've been able to see me set an example of engagement and

interest in supporting the community” (Interview 4, July 2018). This same participant indicated she influenced a particular group that no other participant mentioned. “As a part-time professor at Ana G. Mendez University, I teach Public Administration. I try to teach (my students) in a way where they can make their own decisions, inspire them, make them think and challenge their critical analysis. But in a way, I influence them to realize how important it is to be active in the community and stay on top of the issues” (Interview 4, July 2018).

Three participants noted that outside of direct personal connections, they also influenced members of their community. “I voice my opinion; I share information to inform others. I notice that my voice causes impact and change” (Interview 9, October 2018). Interestingly, where these same participants previously noted that their professional roles limited their political participation, they actually credited their roles with empowering them to influence others towards political action. “I’m able to impact the community because of my role in the government. If the community sees that I work for a particular candidate, then the community will automatically assume that the candidate is a god person and that I support them for that reason so they draw many conclusions from my role and relationships” (Interview 2, July 2018). For one participant, their role in the government translated into them being viewed as subject matters experts within their communities “They understand I’m very active in the community. (They know) I’m aware of what’s happening in the community. They feel they can talk (to me) and share their opinions” (Interview 1, June 2018). Another participant observed a lack of awareness in her particular community among Puerto Ricans who had never been educated on the value of voting and she influenced their awareness of the voting process. “When I got here, for

example, my roommates are Puerto Rican and many of them have been here longer than I have...can you believe, that they had never voted here? ...I oriented them, and I took all of my friends with me and we all voted early. I explained to them the benefits of early voting” (Interview 11, November 2019).

While the majority of participants felt they had influence over others, the remaining 2 felt that they held no influence for very different reasons. One felt that within her particular social network there was no room for influencing political behavior or action. “I feel that if I sit down with people and talk to them, most people have already made up their minds so it’s difficult to debate and dialogue with them. I feel I can’t get through to anyone and it doesn’t really matter” (Interview 5, July 2018). This same participant was not concerned about a lack of engagement within her social network, but rather the ways in which they were engaged. “I’m not worried the community isn’t active. I’m more worried about how they’re active. That so many of them are making decisions that seem counter-intuitive, lacks compassion, against my values” (Interview 5, July 2018). One final participant noted that she didn’t feel she influenced others because she herself was not politically active in ways that others seemed to value. For this participant voting was a right and a necessity, but she indicated she didn’t feel passionate about it. Instead she preferred other types of participation and community engagement that felt more relevant and impactful. She did note however, that it was still important to motivate others to be active even if the ways in which they went about it differed. “I’m in a volunteer organization that works in the community to motivate people to vote. They ask me for advice on how to encourage the population to go and vote” (Interview 10, October 2018).

Issues Facing Latinos; Importance of Issues

With an understanding of their personal circles of influence, participants were next asked to identify the most important issues they felt Latinos faced.

Table 18: Interview Question/Prompt – Top Issues Facing Latinos

Interview Question/Prompt	
<i>What do you feel are the most important issues facing Latinos today? (Please share up to 3)</i>	
N=12	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
Education (Resource/Info. Sharing)	5
Affordable Housing	5
Employment/Living Wages	3
Language Barriers	2
Social Inequality	3
Immigration	2
Healthcare Services/Resources	2
Divisiveness between Latino subgroups	1
Latinas' social well-being	1
Governmental responsibility towards Latinos	1

While responses to this question varied with concerns over specific issues participants were felt were significant, an overarching theme became apparent. All participants were primarily concerned with the Latinos community’s overall welfare and quality of life.

Nearly half of participants shared concerns relevant to Central Florida including the ever-increasing cost of living and wage base, and affordable housing crisis. This issue, they argued, was further exacerbated by the addition of tens of thousands of new residents from Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria, which put additional stress on already strained resources. “Housing (is an issue). Especially for Puerto Ricans that are coming

to Central Florida now. It was a problem before they arrived here and now it's even worse with the additional influx of people that have moved here" (Interview 3, July 2018). One participant was also concerned with affordable housing, having had personal experience with the issue. "Affordable housing is a major (issue) in my opinion. When I got here, I was directly impacted by the issue. There were other people that came from Puerto Rico and we had to build each other up. I went through so much just to get a roof over my head and it was really hard" (Interview 12, January 2020). Along the same lines as affordable housing, economic instability in Central Florida was also a concern among other participants. "Housing and good pay, a decent living wage – at least in Central Florida. Looking more broadly (beyond Central Florida), access to opportunity and decent wages are also still an issue for Latinos" (Interview 8, September 2018). This instability, they argued, prevented Latinos from being able to support themselves and their families, and advancing in society. "Many Latinos are unable to get jobs or adequate jobs. They come here and they have many barriers to getting employment to sustain their quality of life" (Interview 7, September 2018).

One participant expressed concern over the future of the community and its continued exponential growth and development. "I'm concerned about issues that impact the community at large. Community growth, expansion, sprawl in the future and the ability of the community to access (what they need) to survive here" (Interview 10, October 2018).

Another commonly cited issue among participants was a perceived lack of education among members of the community. Education here meaning an awareness of the local culture, laws, customs, available resources, services and information needed to assimilate and make a living in the Central Florida community. "People don't know what

their rights are when they move from one country to another. They don't have enough information, they aren't educated enough, and they should be provided with more resources when they arrive here. They don't know what the laws are, what they need to get established here and be successful here" (Interview 1, June 2018). The researcher explored this issue further, asking participants about where or who this "education" should come from or how individuals should obtain or access it. A quarter of those participants felt there was a shared responsibility. They argued that established residents should impart their knowledge to new arrivals, but that new residents also needed to be proactive and help themselves advance in their new community by seeking out the resources they need. "The community needs to have a greater understanding of the services and resources that are available to them. The community needs to be self-sufficient. There are local resources that give them the basic tools and basic education that will (in turn) give them the ability to support themselves rather than being in a cycle they can't get out of...it's a combination of problems that prevents the community from being more successful" (Interview 3, July 2018). One participant questioned where the lack of education stemmed from, and debated whether it was due to a lack of communication, motivation and commitment, or both. "There are so many resources that a Latino can get but maybe they're not getting it because they don't understand it or they don't know about it, or they just need a push or someone to inspire them to do it. But I think it's a lack of communication. It's the responsibility of the community to let people know about it, and (the people) that come here should go and also find it" (Interview 10, October 2018).

Some participants were also concerned about social inequality and the community's welfare. One felt that Puerto Ricans had historically been misunderstood as

a community. “As Puerto Ricans, the biggest issue we face is the colonial mentality. We’re so used to being treated a certain way and after a certain point, you don’t even realize it and we have to change that narrative. As a Boricua, I struggle to change that narrative even among my own friends...it’s a narrative that’s been instilled in us for so long, we’ve been taught we have to be poor, we have to struggle. And people get here and they assume that life has to be the same way, and it’s not the case” (Interview 11, November 2019). One attributed misconceptions and misperceptions about the Latino population as having a detrimental effect on Latinos’ ability to thrive in Central Florida and the country as a whole. “There are a lot of prejudices, ignorance and negative feelings about Latinos.... It will now also be difficult for people to get the resources or education or information they need to succeed because the government wants to take some of that away. It makes it hard for people who come to the U.S. (like Puerto Ricans now) to acclimate to the culture here because they don’t understand issues, there are differences in language, so many things that can create challenges. They don’t have cultural literacy to be successful” (Interview 5, July 2018). A second participant felt that socioeconomic disparities negatively impacted the prosperity of Latinos. “It’s alarming that as a group, Latinos are the lowest-income-earning group in the nation below African Americans. There are many issues that are affecting Latinos and that are causing them to be at the bottom of the economic scale” (Interview 4, July 2018). The final participant noted that even if Latinos were to obtain needed resources, information, or services, there would still be limitations present due to these social inequalities. “Access to positions of power and decent wages (is a challenge). There are barriers to education but there is still access to it. But (even then), once they’re educated and they’re working, that’s where access is

stifled. Latinos reach a certain level and they don't continue progressing, the (government) their backs on the Latino community "(Interview 8, September 2018).

Language barriers, the inability to speak or understand English, was deemed by two participants to be a significant challenge in that it had the potential to impact every aspect of an individual's life. "Not knowing English is a huge issue for Latinos in Florida in general because without understanding the language they are limited...they don't even know where to start and where to find services. It also impacts the family as a whole and no one succeeds. They can never be as successful as they would be in their native country simply because they don't know the language here" (Interview 2, July 2018). This barrier, prevented them from thriving in the community. "Many times, language is an issue, they don't know the language so it makes it difficult for them. Perhaps in their home countries they were professionals but when they come here, they have to take other jobs. It's more difficult for them when they get here" (Interview 7, September 2018).

As has been discussed, Puerto Ricans hold the right of citizenship, both on the island of Puerto Rican and in the mainland United States. They therefore don't face the same immigration issues that Latinos from other countries face. Even without a direct stake in the matter, two participants felt that immigration matters were relevant to the Latino population as a whole. One articulated her thoughts on the general treatment of Latinos facing immigration challenges. "The issues facing undocumented individuals and families, families being separated. Even though it is not an issue that impacts me directly, I still have sympathy for these families as a Latina. I get angry when I see these Latinos suffering" (Interview 7, September 2018)

Two participants were concerned over the inability of Latinos to access affordable healthcare services, resources, and information. “There are so many Latinos who cannot afford healthcare, who cannot afford their medications. There are some options like Medicare and Medicaid, but that doesn’t always help. There are other needs they have and there should be ways for them to get the care and assistance they need. This is America, there is supposed to be “the American dream” (Interview 7, September 2018).

The internal divisiveness and in-fighting between Latino subgroups were a concern for one participant. She argued that this divisiveness fostered further misperceptions about Latinos and prevented their social advancement. “There is also a lot of divisiveness within Latino subgroups that make them fight amongst themselves rather than banding together as a singular community together. And every group has their own agenda. (There should be) a broader vision for Latinos rather than just having a “Puerto Rican agenda”, it’s a Latino issue not just a Puerto Rican issue” (Interview 4, July 2018).

One participant noted that the advancement of the Latinos was important, but that it was essential to focus on Latinas in particular. “I’m interested in anything that has to do with women’s welfare, working women’s issues, and business development opportunities” (Interview 9, September 2018). They also noted that greater awareness of Latinos arose, Latinas should not be forgotten in the greater scope. “Latinas are leaders, they make a difference and we still are behind the power of men in this community and that has to change. It’s getting better but there needs to be more done”.

The final issue raised by one participant pertained to the functionality of government. “There needs to be a clear awareness of governmental actions and behavior.

“There should be more transparency in government, I don’t like secrets” (Interview 9, September 2018).

Satisfaction with Government (National, State, Local)

After determining the issues that participants felt were most relevant for Latinos, they were next asked to indicate their satisfaction with the government in addressing these issues. Beginning at the national (Federal/Presidential) level, followed by the state government (Gubernatorial), and local (City/County) governments. The purpose of this series of questions was to determine whether perceptions of government responsiveness were a factor that influenced (either motivated or deterred) political participation. It should again be noted that one third of the participants within this study were employed by the local government. Although asked to respond to all questions with as neutral a perspective as possible, bias could have potentially influenced their perceptions and opinions of the local government towards the Latino community.

Table 19: Interview Question/Prompt - Satisfaction with Government

Interview Question/Prompt:		
<i>Given your concern about these (previously mentioned issues facing the Latino community), how well do you think the government is addressing these issues?</i>		
Response Theme	Perception	Participant Response (n)
N = 12		
National Government	Dissatisfied	8
	Neither Satisfied/Dissatisfied	4
N=11		
State (Florida) Government	Satisfied	3
	Dissatisfied	4
	Neither Satisfied/Dissatisfied	4

Interview Question/Prompt:		
<i>Given your concern about these (previously mentioned issues facing the Latino community), how well do you think the government is addressing these issues?</i>		
N=12		
Local (Orlando/County Government)	Satisfied	8
	Dissatisfied	1
	Neither Satisfied/Dissatisfied	3

A majority of participants expressed strong dissatisfaction with the national government and the ways in which they addressed (or failed to address) issues relevant to the Latino community. “I don’t think the government has done anything to address these issues. There is a huge disconnect between the needs of the community and the elected officials at every level” (Interview 12, January 2020). This theme, the perceived lack of care and concern for the Latino community, arose frequently during the interviews. “They’re not doing anything at all. They’re doing the bare minimum and they don’t care” (Interview 8, October 2018). Some perceived the government had created a divisiveness within the community. “It’s terrible. Before, there was hope but under the current administration, they’ve just created hate, they’ve divided people, focused on their differences” (Interview 5, July 2018). To this point, another participant felt that greater internal cooperation and understanding within the government was needed in order to truly be efficient at addressing issues. “They’re not addressing the issues (that matter) and they don’t care. I believe in collaboration. There should be collaboration across political parties but you don’t see that happening nowadays. There is a lot of division and tension in the political world currently” (Interview 2, July 2018).

While some participants did not explicitly indicate dissatisfaction with the federal government’s actions and behavior, they were also not entirely satisfied with the

relationship between the government and the Latino community. “Economically, they say things are better nowadays than in the past, unemployment is low, the economy is thriving. I still have doubts about how well the government is handling issues and meeting community needs...there is still a lot to be done by the government” (Interview 7, September 2018). When attributing the inability of the national government to address issues that concerned them, one participant felt that this political divisiveness had delayed progress. “I think that if they would put aside political arguments, and focused more on the people, it would be better” (Interview 1, June 2018).

Two participants also felt that the inability of the government to be responsive to the needs stemmed from a lack of understanding of the Latino community. Without that understanding they argued, the government could not possibly effectively engage and drive the progress needed to meet their needs. “At lot of progress had been made until recently in terms of representation and understanding (of) the community...but with the current administration, there is a lack of diversity. Without diversity, you’re not fully informed about how to make decision that impact everyone...” She further argued that improved diversity within the government could lead to positive. “...We need more Hispanic representation in higher visibility positions that can inspire others. There’s a disconnect between the Latino community and others, and a lack of understanding about what it means to be Latino” (Interview 4, July 2018).

No participant indicated satisfaction with the federal government’s response to addressing issues of importance to the Latino community. Even for those who had mixed feelings (neither satisfied nor dissatisfied), they still expressed the need for the

government to improve their relationship with Latinos in order to better understand and address the issues at stake.

In terms of satisfaction with the state government, participants were divided in their sentiments about the state's response to the Latino community. Some expressed dissatisfaction with the government. "I don't think the government has done anything to address these issues. There is a huge disconnect between the needs of the community and the election officials at every level" (Interview 12, January 2020). Some perceived indifference on the part of the state government towards Latinos. "The government isn't doing anything for Latinos. There's a disinterest to engage and address issues that matter. They're doing the bare minimum" (Interview 8, September 2018). One participant felt that the government was actually actively engaged, but that their motivations and actions were disingenuous. "I think that what they really want is to get votes from the Hispanic community. They're not being honest or genuine. They try to project a message to the Latinos but it's not real" (Interview 10, October 2018).

Another common theme among those that expressed dissatisfaction with the state was the idea that state leaders lacked the proper perspective to understand the community and be adequately responsive to their needs. "There is a lack of diversity of ethnicities in Florida's elected government. The right people are not all at the table to make decisions that impact *all* citizens. There are very few people that truly represent the diversity of Florida. Every position in government and even appointed positions by the governor are not fully diverse" (Interview 4, July 2018). Another participant reinforced this idea, noting that the ability of the government to be responsive and effective was dependent on the influence of Latinos within the government itself. "They have so many

Hispanics working for them right now, (and) they're listening. But we have to understand that they don't think the same as we do, and they also have to represent other communities that are not Latino communities. They are not perfect, but they are getting better. The Latinos that are working for them are definitely influencing them and what they are doing for the Latino community" (Interview 10, October 2018).

Just over one third of participants were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the state government. One expressed that on some issues, the government had done a satisfactory job, while on others more improvement was needed. "They're focused on social issues – Medicaid, housing – but they haven't properly handled the funding in those areas where there is a great need. In terms of the economy, they've lowered unemployment and they're bringing in jobs...they did great. But on social issues they failed" (Interview 9, October 2018). Others felt the government desired to do more for Latinos but simply couldn't "I think they try hard, but their hands are tied and they can only do so much" (Interview 1, June 2018).

Three participants were satisfied with the state's performance in addressing issues of concern to Latinos. "I feel better about what Florida's government has done, despite my personal political party preferences. I'm more impressed and I feel (the Governor) has done a lot of good things for the community to address issues" (Interview 2, July 2018). One participant's perceptions were based on how the government responded to specific issues rather than broadly generalizing about their overall performance. "In terms of recent issues facing the Latino community, and facing Puerto Ricans, like Hurricane Maria, I've noticed the governor actively taking steps. He's been in the spotlight, he's made progress" (Interview 7, September 2018). This sense of some positive if limited,

movement by the government was a continuing theme. It was attributed however, to specific leaders they felt were advancing the cause for Latino community rather than the government as a whole being a positive force for change. “I know there are a lot of progressive representatives and leaders that are in power now like Anna Eskamani, Amy Mercado, Carlos Guillermo Smith. There are people who are fighting for us” (Interview 11, November 2019).

The final participant felt she wasn’t sufficiently informed about the government at the state level to express an opinion on whether or not she was satisfied or dissatisfied with the government’s actions towards the Latino community.

As the focus of satisfaction with government narrowed from the national and state levels to discussions of local (city/county) government, satisfaction increased among participants. The majority felt positively about the local governments’ ability to address issues of importance to Latinos. “Locally I feel that there is a little hope. I have been involved with so many people in different agencies in the City and the County, many of the local government at those levels they recognize and appreciate the Hispanic community... I feel much better about how things are going locally compared to the state and national government” (Interview 5, July 2018). Among those with positive perceptions, there was discussion about the local government’s effectiveness being attributable to their willingness to collaborate with community partners towards common goals. “I feel that the local government is effective in that they have strong collaborations, and local counties partner well together to take action and address issues” (Interview 1, June 2018). Many of the responses from participants regarding their satisfaction also focused on perceptions of inclusiveness towards the local community. “Locally, there are efforts. I

feel lucky to be in this area because there is movement. It is a diverse, accepting, embracing community. The City, Orange County, local organizations in the private and nonprofit sector are extremely active in reaching out, working together... They're invested in not just the Latino community but all communities in an authentic way" (Interview 8, September 2018). One third of participants perceived that diversity and inclusion within the government influenced their ability to understand the needs of the Latino community. "I feel the team has done a lot of good in the community. I feel Mayor Dyer has done well in surrounding himself with the right people – diverse, intelligent people – and that has helped him and that's why he's done so well. He has been creating in the City of Orlando a sense of (collaboration) and acceptance. I feel the same way about Mayor Jacobs (the County level). She has done her share of good things" (Interview 2, July 2018). The perception of Latinos being in highly visible roles within the government also increased satisfaction with the government. "I feel a lot better about the local government than the state and national government. Especially in Orange County, so much progress has been made with diversity. You can find Hispanics all over the local government both at the County and City levels and they're in good positions of influence" (Interview 4, July 2018).

Again, several of the participants within this study were employed by local city/county governments at the time of their interviews. Initially, the researcher was concerned about potential bias amongst some of the participants in terms of expressing their satisfaction the government. However, after completing all interviews, the researcher determined that even participants who were employed outside of the government shared the same viewpoints about the local government's effectiveness in addressing Latino issues. "Locally, Orlando has grown very much and made progress. The community is

rapidly expanding. The Mayor has been excellent. He is a hard worker and he helps the Latino community a lot. He has focused a lot on diversity, especially within his own office and staff, and he's given the Latino community a lot of opportunities in that sense. He deserves credit for that. At the county level, Mayor Jacobs and the county commissioners are also good for the community and they work for the community" (Interview 7, September 2018).

For those who were neither fully satisfied nor dissatisfied with the state government, concerns were focused on how the government addressed specific issues. "In terms of some issues, yes, the local government has provided many services to help the community. They work together with local businesses and agencies. But in terms of some issues in particular like housing assistance, they definitely need to do more" (Interview 3, July 2018). Another concern was the perception of inconsistency among local leaders; that some leaders were more active or effective in their support of Latinos than others. "There are some that are fighting, but there are others who sit down every day and think about how they can make our lives harder. They treat us like we don't live here and contribute, like we don't work here, like we don't do our fair share, like we don't have an impact on the economy here...that's where the issue is" (Interview 11, November 2019).

Only one participant indicated dissatisfaction with the local government. Having recently arrived in Central Florida, she felt a frustration with the treatment of Puerto Ricans on the island and a distrust of local leaders who she felt subsequently failed to address the community's concerns. "I relate everything to Puerto Rico....thinking about what happened with (Governor Rossello resigning), there are a lot of elected officials here who are Puerto Rican, and they openly say that they support Puerto Rico... but it took a long

time for people to even talk about (the problems with Governor Rossello...For me, that's the first disconnect ...” (Interview 12, January 2020).

Barriers to Political Participation

Participants were next asked if they perceived they were able to engage in their communities in the ways they felt were most relevant and impactful.

Table 20: Interview Question/Prompt – Barriers to Political Participation

<p>Interview Question/Prompt: <i>Do you feel you're able to contribute to your community effectively?</i></p> <p>Sub-questions/Prompts: <i>If no, please tell me about some things you'd like to do in your community that you haven't been able to?</i></p> <p><i>Do you feel that you're able to be as politically active as you would like to be?</i></p>	
N=12	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
Satisfied with Community involvement	8
Not Satisfied with community involvement	4

The majority of participants indicated they were satisfied with the ways in which they were engaged within their communities. “I’m satisfied with my level of contribution to the community. I feel that I can act for myself, but I can also contribute by helping others that come to me for assistance. If I can’t help them directly, then I know who to connect them to in the community” (Interview 1, June 2018). One participant stated

that over time her satisfaction had increased because she had strategically positioned herself in professional and personal roles that allowed her to engage with her community. “I absolutely feel that I’m able to contribute. I have been able to work with the government, and with the city. I’ve been able to work with and help people in need. Because of my roles in the community, I’ve gained respect and trust in the community” (Interview 10, October 2018). One participant’s perceptions of her contributions were based on her ability to connect her personal passions to her work in the community. She felt that acting as a voice for a disenfranchised community in need of support gave meaning to her efforts. “I used to work in communications and I was involved in the community, but it was just a job and I didn’t really like it. Now I feel like I’m fulfilled because when I help people it feels tangible... I’m supporting a movement that is creating change. Not just raising awareness. There was one time I went to Washington DC for Take Action for Puerto Rico, and we were actually talking with congressional leaders, and we took leaders from Puerto Rico too and we told congress what our needs and issues were... So, in that way, I felt like I was making a change, and I was able to speak on behalf of my people. I do feel like I’m involved in a way that impacts my community” (Interview 11, November 2019).

Even though every participant indicated that they were actively involved in their communities and satisfied with the manner in which they were involved, some felt they could do more. “Yes, I’m able to contribute to my community, but I want to be more involved. I feel I owe it to the community and dedicate more time to being involved in the community” (Interview 5, July 2018). Another felt that her future community involvement could go beyond political participation. “I feel I can do more. I can maybe volunteer more,

help our elderly population, our veterans, or children. I have ideas in mind about how I want to help not just politically but also socially, the people in need locally” (Interview 7, September 2018).

Three participants in particular indicated that even though they were actively engaged in their communities, they again felt limited in the ways they were able to engage because of their professional roles in local government. “I’m engaged but it’s more of a challenge because of my role, to contribute effectively. I have to be careful but I would like to do more. I have my beliefs and opinions and efforts I want to support or do but there are ways in which I cannot be active simply due to my role in the City of Orlando government” (Interview 2, July 2018). One participant had found ways to balance her professional role with her personal desire to support the community without conflicts of interest. “Because of my role in Orange County government, I cannot participate in political campaigns but I can be an ‘instrument of information’ for people when they’re seeking information. I cannot take a side, but I can provide information. I do feel I can contribute, even if it is somewhat limited” (Interview 3, July 2018).

Two participants felt their personal responsibilities conflicted with their ability to effectively engage, and they were therefore dissatisfied with their contributions to the community. “I think I could do more to be involved. Right now, I’m focused on myself and my future but once I move into other stages of my life, I hope that with future jobs, school and other opportunities, I’ll be able to make more community connections and get further involved” (Interview 6, July 2018).

Perceptions of Latino Political Participation

The final interview questions were focused on determining the participants' perceptions of political participation in Central Florida. The first question asked whether participants felt Latinos in the community were politically active (speaking to quantity of participation), followed by a question of whether their participation was effective (speaking to quality of participation). Participants who perceived that Latinos were not active were asked for their recommendations on strategies to increase Latino political participation. This question was also asked to test whether it could be used to drive the focus groups conversations.

Table 21: Interview Question/Prompt - Perceptions of Political Participation

Interview Question/Prompt: <i>Do you think that Latinos are politically active?</i>	
N=12	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
Yes	7
No	3
No Opinion	2

Participants were divided in their responses. Seven perceived that Latinos were politically active and engaged, 3 believed that Latinos were not politically active, and the remaining two did not have an opinion either on where Latinos were active.

Among those where active engagement as perceived, one participant spoke to a perceived progress in political engagement over time. "I've seen more progress now. In local elections for county commissioners I saw a lot of Latinas come out. And a lot of women, which made me really happy. I saw a lot of Latinos on the ballot. I think they are

more active now than before and they're making their place in the community" (Interview 7, September 2018). This perceived shift held true for other participants who believed Latinos may not have been previously active, but over time they had become more engaged. "Historically, they haven't been as active. I think they're waking up now because of the social and political climate and what is happening in the world (Interview 2, July 2018). One issue thought to have motivated greater participation for Latinos was Hurricane Maria and the perceived failure of the United States government to support the people of Puerto Rico. "I feel that the Latino community and Puerto Ricans in particular have come together to address many of the issues facing them, especially Puerto Ricans after Hurricane Maria. They're receiving more recognition and they have a stronger voice than they did before because of how they've stood together. They've had a positive impact, people are looking at them more (Interview 6, July 2018).

Among those that felt that Latinos were not politically active, their perceptions of the reasons for the lack of participation varied. First was the idea that Latinos were not being proactive or doing enough to empower themselves be engaged. "I feel that they're active but they need to be encouraged to be more active. They need to be more involved especially in learning the rules, the laws, the requirements of life here (Interview 1, June 2018). Another felt that a lack of understanding of the political process prevented participation. "They just don't know the connection...I was able to see the connection between taking action and making change. But they don't necessarily see that. I think that's why they're not as active" (Interview 12, January 2020). One participant felt a lack of participation was attributable a hierarchy of needs that presented itself before participation could even become a relevant priority for Latinos. "Latinos are not active yet.

Even if they want (to), they can't focus on civic engagement because they have other needs that they have to address before they're able to focus at all on engagement – housing, employment, transportation, education, healthcare, cultural competency. Latinos haven't been active because the community has not always engaged with Latinos when they need to, they wait until they need a vote. But I feel that it's changing now. The engagement is getting better and I see movement in the community" (Interview 8, September 2018).

One of the common themes discussed throughout the interviews proposed that Latinos must be more proactive with getting engaged in their communities. This arose again during the final discussions as participants proposed that in order to resolve the lack of participation, the community needed to take responsibility to proactively reach out to those members that were not actively participating "There are a lot of Latinos that have been here for a long time and they're already involved and voting but there's still a lot of work that needs to be done to connect with more people and get them involved. Since people are off in their own worlds, some have two and three jobs...and when it comes to politics, they don't have the time to deal with it so they don't take action" (Interview 11, November 2019).

As with participants who had shared that their political participation was different in Puerto Rico compared to their experiences once they moved to the United States, some argued that Latinos may have been active in Puerto Rico, but once they arrived to the United States their priorities may have shifted. That they may no longer be interested in local political participation because they don't feel they have a stake in the existing issues or understand the value of their engagement within their new communities. "When

you're in Puerto Rico, there are tangible issues like roads, transportation, and schools that people and the community need. They get engaged because they can literally see what is wrong that needs to be taken care of, so they share their voices. In the mainland U.S. those are not the same issues. Most of the things they were fighting for they gained just by getting on a plane and making this their home. So, in their minds there's no need to vote because they've already gained everything they were fighting for" (Interview 9, September 2018). Another participant shared a similar opinion, that differences in voting and the matters at stake impacted how Latinos get involved. "There's a lot of Latinos here that prefer not to vote, but there are also a lot of non-Latinos that prefer not to vote. But at least in Puerto Rico, it's like a sport. That type of attitude of needing and wanting to be involved and active is changing. There are a lot of leaders that have come from Puerto Rico that are influencing people here to become active" (Interview 10, October 2018).

Effectiveness of Latino Political Participation

Participants were also asked to consider whether the political participation they observed in their communities was effective in creating change and moving the needle on the issues of concern to the Puerto Rican community of Latinos in Central Florida.

Table 22: Interview Question/Prompt – Effectiveness of Political Participation

Interview Question/Prompt: <i>Do you think Latinos are effective in terms of their political participation?</i>	
N=12	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
Yes	6
No	5
No Opinion	1

Participants were split in their opinions of whether Latino political participation was effective. Half perceived that Latinos were active and that their participation is effective. “When they are active, they are effective. The Latino community has become unified. Puerto Ricans are realizing that they need to exercise their vote for others that don’t have the ability or capacity to vote” (Interview 8, September 2018). The idea of a unified Latino community influencing the effectiveness of participation was relevant for other participants. “When we all unite, and we all come together, (that’s when change happens) ...It’s effective when we unite. But if it’s each person on their own...we need to not only take action, but it’s important to educate people about taking the right action, teaching them how to vote...So that’s the challenge” (Interview 11, November 2019). Participants also discussed that there was still room to improve on the effectiveness of participation. “There are Latinos that are actively involved. They are helping each other get involved, raising awareness, and more of this needs to happen” (Interview 2, July 2018). Others placed responsibility for issues with effective participation on the government, stating that an inauthentic relationship with the Latino community prevented effective participation. “The government and candidates need to genuinely build relationships, not just get immediate support to get a vote...You need to work hand-in-hand with people, show them that you're there for them, that you're one of them, that you'll stand by their side. (It) takes a very long time to build a relationship that way” (Interview 3, July 2018).

Some participants felt positive about current and future Latino participation and their potential to become more effective. “It’s getting better, it’s not perfect. People are getting more involved and they’re doing more. It’s changing over time” (Interview 10,

October 2018). Some perceived that the effectiveness of participation had improved as a result of the community being motivated to act. “I think the change happened here in this county because of local efforts. We were active on social media, we were out on the streets, and I could see the difference. People were more aware. We also used well known public figures in Puerto Rico and they were spokespeople to motivate the people, people who came here after Maria, to take action and vote. So, I know those efforts are what made the difference” (Interview 11, November 2019).

5 participants felt the political participation they observed was ineffective. “They’re active but not effective. They don’t understand there are differences between politics and processes in Latin American countries and Puerto Rico versus the systems and processes here. Very few people understand the electoral system. The responsibility is on the community to inform the people because if people aren’t motivated to proactively learn, someone needs to raise awareness and let them know why it’s important to be involved. They need to know why they need to be integrated into the community, not just be in isolation because they don’t make an impact that way” (Interview 4, July 2018). The matter education - a lack of awareness about local community resources and information – was previously discussed by several participants as an issue of importance to the Latino community and discussed further as relevant to the ability of Latinos to make an impact with their political participation. “I feel that Latinos could be much more effective if they had more information when they arrive to this country. With more knowledge and a basic understanding of how things work, they could have a greater impact. I feel that those that come from Puerto Rico have a different perspective on how they should/could be involved because they don’t have a voice at the federal level, they’re not used to being involved”

(Interview 1, June 2018). One participant argued that Latinos were active but their effectiveness may not have been apparent in areas that are generally part of traditional, formal political processes. “I don’t think Latinos take full advantage of every opportunity they have, but they are active. They like to help others, and they like to be involved in and support various social causes as well. They are active in many ways in the community through organizations, churches...and they help a lot. They are involved but not (always) in the mainstream” (Interview 5, July 2018). The remaining participant felt she was not sufficiently informed to share her opinion on the effectiveness of Latino political participation in the community.

Increasing Latino Political Participation

As previously mentioned, in addition to core questions and prompts that drove the interviews, the researcher also sought to test out a focus group question to determine if participants had concrete ideas, strategies or recommendations on how to increase Latino political participation. As such, participants who indicated that Latinos were not effective in terms of their participation were asked to share their recommendations for increasing Latino political participation in their communities. Their collective responses are summarized in Table 22.

Table 23: Interview Question/Prompt – Increasing Latino Political Participation

Interview Question/Prompt: (If answered “No” to whether Latinos are politically active) <i>What do you think Latinos could do to increase their political participation?</i>	
N=5	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
Access to education – Available community resources, services, and information relevant to quality of life in Central Florida	2

Interview Question/Prompt: (If answered “No” to whether Latinos are politically active) <i>What do you think Latinos could do to increase their political participation?</i>	
N=5	
Response Theme	Participant Response (n)
Address the hierarchy of needs- Before participation can be increased, there are other priorities that must be faced.	2
There are barriers to engagement – whether time, money – and participation is a luxury that not everyone can afford	3
Change the messaging strategy to authentically engage with the community	1
New arrivals to Central Florida must take it upon themselves to become educated and involved	2

Several recommendations were made about ways in which participation could be increased among Latinos. The first being a theme commonly discussed throughout the interviews: access to education in the form of resources, services, and information pertaining to the Central Florida community. With this education, it was argued, citizens could be better informed about all aspects of life in the community - how to obtain jobs, where to go for needed social or medical services, finding schools for their children, or learning how to become civically and engaged through voting. “There are Latinos who are actively involved in helping other Latinos get registered, be active, etc. I think that more of this needs to happen. The community needs more information, more resources” (Interview 2, July 2018).

While it was previously argued that it was the responsibility of existing residents to reach out to new arrivals, the debate continued as some participations proposed that new arrivals to Central Florida must take it upon themselves to learn about their new communities and seek out the information and resources they need. “Making sure to be

proactively involved in educating themselves on rights, processes and gaining information to be successful in the country is key. Not just waiting for the information to come to them or not being active in the community because it will negatively impact them if they don't take any action (Interview 1, June 2018).

Two participants specifically noted that although education was vital to getting Latinos effectively engaged in the community, they faced several barriers. One argued that while political participation is a right, for some populations it is more often a luxury. "Latinos need to be educated so they can make informed decision. But it is a luxury to be involved. You need time, education, and it's difficult to have that in daily life, they're surviving and they don't have time to be more involved, but they should be and need to be" (Interview 5, July 2018). The idea of conflicting priorities serving as barriers to participation was mentioned by other participants. "Latinos face many challenges when they move. They need a job, some have multiple jobs, they need to take care of their families. So, any spare time they do have is not going to be spent on educating themselves on how to vote. They last thing on their agenda is politics. They feel they're set and that they don't need to vote. They'll let someone else worry about it" (Interview 9, October 2018).

Two participants felt that communication between the government and the Latino community was a challenge. As with most engagement with Latinos, the approach was a "one-size-fits-all" strategy that didn't account for differences between subgroups. Therefore, it didn't make sense to have the same tactics, messaging, and communication for the whole community. Instead, they recommended catering relevant messaging to specific subgroups within the community as needed. "There needs to be a change of

strategy in the messaging. They (politicians) want to put all Latinos in a box and Latinos are all different. Venezuelans care about certain issues, Puerto Ricans care about other issues...the way they talk to my mom is not the same way that they talk to me. It seems like they haven't been able to change that strategy" (Interview 12, January 2020). Another participant challenged current communication strategies and proposed that participation could be increased if there was a greater focus on social issues when engaging with the community, noting that some individuals are less likely to be involved if the conversation is political. "There should be different approaches to getting people involved. For example, projecting a message without being strictly political. There are different ways to get people engaged that goes beyond just politics, explaining the social issues help. Through social media or different types of communication, presenting simple communication, more broadly than just talking about politics" (Interview 10, October 2018). Delivering non-political messaging, they argued, could be a gateway for increased interest in community engagement and eventual increase in overall participation.

In this same vein, another participant argued that not all engagement needed to be political and that Latinos could be motivated to be involved in non-traditional ways beyond formal politics. "It should start with children in school. Many women don't work, they can get involved in their children's school for example with the PTA. Even being active like that, in helping and supporting children makes a difference. They can start with being involved within their own immediate communities. Participation is not only political; it's not just voting. It's about being actively engaged in the community at different levels in different ways, and all of those things can be integrated. You can be involved in local

politics, local communities, supporting them however you can” (Interview 7, September 2018).

After testing the question, the researcher determined it would perform well when used to lead discussions in the focus groups. Since every participant that was asked to respond to the question felt there were ways in which political participation could be increased among Latinos and also suggested ways in which it could be made more effective, it was used as primary guiding question to drive focus group discussions.

4.3 Focus Group Findings

The overarching goal of the focus groups was to address the following research question: *If political participation is valuable to Puerto Ricans in the Central Florida community, what are the perceptions among Latinas about strategies for increasing said political participation?* Furthermore, with relevant literature pointing towards Latinas and their social capital as potential drivers of political participation, the researcher also sought to determine how Latinas of Puerto Rican origin in Central Florida leverage their social capital – and social network associations in particular – towards the political participation they perceive to be most relevant and effective. As such, the focus groups were also designed to address the following question: *How does Latina’s social capital influence their political participation?* It should be noted that although there were 2 separate focus groups conducted, the responses between them were not significantly different so as to warrant separating their responses in the findings below. Therefore, the findings for both focus groups are presented together below as well as in the discussion section of this chapter.

4.3.1 Need for Latinos to Increase Political Participation

Participants were asked to start the discussion by sharing whether they felt Latinos needed to increase their political participation. There was collective agreement that Latinos must increase their political participation in the Central Florida community. “Yes, they must get involved in the community. They need to register and vote. They also need to listen to the issues that are going on, and understand more about what lies beyond their self-interests, what matters to the community as a whole”.

One immediate response to this question brought up a point that had frequently come up during the interviews. Namely that yes, Latinos needed to increase their political participation but many who want to participate face challenges and barriers that impact their ability to do so. “The Latino population is driven innately to participate in the electoral process, it’s just that they don’t have the knowledge of how it works here in the U.S., or they’re distracted (by other priorities) to be able to be concerned with that.”

Another participant agreed that balancing multiple priorities prevented participation. “We are really bad at volunteering because we have lower levels of economic tiers - single moms, working multiple jobs, working in the service industry- and they just don’t have the time because they have other priorities.” If the community’s most basic and essential needs could be met, participants proposed, members of the community would likely have more time to engage in political participation.

4.3.2 Recommendations for Increasing Quantity of Participation

The researcher first asked participants how they felt the *quantity* of Latino political participation could be increased. Participants stated that before being able to take action

at even the most basic levels, for example by registering to vote or participating in elections, the community should have knowledge on the value of political participation, and how to become involved in political processes. “There’s a lack of understanding of the political process. They don’t understand the layers of policies, the powers of the state and what the federal government is supposed to do. If the foundation is weak, then the understanding is going to be even weaker.” As was revealed in the interviews, the confusion around the political process for many stemmed from significant differences between political processes in Puerto Rico and the United States mainland. “There are challenges because the Latino community that comes from the island is not accustomed to the way things work in the mainland. They don’t vote as often in Puerto Rico. Here you’re voting for every level, multiple times a year. So, the way you engage is different if you’re born here, or if you came from Puerto Rico and moved here”. This reinforced the idea that education was essential to empowering Latinos and Puerto Ricans in particular to become engaged.

The researcher next asked the focus groups whose obligation they felt it was to shape understanding and increase education and awareness for the Latino community. Participants were unable to reach a consensus on how this issue should be addressed. Some felt that the responsibility was on local leaders and organizations to assist members of the community (and in particular new arrivals) by sharing their resources and knowledge. “Grassroots movements by the community should take place to let the new community know what is happening. More and more people are interested in helping others out, getting the new Latinos informed and aware.” Others felt that the onus fell on community members to proactively seek out the information they needed to help

themselves. “If you want a better community, instead of complaining about problems going on, you need to take steps to contribute to better the community. It’s your own responsibility to become informed and participate in community activities.” Some participants argued however, that placing the responsibility on individuals would be ineffective because individuals tend to focus on personal needs rather than the needs of the greater community. One participant spoke from personal experience, and how her mindset had shifted from self-interest to a broader perspective. “Something had to happen to me, like a jolt, that propelled me or triggered interest in doing for others... and being involved... (becomes relevant) when there’s a need.”

This led to a discussion of individual versus collective mentalities and their influence on political participation. Several participants pointed out that in terms of the Latino community, the individual level refers to individual sub-groups (i.e. Puerto Rican, Colombian, Cuban, etc.). Participants felt that there was a significant amount of divisiveness between individual Latino communities that all fought for their own concerns and causes. “We’re still creating a community. We’re still debating our (collective) identity because there are so many subgroups.” As a result, they argued, despite having some of the same needs and goals, individual Latino communities often tended to focus on themselves rather than taking into consideration the needs of all Latinos. “People think selfishly instead of collectively, thinking ‘what is better for my community?’” Participants overwhelmingly agreed that promoting unity was the best approach to address this issue. “It’s about modeling behavior that promotes inclusiveness.” The needs of the greater community were deemed more important than the needs of individuals or in this case, individual communities. “There is nothing wrong with having your own interests for certain

issues but if we should think collectively and worry about the community as a whole. We can maintain an identity, our individual identity, but in order to bring out change, we have to think collectively.” One participant felt that a distinction needn’t be made and that it was possible to address both individual and collective needs. “Our issues are important but we have to identify with collective needs so once we are involved in other aspects of the community, then we bring our own individual needs to the table”.

4.3.3 Recommendations for Increasing Quality of Participation

The researcher next asked participants how they felt the *effectiveness* of participation could be improved. Although responses varied, they amounted to a few areas of focus: education, resources, access, and representation.

Education focused on politics, raising awareness of community involvement, was once again, the primary way they perceived overall quality of participation would increase.

The next proposed recommendation was to focus on resources. Having information and knowledge with which to educate was not enough on its own without the means for effectively communicating it. “(We need to be) putting resources into place to get the community activated. Education is important but you need (the money and) the resources to be able to develop materials that will reach the masses.”

Next, the discussion turned to the idea of access; that all members of the community should have a seat at the table and access to the political process. “We are so marginalized. There’s so little representation of people of color. We have to fight tooth and nail to get our fair share”. Furthermore, they felt activism should not be one sided. Yes, individuals should step up, advocate for themselves, and when possible act as

leaders for others. “(They need to be) getting involved in the community, creating new organizations to help themselves and help others”. Existing leaders however, also had the responsibility to actively engage with the community as well. “(The community should be) heard by a relevant voice. Community leaders should be involved with the community, hearing the community’s voice and their perspectives”

4.3.4 Social Capital as a Tool for Participation

The core of the focus group discussions was driven by the last research question – connecting Latina’s social capital to their political participation. First, participants were asked how they became involved in their current community efforts or activities. They were also asked whether they joined social network associations with the goal of supporting or being active in their community.

In addressing the first question, all focus group participants mentioned that they had arrived in Central Florida after first living in Puerto Rico. Although they had all been previously engaged or had an interest in political participation while in Puerto Rico, for some, moving to the United States came with different results. For some, it took some time to become involved. “I came here with no initial interest in being involved in the community. Then, something happened to me, personal challenges and struggles...it started with a need I faced”.

Upon first arriving in the States, some lacked social connections or a family foundation, but found that building relationships in their new communities helped them thrive. “You build family because you come here from other states or countries and you feel isolated. If you’re already driven to get involved, and you realize there are ways to

get involved and you build family with like-minded people. That's the very fabric of our community." Another participant also spoke about how connecting with community organization allowed her to adjust to her new life within the United States. "I had the desire to be active and be connected and build relationships for personal reasons and for the betterment of my community. It's about adapting and acculturating and getting involved – integrating into the new community, it helps to be part of these organizations."

One participant mentioned that not only did being active in social network associations empower her to become engaged in the community, but it also led to a career path with the government. "I fell in love with community work because (through these associations) I was working with commissioners, I found a passion for it and I became more and more interested in it over time".

For another, the ability to engage in the community was a matter of both personal and professional fulfillment. "My job and community work have always been a combination of both passions – social work and community support combined". One participant mentioned that being part of social network associations helped her feel more grounded in her life. "I've learned that in this community, you have to not just have awareness, but also be actively involved so you can be more (personally well-rounded) and stable". Another participant agreed with this perspective, that simply being in a social network association improved one's overall quality of life. "If more people (join these organizations) and have the opportunity to experience this, they would be more successful, happier, and more confident about the future of the community rather than being isolated."

The groups were next asked if they felt they were able to achieve their community support goals through their involvement in social network associations. All participants agreed that purposeful engagement in social network associations was the most effective way for them to get involved and successfully support their communities. Some specifically attributed their associations as a tool for engagement. “Being part of those associations helps. I got involved because I wanted to be part of the community. It has helped me make connections and move the needle on issues. I can do so much more; I can be directly in the community...”

For one participant, her career in the government had often felt like a limitation to community involvement, but joining social network associations allowed her to change how she engaged with the community, and some of her perceived limitations were no longer an issue. “Being part of (these social network associations) helps enable and empower me to give greater, broader support in a different way. I can reach many more people and support that through just my job – which is sometimes limiting. I can help many more people in different ways that just to go through my official role in the government”.

4.3.5 Perceived Social Roles & Political Participation

Since this study is driven by a focus on women as drivers of political participation, the final focus group questions sought to determine the participants’ perceptions of Latino and Latina social and political roles in the community.

Initial reflections were that participation between women and men differed due to their inherent natures. Women they argued, took action based on their desire to nurture.

“Women are more engaged, wanting to help, more maternal and nurturing. They want to genuinely help and take care of the community.” Perceptions of men’s nature were also discussed. “Men lead with their brains. We want to help from an emotional place; men from a logical place.” One participant felt that women were in fact more effective because of their desire to nurture and take care of those around them. “Women have vulnerability, a touchpoint that allows for faster and more meaningful connection that produces better and quicker returns. Women find solutions and get it done.”

While there were perceived differences in motivation between men and women, there were also commonalities suggesting that despite differences in core motivations, both men and women are equally dedicated to the roles they play for the betterment of their communities. “(Men and women) both bring the same passion, the strengths...both give themselves to it equally.”

Participants were also asked to share their perspectives on how men and women leverage their social capital – in the form of social network associations– as a tool towards political participation. There were some perceived differences between men and women’s use of social capital and how it impacted their roles in the community. “Women depend more on social relationships and associations, to make connections and help (the community). Men work more within the formal relationship and structured organizations to drive solutions and make an impact.”

Participants were also asked about perceived gender roles within the Latino community in Central Florida. Participants disagreed on community perceptions. Some felt that assumed roles were traditional in nature. “I still see that men have the macho mentality, even if there is a perfectly capable woman. They won’t allow her to be in any

sort of position of power simply because she's a woman." Others however, felt that attitudes had changed over time and that as a result, women had greater opportunities in their roles within the community. "It is assumed that women are going to be nurturers, the caregivers and not leaders. The men are usually at the front of the line, while the women stay behind – but this mentality is changing quickly. As women are more active and engaged, they gain more respect." Another supported this sentiment, arguing that Latinas in Central Florida had become leaders and effective change drivers. "Women, Latinas in Central Florida are really strong. We don't have any issues when it comes to doing, mobilizing, inspiring and being agents of change."

4.4 Interview & Focus Group Discussions

The results of this study indicate that as a whole, the study sample represents civically minded, socially connected, and actively engaged Puerto Rican women within the Central Florida community. The participant surveys completed during the interview process demonstrated that as a whole, despite their unique socioeconomic differences in age, income, employment, and education, they had more in common than differences between them. Given their high level of engagement, there is a strong likelihood that their socioeconomic backgrounds had an influence both on their desire and ability to engage in political participation within their communities. "Latinas who have a higher financial status, possess more civic skills, and are more involved with organizations are likely to participate at higher rates" (Bejarano, 2013 p. 556). The study participants also shared a passion for community involvement, and in particular for supporting the Puerto Rican community. They were also active as individuals and collectively through social network

associations and organizations in the community. The following summarizes how the interview results relate to and address the guiding research questions of this study.

4.4.1 What does political participation mean to Latinas in the Puerto Rican community in Central Florida?

Overall, this group of Latinas was found to be highly interested in politics and social issues with an understanding of the importance of being politically active. They found political participation to be highly relevant and they used it as a tool to address the needs and issues they felt existed among Puerto Ricans in Central Florida.

For most, involvement in politics and the act of voting was a matter of cultural upbringing, and it became part of their identities. For others, political participation was not automatic, it was a choice they actively made once given the opportunity. Regardless of how they became active in politics, they all shared the perspective that political participation is an obligation, a way to have your voice heard, and an effective tool for creating change. Many noted significant differences in their political engagement between their lives in Puerto Rico and the United States, but they all perceived that living in the mainland provided them with opportunities to truly have their voices heard and influence political decision-making in ways they were unable to on the island.

Despite some of the differences between them, they were all active voters, and all active members in various social network associations supporting the Puerto Rican and Latino communities. While several participants indicated being limited in terms of their political participation, it is interesting to note that they continued to engage in their communities, sometimes leveraging their professional roles and in other cases working around their limitations to continue driving relevant participation.

4.4.2 What are the factors that influence political participation among Latinas in the Central Florida region?

Study participants were primarily driven to act by social and political issues they deemed important and most relevant to their lives and communities. The more personally relevant the issues, the greater the likelihood they would participate in political decision-making processes. Although community issues were relevant to them, participants noted throughout the interviews that having an issue at stake does not guarantee action. Many noted that Latinos have relevant issues at stake but they either refused to take action, or didn't know how to, or faced barriers that prevented their engagement.

As a form of political participation, voting was highly relevant among the participants. For most, involvement in politics and the act of voting was a matter of cultural upbringing, it became part of their identities. For others, the option to vote was not automatic, it was a choice they actively made once given the opportunity. Regardless of how they became active voters, they all shared the perspective that voting is a right, an obligation, and an effective tool for creating change.

Based on the interviews, the primary influence on political participation outside of personally relevant issues, was cultural upbringing. Participants felt that political participation was an inherent part of their family history, their development and that it had carried on throughout their lives. The majority of participants felt that because of their core values, they were not only motivated to be engaged and involved in the political process, but they also desired to connect with others in their communities and in turn influenced them towards political participation. They primarily influenced their families, friends, and members of their respective local communities by modeling behavior (voting) and

educating them. There were many perceived gaps that these participants attempted to fill through their influence including a lack of knowledge and understanding of the political process, and the value of political participation.

Although many specific examples were raised in response to the identification of significant issues facing Latinos, all participants were most concerned with addressing disparities including lack of access to affordable housing, income inequality, access to healthcare, education, or other social inequalities that lead Latinos to be among the most disadvantaged minorities.

Overall, participants expressed, to varying degrees, some level of dissatisfaction with the government – whether federal, state or local – and the ways in which they addressed issues pertinent to Latinos. The greatest dissatisfaction seemed to be directed at federal and state governments. Most participants noted a sense of distrust and disappointment in the government's relationship with Latinos. Whether being out of touch, or failing to form meaningful authentic relationships within the community, participants felt that political leadership at the federal and state levels had failed the Latino community. These sentiments align with research that has shown that there is a disconnect and lack of trust and understanding between the Hispanic community and the government (PEW Research Center, 2010). Rather than developing lasting relationships with the Latino community, political leaders often choose to engage with Latinos primarily in the short-term to gain support during election campaigns. As a result, the ordinary citizen's perception of the electoral process is marked by cynicism and dissatisfaction with the nature of politics. Personal outreach and relationship building, whether by candidates or

their supporters, has been shown to spur Latino turnout, even when controlling for the effects of age, education, and income (DeSipio, 2006).

Feelings of satisfaction with the local government were more positive. They were credited for being more interested, responsive, and authentic in terms of their relationships with Latinos. A number of factors could account for greater positive perceptions of local versus state and national leaders including the fact that local decisions and actions may be more visible than those at higher levels. When discussed, many participants spoke about personal experiences they had with the government, relationships they had with local leaders, and the fact that they were often able to directly observe the ways in which local leaders behaved and made decisions. These perceptions could of course change over time depending on the current leadership in office. However, within this study, they seemed to motivate the participants to take action within their communities to either support the positive actions of leaders, or engage in ways they felt would address the shortcomings and mismanagement of leaders they felt were negatively impacting the Puerto Rican community. Improved relations between the government and community they argued, could ideally result in motivating Puerto Ricans to take action through political participation, becoming involved in ways that move the needle on relevant issues and improve their overall prosperity and quality of life in Central Florida and the United States.

Overall, participants felt they had few (if any) barriers to political participation, and the majority felt they were able to effectively engage within their communities. Despite feeling mostly satisfied in terms of their own participation, they recognized that significant barriers to participation existed for the Latino community. They perceived that members

of the community were often in a balancing act between their personal obligations, most of which would likely take priority over community engagement. Once again noting that factors including income and education were significant issues and potential barriers that prevented political participation, some argued that participation could be improved if the community was in a better socioeconomic position. Bedolla (2009) suggests that individuals of higher socioeconomic status are able to offset the “costs” of political engagement because they have more resources in terms of their capacity, time, and flexibility. Although addressing SES factors could lead to an increase in overall political participation, it also does not guarantee that participation will occur or increase (Berger, 2011). However, for the participants, it was a relevant place to start to address disparities, take burdens off the community, and allow them to become better engaged.

Finally, the participants were asked if they perceived that Latinos are engaged in their communities and if their political participation is effective. Among all participants, there were differences of opinion in terms of how much participation existed. Most perceived that Latinos were not active, or that current participation was simply “not enough”, while others felt that Latinos were highly active. Whether or not they felt that there was sufficient participation present in the community, they all agreed that there could be an increase in the overall quantity and quality of participation. When asked what forms of political participation would be most relevant for the Latino community to focus its efforts, participants proposed the following: engaging in political leadership, increasing relevant representation, and ensuring the community was properly educated on the political process and the value of community engagement.

4.4.3 If political participation is valuable to Puerto Ricans in the Central Florida community, what are the perceptions among Latinas in the given communities about strategies for increasing political participation?

Interestingly, there was little difference in the recommendations for how to increase the quality and quantity of participation. All participants agreed that increasing participation, both in quality and quantity, was necessary. There was also a strong consensus wherein participants felt members of the community should focus their efforts: taking on leadership roles, developing new community organizations, voting, and connecting with representatives, being some of the recommendations. First, through education; raising awareness of the benefits of community engagement, and also providing guidance on the political process. Second, by encouraging the community to think as a singular collective entity rather than disparate entities if at least to ensure that their common goals and needs were more effectively addressed. Participants also recognized that before engagement could begin, there were many challenges and barriers that needed to be addressed before participation could become a priority for most members of the community. Whether socioeconomic disparities, lack of awareness over the value of participation, or confusion over the political process, these barriers would continue to prevent relevant participation unless addressed in some way. Where the participants continued to be split in their opinions was on who should be responsible for addressing these barriers. Some thought the responsibility felt to the community itself. Every member whether new arrivals, or long-time residents, needed to take it upon themselves to not only improve their situations, but become engaged in order to contribute to the greater good. Finally, participants proposed that current political and community leaders also needed to build genuine relationships within Latino communities—

by taking the time to authentically engage, hear their voices, understand their perspectives, and address their concerns. Through these efforts, participants felt that Latinos could continue to increase both the quality and quantity of their political participation and in turn, move the needle to improve their quality of life.

4.4.4 How does Latina's social capital influence their political participation?

As related to the question of how Latina's social capital influences their political participation, the researcher observed a direct relationship between the use of social capital – involvement in social network associations – and successful community political participation. The group unanimously credited their knowledge and awareness of local needs and issues, their social and political connections and relationships, and for some even their personal and professional successes to being involved in social network associations. The idea here is that social engagement through voluntary associations helps individuals develop interpersonal relationships that empower them towards action as well as greater collective cooperation (Berger, 2011) They also suggested that other members of the community should leverage these associations as tools for engagement.

Literature demonstrates that women who are members of or are engaged in social network associations are more likely to be civically engaged than those who are not. Anderson (2009) posits that while formal political behavior such as voting often takes precedence in studies of political participation, there is value in looking to social forms of participation such as engagement in social networks associations. Social interaction through interpersonal networks provides information. People are able to interact, observe, and communicate with one another, all the while sharing and exchanging information. In

other word's a person's involvement in the community may actually heighten their person's awareness of and exposure to political information and potentially spark political discussion and/or action. The argument then is that social interaction, engagement in social networking, and informal associations bring with them the benefits of a sense of community as well as the potential for the development of organic political engagement and participation.

As for the question of whether Latinas can be drivers of political participation, Latinas in particular have the potential to drive engagement for the overall Latino community. Studies of Latino political participation suggest that Latinas strategically leverage their engagement in social network associations and focus their social and political engagement on making connections. "These connections involve connections between people, connections between private troubles and public issues, and connections that lead to political awareness and political action. It is through these connections that Latinas reflect a more participatory vision of politics that incorporates cultural needs and expectations" (Garcia & Marquez, 2011, p.204). For this study sample of Puerto Rican women, it can be concluded that social capital, through engagement in social network associations, was a valued tool. Given its perceived utility, it has the potential to empower the community towards political participation. Whether there is a willingness for Puerto Ricans in Central Florida to engage remains to be fully explored. However, it could be assumed that for members of the community with similar backgrounds, interests, and social capital to those of the participants, there could be a significant willingness to engage.

4.5 Application of Theory

The theoretical perspectives discussed within this study were selected to determine the relationship between individuals and their communities, and how they shape one another as relevant to political participation. A summary of this approach can be found in Figure 2.

4.5.1 Political Socialization

The theory of Political Socialization posits that there are factors that shape and influence an individual's development including their political and social beliefs, behavior, values. As noted in Chapter 2 of this study, these factors can range from an individual relationships and associations to external environmental within their communities. When questioned about the factors that influenced and motivated their political participation and active engagement within their respective communities, a number of elements aligned with influential factors discussed in Bronfenbrenner's *The Ecology of Human Development* (1979).

Participants spoke about the direct of influence of culture and family on the shaping of their political values and behavior (Microsystem), membership and participation in social network associations (Mesosystem), and being motivated and driven towards political participation due to the existing and emerging issues and needs facing their community (Macro, Exo and Chrono Systems). These noted influences are validated by Bronfenbrenner's theory that an individual's immediate and surrounding environments can influence social and political participation. "The environmental events that are the

most immediate and potent in affecting a person's development are activities that are engaged in by others with that person or in her presence" (p.8).

The Political Socialization theory is further affirmed in that several participants indicated that they were influenced by their families. Political Socialization theorists posit that parent-child relationships influence on their children's development. "Children learn their parents' values, beliefs, and attitudes through both direct teaching and indirect observation, as part of the information and guidance that children either actively seek out or passively accept in maneuvering their way through life" (Glass, 1986, p.686). Although parent-child relationships were not strictly specified by each participant, overall familial and cultural upbringing was noted; similar socialization connections could be made between these relationships. In addition, participations mentioned that because of the influence they received from their families, they in turn influenced their families and those within their personal social networks including children, family, friends, and peers to become active. Glass (1986) suggests that active engagement is leading by example; it gives them exposure and often motivates them to take on the same or similar actions.

Although participants within this study had different motivations for being socially and politically engaged in their communities, their individual contributions were collectively aimed at supporting the greater Latino community. One area of opportunity participants identified to improve the quality and quantity of political participation in Central Florida was a mindset shift among individual members of the community. Whereas individual behavior was often motivated by and focused on themselves, their own needs and interests, they argued, these same individuals needed to instead put aside their personal motivations and focus on taking actions that supported the needs of the Puerto Rican

community, or even better, the greater Latino community. Participants felt that if motivations continued to be focused on individual concerns, the needs of the community would not be as effectively addressed.

4.5.2 Social Choice Theory

The discussion of individual versus collective mentalities in decision making is the primary focus of the Social Choice Theory. Kenneth Arrow (1951) is credited with the development of the Social Choice Theory which posits that society makes collective decisions based on individual personal preferences or goals. It suggests that when individuals have interests in common and share a desire to achieve a common goal, they can come together collectively and make decisions for the good of the community.

The basic premise of the Social Choice Theory is simple enough; even in the face of inherent differences, individuals can come together to make decisions for the good of their collective community. However, literature evaluating the Social Choice Theory argues that individual social decision-making is complex, and it cannot be assumed and generalized that decisions are made simply because they are “for the greater good”. This would be an oversimplification of the individual decision-making process which is often layered (Sen, 1977).

Within this study, the researcher interviewed a small group of strategically selected members of the community, those that are already actively engaged through social network associations, they understand the value of political participation, and see the benefits of acting beyond their personal motivations in support of the greater community. These participants were asked to share their perspectives of the Puerto Rican and Latino

community in Central Florida and their political participation. What's missing here to understand the applicability of the Social Choice Theory is the perspective of the community itself. The study groups are only a small sample of the overall Puerto Rican community living in Central Florida. So, the community voices speaking to their motivations for and barriers to political participation are not fully captured here. The goal of this study was not to focus on the overall community, but to gain an understanding of whether Latinas, Puerto Ricans, could serve to increase and improve upon the Latino community's political participation. So, for purposes of this study, that greater perspective is not needed. However, those missing perspectives of the community are necessary to understand the application of the Social Choice Theory. Since the theory is designed to aggregate and study individual decision-making, there is little to evaluate here. Theoretically, the Social Choice Theory should apply to this study. However, based on the limited data collected and the population that served as the focus here, Social Choice does not seem to be relevant to this study, but it might serve useful in other areas for further exploration which will be discussed in the final chapter of this study.

4.5.3 Social Role Theory

The third and final theory explored in this study was the Social Role Theory. This study did not make assumptions about the relevancy of traditional gender roles within the Puerto Rican community. Instead it sought to determine what those gender roles and expectations looked like as identified by members of the community itself. Since the core of this study focused on determining whether Latinas could be changemakers and drivers of political participation for the Latino community, the researcher also sought to

understand whether the perceived (and actual) roles of Latinas would empower them to drive participation in relevant ways.

This line of inquiry aligns with Eagly's Social Role Theory which was developed with the goal of understanding the reasons behind differences between genders. Alice Eagly (2012) is credited as the founder of the Social Role Theory which argues that the behaviors between men and women reflect the assumed gender roles as perceived by the community's in which they live. These role assumptions turn into expectations that are shared, and in turn produce a type of social consensus that develops into an assumed social role structure.

Within this study, there were a number of varying perspectives shared about the role that men and women serve in the Central Florida community as related to political participation. Some perceived that the roles of men and women were aligned with traditional research – with men being seen as leaders in the community and women standing in the background. Much of the initial research about men and women's roles in society was founded upon the traditional division of labor within households; namely that gender roles reflect a society's assumptions of men as providers and breadwinners, and women as housewives and homemakers (Parsons and Bales, 1955) with the perception of greater importance and power being held by men.

Some of the characteristics perceived by participants of Puerto Rican women in Central Florida were that they tended to make decisions based on emotion, that they acted based on their nature to care for others around them, and that women have an inherent vulnerability about them. Men on the other hand, were perceived to be logical, leading with their brains over their hearts, and acting from a place of competition and

ambition. These sentiments also align with traditional role theory research which observed that in mixed-sex groups, men are more likely as compared to women, to focus on task accomplishment, and women on socioemotional health and stability, and the good of the collective (Eagly, 2000).

The Social Role Theory however, is flexible in that it assumes that gender roles are dynamic; that they can and do change. Within this study, some participants perceived that gender roles within the community were in fact changing over time. Perspectives on social roles assume that men and women's roles change for two reasons: intrinsic sex differences built in through evolution or due to their social environment (Eagly, 2000). Participants noted that Latinas had the opportunity to lead and represent the Latino community due to their ability to effectively find solutions to community issues. Eagly proposes that over time, men and women's societal roles (and presumptions about them) have also changed. The once traditional assumed roles are a thing of the past; women now have far greater opportunities that allow them have increased both their status and income, and therefore, their status within their communities. It should be noted that while Eagly does apply in general to this study, and the findings of this study align with many of the assumptions of this theory, the Social Role Theory does not focus on gender roles according to ethnicity or origin. It is possible that there are other theories that are more applicable and can assist in understanding gender roles within the Latino community in future research. However, for purposes of this study, the Social Role Theory remains applicable and relevant. It also follows then that other individuals from similar socioeconomic backgrounds could have a similar propensity towards higher levels of

political participation and that addressing socioeconomic disparities, or at least having an awareness of them could aid in engaging the community at their respective levels.

CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSIONS

In an effort to understand why political participation rates among Latinos have been historically significantly lower as compared to groups of other ethnicities and origins, this study examined the relevancy of political participation among Puerto Ricans in Central Florida as viewed through the perspective of Latinas. It sought to fill gaps and further the research (as summarized in Figure 1) on political participation, social capital, and the role of Latinas and Puerto Ricans in politics and political participation. It determined some of the motivators and barriers of political participation, as shared through the study participants. It also explored potential solutions for improving on the quality and quantity of participation among Puerto Ricans in Central Florida, through the perspective of the participants who proposed relevant tactics, areas where efforts should be focused, and issues they felt needed to be addressed in order to increase participation within the community. It also explored the potential of Puerto Rican women to drive political participation for the overall Latino community through the vehicle of social capital and social network associations in particular. This chapter presents study limitations, recommendations for future research, and concluding thoughts.

5.1 Limitations

The researcher conducted an in-depth exploration of the study sample through in-person interviews and focus groups. This approach was limited in that it captured only a small portion of the overall population through interviews with 12 individuals and 2 small focus groups made up of 6 total participants from the original participant pool. As such,

the findings of this study are not broadly generalizable to the broader population. It cannot be assumed that this study sample is fully representative of the opinions, sentiments, and experiences of the Latina or Puerto Rican community in Central Florida. Within this sample

This study was founded upon a number of theories about social capital and social network associations. Namely, that active membership and participation in social networks will lead to the development of a political mindset and behavior. The experience of Latinas in this study with social capital was a positive one. They concluded that their involvement with social network associations not only empowered and improved their political participation, but it also had positive impacts on their personal and professional lives. They also felt strongly about these associations being used as effective drivers of participation for Puerto Ricans and the greater Latino community. Some research argues that an individual's political behavior is influenced by more than just membership in an association or organization (Quintelier and Hooghe, 2011) and it cannot be assumed that just being a member lead to increase political participation. They also argue that the successful influence of social network associations on individuals is more likely due to others who are like-minded being engaged in the same network. Therefore, due to the fact that the study sample was selected based on specific criteria, it may be that individuals in the community with similar attributes and like-minded thinking could find social network associations to be a useful tool for political participation in the same way as the participants experienced.

This study focused on the individual level of actor to understand its relationship to the broader community by specifically looking at what political participation means to

Puerto Ricans, and drawing assumptions about what political participation could look like to Latinos as a whole. The danger with this approach is that it could potentially draw too many assumptions and connections between the individual and the broader population without taking into account other variables that influence collective mentalities.

Finally, the Social Role Theory suggests that men and women are inherently different and as such, they hold assumed roles within their communities. Participants in this study were asked whether they perceive the Central Florida community assumes that Latinas and Latinos hold certain social and political roles. Although the goal was to specifically ask Latinas their perspective, this admittedly presents a narrow and potentially biased opinion given that only women were questioned. The exploration of this particular inquiry would be more reflective of the population if Latino men were also included.

5.2 Future Research

Future research should first focus on studying a larger sample of the population. A greater number of individuals could be interviewed, and more focus groups could be assembled to create a broader overall picture of the community being studied. The researcher was unable to achieve full saturation across relevant demographic categories. Therefore, the true diversity of the participant pool was not fully representative of the community being studied. There was only one demographic (age) group that had saturation and greater consistency in responses due to the fact that nearly half of the participant pool fell within that category. Ideally, there would be saturation across all respective demographic groups not only for age, but for other categories as well. Whether the participants here are truly representative of the community as a whole or whether they

are a unique group whose socioeconomic status and backgrounds empower them to be socially and politically engaged in their community merits further exploration.

Although this study purposefully focused on a specific population, Puerto Ricans within Central Florida, this scope could be expanded to include additional Latino subgroups or other populations for a deeper exploration into Latino political participation. It could be beneficial to take a comparative approach and look at other groups within the state of Florida, namely Cubans, that have historically had an impact on Latino politics and compare their experiences to those of the Puerto Rican community. Perhaps the most well-known migration of Latinos to the United States is that of the Cuban population. Since the early 1960s, the U.S. Cuban population has grown to become the second largest subset of Latinos. Cuban Americans made up 6.5% of the total population in Florida and 34.3% of total residents in Miami-Dade as of 2013 (U.S. Census Bureau). The Cuban diaspora is not only significant due to the number of individuals that arrived in the United States, but because the Cuban American community has actually created demographic shifts and caused a reshaping of local and even national politics. While Puerto Ricans in Central Florida were the primary focus here, the Cuban population in the Miami-Dade area could be used to compare and contrast political participation between the two subgroups, perhaps shedding light on the distinct experiences that have resulted in high levels of participation for one group and significantly lower levels for the other.

Beyond expanding the scope of Latinos subgroups, the methodology here could be replicated to study political participation among various populations since it is not strictly limited to the exploration of Latino communities.

As related to the demographic sample studied here, Puerto Ricans, there is a potential for future research of this community in Central Florida given the influx of new residents post-Hurricane Maria. As alluded to by some participants, the impact of Hurricane Maria on Puerto Rico on the population as a whole – for those living on the island, those that migrated to the mainland, and those already living on the mainland – was anything but negligible. For some participants, this cataclysmic event seems to have changed the entire dynamic of Puerto Rican political and social participation. It has put the community as a whole into the spotlight in new ways. The impact of this mass migration is only just being explored and further research of this particular population and the ways in which they are and will continue to be engaged in their respective communities and in the United States as a whole, is warranted. It would be interesting to determine the impact of the event on the community's political participation. Or a comparative analysis could be performed focused on Puerto Ricans who migrated from the island and those already living in Central Florida to explore the differences in their perceptions of the event and its impact on their political participation.

In future studies, the same methodology could be replicated through interviews and focus groups of the Latina community, with an additional step. One could then take the perspectives of the participants and determine how they apply to other Latinas and the broader Puerto Rican community. A community survey could be implemented, exploring the same questions about their perceptions of political participation, the factors that influence them, and their relationship with social capital as drivers of political participation and comparing the results to determine how representative the sample is of the broader community.

Although the sampling strategy here involved random selection, about one third of the total study sample included government employees. Although the study findings did not seem to reveal bias, it could be argued that it would be difficult to completely eliminate bias from these participants. If the participants had more varied professional backgrounds their perspectives might be more reflective of the broader population. Future research could exclude government employees from the study sample to avoid the perception of potential bias. Furthermore, the participants in general had similar backgrounds in terms of their membership and participation in social networking associations. Although that was a purposeful decision for this study, it again makes the resulting data limited in its generalizability. As such, future studies should not only include a significantly larger study sample, but the selection of participants should be less purposeful and more randomized with the goal of being able to generalize to the broader population.

Finally, the scope of this study could further be expanded to include men and women. Although not strictly a limitation here because of the purposeful focus on Latinas, additional findings as explored through interviews and focus groups including both Latinos and Latinas could provide a more inclusive perspective on Latino political participation.

5.3 Conclusions

Given their numbers alone, the Puerto Rican community has the potential be a significant political power in Central Florida. An ever-increasing population, many coming from Puerto Rico within the last few years after Hurricane Maria, continues to change the face of the Central Florida community. On the national scene, Florida has become a pivotal state which is a “must-have” for presidential candidates, often being a key deciding

factor that impacts and drives political decision-making. However, as a political bloc, the Latino community remains largely absent and in danger of “being left without a seat at the table”. This is hardly fair to a group which represents nearly 26% of the population. Understanding political behavior is a complicated task and for that reason it must be approached from different angles. There are several compelling reasons that warrant a thorough investigation of the facts behind Latino disengagement and their lack of political participation. The influence of Latinos will disappear at a rapid rate if their lack of impactful engagement is mistaken for indifference. In short, there is an urgent need to continue exploring whether the problem stems from apathy, from a lack of education and awareness, or a failure on the part of government to meet its responsibilities, all reasons which have been posited here. This report serves as a starting point; a discussion of historical and current literature upon which an understanding of Latino political participation was developed.

The population for this study was purposefully selected. The researcher wanted to know more about Latinas, the relevancy of their political participation and how they leverage social capital to further that participation. While one could argue that these Latinas care about political participation because they’re already involved, the intent of this study was to work with individuals who already engaged, who already understood the value of participation and were driven to engage in their communities to explore and understand their motivations. That was the key on which this study was built, to determine if these women could be leveraged to drive political participation among those who were less engaged in their communities. It was also an exploration of what participation meant to this particular group. There are many assumptions about participation, what is and is

not relevant and impactful and about what individuals and communities should care about when it comes to participation. This study approached this topic without those particular assumptions about what was relevant or impactful and instead left it to members of the community to define it for themselves. Despite their differences they were collectively on the same page about participation, its relevancy, and the ways they leverage their existing social capital to engage and support their communities. There were also assumptions made about social capital and how specific vehicles could be used to further participation but this study wanted to explore the potential of those assumptions and let it emerge, again, letting the study sample determine its relevancy.

The primary takeaway from this study is that Latinas have the potential to influence political participation for the Latino community in Central Florida and the Puerto Rican community. What we can learn from this group is that for most of them, their relationships with political participation developed organically. It was part of their culture, their history, and they've found ways to be engaged that matter to them. Their relationship with the United States has also been unique, their relationships with voting on the island and the mainland is unique. It matters to them more because they couldn't do it there. They didn't have the same voice there as they do here and with that, they desire to motivate others to be engaged as well because they recognize the significance and importance of the opportunities they've been given. They recognize that in order to move the needle on matters they care about; they need to be engaged in relevant ways. By leveraging the power of highly active, socially connected, and motivated Latinas, there is significant potential for the overall Latino community to become increasingly engaged in both the quantity and quality of their political participation.

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL 1



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1
FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Meldin Graziani-Garcia**

Date: **April 02, 2018**

Dear Researcher:

On 04/02/2018 the IRB approved the following modifications / human participant research until 04/01/2019 inclusive:

Type of Review: UCF Initial Review Submission Form
Expedited Review Categories #6 and #7; n=13
Project Title: Bridging The Gap: An Exploration Of Women As The
Driving Force Of Political Participation Within The Latino
Population In Two Florida Counties
Investigator: Meldin Graziani-Garcia
IRB Number: SBE-18-13858
Funding Agency:
Grant Title:
Research ID: N/A

The scientific merit of the research was considered during the IRB review. The Continuing Review Application must be submitted 30 days prior to the expiration date for studies that were previously expedited, and 60 days prior to the expiration date for research that was previously reviewed at a convened meeting. Do not make changes to the study (i.e., protocol, methodology, consent form, personnel, site, etc.) before obtaining IRB approval. A Modification Form **cannot** be used to extend the approval period of a study. All forms may be completed and submitted online at <https://iris.research.ucf.edu>.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 04/01/2019, approval of this research expires on that date. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

Use of the approved, stamped consent documents (English and Spanish) is required. The new form supersedes all previous versions, which are now invalid for further use. Only approved investigators (or other approved key study personnel) may solicit consent for research participation. Participants or their representatives must receive a signed and dated copy of the consent form.

All data, including signed consent forms if applicable, must be retained and secured per protocol for a minimum of five years (six if HIPAA applies) past the completion of this research. Any links to the

identification of participants should be maintained and secured per protocol. Additional requirements may be imposed by your funding agency, your department, or other entities. Access to data is limited to authorized individuals listed as key study personnel.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

This letter is signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J Neal-Jimenez", written over a horizontal line.

Signature applied by Jennifer Neal-Jimenez on 04/02/2018 08:19:13 PM EDT

Designated Reviewer

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL 2



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Institutional Review Board

FWA00000351
IRB00001138
Office of Research
12201 Research Parkway
Orlando, FL 32826-3246

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

January 10, 2020

Dear Meldin Graziani-Califano:

On 1/10/2020, the IRB determined the following submission to be human subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Initial Study, Category
Title:	BRIDGING THE GAP: AN EXPLORATION OF WOMEN AS THE DRIVING FORCE OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION WITHIN THE LATINO POPULATION IN CENTRAL FLORIDA
Investigator:	Meldin Graziani-Califano
IRB ID:	STUDY00001169
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made, and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or irb@ucf.edu. Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Gillian Bernal
Designated Reviewer

APPENDIX C: LETTER OF SUPPORT



HAPBWA Foundation, Inc.
P. O. 2964
Orlando, FL 32801

December 7, 2016

University of Central Florida
College of Health and Public Affairs
Dissertation Committee for Meldin R. Graziani–Califano

To Whom It May Concern –

My name is Eva Pagán-Hill. I am the Past President of the Hispanic American Professional Business Women's Association (HAPBWA) and current president of the HAPBWA Foundation, the 501c3 non-for-profit half of HAPBWA dedicated to providing educational opportunities to enrich the professional and personal lives of professional women and men Central Florida. The mission of HAPBWA Foundation is to promote and increase the leadership and management capabilities of HAPBWA members and female students in our community through mentorship programs, higher education and professional development.

I am assisting Meldin Graziani-Califano with her doctoral dissertation entitled: Bridging the Gap: An Exploration of Women as the Driving Force of Political Participation within the Latino Population in Central Florida

I have agreed to support Meldin in her endeavor to complete her study and my role will be to assist Meldin in forming interview groups. I will help connect her to Latina (Puerto Rican) women within the Central Florida community that she can interview to determine what political participation means to them as well as their political participation motivations and barriers.

If you have any questions or concerns about my role in this study, you can contact me at evapaganhill@bellsouth.net

Sincerely,

Eva Pagán Hill, LMHC
President HAPBWA Foundation

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT SUMMARY (ENGLISH)

Summary of Study for Participants (English)

- **Study name:** Bridging the Gap: An exploration of women as the driving force of political participation within the Latino population in Central Florida
- **Researcher:** Meldin R. Graziani
- **University:** University of Central Florida, College of Health & Public Affairs

- **Study description and purpose:** The goal of this study is to determine the factors that influence Latino political participation in the state of Florida. Latinas in particular have been selected as the focus of this study because data shows that women's roles in society and politics differs compared to men. Latinas tend to drive the way in which their families, social circles and communities behave and they are in fact becoming significant community leaders.

- **Process:**
 - **Interviews:** Interview 10 Latinas in Central Florida (Orange, Polk, Osceola counties) of Puerto Rican origin, exploring their perspectives on political participation
 - **Focus Groups:** Subsequent focus groups may be created after the interviews to determine recommendations for how Latino political participation can be increased

- **Research questions:** This study aims to address the following research questions, with respect to political participation among Latinos within the state of Florida and the role of Latino women to drive changes in levels of political participation:
 - (1) What does political participation mean to Latinas in the Puerto Rican community in Central Florida?
 - (2) What are the factors that influence political participation among Latinas in the Central Florida region?
 - (3) If political participation is valuable to the Puerto Rican community, what are the perceptions among Latinas in the given communities about strategies for increasing said political participation?
 - (4) How does Latina's social capital influence their political participation?

As a participant in this study, you will be interviewed regarding your personal political participation habits within your community. Since the goal of this study is to determine the factors that influence and barriers that prevent Latino political participation, the researcher would like to know what types of participation you feel are most relevant for yourself and for Latinos in general; Also, what barriers or challenges you feel exist that prevent you and Latinos as a whole from being more active with your political participation. Finally, since data shows that Latinos are less politically active than individuals of other

racas/ethnicities/origins, the researcher would like to determine the strategies that Latinos feel are most relevant for them to increase their levels of political participation.

Interviews will take place at a date and time that is most convenient with your personal schedule. Ideally, the interview will take place in person, meeting with the researcher one on one in an environment that is most comfortable for you. This will be more of a casual discussion rather than a strict procedure.

The only information that will be collected from you is in reference to the questions mentioned above. No personal data (names, addresses, etc.) will be collected or shared in any way. There are no risks to participating in this study and there is no compensation. The researcher would like to record the interviews (sound only, no video) and create a transcript of the interview for research purposes only.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the research directly at 939-579-9777 or meldin@knights.ucf.edu.

Thank you for your consideration, your participation in this study is greatly appreciated.

Meldin R. Graziani

APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT SUMMARY (SPANISH)

Resumen del Estudio – Información para Los Participantes

- **Nombre de la Tesis Doctoral:** Bridging the Gap: An exploration of women as the driving force of political participation within the Latino population in Central Florida

(Cerrando la Brecha: El Proceso Explorativo de la Mujer como la Fuerza Impulsadora de la Participación Política dentro de la población Latina en la Florida Central)

- **Investigadora:** Meldin R. Graziani
- **Universidad:** Universidad de la Florida Central, Colegio Salud y Asuntos Públicos
- **Propósito y Descripción de La Tesis Doctoral:** El propósito de este estudio es determinar los factores que influyen en los Latinos en el estado de la Florida a participar en actividades políticas. La mujer Latina específicamente ha sido seleccionada como el sujeto de este estudio porque datos recientes demuestran que la función de la mujer en la sociedad y en la política difiere comparada a la de los hombres. Sus motivaciones son diferentes, y tiene el poder de influenciar en el comportamiento de sus familias, amistades, asociaciones, y comunidades hacia la acción política y de hecho se han convertido en significantes líderes en sus comunidades.
- **Proceso:**
 - **Entrevistas:** Entrevistar diez (10) mujeres Latinas (Puertorriqueñas) en la área de Florida Central (localizadas en los condados de Orange, Osceola y Polk) sobre sus hábitos y participación en la política.
 - **Grupos de Discusión:** Luego de las entrevistas, se formarán grupos de discusión para explorar y determinar recomendaciones sobre cómo se puede aumentar la participación política en la comunidad Latina.
- **Preguntas de Investigación:** La investigadora tiene varias preguntas que se exploraran y contestaran relativo a la participación política Latina en el estado de la Florida, y el papel de la mujer Latina y su potencial para influenciar las acciones políticas de la comunidad Latina. Las siguiente son las preguntas de investigación:
 - **(1)** En la Florida Central, que significa “participación política” para la mujer Latina en la comunidad Puertorriqueña ?
 - **(2)** Cuales son los factores que influyen en la participación política de las comunidades Latinas en el área de la Florida Central?
 - **(3)** Si la participación política es importante para la comunidad Puertorriqueña en la Florida Central, cual es la percepción de la mujer Latina acerca de estrategias para aumentar la participación política en estas comunidades?
 - **(4)** Como afecta la participación en organizaciones sociales a las Latinas?

Como participante en este estudio, usted será entrevistada acerca de sus hábitos en relación con su participación política dentro de su comunidad. Como el propósito de este estudio es determinar los factores que influyen y los obstáculos que evitan la participación de los Latinos en la política, a la investigadora le gustaría saber qué tipo de participación usted considera ser más relevante o importante para usted y para los Latinos en general.

A la Investigadora también le gustaría saber que obstáculos o retos cree que existen que le evitan a usted y a los Latinos en conjunto al estar más activos con su participación en la política (o cuales previenen participación política en) la comunidad Latina. Por último, y ya que los datos muestran que políticamente los Latinos están menos activos que individuos de otras razas, y/u orígenes étnicos, la investigadora también quisiera determinar las estrategias que los Latinos consideran ser más adecuadas para aumentar sus niveles de participación en la política.

Las entrevistas se organizarán a su conveniencia, basado en su itinerario. Idealmente, las entrevistas serán en persona, cara a cara con la investigadora y en un lugar que sea cómodo para usted. Esto será más en forma de una conversación casual y no un proceso formal.

La única información que será recopilada es la antes mencionada. Los datos personales (nombres, direcciones, etc.) obtenida como parte de este estudio no serán compartidos de ninguna forma. como parte de estudio. No hay ningún riesgo en su participación en este estudio y tampoco ningún tipo de compensación. A la investigadora le gustaría grabar las entrevistas (solo el audio y no video) y crear un informe de esta entrevista con el solo propósito de investigación.

Si usted tiene cualquier pregunta o preocupación relacionada con este estudio, por favor comuníquese con la investigadora directamente a su celular: (939) 579-9777 o por correo electrónico a meldin@knights.ucf.edu.

Gracias por su consideración y agradezco su participación en este estudio.

Meldin R. Graziani

APPENDIX F : PARTICIPANT SURVEY (ENGLISH)

Participant Survey

Ethnicity/Origin

- 1.) How do you identify your origin?
- 2.) Are you a U.S. Citizen (born in U.S.), Naturalized citizen (born in U.S. or Puerto Rico, or other U.S. Territory)? Or were you born in another country?
 - (a) A. U.S. Citizen
 - (b) Naturalized Citizen
 - (c) Born in another country
 - i. Which country? _____
- 3.) If you were born in another country, what would you say is the main reason you came to the United States?
- 4.) How many years have you lived in the Continental; United States?
 - (a) 0-5
 - (b) 5-10
 - (c) 10-15
 - (d) 15-20
 - (e) 20+

Socioeconomic Status

- 5.) What is your age?
 - (a) 18-29
 - (b) 30-44
 - (c) 45-59
 - (d) 60+
 - (e) Prefer not to answer
- 6.) What is the highest level of education you have completed?
 - (a) university or college or equivalent
 - (b) intermediate between secondary level and university (e.g. technical training)
 - (c) secondary school
 - (d) primary school only (or less)
 - (e) other _____
- 7.) Do any of the following statements apply to your present situation?
 - (f) In school

- (g) In university
- (h) In age-related retirement
- (i) In early retirement
- (j) Employed
- (k) Unemployed
- (l) Exclusively house wife/ house man
- (m) In military/community/voluntary social service
- (n) Other
- (o) None of the above

8.) If currently employed, what do you do for employment?

(p) Please provide a brief explanation _____

9.) What is your total annual household income?

- (q) Less than \$20,000
- (r) \$20,000 to \$34,999
- (s) \$35,000 to \$49,999
- (t) \$50,000 to \$74,999
- (u) \$75,000 to \$99,999
- (v) \$100,000 to \$149,999
- (w) \$150,000 to \$199,999
- (x) \$200,000 or more
- (y) Prefer not to answer

10.) What organizations or social network associations are you currently engaged in?

APPENDIX G: PARTICIPANT SURVEY (SPANISH)

Encuesta de los Participantes

Etnicidad/Origen

1. ¿Como identifica su origen?
2. ¿Es usted ciudadano de los Estados Unidos (nacido en los Estados Unidos), Ciudadano Naturalizado (nacido en los Estados Unidos, Puerto Rico u otro territorio de los Estados Unidos)? ¿O, nació en otro país?
 - a. Ciudadano de los Estados Unidos
 - b. Ciudadano Naturalizado
 - c. Nací en otro país
 - i. ¿En cual país? _____
3. ¿Si vino de otro país, porque es que vino a los Estados Unidos?
4. ¿Cuantos años ha vivido en los Estados Unidos?
 - a. 0-5
 - b. 5-10
 - c. 10-15
 - d. 15-20
 - e. 20+

Posición Socioeconómica

5. ¿Cual es su edad?
 - a. 18-29
 - b. 30-44
 - c. 45-59
 - d. 60+
 - e. Prefiero No Decir
6. ¿Cual es su nivel mas alto de educación?
 - a. Universidad o equivalente al colegio
 - b. Intermedio entre la escuela secundaria y Universidad (e.g. entrenamiento técnico)
 - c. Escuela secundaria
 - d. Escuela primaria (o menos)
 - e. Otra (por favor explique) _____
7. ¿Cuál de las siguientes representa su situación en la actualidad? Seleccione todos los que apliquen a su situación
 - a. Asiste a la escuela
 - b. Asiste a la Universidad
 - c. Retirada

- d. Empleada
 - e. Desempleada
 - f. Ama de casa
 - g. En el servicio militar
 - h. Haciendo trabajo voluntario en su comunidad
 - i. Otro, por favor explique _____
 - j. Ningunas de las antes mencionadas
8. Si esta empleado, cual es su empleo?
- a. Por favor explique _____
9. ¿Cual es su ingreso total anual?
- a. Menos de \$20,000
 - b. \$20,000 to \$34,999
 - c. \$35,000 to \$49,999
 - d. \$50,000 to \$74,999
 - e. \$75,000 to \$99,999
 - f. \$100,000 to \$149,999
 - g. \$150,000 to \$199,999
 - h. \$200,000 o mas
 - i. Prefiero no responder
10. ¿De cuales organizaciones o grupos es usted un miembro activo?

APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND PROMPTS (ENGLISH)

Interview Questions and Prompts

Political Behavior Questions

1. Are you interested in politics and social issues?
 - a. Yes/No – Try to get a brief response as to why

2. What roles do you play in your community? How are you active in your community?
 - a. What types of political action/behavior do you take part in?

3. Some people choose not to be politically active. One of the many forms of political participation is voting in elections. Are you currently registered to vote?
 - a. If yes, why did you decide to register?
 - b. If no, why have you chosen not to register?

4. Have you ever voted in a presidential election?
 - a. If yes, when was the last time you voted?
 - b. If yes, what motivated you to vote?
 - i. If no - Sometimes people are not able to vote for a variety of reasons. What was the main reason you did not vote?
 1. Did not have time/too busy
 2. Not interested in the election/politics
 3. Family emergency
 4. Did not like candidates
 5. Out of town
 6. Forgot about the election
 7. No transportation
 8. Lines too long at the polls
 9. Tried to vote but was told that I was not eligible
 10. My vote would not matter, I thought
 11. Sick/III
 12. Process is confusing/Too complicated
 13. Other

5. Thinking about the reasons why you are politically active, who or what do you feel influences you to be active?

- a. Prompts: Political leaders, News media, Peers (friends, co-workers), Family members
6. Do you feel you have influence over anyone's political behavior?
- a. If yes, who?
 - i. Prompts: Children, Other family members, Peers, Co-workers, Local community.
7. What do you feel are the most important issues facing Latinos today?
- a. Prompts: the economy, unemployment/jobs, education, crime, drugs, health care, race relations, immigration, welfare, environment, foreign policy
8. What issues matter to you most?
- a. Prompts: No specific leading responses, but if asked will provide examples including education, children, employment, immigration

Satisfaction with the State of the Nation

9. Thinking about the state as a whole, what do you think are the 3 most important issues facing Latinos in Florida, people like you today?
- a. Prompts: jobs, economy, education, schools, state budget, deficit, taxes, immigration, illegal immigration, crime, gangs, drugs, government in general, health care, other
10. Given your concern about these 3 issues, how well do you think the national government is addressing your concerns?
11. Given your concern about these 3 issues, how well do you think Florida's government is addressing your concerns?
12. Given your concern about these 3 issues, how well do you think your local government is addressing your concerns?

Barriers to Political Participation

13. Do you feel that you are able to contribute to your community effectively?
- a. If yes, please tell me about some things you'd like to do in your community that you haven't been able to?

- b. Do you feel that you are able to be as politically active as you would like to be?

Perceptions of Latino Political Participation

14. Do you think Latinos are politically active?

15. Do you think Latinos are effective in terms of their political participation?

- a. Only if they say Latinos are not very politically active: What do you think Latinos could do to increase their political participation? (Test this question to determine how it does in the interviews, follow-up in focus groups)

APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND PROMPTS (SPANISH)

Preguntas de Entrevista

Preguntas Acerca del Comportamiento Político

1. ¿Esta usted interesada en la política y asuntos sociales?
 - a. Si/No – Try to get a brief response as to why

2. ¿Que papel tiene usted en su comunidad? ¿Cuan de active esta usted en su comunidad?
 - a. ¿En que tipo de actividades políticas esta usted envuelta? ¿O en que participa?

3. Algunas personas prefieren no participar en la política o en asuntos sociales. Unas de las formas mas comunes de participar en la política es el votar. ¿Esta usted registrada para votar en la actualidad?
 - a. ¿Si la respuesta es si...porque decidió registrarse?
 - b. ¿Si no, porque decidió no registrarse?

4. ¿A usted votado en una elección presidencial?
 - a. Si la respuesta es si...
 - i. ¿Cuando fue la ultima vez que voto?
 - ii. ¿Que la motivo para votar en la elección?

 - b. Si la respuesta es no...
 - i. Yo entiendo que algunas veces las personas no pueden votar por un numero de razones o motivos. ¿Cual es la razón por la cual usted no voto?
 1. No tuve el tiempo
 2. No me interesa la política
 3. Tuve una emergencia
 4. No me gustaban/interesaban los candidatos
 5. Estaba fuera de mi hogar/del país
 6. Se me olvido
 7. No tengo transportación
 8. Las filas para votar son muy largas
 9. Trate de votar, pero me dijeron que no era elegible
 10. Pienso que el votar no tiene impacto
 11. Estaba enferma
 12. El proceso es muy confuso o complicado

13. Otro, por favor explique _____

5. Considere las razones por la cual usted es activa en la política. ¿Quién o que la motiva a ser activa? (Continúe si responde NO)
 - a. Opciones: Líderes políticos, las noticias, amistades o compañeros, familia
6. ¿Piensa usted que influye en las decisiones políticas de otras personas?
 - a. ¿Si la respuesta es si, quien?
 - i. Opciones: Hijos, otros miembros de su familia, amistades, compañeros, otros miembros de su comunidad
7. ¿Que piensa usted que son los asuntos mas importantes que enfrentan los Latinos hoy en día?
 - a. Opciones: La economía, el desempleo/empleo, educación, el crimen, drogas, cuidado medico, asuntos relacionado con la raza, emigración, ayuda del gobierno, el ambiente, política exterior
8. ¿Cuales son los asuntos que le importa mas a usted?
 - a. Opciones: (Nada especifico, pero opciones incluyen: educacion, los ninos, el desempleo, la inmigracion)

Satisfacción con el Estado del País

9. ¿En su opinión, cuales son los asuntos mas importantes afectando los Latinos en el estado de la Florida en la actualidad?
 - a. Opciones: Empleo, la economía, educación, educación, el presupuesto del estado, déficit, impuestos, inmigración, el crimen, las gangas, drogas, el gobierno (en general), cuidado medico, otra opción
- 10.) ¿Dado su preocupación sobre estos asuntos, piensa usted que el gobierno de los Estados Unidos se ha encargado de resolver estas situaciones?
- 11.) ¿Dado su preocupación sobre estos asuntos, piensa usted que el gobierno del Estado de la Florida se ha encargado de resolver estas situaciones?
- 12.) ¿Dado su preocupación sobre estos asuntos, piensa usted que el gobierno local se ha encargado de resolver estas situaciones?

Obstáculos Que Evitan La Participación

- 13.) ¿Siente usted que puede contribuir efectivamente al bien estar de su comunidad?
- a. Si la respuesta es si, por favor cuénteme algunas de las cosas que usted a podido lograr en su comunidad
 - b. ¿Piensa usted que usted puede participar en la política tanto como usted quisiera?

Percepciones de la Participación Política Latina

- 14.) ¿Piensa usted que los Latinos están políticamente activo?
- 15.) ¿Piensa usted que la participación política de los Latinos es efectiva?
- a. (SOLO SI DICEN “NO”) Que piensa usted que los Latinos pueden hacer para aumentar su participación política?

APPENDIX J: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS AND PROMPTS (ENGLISH)

Focus Group Questions & Prompts

- 1.) Do you feel Latinos need to increase their political participation?
- 2.) In what areas do you think Latinos should be politically active?
- 3.) (If focus group participants feel Latino political participation needs to increase and/or be more effective)
 - If you were to identify 3 ways to get the Latino community to be more politically active, what would those things be...? (Increase Quantity of Political Participation)
 - If you were to identify 3 ways in which the Latino community could be more influential or impactful, what would those things be? (Improve Quality of Political Participation)
- 4.) How did you get involved in your current community efforts or activities?
 - a. Did you get involved in your community and social associations because of your desire to support or be active in the community?
 - b. Do you think it helps you do what you want to achieve in the community because you're part of these associations?
- 5.) Do you think there are differences between men and women in the Latino community and the way they engage in their community?
 - a. I.E. are their assumed roles for each gender?
 - b. How do you feel men and women are different in their participation?

APPENDIX K: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS AND PROMPTS (SPANISH)

Preguntas del Grupo de Enfoque

- 1.) ¿Piensa usted que los Latinos deben aumentar su participación política?
- 2.) ¿En que áreas políticas piensa usted que los Latinos se deben envolver?
- 3.) (Si los participantes piensan que los Latinos deben de aumentar su participación, y/o ser mas efectivos)
 - a. ¿Me puede dar 3 ejemplos que demuestran como los Latinos pueden aumentar su participación política? (Nivel de Participación)
 - b. ¿Me puede dar 3 ejemplos que demuestran como la comunidad Latina pudiera tener mayor impacto? (Mejorar la “Calidad” de Participación)
- 4.) ¿Como se envolvió usted en la comunidad o en las actividades comunitarias en la cual participa en la actualidad?
 - a. ¿Se envolvió usted en grupos o organizaciones sociales porque tenia el dese te apoyar su comunidad?
 - b. ¿Piensa usted que ser parte de un grupo o organización social les ayuda lograr apoyar su comunidad de las formas en la cual desea apoyar su comunidad?
- 5.) ¿Piensa usted que hay diferencias entre los Latinos y Latinas en la comunidad en termino de las formas en la cual apoyan o son activos en sus comunidades?
 - a. (¿Es decir, piensa que se asume que los Latinos y las Latinas deben participar en la política o ser activos en la comunidad de formas especificas?)
 - b. ¿Como piense usted que la participación política es diferente entre los Latinos y las Latinas? How do you feel men and women are different in their participation?

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