



## Latino Communities and the Climate Crisis

Climate change is here. Wildfires, storms, droughts and heat waves are intensifying across the United States and the world. If we don't act, it will only get worse, causing more harm to our communities.

Climate change affects everyone in the United States, but it has an enormous and unequal impact on the health, livelihoods and well-being of Latinos.

Latinos currently make up [18%](#) of the U.S. population, a number that's expected to [grow to 28%](#) by 2060. As the Latino population grows, it is critical for policymakers to recognize the unique vulnerabilities [environmental racism](#) and climate change force Latinos to face, and prioritize solutions that help this community.



### Climate change profoundly impacts Latino communities

#### Most Latinos live in states on the frontlines of climate change

A [March 2020 Latino Decisions poll](#) found that 78% of Latino voters said they have experienced the impacts of climate change. This reflects the fact that 54% of Latinos live in California, Texas and Florida, states that have experienced increasingly destructive extreme weather events fueled by climate change.

Hurricane Maria forced [4% of U.S. residents living in Puerto Rico](#) to move to the mainland United States in the year following the storm. One year after Hurricane Harvey hit Texas and Louisiana, 27% of Latinos whose homes were damaged by the storm [said](#) their living conditions were still not safe, compared to 10% of white area residents. Historically, government spending has also prioritized the most valuable property for flood protection, [benefiting wealthier and whiter areas](#), not those who have the hardest time recovering from a disaster.

#### Latinos are affected by climate change because of where they work

Latinos in [agriculture](#) make up 57% of farm laborers, graders and sorters collectively, and in [construction](#), Latinos represent 27% of the labor force. These sectors involve work that takes place mostly outdoors and is often in close proximity to environmental hazards and climate impacts. Workers are deeply affected by [extreme heat](#), hazardous air pollution from increasingly destructive wildfires, and more.

## Latinos are impacted by climate change because of where they live

Latinos are [21% more likely](#) than whites to live in urban heat islands, which can be [up to 22 degrees Fahrenheit](#) hotter than rural and suburban areas, because a large portion of city surfaces are covered in pavement and concrete and lack tree cover. As we continue to break heat records, the impacts from extreme temperatures will likely become more severe.

## Economic disparities threaten the resiliency of Latinos to climate change

The [average wealth](#) of Latino households is only \$6,300 compared to white households who have an average net worth of over \$140,000. The wealth gap translates to lack of access to health care, quality housing, exposure to higher levels of pollution, and Latino families' [ability to quickly recover](#) from major storm events exacerbated by climate change.

This gap is driven in large part by the [gender pay gap](#), which is greatest for Latinas compared to any other racial group. Latinas earn 54 cents for every dollar paid to white men. According to the [Leadership Conference Education Fund](#), "Wage gaps also harm the individuality of working Latinas and limit their social and economic mobility. Even with higher education, the wage gap persists."

An unequal economic playing field translates into disproportionate impact from climate change driven weather events. For example, rising temperatures mean increasing energy bills. Projections show that without any climate action, energy demand [could increase](#) by up to 3% by 2040 and as high as 16% by the end of the century in some states. Yet 45% of [Latino households](#) have already reported challenges paying their energy bills, as of 2015. Energy efficiency plays a key role in keeping energy bills low; however according to Census data, Latinos are [more likely](#) to live in older, less energy efficient homes than the general population.

## Climate change worsens air pollution, exacerbating inequities

Discriminatory federal lending and other exclusionary policies have led to housing segregation while allowing pollution hotspots and toxic dumping grounds to be concentrated in lower income communities. Due to this legacy of racism, Latinos are more likely to live in areas with high exposure to hazardous waste and high concentrations of air pollution than the white population in the United States.



- Scientists calculated that Latinos on average breathe in [63% more](#) particulate air pollution than they create through their activities and consumption compared to white U.S. residents who breathe in *17% less* particulate air pollution than they create. Particulate matter, including soot, can penetrate deep into the lungs and cause lung disease, heart attacks, strokes, asthma and cancer. Fossil fuel combustion is a top source of both particulate air pollution and climate pollution.
- Extreme weather driven by climate change can also make the pollution burden worse for Latinos. For example after Hurricane Harvey, the petrochemical industry reported releasing 320 tons of extra toxic pollution in Houston, nearly all of it concentrated [within four miles](#) of a neighborhood that is 98% Latino.

- 48% of [Latinos](#) in the United States live in counties that frequently violate standards for ground-level ozone, a key component of smog, compared to 32% of white U.S. residents. Smog can irritate human airways, increasing the risk of serious heart and lung diseases. Warming temperatures are [expected to increase](#) this harmful air pollution. Reducing air pollution is critical for Latinos, because Latinos are [twice as likely](#) to go to the emergency room for asthma than white U.S. residents.

## Information and service gaps exacerbate climate and health impacts

Latino populations in the United States do not have equal access to resources and protective measures. For example, in Flint, Michigan, information and resources to deal with the lead water crisis [did not reach](#) some Latinos, particularly those who require access to information and materials in Spanish, are apprehensive of government services, or are undocumented or mixed status Latinos. Latinos also have [lower](#) access to health care coverage to deal with health risks worsened by pollution and climate impacts.

## COVID-19 has hit the Latino community hard, because of these and other factors

Early analysis [indicates](#) that COVID-19's severity and fatalities are dramatically higher among those with heart disease, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases. Long-term exposure to air pollution contributes to many of these diseases and makes them more dangerous. Latinos' higher exposure to pollution, combined with the disproportionate number of Latinos making up the essential workforce and lack of access to adequate health care coverage, contributes to Latinos making up [29% of all U.S. COVID-19 cases](#), based on data available as of September 2020.

## The many benefits of climate action

Despite the tremendous risks climate change presents, taking action now to reduce climate pollution would give us opportunities to create more prosperous futures for Latinos and all communities. These include:

- **Healthier communities:** With equitable policies in place, a cleaner future will mean avoiding the worst impacts of a rapidly changing climate — such as stronger storms, wildfires, heat waves and drought — and cleaner air in local communities. And by reducing dependence on dirty power plants and polluting vehicles and ensuring protections for those facing the greatest risks, we can increase overall health and quality of life for Latino families and all communities.
- **Good jobs:** Moving toward a clean future will create new job opportunities as investments in projects that modernize and clean up all sectors of our economy grow. California, Texas, Arizona, Florida and other parts of the country with growing Latino populations [are primed](#) to add hundreds of thousands of jobs in solar and wind energy, energy efficiency and related sectors in the coming years. Already, the share of Latinos working in solar and wind is [2-3%](#) higher than the average share of Latinos working across all industries, showing substantial potential for good jobs in the clean energy sector with the right policies in place.



## Polls show Latinos care about climate change

- A March 2020 Latino Decisions [poll](#) conducted with EDF Action found that nationally 76% of Latino voters said it was very or extremely important that the president and the Congress take steps to pass legislation to aggressively combat global warming.
- The poll also found that Latino voters support clean energy, with 85% saying they are more likely to support a candidate who wants to invest in clean energy compared to a candidate who wants to expand oil drilling.
- 2019 polling conducted by the Yale Climate Change Communication Center [found](#) that Latinos are even more “alarmed” or “concerned” about global warming than U.S. white or Black residents. It also found that Latinos rank global warming higher on their list of election priorities than other racial and ethnic groups.

## What you can do today

- **Fight for a clean and just recovery.** As we move to repair our COVID-battered economy, we have a chance to make our communities more resilient, cleaner and just than they were before. We need to urge our nation’s leaders to rebuild better by investing in U.S. clean energy to create more jobs and lessen pollution.

Investing in clean energy will help produce cleaner air for more communities and help families recover, especially if we prioritize these investments in Latino and other communities of color that have been hit hard by the health and economic impacts of COVID-19 and the climate crisis.

- **Talk to your family and friends about climate change.** Discuss how climate change has affected your community, and follow-up with why you are concerned. Latinos are the most concerned group, but many still think that most other Latinos are **not** concerned, according to polls. Growing awareness about the climate crisis within our own communities is crucial to taking action.
- **Go vote:** Voting allows us to have a say in the future we leave our children. While there are [32 million](#) eligible Latino voters in 2020, lack of engagement, voter suppression, and other factors have resulted in [less than half](#) of eligible Latino voters casting a ballot in recent elections. Everyone should continue to engage and mobilize eligible Latino voters to register and vote and work to stop voter suppression.
- **Get involved:** Latinos must use their leadership, positions and agency to bring climate change to the forefront of policy conversations and priorities at the local, state and federal levels. This includes inspiring more Latinos to run for public office, be civically engaged, and to advocate to their representatives for equitable, comprehensive climate change policy.

