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Equitable Access to Voting Practices in Marginalized Communities

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Equitable Access to Voting

Practices in Marginalized Communities

By

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelors of Arts in Social Justice and

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Abstract

For two hundred years Americans have had to fight for the right to vote, yet it is still an ongoing challenge for many communities, the Latinx community in particular. In this study I analyzed what factors determine an individual's access and participation in the voting process, focusing on the Latinx community in the Canal District of San Rafael, who are impacted by the barriers intended to limit their ability to vote. This study used a mixed methodology to understand these factors with the aim of providing guidelines for supporting marginalized voters. In addition to using qualitative data from interviews with people who participated in voter advocacy, my findings incorporated literary analysis of three political memoirs written by prominent figures of color: Barack Obama, Kamala Harris, and Sonia Sotomayor in order to provide the perspective of people that are actively involved in politics and impacted by these barriers. The findings of this study indicated that the process of creating a safe space for marginalized voters to participate in elections includes providing adequate access to voting, resources that address the myriad of emotions that affect voting practices, political engagement at the family and community level, and educational resources on voting issues. All of these factors highlight what resources need to be provided in order to focus on creating a safe and inclusive space for participation in the voting process in the Canal District of San Rafael.

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Literature Review

Throughout history, major political movements have focused on the development of public policies that protect the right to vote for marginalized communities. The 15th Amendment was a major step forward for African American men, but Southern states heavily rebelled. As a result, the Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965 to protect their right to vote. Presently, voting policies are once again at the forefront of American politics, as current voter fraud claims during the 2020 election are resulting in Voter ID policies being passed, despite the fact that those claims of fraud have been disproven. Understanding and addressing the issues surrounding voting policies on a state and federal level is important as those policies disproportionately impact people of color, perpetuating a problem that these laws were designed to fight.

In what follows, I will discuss three main themes in the academic literature on the various factors that affect voter participation and accessibility throughout history. First and foremost, I will be defining and identifying different modes of political participation to get a better understanding of the historical context surrounding political movements in comparison to current tactics. Second, I explore the push and pull between the 15th Amendment and the Voting Rights Act, both of which were intended to promote voting accessibility for minorities. Third, I analyze how current voting tactics – gerrymandering, voter fraud claims, technologies such as crosscheck, etc. – have negatively impacted voter turnout, specifically in proportion to the Latinx community already hindered by a variety of challenges in terms of voting.

Modes of Political Participation Are a Spectrum

There are a myriad of ways that citizens can approach political participation. For hundreds of years political participation has evolved with generational changes, technological advances, and new legislation. One way of looking at political participation is to break it into two

broad categories: conventional and unconventional. Kaim (2021) explains that "conventional participation is understood as activities related to the electoral process and unconventional participation is defined as protest behavior. Protest behavior is linked to illegality and violence." (p. 53). This definition is a simple comparison of conventional and unconventional modes of participation, and Kaim goes on to elaborate that political participation should be viewed as a spectrum because it's not quite that black and white. It does however provide a good framework for an initial analysis of current modes of political participation.

Over the last two hundred years, political participation has taken many forms. The First Amendment gave us the right to protected speech and the right to gather together and protest, which is something that has influenced every political movement. The complexity of a social movement is worth analyzing, as the lines between a movement and a protest often get blurred. Brittanica defines a social movement as "a mixture of organization and spontaneity. There is usually one or more organizations that give identity, leadership, and coordination to the movement," (Turner, et al., para. 5), while a protest can be understood as the disapproval of a political act through sit-ins and marches. A protest does not necessarily equate to being a social movement, though a social movement can begin with a protest. This complexity is also present when comparing the difference between a movement and a protest: being protected by the First Amendment arguably renders both of these tactics conventional modes of participation. However, there is often a cultural perspective that protests can become violent, which means protests are more often viewed as being unconventional ways of participating, a prime example of the spectrum that was referenced. Over the last several decades in particular the impact of protests has expanded with the advancement of technology and reliance on social media.

In our current technological age, protests have taken on a different shape given that many people rely heavily on technology to politically participate. Social media, for example, plays a large role in modern day politics. In the last thirty years or so, social media has had an impact on voting patterns that has been challenging to analyze. Authors Frimpong and Nkrumahp (2022) point out that "the relationship between online political participation in SM [social media] concerning connections with political activists and the impact on voting patterns appears unclear," (p. 4). Theoretically, with the rise of the use of the internet and the reliance on social media, political participation should have increased as people had more access to widespread information. According to a study done by the Pew Research Center, "20% of social media users have used the tools to follow elected officials and candidates for office," (Raine et al., 2012, para. 11), providing an accessible resource for learning about people that could end up or already are in positions of power. Understanding what political information is reliable though continues to be a problem, and the heavy reliance on Facebook as a news outlet is impactful to the way that people choose to participate. Facebook is not as reliable as a verified news source, and "Baby Boomers are the most likely to see political content on Facebook that supports their own views: 31% of Baby Boomers on Facebook who pay attention to political posts say the posts they see are mostly or always in line with their own views, higher than both Generation Xers (21%) and Millennials (18%)" (Mitchell et al., 2015, para. 9) showcasing the fact that if someone has already received inaccurate information, it's going to be reinforced somewhere on their feed. Though the voting patterns themselves are challenging to analyze, the way information is shared and circulated clearly impacted subsequent political movements.

The way information gets shared online is also prevalent when looking at how involved people get in lobbying during elections. Lobbying is a proactive way for citizens to make their

voices heard, reaching out to their representatives either in writing or orally to push for specific legislation change. It provides an opportunity for citizens to use their voices and show their representative what issues are important to the community. Though lobbying was not always effective, there had been a number of issues over recent years where lobbying has resulted in direct legislation at the state and national levels, from "the citizens who lobbied Congress and helped save Obamacare; the gun-rights advocates who have been so effective for decades; the gun-control advocates — led by high-school students — who lobbied the Florida Legislature to pass a bill in 2018," (Leonhardt & Philbrick, para. 16). These efforts are indicative of the3 progress that can be made when people use their voices, especially when it can reach a broader audience via social media. Politicians are meant to represent the best interests of their constituents, and the efforts made through lobbying are a powerful way of displaying the priorities of the community.

Having an understanding of the different ways in which people choose to participate politically provides a foundation for understanding the historical relevance of past social movements in comparison to what currently influences political progress. By analyzing the variety of ways people have historically chosen to participate, focusing on the process of African American citizens obtaining the right to vote with the 15th Amendment and the contrast with the current hindrances on Latinx voters with the voter fraud claims, a framework is provided to analyze what modes of political participation are effective and why they were effective at that point in time. In order to develop a solution for the existing barriers that Latinx voters face when trying to vote, the framework provided by comparing what political efforts have been effective in the past and how those efforts have been undermined is crucial to utilize in continuing to participate going forward. Efforts made with protests can be effective, but they can also be met

with violence. Social media creates access to information, but the legitimacy of that information is not guaranteed. Lobbying puts people's voices to use, but that does not necessarily override the motivations of politicians. The current barriers for the Ltinx community are being pushed back against, but how we choose to do that is the key to actual progress.

The Fifteenth Amendment and the Voting Rights Act

After the Civil War, America was deeply divided about how to deal with the Southern states' attempt to succeed from the Union. After the South lost the war though, the Republican party needed African American to be able to vote so that they could entrench its power in both the North and the South ("Background of the Fifteenth Amendment"). President Johnson initially refused to sign the Amendment, at which point the Republican dominated Congress vetoed his decision. With the 15th Amendment passed in 1870, a politically motivated African American community teamed up with their white allies and elected the Republican party into a position of power, leveling the playing field back in their favor. Adding the Fifteenth Amendment established a new cultural standard, since when the constitution was written the Founding Fathers did not consider equitable access to voting (in this case for men) a crucial human right. It was not seen as something that needed to be provided for citizens and protected by the federal government. By adding it to the Constitution, the claim was made that having the right to vote was a constitutional right.

Despite the South's reliance on the African American vote to secure their political power after the war, leaving voting rights up to the states provided an opportunity for Southern states to undermine the Fifteenth Amendment. Although African Americans now had the right to vote, it was increasingly challenging for them to utilize that right in Southern states, facing literacy tests that barred them from voting, registrations being thrown away, voting taxes they could rarely

afford, and physical intimidation that led to lynchings, a "a widely supported phenomenon used to enforce racial subordination and segregation" (Equal Justice Initiative, 2017, para 3) in a multitude of Southern States. Though not every attempt for an African American citizen to vote led to them being lynched, it was a major tactic used to prevent them from voting. Between 1870 and 1950, nearly 4,500 African Americans were lynched in the United States (Equal Justice Initiative, 2017, p. 4), predominantly in the more conservative Southern states. The South may have needed African Americans to vote initially so they could secure a more Republican seated government, but after that they made it clear that African American citizens should be barred from voting with their white counterparts.

The challenges that African Americans faced when trying to vote did not fade with time, and more than eighty years later this was still a very big issue in certain parts of the country. The turning point in terms of public policy came during the Civil Rights movement. In his memoir, Barack Obama frequently talks about moments where our country has been increasingly divided, where the tension within our communities can lead to discourse and violence. He talks about how "the civil rights movement arrived, a movement that even in its early, halcyon days fundamentally challenged the existing social structure and forced Americans to choose sides," (Obama, 2021, p. 27); this idea is clearly reflected in what happened in Selma, Alabama. In what came to be known as Bloody Sunday after it was broadcast across televisions nationwide, a peaceful march in Selma quickly turned violent. Citizens were marching from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama to protest the denial of voting rights to African Americans as well as the murder of 26-year-old activist Jimmie Lee Jackson, who had been fatally shot in the stomach by police during a peaceful protest. Initially their march was peaceful, but when "the marchers crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge [they] found themselves facing a line of state and county

officers poised to attack. When demonstrators did not promptly obey the officers' order to disband and turn back, troopers brutally attacked them on horseback, wielding weapons and chasing down fleeing men, women, and children" (A History of Racial Injustice, para. 2), which outraged citizens across the country.

In his memoir, Obama (2021) mentions the higher standard that African Americans are held to, and that particular moment of our history is reflective of that–"it's the added weight that many minorities, especially African Americans, so often describe in their daily round–the feeling that as a group we have no score of goodwill in America's accounts, that as individuals we must prove ourselves anew each day, that we will rarely get the benefit of the doubt and will have little margin for error," (p. 236). Even when the protesters stayed peaceful, they were beaten and injured simply for utilizing their constitutional rights. If a white man had been beaten after peacefully protesting, that march would have played out very differently. The rising tensions in the South, now being broadcasted all over the United States and around the world, led President Johnson to pass the Voting Rights Act in 1965, intended to solidify the legitimacy of the Fifteenth Amendment and to enforce the federal legislation onto the more resistant states. President Johnson claimed that the VRA would "help rid the Nation of racial discrimination in every aspect of the electoral process and thereby ensure the right of all to vote," (Congressional Digest, 2019, p. 9), which proved to be more challenging than he anticipated. As with the Fifteenth Amendment, making it illegal to hinder someone from trying to vote simply because of their race, gender, or socioeconomic status is easier said than done.

In recent years, there have been several pieces of legislation that undermine the Voting Rights Act that Johnson passed. On a state level, redistricting in Alabama in 2022 limited the participation of African Americans, which is a direct violation of the Voting Rights Act.

Alabama participates in a gerrymandering process known as "packing and cracking," which means that "black voters are either concentrated in that district so they are a supermajority there or spread out across the remaining six districts so that their voting power is diluted," (Totenberg, 2022, para. 3). African American voters only have a shot at electing their chosen candidate in 1 out of the 7 districts, despite the fact that 25% of the population in Alabama is made up of African American citizens.

On a national level, Supreme Court decisions, such as Shelby County v. Holder, considerably limit voting rights and undermine the efforts of both the 15th Amendment and the Voting Rights Act. In 2011, Shelby County Alabama filed suit asking a federal court to declare Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act unconstitutional, because it was "requiring certain jurisdictions with a history of discrimination to submit any proposed changes in voting procedures to the U.S. Department of Justice or a federal district court in D.C. – before it goes into effect – to ensure the change would not harm minority voters" (Brennan Center for Justice, 2018, para. 2). They argued that those requirements were unconstitutional since they were discriminatory against certain areas. Both the federal court and the court of appeals both deemed Section 5 constitutional, but when the case made it to the Supreme Court, they sided in favor of Shelby County since the formula used to decide which areas should be covered by Section 5 was outdated. When Section 5 was deemed unconstitutional, it allowed certain states and counties to enact policies that could be harmful towards minority groups without needing any kind of approval from a higher branch of government until Congress can determine a new formula.

The efforts made on both state and national levels to undermine the Fifteenth Amendment and the Voting Rights Act are a prime example of how important legislation is to protecting the voting rights and effectiveness of African Americans and other ethnic minorities. The

progression of the social movements that led to those public policies is important to note though, because "while the existence of widespread poverty and suffering might seem sufficient to give rise to efforts at reform, it must be emphasized again that some basis for hope must also exist to stir people to make the effort" (Britannica, 2023, para. 30); without this hope, none of those policies would have been put in place at all. Though there is still work to do, throughout history there have been moments where the hope and perseverance of a group of people willing to let their voices be heard has led to changes in public policy.

Modern Methods Used to Inhibit Voting

As our culture and society has evolved, so have the tactics that people use to inhibit minority groups from being able to actively vote. Over the course of the last fifty years in particular, several tactics have been utilized to limit the participation of the minority; gerrymandering, voter fraud claims, and the creation of crosscheck have all led to a decreased minority voter turnout. Gerrymandering heavily limits the impact of the minority vote and often inhibits members of minority communities from becoming elected officials where they can represent their communities. The voter fraud claims present throughout the last few elections in particular have incited fear and distrust among voters. Those claims have led to the creation of crosscheck, a technology used to "combat" voter fraud that ultimately just keeps ethnic minorities from being able to vote. All of these factors heavily contribute to the decreased number of minority voters over the last few elections, especially the 2008, 2012, and 2016 presidential elections (Anderson, 2021, p. 136).

Gerrymandering has been a prevalent issue in many areas, as it dilutes the impact of the minority vote. In essence, "racial gerrymandering is designed to create an all-white power structure virtually impervious to the rights, claims, and public policy needs of people of color"

(Anderson, 2021, p. 143), which directly contradicts all of the federal legislation that has been intended to encourage and protect the voting rights of minorities. Different states often gerrymander by restructuring their districts, lumping communities of color together, which leads to a lack of representation in their communities because their vote is no longer as impactful. As mentioned earlier, "packing and cracking" is very common in states such as Alabama, and the Shelby County v. Holder ruling makes it more acceptable for those types of practices. Gerrymandering is more challenging to see from within, so it is something that can easily be overlooked by a community whose voice is not being represented.

Minority voices are also being limited by the influx of voter fraud claims over recent years, claiming that fraudulent voting is heavily impacting elections. Republican's claims of voter fraud is not a new concept–for decades they have been claiming that voter fraud is an out of control problem, using it as an excuse to suppress voter turnout in marginalized communities. Though this is not new for Republicans, it has become clear that "in recent years, concerns about voter fraud have grown louder, leading to calls for legislation to require voter identification and citizenship documentation. Such legislation has a cost, as experience shows it reduces the turnout of eligible voters," (Groarke, 2016, p. 1). These claims have gotten more concerning, as Groarke (2021) continues to elaborate that "time and again, concerns about the danger of fraud have been raised to defeat legislation designed to expand access to the vote," (p. 1).

The claims of voter fraud have proven to be incredibly rare, yet because of how widespread and consistent the voter fraud claims have become, nearly 50% of Americans believe this to be a very big issue (Anderson, 2021, p. 142). The inaccurate claims about voter fraud would be less dangerous if they didn't lead to people taking action in an attempt to combat this issue. For example, thirty years ago the Republican National Committee was told to cease its

"ballot security" measures, but with the heightened claims of voter fraud, "the RNC recruited tens of thousands of volunteers to show up at polling places, mostly in inner cities, and challenge voters' eligibility using a host of tools and tactics, including cameras, two-way radios, and calls to Republican-friendly sheriffs," (Blake, 2012, para.1). This fear of intimidation spread much farther than just at the polls, where citizens were harassed about the legitimacy of their citizenship and voter eligibility. Kamala Harris' (2021) memoir extensively talks about the way that fear plays a role in who turns out to vote, explaining that in the last decade, "all Latinx immigrants– whether citizens, legal residents, or undocumented–experience the fear of deportation at the same rates," (p. 148), determining whether or not they'll do certain things such as vote, take their children to the pediatrician, or go to parent teacher conferences. Claims of voter fraud lead communities of color to fear the voting process, negatively impacting voter turnout.

The fear surrounding voter fraud has not just stemmed from minority communities, but other communities as well, leading to the creation of crosscheck. The supposed voter fraud present throughout elections led some states to develop a technology that compares the list of registered voters to the DMV database with the intent of removing duplicates or anyone not legitimately registered. This became quickly problematic for citizens of color, especially since "of [the] nearly 35,000 registration forms that were canceled or placed in 'pending status' for the data mismatches from July 2013 to July 216, nearly 64 percent were submitted by blacks," (Anderson, 2021, p. 114), meaning there were thousands of African American citizens who were suddenly ineligible to vote. Anderson continues to explain that "roughly 14 percent of all black voters were purged from databases under the guise of preventing 'double-voting' and 'fraud'," (Anderson, 2021, p. 122), which is especially important to keep in mind, given that the voter

fraud claims have been repeatedly debunked. They were not the only minority group heavily

impacted by this technology though, it was detrimental to minorities across the board, in every

state. For example, "Asian Americans and Latinos were more than six times as likely as white

voters to have their applications halted," (Anderson, 2021, p. 114) a clear representation of how

this technology is directly impacting the accessibility of voting for marginalized groups and that

it is directly targeted towards them. Technologies such as crosscheck make it significantly easier

for different states and communities to prevent people of color from voting using "legal" tactics.

All of these issues have led to a consistent decline in minority voter turnout, especially

since the 2008 presidential election. Anderson comments on how "fifteen million new voters

came to the polls in 2008. They were overwhelmingly black, Latino, Asian…Sixty-nine percent

of these new participants in democracy voted for Obama, and as a result, America had its first

black President," (Anderson, 2021, p. 87), a prime example of how important it was for those

groups to participate; it literally changed history. Over the last few years though those numbers

have drastically changed as state and federal measures have undermined voter turnout, making

people feel like their voice is insignificant. The comparison between the 2012 and 2016

presidential elections was also significant - "take Cleveland…a town where 69 percent of the

voters went for Obama in 2012. By 2016, however, the percentage of voters for the Democratic

candidate had dropped to 66%, while the Republica share stayed virtually the same," (Anderson,

2021, p. 107). Though it may be illegal for states (or even federal) policies to discriminate or

hinder a particular group's ability or desire to vote, there are numerous ways that they have been

able to skirt the system. The presence of gerrymandering–arguably legal given the Shelby

County v. Holder ruling–makes a communities' voice diluted and unheard. The voter fraud

claims have led to fear and mistrust when it comes to voting, making people question the

legitimacy of the process. The development of technologies such as crosscheck have taken the voter fraud claims to an entirely new level, literally removing people's registration from the database entirely, making it impossible for them to vote. These factors are all intrinsically linked to the choice people make to participate in elections; the level of fear, distrust, and apprehension present make it increasingly difficult for someone to take the necessary steps.

Conclusion

The existing academic literature on political participation provides a detailed summary of legal advancements and setbacks for voting rights throughout history. The 1st Amendment gave citizens the right to gather, to speak freely against the government, the right to protest, yet those efforts can be met with violence. The 15th Amendment was a landmark moment in history, meant to give African Americans the protected right to fully participate in our democracy. The violence, intimidation, and disregard they faced in many states undermined the purpose of the Amendment in an attempt at silencing their voices. The Voting Rights Act was put in place to combat that violence and intimidation, and opposing voices simply found new ways of undermining it–gerrymandering, "packing and cracking," the Shelvy County v. Holder decision that gave Southern states a more legal way of keeping African American votes limited. Policy changes have been made on both a federal and state level to protect citizens' right to vote, but there has been a push and pull between the efforts made with those policies and the efforts of those that oppose them that influences the progression of political participation.

The academic literature also provides a framework for understanding the various modes of political participation people have engaged in throughout different movements in U.S. history. The existing literature provides background information about the slow progress made during political movements in terms of voting rights and provides comparisons about what has been

effective and what has not. Progress is still progress though, and despite the challenges that were faced when citizens tried to participate - voting fees, literacy tests, harassment, violence, registrations being removed, etc. - people's insistence on using their voices to fight for voting rights has allowed political movements to continue moving forward. From the peaceful marches during the Civil Rights Movement to the information often shared amongst friends and family on social media to the legislation passed by federal and state governments, it has become clear that there are a number of impactful ways to participate politically that evolve over time.

What is currently lacking in the academic literature is an understanding of how to best create a safe space for people to learn how to utilize their voices and participate in political processes; a lack of understanding or fear of the process itself can lead to frustration that impacts someone's participation. Moreover, seeking guidance in the voting process includes a certain amount of vulnerability, so it is important to understand what can be done to make people feel comfortable enough to take that step. The factors that impact or motivate someone's willingness to participate in the political process is rarely analyzed, meaning it rarely gets addressed.

Methodology

Research Question

It took more than a hundred years for citizens of color to obtain the right to vote, and yet it is still challenging for marginalized communities to participate in this fundamental right. Given the rise of Latino voters over the last ten years in California (NALEO Educational Fund, 2022), my research aimed to examine what factors inhibit or motivate voter participation and compared these themes to insights shared in the political memoirs of Barack Obama, Sonia Sotomayor, and Kamala Harris.

Description and Rationale for the Research Approach

My research was guided by multiple social justice theoretical frameworks: Cultural Humility Principles, Asset-Based Approach to Research, and Accompaniment. These frameworks guided my interview questions and my approach to research. The three main Cultural Humility principles, life-long learning, understanding that people are complex and multi-dimensional beings, and fighting institutional power imbalances (Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998) guided my initial research efforts as they provided the foundation for the entirety of my research. Lifelong learning is crucial for the development of us as individuals and as a community; it must be intentional and consistent for progress to be made. As students, it could be easy to take the privilege we have for granted. I am privileged in many ways, and I had to keep that in mind when conducting research, as it creates an open mindedness and empathy for those that I was seeking to better understand. My experience working with the Canal District residents was eye-opening to my own positionality within the community. As an English speaking citizen, I have rarely felt as out of place as I did being in a community that predominantly spoke Spanish. It was the first time I had truly experienced what it felt like not

having a voice. This understanding encouraged my involvement with the voter outreach Canal Alliance was doing, reaching out to people to see if they were registered or had any questions, helping facilitate presentations geared towards explaining the process of voting, and helping residents fill out their registration cards.

The next framework that informed my research design is an Asset Based Approach to Research, which is an approach that builds on already existing capital within the community (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). Asset Based Approaches to Research focus on building the values and skills the community possesses and elevating resources people can utilize to create a better life for themselves. Canal Alliance and the League of Women Voters were already taking steps towards providing information about the voting process to a number of people in the community and working towards getting as many people involved in the process as they can. With my research, I hoped to use this foundation to better understand how to create equitable voting processes for the entire community. The League of Women Voters had made thorough and extensive videos about the pros and cons of the propositions that were on the most recent ballot, going over the depth of the ballots, the funding, and the impact voting yes or no for a particular proposition will have on the community. These efforts provided a foundation for people to make their best judgment about how they should vote. The League is non-partisan, so their efforts were designed to make sure people could vote with the most accurate, up to date information rather than trying to sway people in one direction or another. Canal Alliance focused specifically on explaining the voting process for citizens that may have immigrated to the United States and weren't familiar with our voting system. Both of these organizations were creating impactful resources for a number of people within the community, and the primary goal of this research was to further their efforts.

The last framework I used while constructing my research design was Accompaniment (Farmer & Weigel, 2013), by focusing on building relationships with the understanding that we were working side by side to understand the ballot initiatives and the voting process. I hoped to make a positive impact on the community with my research because, despite my privilege and my educational resources, I also struggled with our voting system. I am not exempt from the confusion most feel over the convoluted language of the ballots and the policies present on them, nor did I feel comfortable with all the nuances of the process to vote. Even as someone that has the privilege of English being their primary language and having the opportunity to study that at a university level, it still takes work and dedication to understand the voting process. As much as any member of the community, I faced these challenges and sought to understand them better. The understanding that I did *not* understand this process as a whole provided me with empathy for those that struggle with this, as well as a drive to learn more about how we could make these resources even more accessible for the community. My involvement with both the League of Women Voters and Canal Alliance had provided an opportunity to learn more about the efforts they are already taking and to build my own knowledge base about the voting process itself - in order to make it better, I had to first understand how and why it's so important to vote. I was able to take that information and share it with both organizations after I had gained a more thorough understanding; the disconnect between the two communities meant that many things got lost in translation (both figuratively and literally). By sharing information I had learned with both organizations during their respective interviews, they were able to enhance their responses based on a clearer understanding of the other side.

Research Design

Research Site and Entry into the Field

During the fall of 2022, I had two community partners that I worked with: the League of Women Voters, and Canal Alliance. Both partners provided relevant, unique perspectives to my research about equitable voting practices in this community as their cultures and approaches were vastly different. The League of Women Voters worked to not only empower voters, but to protect and expand voter's rights by encouraging people to exercise their right to vote. This was a national, non-partisan organization, with branches all over the United States. Canal Alliance is a nonprofit organization exclusively located in San Rafael that works to empower and enable Latinx citizens to help break the cycle of poverty present in the community. They partner with numerous organizations in Marin county to provide resources that would not otherwise be available, including Legal Aid, College Prep, voter outreach, and a bi-weekly food pantry.

The Marin branch of the League of Women Voters is where I worked during the fall of 2022. Before the 2022 election, their primary efforts were focused on educating as many people as possible about the upcoming ballots. They created extensive presentations about all five of the propositions on the November 2022 ballot, providing information on where funding came from for each ballot initiative, what the proposition focused on, and what would be the result of voting for or against it. My role with them was unique. Since they are a brand new community partner for the Service-Learning Department at Dominican University, I helped facilitate Dominican's ongoing relationship with them, overseeing the other service learners, and seeing what ways I could assist them with their efforts by fine tuning and contributing to their presentations. Personally, I had an interesting position working with the League; I was often the youngest person present, but the majority of the members were also white presenting women like myself.

In that sense, I had no issues fitting in with the community. The efforts made to build our relationship gave me a great opportunity for interacting with different League members, which was slightly more challenging as everything has been conducted over zoom.

On the other hand, I had the opportunity to make connections in person in the community while doing service learning with Canal Alliance. Dominican has a long standing relationship with Canal Alliance, although it was a new community partner for me in Fall 2022. To build relationships within the community, I participated in some of the food pantries, as well as worked closely with the director of project management to help facilitate voter outreach. Those efforts were especially important, not just because of my lack of history with the community, but also because of my newfound role within it. The majority of the Canal district in San Rafael is Latinx, with nearly everyone primarily speaking Spanish. As a White, monolingual English speaker, it was more challenging for me to connect with members of the community given the language barrier. While there, everyone always smiled at me, asked questions about school (that were often translated by the project manager), reinforcing the opportunities I missed out to connect more fully with community members.

Sampling Procedures

While I worked with Canal Alliance, I asked the director of project management and a volunteer involved in voter outreach to be interviewed. Both interviews were conducted via zoom and recorded for easier transcription later on. I also reached out to the director of League of Women Voters (the Sonoma/Marin branch) to help facilitate connecting with other members. I reached out via email to members to find members willing to be interviewed. Participants from the League of Women Voters all chose to conduct their interviews over zoom as well.

Participants

Participants of my interviews were Canal Alliance volunteers as well as members of the League of Women Voters. These participants were of varying ages and education levels. The members of the League of Women Voters that participated were white, English speaking women from Marin county. The Canal Alliance volunteers were both Latino, bilingual Spanish speaking community members. There were four interview participants, all of whom had pseudonyms used.

Pseudonym	Organization	Position	Language Ability	Age range	Gender	Ethnicity/ Race
Riley	Canal Alliance	Director of Community Engagement	Bilingual Spanish and English	30-35	Female	Latino
Charlie	Canal Alliance	Community Resident who is ineligible to vote	Bilingual Spanish and English	30-35	Female	Latino
Lucy	League of Women Voters	Volunteer	English	50-55	Female	Caucasian
Sally	League of Women Voters	Volunteer	English	50-55	Female	Caucasian

Instruments for Data Collection

The primary instruments used for data collection were interviews conducted in the community, either over zoom or in person, or from field notes collected from my personal experiences working in the community. The interviews conducted varied slightly based on which individual was being interviewed. Interviews conducted with members of the Latinx community consisted of fifteen questions geared towards better understanding how accessible information

about voting feels for the individuals and how that impacted their voting efforts (see Appendix A for interview questions in English). Members interviewed from League of Women Voters had interview questions more focused on how they got involved with the efforts being made by the League and what led them to believe that it was an important effort (see Appendix B for interview questions). My field notes were initially saved on my phone in the form of audio recordings and bullet points saved in my notes (to capture as much detail as possible) and then transcribed electronically after the fact to better connect the themes present in my academic readings to what I was seeing and experiencing in the community.

Procedures

All four interviews were conducted over zoom, and each interview was thirty to forty-five minutes, varying based on the depth people answered the questions with.

To build rapport, I started all of the interviews off by explaining that if they did not want to answer anything, we would simply skip the question and that nothing they shared with me would be shared without their consent. None of the interviewee's names were used in my study. My beginning questions were all focused on simple facts that could put the participant at ease (how long they had lived in Marin, which area they live in, etc). The questions then progressed towards being more anecdotal. I asked more in depth questions about what it was like for them when there was an election coming up, times they had ever been excited about an election, times they had been deterred from voting one way or another because of an experience they had had or over something they had heard. As the conversation continued, I often asked follow up questions to hear more about a particular experience. All four half hour long interviews were conducted over zoom, screen recorded, and listened to after the fact so that they were transcribed accurately.

Data Analysis

During the interviews, notes were made about body language (facial expressions, hand motions, etc), receptiveness to questions, mood, and tone. After transcriptions, interviews were coded with notes in brackets throughout transcriptions about repetitive themes. Expected codes based on the literature review included education, language barriers, fear of intimidation, unfamiliarity with voting processes. Unexpected codes that were identified included the role emotion and personal relationships impacted voting participation The initial coding of the transcripts included peer coding to allow unique insights to emerge from diverse perspectives. All field notes were also coded using the open coding process, with notes made in brackets to further identify consistent coding patterns.

After initial coding a concept map was created with the initial codes to identify emerging themes in the data. The concept map was debriefed with peers to allow for different interpretations of the data. During peer debriefing relationships between the emerging themes and the research questions were explored.

Using the concept map, I then returned to the transcripts and completed focused coding to identify specific data (e.g., participant quotes or recorded observations) that either supported or contradicted the emerging themes. Next, I returned to my concept map to revise themes based on the results of the focused coding. Finally, the identified themes were used to answer the research questions, and specific data was identified as evidence to support the conclusions for each research question.

I also utilized the analysis of the three political memoirs to better understand the way that education, deep familial ties, and involvement in community engagement for prominent political figures of color provided an opportunity to overcome existing systemic barriers. This analysis and understanding provided a framework for recommended tactics that could be applied and

utilized within the Latinx community, as the systemic barriers present in the memoirs are reflected in this community as well.

Validity

The first main threat to the validity of my research was reactivity, which is defined as "how the presence of the researcher affects participants' behavior or the researcher's positionality affects the ways in which participants respond to the researcher's questions" (Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design, 2013, p. 31). As a white, English speaking student, my own positionality could have a negative impact on the way participants of the study responded to questions, telling me what they think I wanted to hear rather than what was true for them individually. Having a Spanish speaking member of the community facilitate the interviews I had with individuals who only spoke Spanish helped counter that possibility. The presence of a familiar face meant that interviewees gave open, honest responses to the questions and helped counter the possibility of reactivity during the interview, as I was trusted by a member of their community.

My own implicit biases and assumptions could also impact the validity of my research. Maxwell defined researcher bias as "ways in which data collection or analysis are distorted by the researcher's theory, values, or preconceptions (Qualitative Research Design, 2013, p.31). My own implicit biases about members of the League of Women Voters and the Canal community could impact the way I interpret the data acquired during the study, molding it to fit my pre-existing assumptions. I went into my interviews with the mentality that the ballots and propositions have legal jargon that is challenging for the average citizen to understand. This assumption meant that at times, I focused heavily on that aspect of my interviews, as I hope to confirm that suspicion. To prevent these biases from impacting my interpretation of the data as

much as is feasible, I used two of Creswell's methods for increasing validity during my study: rich, thick description of findings in the data (so that my own biases may be apparent to another reader), and member checking in the moment by asking clarifying questions of the interviewee.

  As a student, my belief was that voting is a fundamental right to every citizen in our community. Both organizations that participated in the study were working towards providing information for the community in the hopes that more community members would utilize that right. As such, we shared a bias as there is a consensus about the importance of voter outreach efforts and voting being an important right for all individuals.

Findings

Throughout my interviews of citizens involved in voter outreach, it became clear that voter participation in the Canal district is impacted by multiple factors, including people's physical access to voting, residents' emotional responses to the voting process itself, the relationships present in the community, and access to education within the Canal community. Understanding the interconnected role each of these factors play in whether or not someone will vote is crucial to encouraging and increasing the number of community members that are able to actively participate in elections. What became clear throughout each of these frameworks was that there were very few safe spaces where citizens could overcome fears, build trust, and learn about the process. Creating a safe space that enables full voter participation in the Canal must address all areas that impact whether or not people vote in elections. In the following section I first analyze the ways that physical access to voting poses a challenge for Canal District community members, with time in particular playing a prevalent role. Next, I discuss the emotional responses people have to political engagement and whether or not they have access to participate and in what ways their participation is impacted by those responses. After that I establish the way relationships within the community, with government, and within one's family play a role in how someone is able to participate politically. I then analyze the importance of education within the Canal community and how access to education and different resources is a key component of political participation in the community. Finally, I take a broader look at the way all of these different factors play an intrinsic role in the impact on the action taken when it comes to voting and how creating a safe space for members of the community to ask questions and build trust is key to increased participation.

Physical Access to Voting

A major hindrance to voting for members of the Canal community is physical access, involving citizenship status, time, and access to polling stations. These challenges have led to certain steps being taken to make it easier for citizens, mainly involving absentee ballots. Citizenship status is an issue that is prevalent within the Canal District and can influence whether or not someone votes, as some people are not eligible at all. The amount of time someone has is also impactful, since members of the Canal community working jobs that involve manual labor or are under the table provide little opportunity to vote. This also ties into their physical access to polling stations, as someone may not have the time or resources needed to go vote in person. Riley, a member of Canal Alliance who focuses on voter advocacy, shared her experience with the challenge residents of the Canal District face when it comes to citizenship.

> I see, especially people who have friends and family members who cannot vote because of citizenship status or another reason, be really thrilled to learn that they can vote and their kids can vote, when they do become able to.

Unfamiliarity with the voting process can influence whether or not someone believes they are eligible to vote, especially if they know family members are not eligible to vote.

On top of that, even those that do know they are eligible to vote often do not have the time to vote, for two reasons. For one, there are federal regulations in place that require companies to allow time to go to the polling stations to vote without penalty, as the polling stations are only open during certain hours. However, many citizens of communities such as the Canal District are working jobs that are under the table—childcare, manual labor, etc– that would not be protected by federal regulations. Also, if they are working multiple jobs, it is unfeasible that they would have the time to go to the polling stations. Polling stations themselves

also pose a challenge at times for citizens, and Charlie — another Canal Alliance member who focuses on voter outreach — shared her thoughts on this during her interview.

> Others like, of course, they cannot vote because they're not eligible. But the people who are eligible, they don't want to like, take a lot of time to go to the civic center to put the ballot in there.

> If someone is working multiple jobs and they believe that they need to physically go down to the polling station in order to vote, it can be just another thing they need to take time out of their day to do.

> Registered voters in California now have the option of mailing in their ballot if they are unable to go in person since this has been a challenge for certain communities. If they are even registered to vote, many people are not familiar with the absentee ballot process though, a gap in knowledge that Canal Alliance works to rectify. During elections they often set up booths in highly populated areas - schools, grocery stores, etc - so that people can register to vote right there, at which point Canal Alliance mails in the registration and often follows up with people on what resources there are for them to learn more. Taking this time to get them registered and provide resources to then vote via absentee ballot increases the number of community members that choose to vote as well as building trust within the community when people can see that there are people that care about their voices being heard. This option is a step towards making voting more accessible for members of the community hindered by other factors, but educating them on those options is key to counter some of the challenges.

> Citizenship status, a lack of time - to both research ballots or candidates and to take time off of work - and the access needed to go down to polling stations in the event that someone does not utilize the absentee ballot option all pose tangible challenges for members of the Canal

District to vote. Though the absentee voting option is a step taken towards making voting more accessible, access to more educational resources is crucial so that community members know they can utilize that option as well as other resources.

Emotional Responses to the Voting Process

The way someone feels throughout the process also plays a major role in the way people participate, with fear acting as a challenge for people to be willing to vote and tension or conflict often acting as a motivator for someone's involvement in outreach itself. In her memoir Sonia Sotomayor explains how fear shaped her everyday life throughout her college experience. When reminiscing about her undergraduate years at Yale, she explains that "there were vultures circling, ready to dive when we stumbled. The pressure to succeed was relentless, even if self imposed out of fear and insecurity. For we all felt that if we did fail, we would be proving the critics right, and the doors that had opened just a crack to let us in would be slammed shut again." (p. 183) due to the affirmative action that often gave minority students the opportunity to attend a prestigious school. Her key point is relative to the same commentary Obama makes about African Americans being held to a higher standard in our society; when systems such as affirmative action are put in place to provide more equitable access to resources for minorities that would uplift their quality of life, there is a smaller margin of error for them. This can create a fear of failure for many in the community, making it even more challenging to utilize those resources. This fear leads to a hesitation to involve themselves in political engagement or activism, quieting their voices. It is so important though to have their voices represented and utilized, especially if others cannot speak for themselves. Sotomayor continues this stream of thought when commenting on the moment "that [she] saw how difficult it was to energize a community that felt marginalized and voiceless," (p. 196). When people feel that their voice

doesn't matter or that there could be negative consequences to speaking up, it can be incredibly difficult to get people involved in any type of political engagement.

Though the fear that members of the Canal District seemed to experience was a different strain than the fear Sotomayor felt and witnessed, it became clear during the interview with Riley that fear of government involvement is very prevalent in the Canal District.

There are fears like, maybe I'm a citizen, but my parents aren't. If I vote, does that affect their citizenship status?

If someone's parent is ineligible to vote due to their citizenship status, being afraid that voting could impact their ability to obtain citizenship status would definitely be a major deterrent, especially as tensions rose across the country about undocumented citizens. This fear surrounding voting and citizenship status was not just present in the children of immigrants, it was present in parents as well on a larger scale. During her time as a District Attorney, Kamala Harris comments on the fact that "parents canceled their children's pediatrician appointments out of fear that ICE would be waiting for them," (Harris, 2021, p. 147) when tensions were especially high due to the presence of citizens that were potentially undocumented. Fear of government kept people from getting the health care they and their children needed, overriding their fundamental parental instincts. When fear hinders a parent from doing something as important as taking their child to the doctor, it's logical that they would also be afraid to use their voice. Though someone might want to participate politically, this type of fear can be very challenging to overcome.

In comparison, tension and conflict surrounding elections seemed to be a major motivator for all of the interviewees to get involved with voter outreach and advocacy. With the League of Women Voter members this was especially prominent, as the interviewees had voted regularly as

adults but chose to get more involved after the 2016 presidential election. Lucy spoke passionately about what prompted her involvement in the League.

> So in 2016, when it became obvious that we were going to have a really insane president, I couldn't stand it and I needed to do something. So I joined the League. I joined right then when, right after he won, and I just, you know, couldn't believe what had happened. And so I just had to join and do something.

Her disbelief and frustration over that particular turn of events made her take immediate action, getting much more involved in trying to make sure the community had different resources they could use to get more educated about the process of voting. In an interview with Sally, this same idea also came up repeatedly. She talked about how people often abstain from voting if they aren't excited about their options, another reflection of the way someone feels impacts their involvement. She elaborates further on this point when she talks about what prompted her own involvement with the League of Women Voters.

> I think particularly after the 2016 election, I've always been very politically minded but I really was just, I was scrambling to think of what I could do to make an impact. I went to the women's march in Washington in 2017. And I think that lit a fire under me.

Throughout every single interview, each person was motivated to get involved more actively in voter outreach due to their frustration or disbelief over the outcome of that particular election, where it became even more obvious how important it was for every person to utilize their voice. This frustration stemmed from a deep belief that there had to be better than our current options, as they vehemently point out about the 2016 presidential election. This belief was something Harris also touched on, claiming that "that was the best of the American spirit...having the audacity to believe despite all of the evidence to the contrary that we could

restore a sense of community to a nation torn by conflict" (Harris, p. 356), a beacon of hope in the face of extreme conflict and tension. Without the feelings of tension and frustration felt by the interviewees and their belief that there was a better future possible for our society, their involvement in voter outreach would be drastically different.

Community Relationships

In each interview, it also became clear that the relationships people have within their community largely influence whether or not they actively participate in voting. The League of Women voters provide numerous educational resources about the voting process, yet they have not established a relationship with the Canal community yet, which poses a significant barrier for members of the Canal community to make an educated decision about how (or whether) they want to vote. A lack of trust in our government also plays a large role in whether or not someone votes; if the system is not working for them or their voices aren't being heard, there is little motivation to participate. In contrast, familial involvement played a heavy role in getting people involved throughout all of the interviews. While an absence of certain relationships is a hindrance to the community, the presence of family ties in political engagement was a huge motivator for many people to get more involved in advocacy.

For the League of Women Voters, the relationship with the Canal community is an ongoing challenge. Sally, a member of the League, spoke in her interview about how one of the things the League would really like to focus on with the coming elections is building that relationship with the Canal District so that members of the community can utilize the educational resources they provide. She elaborates on how challenging this has been for them, as the League is a predominantly White organization that is not trusted in the community.

It's just how to get in there. I think the League could offer little seminars on the process

and talking about the accuracy and you know, the reality of it. It's just a matter of our

being untrusted and I think that our only hope would be to have someone in the

organization really get excited about it and bring us in.

Lucy also talks about this throughout her interview, commenting on the lack of trust

present between the League of Women Voters and the Canal community as a result of both

ethnicity and age differences.

I think that the diverse communities are less engaged and harder for us to reach because

we are so Willie White, and old. So it's kind of really difficult to get anybody to be

enthusiastic about you know, working with us and taking us seriously because they have

their own community and their own way of doing things. So that's really been a struggle

for us.

Understanding those challenges and dynamics makes it clear that this poses a challenge

for the community across the board; the language barrier present between such a heavily White

organization such as the League and the primarily Spanish-speaking community in the Canal is a

significant challenge, making it difficult for the League of Women Voters and members of the

Canal District to fully connect. Once they focus on building that relationship and creating trust, it

will make the resources they provide more accessible for members of the community that want

to learn more about the voting process and what they would be voting for.

Not trusting the system on a larger scale is also influential, not just within the local

community but also on a national level. In the Bronx where Sotomayor grew up, the Puerto

Rican community did not bother to involve themselves in politics at all, as they did not trust a

system that didn't seem to be doing anything for them. The contrast was huge when she was on

the island visiting her relatives, since those citizens had much more faith in being heard by their government. When visiting her family in Puerto Rico, Sonia Sotomayor was taken aback by "the manic enthusiasm that gripped the island in election years, and still does…a marked contrast to the political despondency felt by Puerto Ricans on the mainland in those years." (p. 195), a prime example of what happens when people trust their community, both local and nationally. On the mainland of the United States, this lack of trust in the system continues to be a challenge for members of marginalized communities to get involved politically.

Family involvement played a very positive role in someone's political engagement and decision to get involved with voter outreach efforts. The way many are raised to think about politics and our involvement is often directly tied to how we participate as adults. This experience seems to be a common theme in some families–whether or not voting gets talked about or encouraged influences the choice they make to vote. Riley talked extensively about how impactful her family's ideals were on her voting outreach involvement.

> My dad really instated in us the responsibility of voting…Yeah, we kind of sit down usually with family, voting by mail, to weigh the pros and the cons of every other candidate or measure on the ballot.

The discussion they had as a family about ballots, sharing information, and the priority that her father made about voting instilled a deep belief in Riley that every single vote matters, in every single election. This idea was also reflected in Kamala Harris' upbringing, when she talks about how her "parents took [her] in a stroller to civil rights marches" (p. 281), heavily influencing the role she would later play in politics as the first female Vice President. She later contemplates what path she would have followed if not for the activism led foundation her parents laid for her.

The presence of familial involvement, whether it was sitting down at the table together to discuss a ballot or being taken to marches in a stroller directly tied to the voter outreach these citizens would eventually focus their efforts on. Several interviewees mention that the trust present and the safety of that environment impacted how civically minded and engaged they became as adults.

Education within the Canal community

The level of education someone has access to can be a determining factor in whether or not someone chooses to participate politically: the more education someone has, the easier this process is to follow, so being able to obtain an education can either motivate someone to vote or lack that education can discourage them from voting. Language in particular can be a significant challenge, since many of the Canal members are primarily Spanish speaking and the majority of political resources are only provided in English. Also, the legal jargon present on ballots or in the resources provided about the ballots is often unnecessarily challenging for someone to understand, especially if they had limited access to education or don't speak extensive English. These factors are ultimately hindered by whether or not someone had consistent access to education and the opportunity to learn about this process.

The limitations to someone's access to education often begins during childhood, and often "the child who spends school days in a fog of semi-comprehension has no way to know her problem is not that she is slow-witted" (Sotomayor, 2016, p. 200), an uncertainty that becomes more ingrained well into adulthood. This is something seen often in the Canal, and Charlie explains a situation in her interview in which she was not fully able to help another member understand what was going on with this process even with the resources that were readily available.

> That's the issue, those resources didn't help the lady because most of those resources are difficult to navigate for her you know, and I was sitting with her and I was reading a lot of things, a lot of stuff and resources for her. And she got more confused.

For some, there is not enough of a foundation to fully utilize the resources that currently exist–videos, websites, pamphlets–if they don't fully understand the process itself. In order to try and gain an understanding of what they would be voting for, there would also need to be a solid understanding of the nuances of a complicated process. Riley comments during her interview that taking the time to learn about the process and really unpack everything is a huge challenge for people, especially those that don't already have the necessary foundation.

> Barriers around…access to the complex level of information that you kind of need to sift through in order to make an informed vote…you know, it takes a lot of time to actually sit down and research. And not everyone has digital access to be able to do that on like, voter guides that I search for online.

It is indicative of little understanding that Canal members sometimes have of the voting process, especially if they immigrated here from a different country. Voting on issues in the United States can be very complex, and there are levels to how important education and accessible resources are to being able to actively participate politically.

There is an understanding within the community doing voter outreach that educational resources are a must if there is any hope of getting people more involved politically. The League creates "interview style" presentations to explain the issues present on ballots, but they do not currently have these presentations translated into Spanish. All of the challenges Canal members face as a result of a limited education has put pressure on the League to make those translations a priority, and in the meantime Canal Alliance focuses on providing as many resources as they can

in Spanish to make it easier for the community members to digest information that could potentially overwhelm them in another language and provide them with a space where they can ask those questions.

Conclusion

The themes present throughout all of the interviews created an unexpected framework in which to understand what factors inhibit or motivate voter participation. Access plays a role in a variety of ways, with polling stations and an individual's time being most prevalent. The presence or lack of specific relationships within the community was a contributor to whether or not someone participated in voting. Having a network of people that could support and encourage the sharing of information and active voting was a determining factor in someone's political participation, as it could make the process more accessible. The emotions people felt also played a major role in whether or not they chose to vote and how they chose to get involved in advocacy itself. The fear Canal members seemed to feel posed a challenge for them to actively participate in voting, while the tension during certain elections made it clear that there was a strong correlation between passion and voting. There was often a lack of political participation if people did not understand the process or importance, reflective of how important education is for increased participation in the community. The connection between all of these factors made it clear that having a safe space where people have trusted relationships and feel comfortable enough to ask questions, seek out information, and speak up is crucial to encouraging voter participation in the Canal community.

Discussion

Having a base understanding of not only the challenges faced for certain citizens but what things motivated people to participate politically - access, the fear often present during elections, moments of tension and conflict, the relationships present within communities, the access to education - created a framework for what approach would be most impactful on this issue. The number of factors were indeterminable, but that understanding provided a springboard for the voter outreach efforts to continue and become even more effective.

Implications for the Literature

Previously, there was a gap in knowledge about why people choose not to vote; during certain elections, African Americans and Latinx citizens showed up to vote at a high percentage but this turnout was not consistent. Understanding the factors that influence that shift - access, emotional response during an election, relationships within the community, and the access to education and different resources - provides an opportunity to focus on those particular issues to promote and encourage voting participation, as everyone's voice matters. Participating in our democracy - especially for a citizen not raised within it - can be daunting, frustrating, nerve-wracking. Being willing to face those challenges requires a certain level of bravery and vulnerability–being open to challenge the way things currently are, and asking for help in participating and better understanding. Throughout this research, it has become clearer that in order for Latinx citizens to more fully participate during elections, it is necessary to provide a safe space where they can learn about the process, ask questions, and gain the desire and confidence necessary to vote.

Implications for Practice and Policy

These findings create an opportunity to continue the conversation about what can be done to promote political participation during elections now that they are specific factors that clearly impact voter participation within certain communities. Tackling these issues can be done in a variety of ways, with a particular focus on building trust within the community. Having a foundation of trust will create a space where members are comfortable asking questions and learning about the process. Once community members are more comfortable asking questions and seeking out information, providing more educational resources for those that are unfamiliar with the complexity of the voting process will also be impactful.

The organizations in Marin that currently focus on voter outreach and advocacy could make more significant progress if they were able to continue these efforts all year round rather than every couple of years when there's a big election. Every election matters, from federal all the way down to local, and continuing to try and register people and educate them on the process will keep it from becoming overwhelming when it becomes time sensitive. The League of Women Voters in particular could be working on this consistently, trying to build relationships within the community and providing more resources for individuals that only speak Spanish. Their presentations about upcoming elections and propositions on ballots are incredibly insightful, but they are only reaching one part of the community since they don't offer the presentations in anything but English. Overall, these themes contribute to social justice issues and our sense of community by bringing an awareness to the challenges people face in participating politically and being able to use their voices, something that impacts our society as a whole.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the consistency of the themes throughout my interviews, there were limitations to my study. My inability to speak Spanish meant that it was difficult to get the perspective of members of the community that are directly hindered by a language barrier, a fitting irony for my research. Also, all of the individuals interviewed are involved in voter outreach efforts, so they not only have access to voting (save for one interviewee who is ineligible) but are passionate about the importance of voting. Ideally there would have been some individuals who do not see the importance of voting and would have provided a contrast to the perspectives present during my interviews.

Directions for Future Research

My findings were specific to Marin County and the Canal District, so if someone continues my research, it would be imperative for them to build a relationship with the community (one of my challenges as a White, non-Spanish speaking individual) to acquire their perspective and further develop the understanding we have about the best ways we can encourage voter participation within the community.

For more than a hundred years certain groups have had to fight for the right to vote, and though progress has been made, that fight is not over. The Latinx community's voice is a crucial part of the community, yet it is severely underrepresented in Marin County. It is imperative to continue the conversion about what provides easy access to participating during elections for the Latinx community so that we can continue to uplift them and work towards countering the challenges they face.

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Appendix A - Interview Questions (Canal Alliance)

1. Which area of Marin County do you live in?

2. How did you come to live in Marin?

    a. How long have you lived in Marin?

3. How did you come to be a voter in Marin County? (then they can tell you if they are not registered)

    a. How long would you say you've been registered to vote? Approximately?

4. Can you tell me what it is like for you when there is going to be an election? (Let them respond first to this open ended question, and then use the follow up prompts to gather more information).

    a. How do you find out information about what is on the ballot?

    b. How do you decide which people to vote for?

    c. Who do you talk to about the election?

    d. Who do you reach out to if you have questions?

    e. What do you read?

    f. What do you listen to?

5. How do other people in the community find out information about what will be on the ballot?

6. Can you tell me a story about something that you experienced or heard that affected how you voted?

    a. How did that make you feel?

7. Can you tell me a story about a time when you were excited to vote in an election?

    a. What was that like for you?

    b. In general, what motivates you to vote?

8. How are people in the community motivated to vote in an election?

9. Can you tell me a story about a time when you couldn't vote?

10. Can you describe the challenges other people in the community face that prevent them from voting?

11. Were you able to participate in the election last fall?

    a. If no, can you describe the challenges that kept you from voting??

    b. If yes,

        i. How did you find out what was on the ballot?

            1. Did you know in advance of voting what was on the ballot?

                a. If yes, where did you see the information?

        ii. How did you make decisions about what to vote for?

        iii. What were some of the important factors that impacted your choice in how to vote?

        iv. What was something that made a person more appealing to you?

        v. Can you tell me a story about how you handled something that was confusing to you?

            1. Who did you reach out to ask questions?

            2. Did you talk to family or friends about the issue/candidates?

            3. Were you able to conduct any research on the issue/candidates?

        vi. Why did you think it was important to vote in this election?

        vii. Did you vote in person or mail in your ballot?

12. What factors impacted that choice?

13. When the election was going on, did you know in advance what was on the ballot?

14. How does voting affect your community?

15. How does voting affect you and your family?

16. What is your highest level of education? (college, high school, etc)

17. What do you do for work?

Appendix B - Interview Questions (League of Women Voters of Marin)

1. Which area of Marin County do you live in?

    a. How long have you lived in Marin?

2. How did you come to join the League of Women Voters?

3. Was there something specific that prompted your involvement?

4. How long have you been a member of the League of Women Voters?

5. Can you describe the goals of the League?

6. Can you describe the approach(es) the League takes to reach these goals?

7. What form of voter outreach have you been involved with while being a member of the League?

    a. How long have you been involved with that form of voter outreach?

8. Can you describe a typical day when you were conducting voter outreach?

    a. How does your work with voter outreach make you feel?

9. Can you tell me a story about a time you felt like the work you were doing with voter outreach was making a difference?

    a. What was that like for you?

10. What do you think is most impactful about the work the League does towards voter outreach?

11. Do you think there's a specific gap right now in Marin in terms of who is actively civically engaged in terms of voting?

    a. Do you think there's a specific group the League should focus on reaching?

12. What resources do you think the League could/should be utilizing to reach those groups?

13. What do you hope the League will be able to achieve in the future?

14. How did you come to be a voter in Marin County?

a. How long would you say you've been registered to vote? Approximately?

15. Can you tell me what it is like for you when there is going to be an election?

   a. How do you find out information about what is on the ballot?

   b. How do you decide which people to vote for?

   c. Who do you talk to about the election?

   d. Who do you reach out to if you have questions?

   e. What do you read?

   f. What do you listen to?

16. How do other people in your community find out information about what will be on the
    ballot?

17. Can you tell me a story about something that you experienced or heard that affected how
    you voted?

   a. How did that make you feel?

18. Can you tell me a story about a time when you were excited to vote in an election?

   a. What was that like for you?

   b. In general, what motivates you to vote?

Appendix C - IRB Letter of Approval

Jan 27, 2023

Ryan Bergman
50 Acacia Ave.
San Rafael, CA 94901

Dear Ryan,

On behalf of the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the
Protection of Human Participants, I am pleased to approve your proposal entitled *Equitable
Access to Voting Practices in Marginalized Communities* (IRBPHP Initial IRB Application
#[11089]) .

In your final report or paper please indicate that your project was approved by the IRBPHP and
indicate the identification number.

I wish you well in your very interesting research effort.

Sincerely,

Michaela George, Ph.D.

Chair, IRBPHP
Cc: Jennifer Lucko