

Journal of Family Strengths

Volume 16

Issue 1 *Latino Civic and Social Engagement:
Voices, Experiences, Trials, and Triumphs*

Article 9

9-30-2016

Si Votan: Texas Latino Politicians Perspectives on Engaging Latino Voters in the Electoral Process

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Recommended Citation

Pfeffer, Rebecca Ph.D. and Sanborn, Robert D. (2016) "Si Votan: Texas Latino Politicians Perspectives on Engaging Latino Voters in the Electoral Process," *Journal of Family Strengths*: Vol. 16 : Iss. 1 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/jfs/vol16/iss1/9>

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Drs. Pfeffer and Sanborn (JFS) conducted interviews with Texas politicians Adrian Garcia, former Houston City Councilmember and Sheriff of Harris County, Texas, and Texas State Senator Eddie Lucio Jr., to discuss the role that Latino voters play in the electoral process on both the state and national scale. Interviews have been edited for clarity.

Adrian Garcia (AG) is a native of Houston, Texas. He became a member of the Houston Police Department in 1980 and served the department for 23 years. He was eventually appointed as HPD's liason to the Mayor's Anti-Gang Task Force, and later promoted to Director of the Anti-Gang Office. In 2004, he began his first elected position in the Houston City Council. In 2008, he ran for Sheriff, becoming the first Latino Sheriff of Harris County. He served in this role until 2015, when he stepped down to pursue a bid for Mayor of Houston.

Eddie Lucio Jr. (EL) is a proud native of the Rio Grande Valley, where he was born in Brownsville, Texas. After a four-year career as a teacher near his hometown, he began his career in public service in 1971, first as the Cameron County Treasurer and later as the Commissioner of the county. Lucio Jr. was elected to the Texas House of Representatives in 1986. In 1999 he was elected to the Texas State Senate, representing District 27.

JFS: So we're doing this issue on Latino families and so we're making sure we talk to a couple of prominent Latino politicians. So the first question, Adrian, is, both you and Leticia Van Der Putte of San Antonio have had big races for mayor, You in Houston and she in San Antonio and for an outsider, or for a researcher, going into that race, we would have predicted based on the population of Houston and San Antonio, that both of you would have been winners. It may have been a squeaker, but you were not winners. What changed in the dynamic, do you think, for you. Did Latinos not show up to vote? What happened?

AG: Latinos showed up to vote and showed up at a higher number than they've had in years. So they came out. Each of the...each of the top four candidates, including myself...I got the majority, about sixty, sixty five percent of the Latino vote, but my other opponents did get percentages of the Latino vote. I did get the majority of them. However, that's all I got. Because with an African-American, two African-Americans in the race, two Anglos in the race, the

coalition that you need in Houston to win the race got squashed out between us.

JFS: Wow. So white and black voters both sort of thought of you as the Latino candidate. And while you got some votes, you didn't get the part of the coalition vote that you needed.

AG: Correct. If I could have pulled some of the moderate conservative vote and if I could have pulled some of the liberal white vote, if I could have gotten a percentage of the African-American vote, I would have been in the run-off and I think I would have won.

JFS: Now, so for you to get 60% of the Latino vote, does that seem like a low percentage for you in terms of if a white candidate or a black candidate were getting higher percentages of those votes, respectively? Is the Latino voter different? They're not one big group, in a sense.

AG: They're not. And it's a very...a very interesting crowd because they do tend to vote more for the person than they do for their own respective candidate.

JFS: Interesting.

AG: It really is. And you know, you respect that because that's kind of what we tell people all along. That's the kind of voter that you're looking for. So getting 60% of that, even in spite of having other strong candidates in the race, I thought that was well for me to do. However, the other communities saw their own candidates and did exactly what basically the Latino community did. They voted for their own respective candidate. Now I did get percentages of the others but not as much as I needed.

JFS: Great. Senator Lucio would you mind telling us just a little bit about how you became interested in politics in the first place?

EL: Well, you know, as one of ten children in a family with humble surroundings, I saw and lived through the struggles that my mother and father went through to put food on the table and to put a roof over our heads. So many things that people take for granted were even more challenging to mom and dad simply because we were

such a big family. I used to go to the courthouse when I was a kid. My dad was the chief office deputy at the courthouse. He worked there for thirty years. And he was our only breadwinner and there were issues that I saw that I could help other families with as well, not only ours, but other families as because I came from a community that was highly impoverished. And back in those days obviously I was the son and one of ten that were the children of the greatest generation. My mom and dad went through the depression, the depression years in the thirties, and then my dad was a disabled American veteran of foreign wars. I really admired the way he served the public and the church. But one of the issues that was very big was finding housing, for example. Extremely challenging because no one wanted to rent to a family with so many kids.

JFS: How many kids are in your family?

EL: Ten.

JFS: And what number are you?

EL: I'm second. I was the...I have an older sister but I was the eldest son. But you know, seeing the pain and sacrifices that my parents went through motivated me to help them out, to make a difference, and to be as much of a role model for my brothers and sisters as I could be. And of course there are many, many stories obviously that happened when we were young and of course for all of us, the greatest thing we could become was a *professor*, a teacher, a *maestro*. You know, so, seven of us winded up...Nine of the ten of us graduated from a university. And seven of us were educators because that was, at the end of the day, to be able to transfer the knowledge and prepare other poor kids to be educated was real special. So I became a teacher at the age of 20. I started coaching football, basketball and track. And I had a lot of wonderful stories. One in particular I'd like to share with you was the first time I prayed in school as a teacher. You know, you pray in school all the time, silently before a test, but that was the first time I prayed as a teacher in that I had a...I didn't realize it but when I walked into the gym, I had about 103 seventh, eighth and ninth graders, junior high school, that were all mine. And I looked them over and these were tough kids, man, from poor neighborhoods and I chose ten of the

worst looking guys and I took them into my office. And of course they were cutting me up into a thousand pieces and I...I said, "you know, I looked you guys over out there and I needed...I decided I was going to make ten squads and I needed leaders. And I looked at everyone out there and I think you ten will make great leaders so how about it? Will you be my squad leaders?" And of course they were stunned, because no one...these were the trouble makers of the school, problem children, problem students. And no one had ever asked them to do this. And you know what happened? They started dressing up, they started leading, they learned responsibility. And at the end of the six weeks I gave them an A because they did everything I told them to do. And then the parents came to see me. They wanted to know who this Coach Lucio was because their kids have never gotten an A on anything. And I told them, you know, what they had done and that I was very proud of them. You know what? Those kids today, I run into them and they actually tell me, "You know, Coach, everything you said was going to happen happened in our lives." And I used to tell them a little story at the end of each classroom that I had about life and about what to expect. And I was just young. Twenty...I taught from twenty to twenty four before I ran for public office at the age of twenty four. But those four years I would always tell kids stories about my...our...you know, what had happened to me, my brothers and sisters...because they could relate to us because they were, you know, the same kind of kids: poor families, growing up, trying to make it, parents working hard, wanting the best thing for them. So I told them the best way out, the way out, is an education. The way to climb a little bit and make a living and enjoy a little bit better quality of life is education. Anyway, to make a long story short, I had a lot of successes. I had a tremendous coaching record. I was about ready to go into...I was about ready to go to the high school to coach, you know, at that level because I was a pretty good coach with a great record. But I picked up a newspaper and I saw that there were some county offices up for grabs and I decided to run for county treasurer and I won. My opponent was 94 years old. Yeah, actually it's funny...not funny but there were three of us and she and I went into a runoff and the week before the election, the runoff election, she passed away. And people were making fun of me that I killed her and I told them, "No, no, I didn't! She's ninety four years old, man, she died of a heart attack." Anyway it's a funny story and yet I still get...I went to her funeral, I paid her respects.

And she still got 5,000 votes even after she died because a lot of people the people in that community were...voted for her because she was Anglo, and she had there a long, long time. A long time. And there are so many stories about the early days of my political, I'll call it "career" because I've been in public office 42 years. I've served twelve years at the county level and thirty years in the legislature so that adds up to 42. I just got reelected for a four year term so this is what God had in store for me. I think he had a plan and it wasn't to continue my teaching career but go into politics and work on public policy that hopefully would help people. So that's, you know, how I got started. Being a teacher, understanding the needs in public education, in health care. You know, we went to the clinic to get our shots. We knew how important Medicare was and I've done everything possible to make better our health care delivery systems and everything that's happened in the valley. Thank God I've been a part of it in a small way or a big way. And I think a big way because I've carried major pieces of legislation to make all of these things happen so that's what motivates me to continue because the work is not finished yet obviously. As you heard last night maybe in the democratic national convention what they talked about and the things we need to continue to do. I agree but I also want to add that nothing can get done unless we work bipartisanly. Unless all of us understand that we have our duty, a duty to the people that we represent not only in our districts but in the whole state. But the only way we can do that is by working together.

JFS: Absolutely.

EL: I'm excited about the next four years.

JFS: Well we have a lot...there is so much left to unfold. We'll see!

EL: Right.

JFS: So when you were a young man, just 24 years old and running for county office, and you were running against this 94-year old incumbent, what was your family...were they supportive? Were they surprised?

EL: Yes! My family actually was really supportive. My wife...I had been married for two years already and I had a little baby girl, who is now 46 years old, Lynda, was a baby. And I'm going to tell you the truth, the gospel truth, is that I ran for that office because as a teacher, I was making less than \$8,000 a year, and that position paid a little bit more, a couple of thousand dollars more a year. And I said, "you know, I could buy my own home." And I did. I bought a home and my mortgage was...get a load of this one, \$128 a month. A three bedroom, brick veneer home in a nice little neighborhood. So I was a pretty happy guy and I worked real hard, I followed every letter of the law, every statute I followed them, and I became president of the County Treasurer's Association of Texas five years later in 1976. All the treasurers throughout the state that I had been meeting, that I had been working with and meeting along the way in conferences and...all thought I had what it took to lead them. And we accomplished some things under my presidency that you know, I...my family obviously had a lot to do...I had a lot of cousins. Believe me when I tell you this, I had over 100 first cousins. Everybody had ten or eleven kids. Nine, ten, eleven on my dad's side. On my mother's side it was more conservative. They only had six, seven and eight kids. I know that family has played a major part in my success, my brothers and sisters, my cousins, everyone, uncles and aunts, *compadres*, *con madres*, you know, everyone that was connected to the families, but also the friends that I've been able to establish along the way. I was a pretty good golfer. I was captain of the golf team in high school and I tried every sport but I was always a bench warmer in football, basketball, baseball. I could never make the first team until I picked up a golf club and then I became a pretty good golfer. But in coaching I was good and met a lot of wonderful people along the way. Some of my former students were old enough to vote because there was a very small difference in our age group. Some of my students were 15 years old, I was 20. So when I ran they were just about to get to voting age but they helped me with their parents. You know, I was very fortunate to be at the right place at the right time.

JFS: Sheriff Garcia, when we look at Latino voters in Texas, there used to be a thought, a number of years ago, certainly when George Bush was the governor and then the president that Latinos, certainly in Texas, and Latinos around the country, could become Republicans. Because there was a history in Texas of when Latinos

gained a certain amount of wealth, they voted Republican. Is that changing because of attacks on immigration or perceived racist attacks that we're seeing more and more in the media?

AG: I think it has. I think you're right. There was a movement that if the community got respect from any candidate, Republican or Democrat, and especially from a Republican who the party doesn't necessary go after in a meaningful kind of way. And George Bush proved that with a little respect, a little warmth, that you can pull the community over. And at the end of the day, the core values of the Latino community do line up nicely in most regards with the Republican Party. However, the community did have a chilling effect with Trump and with the whole...even with President Obama on the immigration enforcement. Some of the affected me as well because as a sheriff, I had the immigration policies in the jail. And even though it was in the jail and we were doing phenomenal things outside, there was still a bit resentment that I had any sort of relationship with ICE. And so I think that has created a big, a big slowdown for the community to say, you know what, we're going to stay with the Democratic Party. Because they're less...they haven't been perfect, but they're not saying ugly, mean things about us.

JFS: When Jon Stewart was on the Daily Show, he did a show that he based from Austin and one of his segments was "Will Texas ever turn blue," and become a democratic state. And when he interviewed all these Texas democrats, politicians, and they talked about how Texas would turn blue, and at the end of the segment, Jon Stewart said, "They think Texas is going to turn blue. Those poor bastards."

AG: [laughs]

JFS: And we've been talking about Texas turning blue mainly because of Latino voters voting. But it seems to be coming along sort of more slowly than we anticipated.

AG: Yeah. You know, I've looked to places like California where I heard some of the insight based off history if you will, where the state knew that if they didn't do work on the electorate, on the Latino electorate in particular, that California would never turn blue. And so they made a very significant investment over roughly five years.

And there was a constant, constant investment in the community, organizing the community, registering the community, creating citizenship classes and programs, just a very concerted effort. And it worked. In Texas, we have not made that kind of investment. We're still trying to turn Texas blue by virtue of winning elections but not necessarily by developing the electorate. So I think those are two very different things. And I've told the folks who have supported me in my previous elections, you know because they'll ask me the same question, "How do we get Hispanics to vote?" Well, if you train them. If you reach out to them. And you don't do it three months out from the election. Then you will. The community wants to be respected. I've always said that. They want to be touched, they want to be spoken with on a regular basis and not just when there's an election. And when you look at my congressional race, when you look at... The congressional race was an epiphany for me in terms of what is happening in Houston because when you look at the fact that one in four kids are living below the poverty line, when you look at the median income being \$39,000, when you look at the fact that only 47% of the community owns their own home, then it occurred to me. No wonder we're not coming out to vote. We're busy putting food on the table because we represent a significant amount of Houston's poverty. Working poverty, but nonetheless poverty. So when it's time to vote, who gives a shit? You know, I've got to put food on my table. I've got to keep my kids clothed. I've got to pay the rent. I've got to find the next cheapest rent. That's why there's so much mobility among Latinos in Houston, because they're chasing the cheapest rent or they're on the verge of being homeless. So that... if we were just to pay attention to some of those dynamics, we could turn Texas blue immediately. But we're still trying to do it in Texas by virtue finding a good candidate to reach out to the population and assuming they'll come out to vote. We're still looking at a slate to get strategy to turn Texas blue. We might win it in office, but you then have a really soft electorate that could turn... that republicans could overwhelm in the next election and we have not understood that.

JFS: Senator Lucio, do you think that with the population of Texas, that it's possible that Texas could ever become a blue leaning state?

EL: Of course. Absolutely. I think we have some great young leaders in the House especially. We've got some incredible young Latino men

and women who could easily become governor of this state and I tell that to many people around, you know, Arizona, Texas, west Texas, South...wherever I'm at and there's a substantial amount of Latinos in that community that I get to meet. I tell them, I say, "You want a Hispanic governor one day? You can have that," I say, "but you're going to have to all go out in big numbers, everyone, and you can have that. You can have someone that represents and can relate to you, someone who represents your interests and can relate to you. Someone that can communicate well." I'm a little biased. I have a son, he's 37 years old, a state representative. I would love for you to interview him someday and ask him about some of the issues important for the Hispanic community. He would, you know, obviously, and I say this in a sincere way, he would blow your mind. You know, because he's an attorney but he's got a good heart. But remember, this is another generation! My generation, it's the generation that follows me. And I for one have faith that he or other reps that I know in the future will set the tone. But it won't happen unless the Hispanic community goes out and votes, or the minority community in this state decides that it's time for us to have a minority for governor. It won't work. It will never happen. Not in my lifetime anyway. But it will eventually because are you aware that when you look at the student population in our state, 54 percent are Hispanic students?

JFS: Really?

EL: 54 percent! And in the years 2020, 2025, it will be 60 percent. So we need to keep them in school. We need to educate them. We need to be sure we level the playing field politically, economically. I want these guys to be the CEOs that make the corporations, and gals. I want them to be leaders, and not only in the political arena but also in banking and industry. We need them all over the place. But that will never happen if we don't fund public education, if we don't fund higher education at the levels that they're needed to be funded. And the only way we can get there is by electing people who truly care and want make a difference.

JFS: At our friends at Univision, they'll say that they're always surprised that from a business perspective, not enough people pay for advertising on Spanish TV. Right, so they would love to motivate the Latino community and to be part of a movement that gets

people to be engaged because they aren't seeing people say it's worth it to advertise in Spanish speaking TV. It's sort of an amazing thing, isn't it?

AG: It is. But the other side of it too is, having been there, and having been...I was probably the only candidate in the mayor's race that really made a significant investment with Univision. The challenge is that they're the most expensive!

JFS: Because more people watch them.

AG: Yes!

JFS: Oh see, that's interesting.

AG: And so, from a campaign standpoint, you have to figure out, okay, I need yard signs, I need radio, I need TV, I need flyers, I need everything else. And that's why so many campaigns now are really trying to target the Latino community via social media. Even today I still get a lot of feedback on there. "Oh, we love your mom on Univision and she always looks beautiful and..." but at the end of the day it was...I couldn't afford to stay on the cycle that I wanted to and needed to. It's just expensive. It's just expensive.

JFS: I was talking to a group of young Latinos and they said that there is a saying in the community, certainly with new immigrant Latinos, which is, *si votan nos botan*. I don't know, have you heard that before? It's "if we vote, they'll kick us out." But it sounds better in Spanish. Is there a feeling amongst even second generation, third generation Latinos?

AG: That's the saying but I think the attitude is, why vote? It doesn't change anything. I think at the end of the day, that's really what the issue is. You know, just recently, the murder of this young boy, Josue Flores, has really percolated a lot of frustration. A lot of frustration against the mayor, a lot of frustration against the police, a lot of frustration against elected officials, Latinos and the like. A lot of resentment of the candidates as well - oh you want our vote now but where are you? And so they're going why do we vote for you if when we have this kind of tragedy, we get nothing. So they were like, hey, where is Mayor Turner? I mean, that was a repeated

conversation and I can see his staffer picking up the phone and going, you've got to get your ass over here. So I think the attitude is, we're not...even when we vote, we're not given respect. And even though the strategy is well if you vote you get respect, but there's...I think because there's a lot of moving pieces within the Latino community, as I mentioned the challenge of poverty, and education and home ownership, that people are saying, "Okay. I'm going to come out. But if I come out to vote, are you going to fix the streets? Am I going to get a better job?" Or, "Are you going to help me with my house?" And then when you get elected, let's say you realize you can't just flip a switch, they're like, "Oh, see? We voted, and everything is still the same."

JFS: Those who study immigration will talk about, sort of, what is the life cycle for families? Whether they immigrate from Ireland or from Asia or from Latin America, with this idea that first generation immigrants tend to focus all their time on how do we become integrated? They still speak their home language, trying hard to learn. Second generation speak both languages, still probably aren't voting, maybe just sporadically, depending upon education levels. Third generation immigrants then, mostly forget their home language. Now they're speaking English and are voting much more actively. When we take those parameters and put them on the Latino population in the United States, we certainly on the East Coast you see third generation Dominicans and Cubans, Puerto Ricans who always are very active when we vote. In California, a lot of third and fourth generation Latinos voting. Here in Texas, in San Antonio, fourth, fifth, sixth generation Latinos in San Antonio, but the most of the rest of the state, we're talking first and second generation. Do you think part of this is just time? For those generations, for us to get to where the majority is third generation, for us to see sort of the wholesale voting that we might see in other parts of the country?

AG: I think so. I think that if Texas stays where it's at today, does what it's doing today and really changes nothing, then I see Texas turning blue eventually within fifteen or twenty years. But that's just because...

JFS: Just a natural progression without any action.

AG: Exactly. However, the challenge then becomes that, that's the assumption that Latinos will stay democratic. And so, because when you...when the generations progress, the attitudes change. And so third and fourth and fifth generation don't necessarily have the same appreciation for the challenges of the first generation, and there's a lot of...I've heard some conversation of "well, they've got to pull their bootstraps up like my dad did, and blah blah blah," and so...so I think that there's, for me at least, if we don't, as Latino politicians, make a true commitment to policy that really impacts lives today, then when those kids become multigenerational, they're going to say, "Nobody was there to help me. The democrats in office never helped me and didn't do anything. And you know what? I don't like paying these taxes, so I'm going to go to the guys who are going to help me save my money." So I think that we have to pay attention to today, to make sure that those generations...That's why Cubans are so, so steadfast with voting. They remember the support that they got in the early years. And so we have to really recognize the fact that an early investment today, a true policy investment today, will make...will provide dividends for generations.

JFS: When we look at the national scene, we also see where in Nevada and in Virginia, smaller Latino populations than in Texas. But those are populations that make sort of a difference in the balance. Will there be a day, do you think, when people start looking at the Latino population in Texas in terms of, maybe not that we're blue but we're purple, and there's a balance in terms of approaching the Latino community?

AG: I think so. I think so. And if you look at it, that's kind of where we're at today. We're not blue, we're not hard bright red anymore. I think we're in that early transition to purple. But I think that we...if you look at, in my election, okay, I won [for sheriff], and then we had several Latino elected officials in office at that time. We had several people on city council, we had Sylvia Garcia in the Harris County Commissioner's Court, we had a couple of judges, a couple of constables. Now when you look at it, we've got one Latino on city council, we've got no one on the Commissioner's Court... thankfully we're going to have another Sheriff. And but we have almost, I think we lost half of the Latinos in court, on the bench, and so...because we have to be able to win in non-safe elections. That's not

happening. That is not happening. That's a challenge. And so that's really where the fight is.

JFS: Safe being presidential years, right? When more people vote?

AG: Yes, presidential years, but also, safe districts and safe city council seats. I mean, Jason didn't win District H against an Anglo with a Hispanic [inaudible]. And so we have to make sure that, one, we hold our own in those districts, but second, we also need to be able to win at large. We haven't had anybody at large since Gracie Saenz and we don't have Hispanics in state offices that are in non-Latino districts. And so we...that's where the real work is at. And it doesn't mean that the democratic population isn't in those non-safe areas, or not in those non-safe election years, it means that we just wait for three months out from the election to start talking to people. And as a result, folks tune out. They're busy with their lives and they have not yet seen what elections mean to their lives.

JFS: What is...Is there a stereotypical Latino voter? Or a Latino family that votes? I mean, do you think of a Latino voting family different than...I mean, what's different about a Latino family than any other family that might be voting?

AG: You know, I think that...I think what I am seeing now, especially with the young Latinos, is that the conversation is starting from their level up. Versus what it was in South Texas, that's where people remembered the poll tax and then told everybody, "You've got to get out and vote," and "Make sure you get out and vote." I remember when I first came into office on city council that I was meeting families that knew that they were machines in the neighborhoods. Because they were like, "Hey, let me get to meet you," and so on and so forth, "...because our family alone is a hundred votes." Those families are gone. So but that was because in the old days, mom and dad, grandma and grandpa, drove it because of their early experiences. We've forgotten about that. But now with the immigration issues, the young Latinos are saying, "You know what? It's now up to us. And so, Mom, Dad, you better go out to vote." So they're...I kind of see what that shift...that's the shift today.

- JFS: Senator Lucio, do you think that there's a stereotypical Latino voter? Do you think a Latino voter is distinct any way from other types of voters in this country in terms of issues that are important or priorities or maybe values in the family, or other factors that will influence voting decisions or even the decision to vote in the first place?
- EL: Well, you hit it right there. We have to be a community, a Latino community with values. If we don't have values and we don't have discipline, then we don't accomplish much. If we don't have...if we're not conscious of what we should be doing to make a difference not only to our family but to everyone in our community, and also if we can't understand how important our vote is, then politically then we still have a long way to go. But obviously values are really important. The value of working. The value of faith. Making sure you honor mother and father. There's so much faith in every culture, in every community. Then that leads to destruction of family and community, so values are really important and they come in every form and shape. And I think we need to value life. So all the things that have been happening, people shooting each other, people shooting policemen just because they're policemen. Or teachers just because they're teachers. Or black or Latinos because they're minorities and they need to go back to Mexico. I mean this is a reality that exists for a lot of people. But now, let's give credit to a lot of wonderful people in our state. It's not all negative, there's a lot of positive. You know, I've gone to a lot of churches and those people truly from the bottom of their hearts worship God, worship our lord Jesus Christ. I've even gone into synagogues. They're everywhere I can go. I've visited with the Jewish people. I think I've met a lot of people who truly care about life and care about our state and country. That gives me the motivation that I'm looking for to make a difference. But it's working with each other, making sure that we're inclusive of everyone in our surroundings to be able to come up with answers and solutions to these ills of society. That's, I tell you what, we have more good than bad. That is for certain. And I'm very proud of those that really want to make a difference, those that live through example. Leadership to me...I've always defined it...leadership is not the ability to tell people what to do, it is the ability to make people want to do the right thing through example. And we have a lot of leaders that want to, like to live a beautiful example of righteousness, justice, and I

admire them. I really do. And there's young people that I've seen who we need to give a lot of credit to because in their young life, they found the right road and they're traveling the right road. And I can say that we're in good shape for the future.

JFS: Absolutely. I feel really hopeful, so thank you.

EL: Me too! You said it all right there. We live with hope. *Esperanza*. That's what we do. And *esperanza* is a value, it really is, because when you live with hope, you're a man or woman of faith. You really are. Because you're hoping for the best. You're hoping for the changes that will create a better quality of life for all, so that's a virtue right there.

JFS: When we do press conferences, if the subject matter is families, we see Spanish language television show up more often than not. So Telemundo, Univision, Azteca, you know, they will tend to come. Is there more of an interest in family issues amongst Latino voters than other populations, in general?

AG: I don't know. I want to be sure I say this right. I don't know if it's interest, but you get their attention faster. When you...when you're driving the conversation on a Latino family or a family issue, the family might be listening to the radio but would turn it up to, what did they say about families? Now are they scanning the channels to look for family programming and topics? Not necessarily. But once you say family, you've got my attention.

JFS: Well that's interesting. Why do you think that is?

AG: I think it's just...I think it's the central, core value of the community. They're worried about their kids. I mean my wife can't stop crying over Josue. You know? Never met the kid, I mean...I mean it's a horrible murder but, not that murders haven't happened before. But there is, there is that poor family. You know? That poor kid. That's our neighborhood, where I grew up. So there's...I think that when you're talking about, you know, the families and children, there's a seventh sense, a sixth sense in the community that wakes up and says, "Well, wait a minute. What's this about?" We pay attention to that.

JFS: Is there....You know, I sometimes think that there's more...the issue of trust is more important amongst the Latino community. If they trust you or they perceive that they trust you, then we'll listen to you more closely. Talk to me about the importance of trust.

AG: Well I mean, it comes down to the fact that if the community doesn't see you in action, if they only see you when it's an election year, then you've already violated the trust factor in the community. But when they see you out there and they see you advocating, they see you fighting for them, they begin to really...to say, "hey that's our guy. When there's a problem, that's who we go to." And so the community does...they may not like you, but they'll gravitate to you because they do trust you. And that's something that we've seen in many cases. You know, Ben Reyes, that name, he... you walk into his old council district and talk to families, they'll tell you no one ever fought for us like Ben Reyes has. And when our kid got thrown in jail, Ben was there. When our street needed to be fixed, Ben was there. And you know, and as someone who's trying to serve the great diversity of the city, you're thinking, "Oh man, that's old school politics. Man, that's not...We don't do that anymore. You've got to be more refined and more polished." But you know what? That's the bread and butter of the Latino community.

JFS: Yeah. And Ben Reyes ended up going to jail, didn't he?

AG: Yeah.

JFS: He was trustworthy, but not enough.

AG: Yeah. Yeah.

JFS: It used to be that...we know that when we look at data from the state of Texas, we know that Latinos ask for fewer benefits from the state than any other group, right? So Texas under-gets its' federal share, whether it's food stamps or free school breakfast or whatever, Latinos tend to claim less of it than any other group. And when people ask me about that, I say well there's this issue of trust. They don't trust signing up. And I often will say, you know, historically, certainly in the last ten years, Latinos trust two things: Univision and Adrian Garcia. I've always said that. And it's important though for them to see that a leader...and Univision is an

institutional leader, but it's important for them to see a leader guide the way in many ways.

- AG: That's right. That's exactly right. And, look. You know, you mentioned that Ben ultimately ended up going to jail, but at the same time, when you talk to people in the Latino community, they push aside the fact that he went to jail. They push that aside. And it's because he fought for them and he advocated for them and he made their lives better. I mean, there's people today that I run into and they're like, "Ah, you know, I'm a voter because Ben got me registered and helped me become a US citizen, and he told me, you better get out there and vote." And if you look at that era—because I heard this and I didn't believe it—voting in that council district was, in those precincts were averaging about sixty to seventy percent voter turnout. And that's because he had his staff trained. Hey somebody is calling about a pothole, ask them if they're registered to vote. They're not? Okay, let's get the pothole fixed but take voter registration forms out there to them. And so it was a machine. And so the trust comes with that. Wow, not only are you dealing with this issue, but you're making me a part of this system and I'm understanding how it all works. Wow, it makes sense to me. The generations including myself didn't really pay attention to that. We were strictly on the surface delivery, but we never really made the investment of time and energy on voter registration, on the daily voter registration side.
- JFS: Senator Lucio, growing up was there a culture of voting? Did it feel like people around you...you know, when you were a little boy, did you go with your parents to vote? Did they vote and instill in you the value of voting?
- EL: Absolutely. That's a very good question. My dad...I'm going to tell you another thing. I have never missed a vote. When I was growing up, I voted every time. And when I was coaching once, one day I hadn't voted, and I said, well I'll be back in plenty of time before the polls close. We were going to play like a 4:00 afternoon game out of town up the valley...and I said, I'll be back by seven for sure. And something happened. It became, I mean, it was late. I don't remember if it was a breakdown or something. Anyway I didn't go see my dad for two weeks because I knew he was going to ask me if I had voted for the school board and I was scared of him. You

never, I know that you haven't met, but my dad was one of those guys that was so patriotic. He would preach Americanism and patriotism every day of his life to us. And my mom would pitch in with citizenship. It was one of the greatest lessons we ever had. We were also taken to church every Sunday and we took up a whole pew. And I remember...one of the things I remember so distinctly, it was during lent. Lent. During lent for forty nights they would make a meal and everyone would have a humble rosary and we all would pray as a family. So that kept us together, that kept us going in the right direction.

JFS: And were other people in the community growing up as engaged with voting and civic responsibility or was it kind of rare?

EL: It was...you know, back then it was... you know, they'd throw a big barbeque out in the park or out in the country. I went to many of those out in the country where they'd have the *carne asado con junto* and it was dancing and all kinds of fun and there was beer, obviously. And that was the drink of the day. And at blue ribbon and I remember some of the old beers that existed at the time. But there was always this group that was really active. And then there were others that didn't like politics for one reason or another. They felt they couldn't make a difference and that things would never change. They felt a little frustration that nothing was changing for the better. But I saw an opportunity. Things changed. You know what happened? In 1970 when I was campaigning, I actually campaigned in bars. Every bar in the whole county. I knew where every bar was, the name of those bars, the owner of those bars. And then something happened in the middle of that campaign year. We looked at, hey where are the women? Where are the ladies?

JFS: Interesting!

EL: You know, the wives at home. You know what? They count even more so because they're going to be sober and they're going to vote. So we started doing coffee in the backyard. You know, a little *pan dulce* gathering. We would buy some *pan dulce* and buy some coffee and the ladies would gladly invite their neighbors and there were more women and children and aunts because the guys were having a cold beer somewhere. And you know, I was able to see a total transformation of how we campaigned. I never campaigned in

a bar after that. Never. First of all, it was more costly because everyone wanted you to buy them a beer. Secondly, you know, those guys were nice and they were good men and good people but again as I mentioned, sometimes you couldn't count on them coming through. You know what I mean? But the women? Oh my gosh, you could count on them. If you wanted to get something done, I always said give it to a woman. She'll get it done for you and she'll do it right. So that's when we changed things. I was one of two first Hispanics that were elected county-wide in Cameron County. The judge and myself were the first two Hispanics at that time. All the years before that, all in the history of Cameron County, it has been all non-Hispanic white people that had served.

JFS: So did it feel, at the time, as amazing as it was? You know, looking back it's really historic. But at the time, did you know you were making history?

EL: Yes! At the time we said, "wow things are changing". And I told people many times, "You know why things are changing? Because of you. Had you not voted, had you not gotten involved, then so...this wouldn't have happened. So the answer to the future is for you to get involved in bigger numbers if you really want things to change and have the reforms that you're looking for in education and everything else that's important to you." So things got better. We had voter registration drives. I knew Willy Velasquez on a personal basis. But I also told Willy one thing. I remember talking to him one time and I said, "Well you've mastered voter registration, which is wonderful. Now I'm going to challenge you to master a system by which you get people to the polls. How do you motivate them to go vote after they're registered?" Because the voter turnout was still low, you know, percentage wide. And that's something, quite frankly Rebecca, that we're still working on today. People need to...if I have a little crowd, I know I can motivate them. I know that I can tell them that they can turn things around, that one vote makes a difference. In 1978, I ran for County Commissioner. Eight years later, and I won with 36 votes out of I think 4500 or 4800 votes cast for that precinct Commissioner race. And I won on the last block that came in. I was trailing all night long. So I remember working that particular precinct very hard because I knew that that particular precinct, people did vote. And they did. And they voted for me. So you study and you try to figure out which precinct or

which voting block does participate and you concentrate a little bit on that one because you know for certain they're going to vote. So to be honest, I wish the whole community would come out and participate and send a strong message that minorities and Hispanics in this state are going to make a huge difference in who serves as governor, lieutenant governor and so on.

JFS: How did you, Adrian, how did you get interested in politics?

AG: I got interested in politics in a couple of ways. One was that when I was in high school, I was taking an automotive class, automotive repair. And I remember coming into the shop and watching the principal and my teacher argue. There was something that made the principal mad. So the principal walks out and goes, "I'm going to close this program." And so, a letter came out saying automotive repair is going to be closed. So I asked the teacher, what's going on? And he said, "Well, you know, he's angry at me because..." Well I forgot what the issue was, and I was like, "well, why is he going to close the shop down? We all want this." And he goes, "Well, he's going to close it down." And so I started talking to the class and we said, well that ain't right, when I started talking to my classmates. And so I went and told the principal we wanted to have a meeting. So we went and we set up a little table and met in the shop and invited all the students that had automotive repair in all the different periods and some of the parents showed up, and we saved the program. And I was like, wow, this is weird! This is an interesting thing. And then I saw, my dad...my dad was a mason. And he would tell me, "Yeah, we're bringing over some people who are running for office and they're coming over to talk to us and you've always got to listen to these people, son, and da da da da." And so that kind of piqued my interest. But then I was watching TV and I was watching, I don't even remember what politician it was at the time. But I remember seeing them address issues of the day. And I thought, you know, thank God somebody's doing that. I mean, that's important. And so, little by little, different issues. But at the end of the day, what pushed me over the side was the Ida Delaney murder. You remember, these were Hispanic officers, drunk, shooting...well one officer Officer Gonzales, shoots and kills Ida Delany. And the conversation in the African-American community went from those police officers to those Hispanic police

officers. And because there's so much tension, the Hispanic leadership, whoever it was, was very quiet. And I started getting worried, thinking, man, I don't agree with what those guys did but it was those guys. It wasn't the Hispanic community and it wasn't all Hispanic officers. And so I...I heard there was going to be a community meeting in the Third Ward somewhere so I decided to go to it and I walk in the room and there's Al Green, Howard Jefferson, and others. And I walk in and they're looking at me like what the hell are you doing here, in uniform?

JFS: How long had you been a police officer at that point?

AG: Maybe about nine years? I don't think I was married yet. And so I walked in and I just said, hey, I'm here because you're talking about me. And I don't think that's right. I agree with what you're concerned about. It wasn't me. It wasn't my friends. It wasn't the community. So I'm just here to ask you to keep doing what you're doing but make sure that your remarks are focused. And they're like, "You've got balls, boy." [laughs] And that's...that was the major catalyst that got me moving closer to politics.

JFS: And your first elective office was city council. How did you make that decision? You were the head of the gang task force at that point?

AG: I was the director of the city's anti-gang office and there was a rift in the community with then councilmember Vasquez. And the democratic leadership, they were angry with him because he wasn't paying attention to them or whatever the case is, so they wanted me to run against him. And I said, nope, that's not my fight. But I made the mistake of saying, you know I'll take a look at city council when it's an open seat. But I'm not going to run against him. And well what does Gabe do? He's runs for Controller, so he vacates his seat. So everybody's like, hey, there you go! So I filed on the last day, on the filing deadline, in a crowded race, but worked hard and won. But that...that came from...because as the director of the anti-gang office, I was working all over the city. People were seeing me at civic club, at their churches, at their schools, and people kept saying, "Aw man, you're doing a good job. You should run for something." And then I got in.

- JFS: We know that 11% of eligible voters nationwide are Latino but the turnout at the poll is really small. So if you had to...what are some of the challenges we face in getting Latino voters to the polls?
- EL: Again, to make them understand, you know, if one thing. If we could look at one thing and focus on one thing that would put us all at the same level, where we're all equal? It's not economics, you know, it's not your ability in athletics, but when you go out and vote, I tell all people, the humblest of all, the poorest of all, his or her vote is the same as the president of the bank. It counts for one. And quite frankly, the president of the bank probably doesn't have a big following. But the poor people, the humble people, if they can gather their friends and relatives and everyone else, that adds up to a huge number if they do it. But the challenge is for them to do it. For them to understand how powerful they are. I mean let's face it. We've got more people that are less fortunate in our community than the well to do, that they're more powerful if they come together as a block.
- JFS: So how can we make that happen? How do we encourage these communities to come out and learn about the electoral process and cast their votes?
- EL: It's pretty simple. You've got to have public officials like myself, each one of us, to go and make sure we make time, a lot of time, to make sure we get together with these people that...in the different neighborhoods. If you represent a precinct or a district or if you're a city commissioner or a school commissioner. If you get elected in a certain area of the city, you campaign hard there in terms of getting all the voters, you know, voter turnout. And I think that's what I'd like to see more elected officials get involved with. Unfortunately, once you're in, many of us will say well I'll just take care of my own and I don't care about anything else. When the time comes, I'll be back on the campaign trail. But being in public office is not about...it's not seasonal. It's year round. People often ask me...the men I see at all the funerals...well I don't go to the funerals just to go to the funeral. I've got to know them, it's got to be somebody that might have a daughter or a son or a cousin that I know and I want to pay my respects. But you do that in order for people to get to know who you are. And you're sincere about it. Same thing with other things you're invited to. I know it's hard to be away from

family. But you've got to take family to a wedding or a quincinera or to this or to that birthday party once in a while. You can't stay away from the public eye and then come out every two or four years and expect the public to be happy with you. The public will always say, "He's always been with us. We've got to help Eddie. He's always been with us." And I've tried my best. And that allows me to be successful politically. But every time I have the chance, whether I'm at church or a school, whatever, I talk in general terms about the importance of voting and that the only way we can get things done is by participating in the political process, number one. And then when the election is over, we put political labels aside and say, "Look, let's get down. Let's work something out here. Let's find some middle ground. Let's compromise. Let's do whatever we have to do to find solutions to our problems." So that's my attitude about politics. But I continue to try to get the vote out. I'm going to do that in this election. Sometimes, Rebecca, we're not totally in agreement even with our own candidates in our own party with all the issues at hand but we have to try our best to maybe try to change people to think more the way you do. And I'm going to give you an example if I may.

JFS: Adrian, sometimes you hear about...I think to most of the world looking in at our politics, they think Latinos and African-Americans and liberal whites, they're all voting together. But if you move a little bit deeper, not too deep, you sometimes hear that there's a rift between Latinos and African-Americans. I guess if we go deeper than that, is that rift really any different than any rift that could be perceived between races, or is there indeed a larger rift?

AG: I think it's a larger rift. I do. And I don't...But it has an ebb and flow to it. Sometimes it's stronger than other times. For example, when I ran for mayor, there was a little bit of resentment among some of the African-American members of the community. You're doing a good job, you know, you shouldn't do this.

JFS: You shouldn't resign being sheriff?

AG: Yeah, yeah. And you just wait. We'll make sure that you'll be the next mayor, you know, that kind of deal. And then there is...when you have...similarly, candidates in other races and there's a potential of it being an African-American, there's a very strong

position of don't put anyone in this race. This is our person. Don't put anyone in this race. And so it's respected, but at the end of the day, you do hear it in the community sometimes. Man, look at the strength that the African-American community can exert. We're not there yet. And they make their positions pretty strong. Back in the old days, I still hear a lot of conversation about how Mickey Leland was navigating that coalition between African-Americans and Hispanics and there was a very thoughtful, maybe very political, but very thoughtful, "Okay, this one is ours. The next one will be yours. This one is yours. The next one will be ours." You know? And so it was very, very structured, very disciplined. And if there was anything that had the wheels come off the wagon, they had a sit-down. "Hey, let's watch this. Let's take care of this right now." You don't see as much of that today. And because of that, I think it has the potential of making these rifts a little bigger because then it's a general community and not an individual set of leadership that is saying this is how we're going to manage it. The community has grown too big. It's not a neighborhood-based anymore. It's more regional. So you're only representing a smaller group and the other side of the town, folks are saying, "You don't speak for me. I don't know you. And I think we ought to fight, run that seat...put an African-American in as well." So I think there are going to be those challenges as well that are going to occur.

JFS: In other states, to bring this around to where we started, in other states we've seen larger movements to get Latinos to vote. You know, New Mexico and Arizona had La Raza and there are some other groups in California. I haven't seen anything equivalent in Texas. Is there any group that could be that group in Texas? Or is it...or do we have to found a new group?

AG: LULAC can do it. And when you look at NAACP in contrast to LULAC, NAACP has attorneys, they have policy people, they have a lot of young talent. When you look at LULAC, there is not a legal structure to it, or anything of that nature. So I think it can be. I think it's made some progress. But I think the other side of it is when you look at the leadership, it's mostly grey haired leadership.

JFS: Yeah, that's interesting. When you were a kid growing up, what was the discussion about voting? Did your parents vote?

AG: You know, I don't remember. And I...there wasn't much of a...I don't remember, so I know that there wasn't much of a conversation, other than my father saying at his masonic meeting that elected officials were coming over or candidates running for office and we have to help them. But that didn't necessarily translate into you need to go vote. They never took me with them to go vote. So I don't remember any of that. Of course, my parents became naturalized in the mid-seventies, but I don't think that there was any discipline to vote by them.

JFS: And when you turned eighteen, did you rush to vote?

AG: I did! I did. Because you've got to remember, when I turned eighteen, this was in '78, it was at the tail-end of the Vietnam war. And there had been, in our family there was a lot of anxiety that my older brother could be drafted. So I wanted to vote for someone who would stop the war.

JFS: Wow. So '78. So you voted for Carter? Or Reagan?

JFS: Carter was the first of Reagan and Carter...

AG: Was it? Well then it had to be Carter?

JFS: Because you're a big democratic voter all the way.

AG: Yeah, yeah.

JFS: Senator Lucio, how do you think Hillary Clinton will do with Latino voters in Texas and in the United States?

EL: Well I think she'll do well. I think Trump has dug a hole so deep it's going to be hard for him to get out. You know, the way he treated the immigration issue and not only for Latinos but for anyone wanting to come to America. By God, we're a country of immigrants. It could have been five, six, seven generations ago when we might have been first generation but we value our families and we want them to grow up in an environment, in a country that offers freedom and justice. So I can't blame people from Mexico or Central America coming to our borders. They're hungry, they're naked, they're homeless, and they're prosecuted. And all of that is biblical to me and if we're to be good neighbors, if we're to find

favor with God, we have to live. The word of God and the scriptures and the lessons that were left to us by the greatest of them all, the history book that was written about him in the New Testament. So that's a big part of it, Rebecca, in my decision making. My faith is very important so I have to tell you from the bottom of my heart that before I can sign anything as a legislator, I have to think deep into my faith and think, would this be what my lord Jesus Christ would want me to do? I mean, am I helping his flock? Am I don't the right thing? Am I doing the Christian thing, since I'm Christian? So it's not easy because you get criticized quite a bit but I'm glad I do it.

JFS: I mean, it's really interesting because a lot of times religious morals and political morals are aligned and sometimes they're not. And in cultures that value religion...and certainly in the Hispanic community we see strong Catholic roots sometimes. So do you think people vote according to their religion more than according to...

EL: Yes. That is such a perfect question and I need to tell you, when Al Gore was running for president and George W. Bush was his opponent. I was at home watching the Catholic channel. I hadn't gone to church because I felt terrible so I was watching the mass at night and going through the mass and when the priest spoke, and this is on national TV, and it caught my ear right away. He said, "Well, it's a political year and it's election time and I'm not going to stand here and tell any one of you how to vote. But I will tell you one thing. I'm going to tell you how I'm going to vote." And you know what he said? He said, "I'm going to vote for whoever is pro-life for president." And I looked over my shoulder at my wife and I said, "Hon, I know who's going to win the presidency." That's what I said! And she said, "How do you know that? You're watching the mass." I said, "Well, you didn't hear what he just said. The priest said that he's going to vote for George W. Bush without mentioning his name." and sure enough that's the way it happened. And you know why it happened, Rebecca? Because of what you just said. The Christian community, the Latino community, he was the first...he beat Ann Richards in the Rio Grande Valley because of his pro-life stance. People don't know that, don't remember that, but I keep up with everything that happens especially in my area of the state, with democrats and republicans running for public office. So you're right. You're absolutely right. Our faith has everything to do

with who we support that is aligned with the issues we care for, regardless of whether they're Democrat or Republican.

JFS: So do you believe that in Texas, is there a way to...how can we encourage Latinos to vote according to the Democratic party if sometimes people vote according to an issue?

EL: I've told them. I've said, "Look. Vote for whoever you think will do the best job for your community, for your family. But also if there's an issue that is dear to your heart, encourage the candidate...let them hear from you. Maybe they'll have a change of heart. Maybe they'll balance it out and won't be so far to the left." You know what I mean? Or not looking at these issues. You asked me about Clinton and whether or not she'll do well with the Hispanic community. She will do well because Trump has dug that hole so deep with the immigration issue and other issues that he is so far off on for all the Latino community. I'd say eighty percent, at least eighty percent go to Hillary's corner. That's the way I see it. And that's going to be a big if in this campaign by the way.

JFS: You're sort of a political anomaly in that you're a pro-life democrat.

EL: Exactly. Exactly. I told my colleagues, I said, "You're Republican, my brothers and sisters. You are pro-life. Wonderful. But then you forget about that child. You don't fund public education. You know, you're for the death penalty. That's not being consistent. And then my colleagues, my fellow democrats, they're pro-choice. And they'll fight me tooth and nail to fund public education. They'll fight you tooth and nail if you're against the death penalty. How can you be pro-choice and then be against the death penalty? You've got to be consistent. And that's what I'm looking for in my colleagues in the legislature.

JFS: Well, thank you both so much for these great conversations.