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Latinos and So Cal Local Government

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LATINOS AND SO CAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Public opinion surveys can play an important role in decision making as they gather information that complements data from standard sources such as the Decennial Census and Current Population Survey. This Fact Sheet presents findings from a recently completed survey of Southern California residents (those living in the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura). Details of the survey can be found in the appendix. The information from the survey can help better inform elected officials about the public's concerns and priorities, such as how Latino residents feel about the region and about local government. Latinos' concerns about the region's top problems are similar to those of other Southern California residents, although they rank some problems differently. A majority of Southern California Latinos do have some degree of confidence in their local government, and actually have more confidence in local government's ability to solve problems that affect them personally than non-Latinos do. However Latinos are slightly more pessimistic about quality of life in the region.

LATINOS AND GOVERNMENT

As Latinos make up an increasing portion of the electorate in Southern California their views on government become increasingly important. For example, in Southern California Latinos compose just over 40 percent of the population and almost 30 percent of households according to the 2000 Census, up from 33 percent of the population, and 22 percent of households in 1990. Two thirds of Latinos in Southern California are of Mexican origin, although just over half of the Latino population in the region is native born. The California Department of Finance projects that in the year 2020 about 52 percent of the regional population will be Latino.

The Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) notes that "Latinos exceed all groups in California when it comes to trust in government" (2002). They explain that most California voters have very different values than Latinos. White voters, who tend to be affluent, suburban, and college educated, are very different from Latino voters, who tend to be more like ethnic voters of the past – "many are immigrants, have children, live in lower-income households, and reside in

big cities – qualities that provide a focus on meeting basic needs and a desire for government to offer more public services to help achieve the American Dream" (2002). This fiscal liberality is consistent with their greater trust in government at all levels, and its ability to perform its functions, according to PPIC. Our survey results indicate that Latinos do have slightly higher levels of confidence in local government than non-Latinos when it comes to solving the problems that affect their own family, but levels of general confidence are about the same.

LATINO CONCERNS, CONFIDENCE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

To identify the most pressing problems in Southern California, the Southern California Survey specifically asked respondents to name the top three problems facing the region. We developed a scoring system to determine the order of importance of problems among groups. We assigned a score to each response depending on whether it was the first, second, or third answer. First answers received a "4", second answers a "2" and third answers a "1". The results are displayed in Figure 1, which lists the top five problems for both Latinos and Non-Latinos according to these composite scores. While both groups identified economic conditions, transportation, crime, schools, and housing as the top five problems, the two groups ranked the problems differently. While Latinos ranked economic concerns highest, followed by transportation, crime, schools, and housing, non-Latinos ranked transportation as the most pressing concern, followed by the economy, schools, housing, and crime. Latinos do tend to have lower incomes than non-Latinos, which may account for economic concerns being a more crucial problem.

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RECOMMENDED CITATION

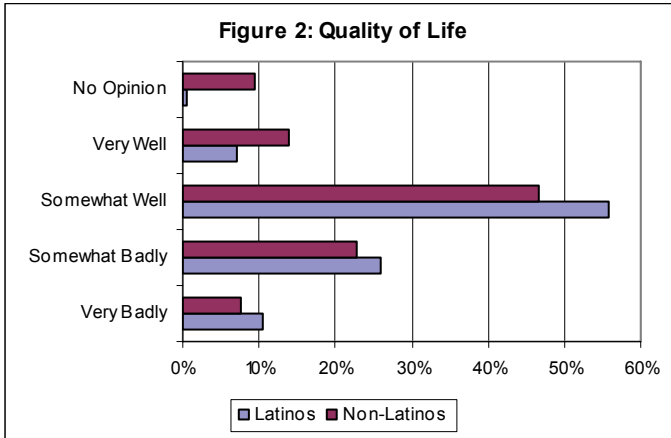
Haselhoff, K. & Ong, P. (2005). "Latinos and So Cal Local Government." *Information Sheet*, UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies.

Figure 1: Top Five Priorities

| Latinos | Non-Latinos |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Economic* | Transportation |
| Transportation* | Economic |
| Crime and Law Enforcement | Schools |
| Schools | Housing |
| Housing* | Crime and Law Enforcement |

* Significant differences between opinion of Latinos and non-Latinos.

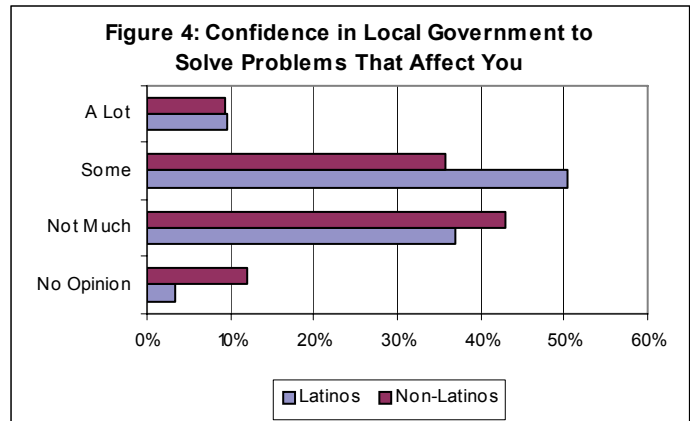
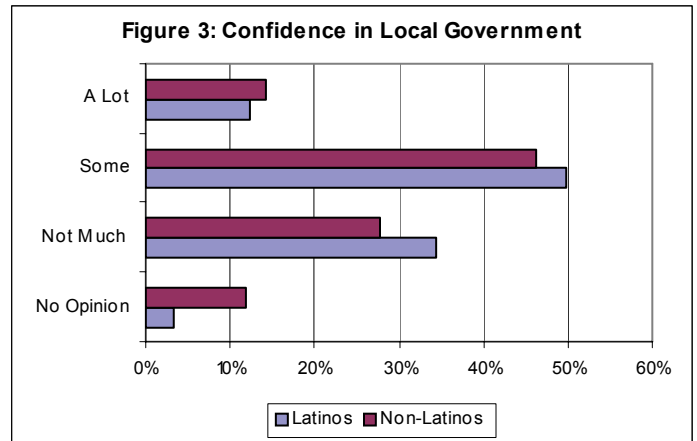
Overall Latinos are slightly more pessimistic about quality of life in the region than whites and other¹ ethnic groups (see Figure 2). When asked whether things are going very well, somewhat well, somewhat badly, or very badly, a majority of both Latinos and non-Latinos responded “well”, but non-Latinos were twice as likely to answer “very well.” More Latinos responded “badly” than non-Latinos.



Figures 3 and 4 display the responses to two questions about confidence in local government. We asked about general confidence as well as confidence in local government’s ability to solve the problems that most affect your own household or family. Latino responses to both questions were similar; just over 60 percent of Latinos have at least some confidence in their local government, while just over a third report “not much” confidence in local government. Non-Latinos were actually less likely to indicate a lack of confidence on the general question, but more likely to respond that way on the personal confidence question. Only 28 percent of non-Latinos lacked general confidence, but that percentage jumped to 43 percent when asked about confidence in local government’s ability to solve the problems that affect their family (only 45 percent had “some” or “a lot” of confidence, versus 60 percent for Latinos). So relatively, Latinos actually have slightly less general confidence in local government, but they do have more confidence in its ability to solve problems that affect them.

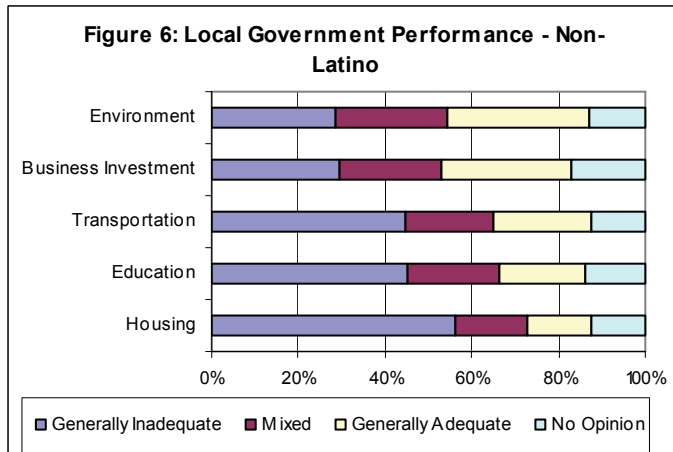
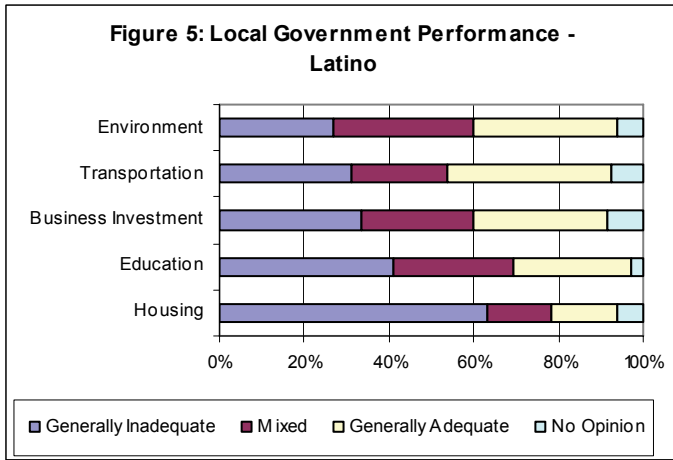
LOCAL GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

The survey also asked respondents whether the performance of Southern California’s elected officials in several different issue areas has been generally inadequate, mixed, or adequate. Overall Latinos are most pleased with local government performance on the environment, transportation and business investment, and not as pleased with their performance on education and housing (see Figure 5). These results were generally similar to the feelings of Non-Latinos, although there is much higher dissatisfaction with local official’s performance on transportation among Non-Latinos, 44 percent who said local officials were doing an inadequate job in this area, versus only 31 percent of Latinos (see Figure 6). Latinos also were more critical of government officials’ performance on housing, as 63 percent rated their performance as inadequate, versus 54 percent of non-Latinos.



DEMOGRAPHIC AND NEIGHBORHOOD DIFFERENCES AMONG LATINOS

We also looked for neighborhood and demographic variations on how Latinos view regional problems and local government. First we looked at the scores for problems in the region according to whether Latino re-



spondents lived in a majority Latino neighborhood or a minority Latino neighborhood. (Majority Latino neighborhoods are defined as those with Latino composition of 50 percent or more). While Latinos living in majority Latino neighborhoods were slightly more concerned with economic conditions and slightly less concerned with transportation and crime than those in minority Latino neighborhoods, the difference was only statistically significant for crime (see Figure 7). We also found that those in minority Latino neighborhoods were slightly more optimistic about quality of life, with 60 percent saying quality of life was going “somewhat well”, versus 51 percent of those in majority Latino Neighborhoods (see Figure 8). Conversely, 14.5% of those in majority Latino neighborhoods said things were going “very badly”, versus only 6.4 percent of those in minority Latino neighborhoods. Finally, Latinos who live in majority Latino neighborhoods have less confidence in local government generally, and in its ability to solve personal problems than do Latinos who live in minority Latino areas (although this difference was only statistically significant in the case of general confidence). There were no significant differences on ratings of local government’s performance on specific issue areas among those in majority or minority Latino neighborhoods.

We found few significant differences in these views according to a breakdown of Latinos by income or age. We calculated the median income for Latinos in the survey to be \$30 - \$39,000. Latinos making the median income or higher were more likely to say that quality of life in the region was going “very well” (11.6 percent) than those making less than the median (3.5 percent), but the overall percentage of those with median incomes or higher who indicated that quality of life was going “well” was only slightly higher (64.2 percent) than those with less than the median income (61.7 percent). Similarly, older Latinos (those age 36 or older) were twice as likely to have confidence in local government’s ability to solve the problems that most affect them than younger Latinos were (12.6 percent versus 6.2 percent), but overall the percentage that had at least some confidence was almost the same in both groups (about 60 percent).

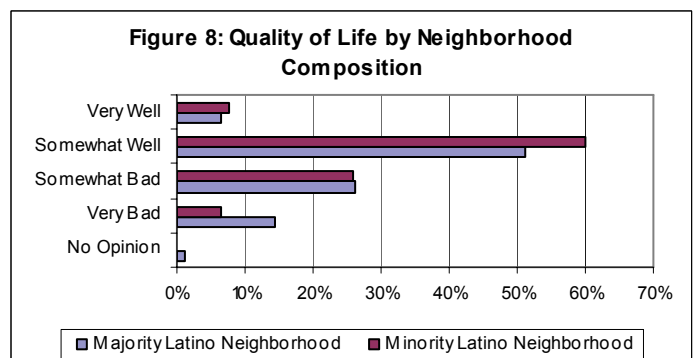
CONCLUSION

While we do see slight differences between the views of Latinos and non-Latinos, overall it appears that the opinion of both groups on Southern California’s problems and local government performance are more similar than different. This is good news for policymakers who have to craft programs and policies that cut across ethnic and demographic groups, and take into account the views of a growing Latino electorate. Although measuring the diversity of views within the Latino group was somewhat limited by the size of our Latino sample, it also appears that the views of Latinos are fairly similar regardless of age, income, or the neighborhood where they reside. Knowing that the concerns of these various groups tend to overlap should help inform the public agenda in Southern California.

Figure 7: Top 3 Problems by Neighborhood Composition

| Majority Latino | Minority Latino |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Economic | Economic |
| Crime | Transportation |
| Transportation | Crime* |

* Significant differences between opinion of Latinos and non-Latinos.



¹ Other” includes Asians, African-Americans, and mixed ethnicities, as well as respondents who did not indicate their ethnicity on the survey.

APPENDIX: SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY, 2005

The 2005 Southern California Public Opinion Survey is supported by the UCLA Ralph and Goldy Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies and is designed to gather the views and opinions of Southern California residents on critical public policy issues in this region. The survey was developed with input from the campus and community organizations. UCLA units include the Center for Communications and Community, the Institute for Transportation Studies, the Center for Civil Society, and the Anderson School of Management. Three public agencies participated in the process, the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), the Metropolitan Transportation Agency (MTA) and the Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation (LAEDC). Several UCLA faculty provided valuable input: Professors Vickie Mays, Michael Stoll, Brian Taylor, Amy Zegart, Frank Gilliam, Helmut Anheier, Chris Thornberg and Ed Leamer.

The 2005 Survey gathered basic demographic data and covered seven topical areas: 1) major issues facing the region, 2) the efficacy of local government, 3) transportation, 4) the state of the regional economy, 5) housing, 6) civic engagement, and 7) major disasters. When possible, questions were worded to parallel existing questions from other surveys.

The Survey was conducted in English and Spanish during the months of January and February 2005 using random digit dialing, and the data were collected by The Social Science Research Center at California State University, Fullerton. There are 1544 completed surveys for the five counties: Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura. The sample is divided proportionally by county household population. The characteristics of the sample by age, ethnicity, income and home ownership categories are consistent with the 2004 March Current Population Survey. There is a sampling error of +/- 2.6 percent at the 95 percent confidence level for the full sample. (Sampling error may be larger for subpopulations).

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