

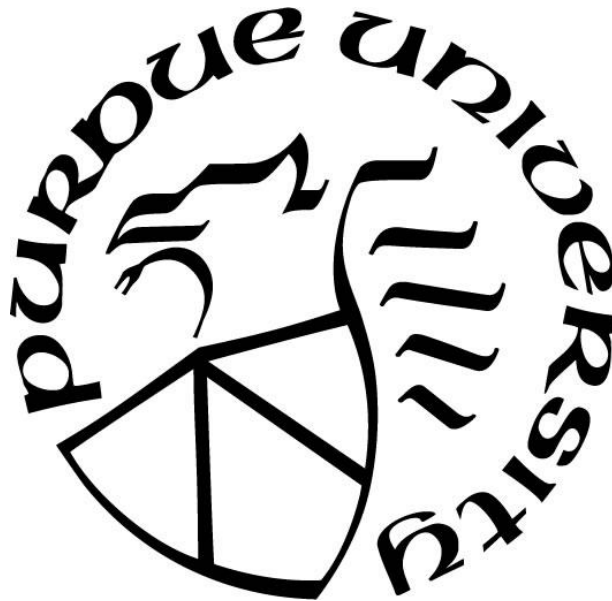
**LATINO DEMOCRATS OF ALLEN COUNTY:
STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PLAN PROJECT**

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Abstract

This study sought to identify obstacles and challenges that impact political participation and involvement among Latino voters. At the same time, it explored how the Latino Democrats of Allen County (LDAC), a constituency caucus in a primarily conservative area, could address such barriers to engage Latinos from the area politically (specifically in support of the Democratic party). Social Identity Theory provided a backdrop from which to examine the challenges and obstacles that Latinos face to participating in local government. By exploring these questions from the perspective of Social Identity Theory, I examined how a demographic in a primarily conservative area grapples with their political participation. Findings suggest that Latinos struggle with their participation due to lack of awareness about opportunity, low political efficacy, lack of trust in the political process and those that facilitate it, and lack of education about how the political process works. Literature on communication strategies and techniques used by organizations and groups with similar structures and goals provided a roadmap for constructing a functional and meaningful strategic communication plan for LDAC based on the findings from this study.

Latino Democrats of Allen County:

Strategic Communication Plan

Introduction

Historically, Latino voters in the United States have been an under-represented and overlooked demographic in terms of voter issues and outreach (Hero, Garcia, Garcia, & Pacho, 2000). In fact, as of the year 2000, Latinos had lower political participation (voting) rates than the general population, perhaps due to the lack of outreach from major parties (Hero, Garcia, Garcia, & Pacho, 2000). One reason for the lack of outreach can be attributed to the geographic distribution of Latinos in the US during that time—Hero, Garcia, Garcia, and Pacho (2000) address this as a factor, citing the Latino population as “small and geographically concentrated” (p. 530). Another reason may be the range of diversity among Latinos in the US—diverse in terms of country of origin, “language use, degree of assimilation”, group identities, in addition to typical differences among Americans including class, education, and income (Fraga, et al., 2012, p. 143). Social Identity Theory states that the salience of a group identity is linked to political motivators; for Latinos, this group identity is often referred to by researchers as pan ethnicity (Huddy L. , 2001; Min, 2014; Polletta & Jasper, 2001). While Latinos in the United States share many cultural similarities, they are equally as diverse—pan ethnicity describes the instance in which diverse groups feel a sense solidarity and support for each other based on their similarities. As a result, collective identity, such as pan ethnicity, can enhance mobilization for movements, whether politically, socially, or otherwise (Min, 2014; Polletta & Jasper, 2001). Applying the literature regarding political involvement among Latinos to Social Identity Theory, one might wonder how identity, a collective one at that, impacts mobilization and political participation. Whether or not members of the Latino community feel a strong sense of pan ethnicity, that is

attachment or solidarity to the group, their group identity contributes to the degree that they become politically involved (Min, 2014). The fluidity of these factors presents a challenge to understanding the political leanings and motivations of Latino population, however, the current political context has created an opportunity to identify their interests, concerns, and obstacles to political participation.

This study examines obstacles and challenges that Latino voters in Allen County, those who identify as independent or Democrat, face to participating in the political process at the local level. Ultimately, the results of this study inform the development of a strategic plan for the Latino Democrats of Allen County (LDAC), the only Latino caucus in the county. Due to LDACs affiliation with the Democratic party, the study focuses only on voters who identify as Democrat, Democrat-leaning, or independent, as they are the target audience for outreach efforts from a Democratic organization. The strategic communication plan for LDAC will serve as the foundation that guides the organization's communication efforts and, ultimately, the election of democratic representatives in Allen County, Indiana.

Background

LDAC is made up of four board members which include a president, vice-president, treasurer, and secretary. The caucus conducts monthly meetings to discuss community opportunities, ongoing projects, and gather feedback and ideas from members. The Latino Democrats of Allen County (LDAC) is the only caucus for the Allen County Democratic Party who actively seek to represent the voices of Latinos in the area and, as such, issues of particular importance to Latinos fall on LDAC to bring to the Democratic Party. Through engagement and outreach efforts, LDACs relationship with the Latino community is the link that connects the concerns of the community with the entity that serves to represent their concerns on a grand

scale, the Democratic Party. It is important to note that engagement, in this sense, refers to the willingness to participate in back and forth communication—here, I refer to the opportunity for LDAC to participate in a dialogue with the Latino community with the goal of prompting action. This distinction in defining engagement is important to note throughout this study.

Allen County is the largest and third most populated county in Indiana (National Association of Counties, 2019). It is important for LDAC to examine the obstacles and challenges this demographic face and how these factors translate to engagement or participation in the political process. In turn, applying these findings will prove valuable in determining what kind of efforts will motivate them to become politically active and influence their political ideologies. LDAC reports its findings to a Central Committee (more on this in below) which disseminates the information up the hierarchy of leadership within the state party with the goal of influencing future outreach, key issues, and representation. In order to understand the potential impact of the work of LDAC, a general understanding of the structure of the Democratic party and the manner in which information is distributed is helpful.

The Indiana Democratic Party is comprised of tiers through which information is shared by way of committees. In its simplest terms, state party is informed by the congressional and county central committees which are made up of party chairs, caucus (organizations and groups) leadership, and other politically affiliated representatives. This flow of information serves to build a network of individuals and groups who enable the party to effectively represent constituencies at the state level, but also at the congressional and county levels, in addition to developing effective outreach efforts to win elections. In Allen County, the Central Committee is composed of caucus and community leaders (including the president of LDAC), an executive committee (party chairs and vice-chairs), voter registration representatives, the Poll Staffing

Chair, Deputy Chair of Technology, and previous chairs who can provide guidance. This group shares information and ongoing efforts for engagement for their respective constituencies, in addition to voicing concerns on behalf of the communities they represent. Ultimately, the Central Committee's role is to represent the needs and voices of their constituencies, discuss ongoing efforts, and make decisions about prioritization of projects; these conversations inform the actions and decisions made at the Allen County Democratic Party (ACDP). Members of the ADCP can then take this information to the State or Congressional Central committees, when relevant to the actions and decisions taken at these levels. For LDAC, its efforts are essential to the representation of Latinos in the county, as the data and observations they report to the Central Committee inform a larger understanding of the issues that concern the Latino community in Allen County. If the Party serves as the umbrella for which key issues are identified, disseminated, and tackled, the caucus' (specifically LDAC) focus is to interact and engage directly with specific constituents on said key issues, and funnel the results (findings, challenges, feedback, etc.) back to the party (through the various committees) to inform future key issues and actions (Indiana Democratic Party, 2019).

Literature

Much of the literature regarding Latino political participation focuses on the factors that motivate them to become involved politically or, alternatively, prevent them from doing so. The gap, however, exists in how we communicate to the Latino population in a way that empowers and engages them in the political conversation. Factors such as socioeconomic status, immigration status, education, political orientation, or the value of what they say impacting or persuading those in power—political efficacy, are all well researched and documented (Leighley & Vedlitz, 1999; Michelson, 2000; Mohamed, 2013). Additionally, there is an abundant amount

of literature regarding historical occurrences, statistical data about population growth, distribution, and characteristics, and their contribution and impact on identity formation, values, and political and social motivations. These resources provide a backdrop for understanding the evolution of Latino voters and addressing gaps in the communication and outreach on behalf of the Democratic Party. Research regarding effective communication practices and strategies within niche organizations is available to apply to LDACs strategic implementation of this study's findings, such as Reger and Staggenborg's (2006) examination of leadership and strategy in local chapters of the National Organization for Women, and other research exploring framing and communication practices of activist organizations (Woods, 2019; Zoch, Collins, Sisco, & Supa, 2008). Specific findings about constituency caucuses, like LDAC, however, are scarce. While much of the literature focuses on government organizations, activist techniques, or public groups' ability to remain active, little focuses on the communication strategies implemented to effectively reach the targeted demographic (Lui, Horsley, & Levenshus, 2010; Pilny, Atouba, & Riles, 2014; Reger & Staggenborg, 2006). As a result, I have compiled the findings of communication scholars as they relate to communication strategies and techniques in both government and activist organizations, as the challenges they face in terms of mobilizing and engaging their target audiences mirror those that LDAC faces in its own efforts (more on this later). I will utilize these findings to develop a foundation from which to establish a strategic communication plan for LDAC. The purpose of this study is not only to address the challenges Latino voters in Allen County face in participating but applying that information practically and effectively through the actions of LDAC.

Communication Strategies

The manner in which an organization communicates is defined by the rules that govern it and the external factors that impact how effective they are in addressing their target audience's needs (Lui, et al., 2010). As a political caucus, LDAC faces similar challenges as those faced by government organizations; for example, Lui, Horsley, and Levenshus (2010) pointed out that, unlike corporate and for-profit organizations, "government organizations are defined by politics" (p. 192); this is truly the case for LDAC, whose sole purpose is to have an impact on the politics of the county. For government organizations, the ability to which they can address the public's needs is dependent on the political outcomes such as funding, priorities, and legislation, similarly, LDACs priorities relate directly to how these outcomes affect Latinos in the community. Strategically crafting communication in such a way that enhances these outcomes, through framing, would benefit both LDAC and its target audience. Zoch, Collins, Sisco, and Supa (2008) point to the importance of message framing, not only what is said when crafting communication but how it's said to drive engagement among a key demographic. Through motivational framing, an organization can craft a message in such a way that encourages action from its audience, this is precisely what LDAC seeks to do. Identifying the challenges that Latino voters in Allen County face will enable LDAC to frame its communication in such a way that aligns with their audience's needs. Zoch et al. (2008) suggest that depictive framing devices, such as testimonials and statistics can be very influential when it comes to motivating and persuading audiences.

Establishing legitimacy has also shown to impact public perception, which Lui et. al, (2010) cite as a key factor in government organizations' success. This can be applied directly to LDAC—as a group directly affiliated with the Democratic party, they must work to gain the trust

of individuals with preconceived notions about the party, what it stands for, and whether it truly means to represent their concerns and experiences. Both governmental organizations and LDAC has a unique and comprehensive set of rules that govern their practices and, as a result, influence the manner in which information is disseminated and perceived, stressing the importance of framing messages to align with audience needs and organizational goals (Zoch et al., 2008). Understanding the needs of the target audience, in this case the Latino community, provides an opportunity to craft messaging that directly address their apprehensions and interests, potentially gaining their trust and legitimizing their cause.

To persuade members of the Latino community, LDAC needs to relate to their self-interests and demonstrate its commitment to advocate for them when those self-interests are threatened (Woods, 2019). The need to prove their legitimacy, that is their credibility, is key for LDAC—the literature points to a number of methods to achieve this. Woods (2019) identified the role of the legitimation process for activist organizations, particularly in garnering support and credibility. LDAC communicates with and works alongside a variety of groups and organizations under the umbrella of the Allen County Democrats, in addition to community activist organizations and public organizations. These organizations have already established their legitimacy – they are well regarded in their commitment to the community and defending the interests of the people. Through these collaborations, LDAC can expand its reach and visibility in the community and establish a reliable and consistent presence in its efforts to represent the needs and interests of the Latino community. Woods' (2019) research points to the need for legitimation among activist groups in their efforts to appeal to their demographics, citing endorsements of credibility through already legitimized groups or organizations—for instance, the Allen County Democratic Party within the political sphere, or well-known activist

groups in the area held in high regard for community organizing (Woods, 2019). The correlation between activist groups and LDAC in this instance is warranted due to overlap in their efforts to appeal to key demographics. LDAC has hosted protests, rallies, and been vocal about engaging the community in work to pressure legislators and other political representatives to make decisions on policies that affect Latinos, therefore much of the work they do correlates with Woods (2019) definition of activist organizations. The alignment with the Allen County Democratic Party is an advantage to LDAC in gaining legitimacy across groups within the community, however, maintaining positive relationships with these organizations is important, too (Reger & Staggenborg, 2006; Woods, 2019). Research findings on governmental communication strategies identified the impact of internal communication on external communication (that with the public or target audiences), that is, communication among group members and its partners, rather than directly to their target audiences, as well as communication among groups working together on a single project or effort, (Lui, et al., 2010, p. 193). The most applicable examples to LDAC were those characterized as two or more groups coordinating on a single issues (multiple caucuses working together on one event/project), or those where two or more agencies (in our case groups falling under the umbrella of the Allen County Democratic Party) were coordinating on a broad-scoped project or task (such as the local elections). The factors Lui, et al. (2010) identified included the back and forth communication between similar groups which lead to inconsistent and contradictory perspectives, media scrutiny, and poor public perception. For LDAC, these interactions can be either positive in that they enhance relationships and create an opportunity for community members to interact with them, or they can be detrimental if, as described by Lui et al. (2010) they are contradictory and inconsistent. These factors can be applied directly to the structure of the Allen County Democratic party,

specifically in relation to the Central Committee, which is composed of caucus leaders, including the LDAC president. LDACs effectiveness in driving change for Latino voters is either enhanced or diminished by effective practices within the party (Lui, et al., 2010); these collaborations make up a large part of the outreach conducted by, not only the Latino Democrats, but many of the caucuses and organizations within the Allen County Democratic Party. Establishing positive relationships and open lines of communication between groups will enhance the quality of interactions between the Latino Community and LDAC, according to the literature (Lui, et al., 2010; Pilny, et al., 2014; Woods, 2019).

Availability of moral resources such as legitimacy (as described above), peer influence, specialized knowledge, and public trust are paramount to social movement organizations' effectiveness and longevity in maintaining support from and mobilizing their demographics (Lui, et al., 2010; Reger & Staggenborg, 2006; Woods, 2019). Pilny et al. (2014) describe the benefit of such resources in their ability to build communication networks which, in turn, aid in recruitment efforts, message framing, and information dissemination (Woods, 2019). Pilny, et al.'s (2014) definition of a social movement organization overlaps with many of the characteristics of LDAC, as an organization with "clearly identified opponents", "linked by dense informal networks", and "[sharing] a distinct collective identity", as a result, for the purpose of this section, I will defer to Pilny et al.'s (2014) results regarding the efficacy of moral resources for social movement organizations. The Latino Democrats have received media coverage for activities such as public rallies, protests, and fundraising which have had a positive effect on membership and monthly meeting turnout. The group's affiliation with the Allen County Democratic Party contributes to its communication network, as highlighted by Pilny, et al. (2014), which makes it more likely to be "covered by the media and have regular contacts in

the media because actors in the media might perceive such SMOs (social movement organizations) as more important and newsworthy” (p. 362). In addition to enhancing legitimacy, resources, and peer influence, media coverage strengthens the organization’s communication network and centrality within the community—according to Pilny et al. (2014), this is an indicator of an SMOs ability to thrive and maintain supporters, a goal of LDAC.

Public support is at the root of public, political, activist, and social movement organizations, as clearly described in the literature (Lui, et al., 2010; Pilny, et al., 2014; Reger & Staggenborg, 2006; Woods, 2019). In order to gain public support, organizations must demonstrate their legitimacy to both the public and each other, and demonstrate value alignment with their demographic through their actions, as well as, if not primarily, through their communication and relationships (Lui, et al., 2010; Pilny, et al., 2014; Reger & Staggenborg, 2006; Woods, 2019). In order to do this, Woods (2019) points to the tactics used to convey values, such as through emotion, or entitlement as a result of a lived experience that was impacted by the values. For LDAC, identifying the ways to apply these tactics and demonstrate such values is the first step to building trust, support, and establishing a relationship with the community. Zoch et al. (2008) pointed to framing techniques that address issues that concern a target audience in order to motivate them to take action. LDACs exploration into the challenges that Latinos in Allen County face will provide insight into the appropriate framing techniques for the caucus’ goals and efforts. Identifying the values that are important to the Latino community will ultimately drive LDACs communication strategy. Additionally, this information will add to existing scholarship for future research on how to engage other minorities in the political process.

Summary of Communication Strategies

The literature suggests that factors such as the rules that govern organizations, effective framing techniques, legitimacy, public support, and other moral resources impact the quality and efficacy of communication strategies (Lui, et. al, 2010; Pilny, et. al, 2014; Reger & Staggenborg, 2006; Woods, 2019). In addition to these factors, the value of message framing when crafting communication that seeks to drive engagement among a key demographic should not be overlooked, as it can alter or enhance the receiver's interpretation (Lui, et al, 2010; Pilny, et al, 2014; Woods, 2019; Zoch, et al., 2008). In other words, the perspective from which LDAC crafts its messages has a role in influencing its audience, such perspectives should be relevant to Latinos. Zoch, et. al (2008) found that many organizations fail to use framing techniques in their communication despite the influence they have on motivating audiences. For LDAC, this is what the strategic communication plan aims to do in order to effectively reach its target audience—frame its communication in a way that appeals to Latino voters in an effort to persuade them to take action through voting, volunteering, or running for office. The next step, after applying the scholarship on communication strategies, is to explore the factors that influence Latino political engagement. Understanding challenges to political participation for the Latino community in Allen County will provide insight into how to craft intentional messages that drive public support and establish legitimacy (Lui, et al, 2010; Pilny, et al, 2014; Woods, 2019; Zoch, et al., 2008).

Latinos and Political Involvement

As the Latino population grows and becomes more dispersed across the United States, their political engagement, and more specifically, their vote and participation in political elections becomes more impactful (Hero, Garcia, Garcia, & Pacho, 2000). Recent mainstream news outlets and surveys, including the Pew Research Center, have touted that Latino voters

have the potential to swing the next major election in 2020 (Allen, 2019). While mobilizing Latinos to vote is important to LDACs organizational purpose, so is engaging them to participate in other ways, such as volunteering in political activities, running for office and supporting campaigns, in an effort to fulfill the goals of the Indiana Democratic Party's platform.

As of 2015, in the United States, Latinos were the single largest minority group (Barreto, et al., 2009; Fraga, et al., 2012; Malave & Giordani, 2015). Hero, et al., (2000) noted that Latinos primarily self-identified as "Democrats or Democratically-leaning", which he attributed to legislation that supports, protects, and enforces civil rights, as well as ethnocultural issues such as immigration (p. 531). In Indiana, the Democratic Platform includes statements regarding protecting Hoosiers from racial profiling, making communities safe for immigrants, specifically in reference to unfair tactics used by the U.S. Immigration Customs Enforcement, and enforcing civil rights protections (Indiana Democratic Party, 2019). While it's unknown if Hero et al.'s (2000) findings ring true for Allen County, Indiana, this study provides an opportunity for exploration by examining how LDAC can engage with this population given their singularity as an organization that engages Latinos politically, and since, according to the data, Latinos may be more receptive to organizations affiliated with the Democratic Party due to these stances. The question at-hand, however, is how to communicate these messages in a manner that resonates with the population, given their historically low levels of participation and representation.

According to scholarship regarding identity and political involvement, there is an opportunity to mobilize the Latino demographic due to their collective identity. Social Identity Theory suggests that identity is correlated with attitude, and these identities have the capacity to fluctuate based on situational context; for example, Latinos mobilizing in the midst of political turmoil as a result of being targeted, would be in line with Social Identity Theory (Huddy L. ,

2001). Vega's (2015) research indicated that Latinos in the Midwestern town of Lafayette were connected to their Hoosier identity while maintaining their cultural identity, giving rise to the adoption of a pan ethnic identity, Latino or Hispanic, rather than simply American. Barreto, et al. (2009) found that this identity created a sense of solidarity among Latinos, particularly in the face of political adversity, which served to mobilize the population during the 2006 protests against H.R. 4437 that took place across the country (Min, 2014). How, then, does a collective identity impacts mobilization and political participation? The sense of solidarity and group consciousness for Latinos is stronger and provides a greater opportunity for mobilization if they feel strongly connected to the overall group, Latinos, as opposed to their individual ethnicity (Leighley & Vedlitz, 1999; Polletta & Jasper, 2001). An application of these findings could allow LDAC to determine whether they hold true for Latinos in Allen County. If collective identity has a bearing on their civic engagement, as Huddy, et al. (2007) note, then by eliminating, or at the very least minimizing, obstacles to participation, such as their perceived political efficacy, LDAC can provide an outlet for mobilization. By framing LDAC communication in such a way that it awakens group consciousness, perhaps their efforts can strengthen political efficacy and enhance political participation among Latinos in Allen County.

Low levels of political efficacy have shown to be a deterrent to civic participation according to Hero, et al. (2000). Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1984) define political efficacy as "the feeling that individual political action does have or can have, an impact on the political process" (p. 187), for example, how empowered one feels in their ability to create change or impact the political process. Understanding the low levels of political efficacy among Latinos in Allen County will add valuable insights to the attitudes about political action in a conservative state. Factors such as education, socioeconomic status, and psychological resources can impact

political participation, however, it is political efficacy which motivates them to become actors rather than spectators in the process (Jackson, 2009; Michelson, 2000). Jackson (2009) noted that Latinos would benefit from messages that reassure and empower their contribution and political importance. How then, can LDAC reassure Latinos in Allen County that their voices and participation matters? What challenges and obstacles need to be addressed in order to enhance their political efficacy? By identifying these things, and addressing them in the strategic plan, LDAC can engage Latinos in Allen County more effectively. Michelson (2000) found that stronger representation for a demographic (minorities, specifically black or Latino) enhances levels of political efficacy; this finding creates yet another opportunity for LDAC in its efforts to increase representation for Latinos in the area. By identifying the challenges that prevent Latinos from participating and creating a strong foundation from which to address those challenges through the strategic plan, LDAC can work to enhance political efficacy among the demographic. Examining how these variables impact Latino voting habits and political involvement will provide new insights to existing scholarship, as well as to LDACs efforts by informing the strategic communication plan that will serve as a foundation from which to engage Latinos in Allen county in the political process.

Last updated in 2018, the Indiana Democratic Party slogan is “Building Stronger Hoosier Communities Together”. Vega (2015), who conducted extensive research regarding the national and ethnic identity and sense of belonging and solidarity among Latinos in the Midwest, (specifically in Lafayette, Indiana, just over 100 miles from Fort Wayne) noted that the demographic displayed an attachment to Indiana, identifying themselves as Hoosiers, while owning their cultural heritage. LDAC understands this phenomenon among their demographic and can draw similarities from Vega’s (2015) findings. For example, Vega described the

solidarity among Latinos when Senate Bill H.R. 4437 was introduced, the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act. Vega's (2015) recounting of protests in the city and Latinos of all backgrounds uniting to support each other and speak out are similar to recent occurrences in Allen County. LDAC organized a protest against the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency for inhumane treatment and family separation the southern border—over 200 people attended the protest with Latino speakers and attendees of all backgrounds. Barreto, et al. (2009) found that this identity created a sense of solidarity among Latinos, particularly in the face of political adversity, which served to mobilize the population during the 2006 protests against H.R. 4437 that took place across the country (Min, 2014). This bill, and others like it, were perceived by Latinos as a direct attack on their being (Barreto, et al., 2009; Vega, 2015). Vega (2015) also noted the rise of Latino solidarity in the Midwest, where the sense of community empowered both Latinos and non-Latinos to participate in record-breaking protests against the senate bills.

While opinion toward immigration (particularly toward Latino immigrants) has a history of negative attitudes and a “narrative of impending fear and takeover” (Vega, p. 8, 2015), recent discourse has enhanced these attitudes, and demonized Latinos, regardless of immigration status (Berg, 2009; Heuman & Gonzalez, 2018). Hueman & Gonzalez (2018) described the Donald Trump's “Border Rhetoric” as dangerous and essentialist, categorizing Latino immigrants, refugees, and DREAMers as deviant and inferior. Barreto et. al. (2009) found that this type of rhetoric can serve as a political opportunity to mobilize groups who feel threatened by the political conditions. The rallies held by the Latino Democrats demonstrate these findings and highlight the importance of both ethnic and national identity, solidarity, and political

involvement among Latinos and mobilizing efforts. Perhaps taking advantage of these messages to mobilize Latinos based on their sense of pan ethnicity will prove successful for LDAC.

Applying the Literature

The literature regarding Latinos and political participation points to a number of factors and motivators that deter or enhance political involvement such as political efficacy, mobilization efforts, and pan ethnic and collective identities, as well as the way that communication strategies can enhance an organization's efforts to engage their demographic. Understanding the role identity plays in increasing political efficacy and engaging Latino voters will provide this study with a stable foundation from which to interpret and apply its findings. Social Identity Theory helps us understand the motivations of Latinos as we search for ways to mobilize an entire demographic in the political process. The scholarship on political involvement and mobilization efforts point to identity as a consistent variable in the development of political opinions, motivations, and interests. How, then, can we leverage our understanding of identity to engage, persuade, and mobilize Latino voters in Allen County?

Findings from this study will contribute new insights to existing scholarship on the attitudes and motivations of Latinos in traditionally conservative areas, such as Indiana. Additionally, they will create an opportunity for future research to explore how minority groups are engaged in the political conversation. The literature on communication strategies and efforts will allow me to apply the findings from this study in a practical sense by creating documentation that will guide future efforts of LDAC. In order to do this, the study will be guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What obstacles or barriers impact political participation and involvement among Latino voters?

RQ2: How can LDAC address the obstacles or barriers Latinos in Allen County face to engage them politically?

Methods

The focus of this study was to explore and identify obstacles and barriers Latino voters' in Allen County face to political participation and involvement, as well as uncover effective measures to engage and empower them to become active participants. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend ethnography as an effective approach when examining the motivations and attitudes of a specific group. Applying this approach allowed me to conduct an empirical analysis and assessment of the Latino community in Allen County to reflect this cultural group's values, behaviors, and beliefs with regard to the political situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

As a member of LDAC, my attendance at meetings, events, and interactions with the party, LDAC members, newcomers, and the Latino community overall, provided me a unique opportunity to engage as a researcher and without the need to re-establish a relationship or trust with individuals. Through field work (which included attendance at events and meetings) I practiced notetaking, participant observations, and spoke informally with individuals about their experiences. In addition, I conducted informal interviews with community leaders and a focus group with Latino voters in the community to gather additional data to inform the research questions. This data has served as the basis for the direction of the strategic communication plan.

Procedures

Data gathered for this project consisted of field notes, observations, and experiential insights gained by participating in activities, events, and interactions with the Latino community, LDAC, and ACDP. By attending, observing, and participating in LDAC related events,

meetings, and engaging in interactions with members of LDAC, the ACDP, and others in the Latino community, I gained insights that interviews alone could not provide.

Interviews with Community Leaders

In order to establish a foundation from which to guide the focus groups, informal interviews with four active community leaders who work with the Latino community were conducted. The structure of these interviews was much less rigid than traditional interviews, taking the form of a guided discussion centered around a set of questions. Interviews were conducted in various locations suggested by the interviewees, including coffee shops, a restaurant, and a university lobby. The questions peered into their insights on Latino voter engagement and political participation based on their experiences with the community. As individuals who lead efforts of their own, the community leaders' insights provided an empirical lens from which to explore the issue of engaging Latinos in the political process. Asking questions such as, "What concerns have Latinos voiced to you (or your organization) with regard to the political process and their participation?" and "What obstacles have you (or your organization) encountered when trying to mobilize or engage the Latino community here?" provided real-world examples of obstacles Latinos in Allen County face, but also the challenges organizations face in connecting with them.

Using this data, I formulated relevant questions for the focus group participants. The responses from community leaders echoed one another with respect to the questions mentioned above. All interviewees pointed to a gap in the way information is disseminated versus the way it's received by Latinos, in terms of informational and educational materials about the political process. In other words, the information available is not accessible, whether due to difficulty finding it, language and terminology, or other variables. Another common thread among the

community leaders was the lack of representation for the Latino community in political engagement efforts, and the role that plays in distrust or overall apathy at the process. These insights allowed me to formulate questions that would resonate with the participants during the focus group and stimulate the discussion.

Focus Group Participants

The focus group consisted of nine participants. The nine participants were identified through snowball sampling given that they met the criteria. Participants needed to meet the following criteria: at least 18 years old (voting age), of Latino ethnicity, identify as Democrat, Independent, or nonpartisan, and reside in Allen County.

Focus Group

Once the questions for the focus group were modified, I moved forward with conducting the focus group with nine participants. The duration of the focus group was one hour and thirty minutes. In an effort to remain neutral and accessible, the focus group took place in a meeting room at the Allen County Public Library.

Through the focus group, I sought to answer three main questions, 1) What prevents you from becoming an active participant in local politics; 2) Do you feel that your voice and your actions matter as they relate to the political process; and, 3) What would it take for you to take an active role in local politics? Answering these questions would support the research questions mentioned above. By answering question one, participants would identify obstacles or barriers to their political participation (research question one). Question two was meant to address the issue of political efficacy—is anyone listening to what they think, can they make a difference? Lastly, question three explored direction and opportunity for LDAC to address obstacles that prevent their demographic from engaging and participating in the political process (research question

two). This last question explored participants' current experiences with the political process and asked them to consider how it would need to change for them to take an active role. In sum, these questions provided the roadmap for developing the strategic communication plan.

Timeline

Once initiated, the timeline for this study was seven weeks—that is, the data collection and analysis. Once IRB Protocol was approved, community leaders were contacted immediately to request a meeting at their convenience. Participant recruiting for the focus group also began immediately with all participants recruited within three weeks of gaining IRB approval.

Interviews with community leaders were completed before conducting the focus group, and both the interviews and the focus group were completed within four weeks from the start date. The focus group was the final step before data analysis. Once data analysis was completed, the study was concluded, and the strategic communication plan was created using the findings from the data collected in this study.

Findings and Discussion

In order to analyze the data from the focus groups and interviews, I recorded and transcribed the dialogue and responses that took place during and after the focus group, interviews, and any subsequent conversations. After transcribing my data, I read over the data in its original form to allow myself an opportunity to interpret the data prior to analysis. Next, I applied Lindlof & Taylor's (2019) systematic analysis of the data collected, including transcripts, recordings, recorded observations, and other notes.

Thematic analysis includes searching for repetition and patterns in word choices or behaviors, drawing connections between the data and the literature, and categorizing these findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To do this, I reviewed my notes and transcripts to analyze the

responses, interactions, and behaviors based on the concepts outlined in the literature, such as political efficacy, interest, and ethnic or group identity (or identities). Once identified, common themes were consolidated and categorized based on their similarities. The themes identified confirmed existing scholarship findings with regard to political efficacy as a deterrent to political participation. Additionally, the themes lend credence to importance of engaging Latino voters in Allen County and uncovering potential limitations or motivations to interact in the local political scene.

Through analysis of my field notes, interviews, and the focus group, I generated four themes related to the challenges and obstacles that Latinos in Allen County face to getting involved in local politics whether by voting, volunteering, or running for office. These challenges were expressed in passing, during meetings or events, in conversations with community leaders and/or during the focus group.

Opportunity

The theme of opportunity was a common one, even from members of LDAC. During meetings, events, informal conversations, and the focus group the theme came up a lot in a variety of ways. Opportunity in this context, refers to perceived opportunities, as well as literal opportunities. This includes schedule constraints that limit an individual's ability to take advantage of opportunities ("I am too busy and therefore don't have the opportunity to attend) to become involved and, more literally, the awareness or accessibility of opportunities. First, the work that LDAC does is voluntary, therefore it's all done during the very limited "free time" individuals possess. While many people expressed an interest in becoming involved with LDAC by attending a meeting or sending a Facebook message, very few followed-up when provided opportunities to do so. During the focus group, several participants mentioned their interest in

becoming involved in the community and “helping”, however, they also mentioned that the amount of time and availability they had to do so was limited by school, work, families, social obligations, and more. The assumption from participants was that an “all or nothing” approach is required. During the focus group, one young lady said, “My interest outweighs my engagement. I don’t do much politically because I work a lot and go to school, but I like coming to groups when I can.” While she expressed interest, her availability limited her potential for engagement. Instead of being proud of attending in her free time, she felt as though it wasn’t enough. Zoch et al.’s (2008) findings about the importance of framing can be applied to change the assumption that participation is all or nothing. Framing communication from a perspective that appeals to these concerns would demonstrate to LDACs target audience that any participation, whether attending one meeting or five, is a valuable contribution. Additionally, the theme of opportunity was also evident in other ways, such as the question of *how* to become involved. During the focus group, one young man made the following comment:

“When I wanted to become active, I had to ask someone, ‘Is there a group I can work with?’ And when I was doing a grant writing class at [my university], I was trying to see if there was a local nonprofit I could partner with and we [Latinos] don’t really have any. We have to build ourselves up and orient ourselves toward issues like housing, education, infrastructure, because those things are important to us. When I looked online, I couldn’t find any groups like that for Latinos.”

For this young man, the opportunity simply wasn’t there, despite his interest. The same young woman who made the comment about lack of time, said the following:

“I think I could do more I just don’t know how to do more. My problem is I don’t know how to find people who are just as passionate as me in their specialty. I don’t know the

right steps to go about to make a change for that and that's my weakness. So, I want to be more involved, but I don't know how."

These comments about opportunity, and the interpretation of opportunity, are important to note because they demonstrate the importance of building the social networks that Pilny et al. (2014) described as a result of accruing moral resources. For some, it is not the drive that prevents them from engaging, but the availability of resources at their disposal and awareness of opportunities. Perhaps through the application of framing techniques, in conjunction with taking advantage of social networks, LDAC can more effectively communicate the opportunities for involvement while addressing concerns about commitment expectations and schedule constraints. Along with opportunity, another challenge Latinos face, is the notion of political efficacy. Can I make a difference? Does my voice matter?

Political Efficacy

The literature points to one's political efficacy as an indicator of how involved they are politically (Hero, et al., 2000; Michelson, 2000). For the individuals I interacted with levels of political efficacy came up regularly, not only in themselves but in their interactions with others in the Latino community. In speaking with one community leader who, incidentally, is also running for office, he shared this observation of Latinos who display lower levels of political efficacy:

"I think, historically, neither party has done a lot for Latinos. Candidates who are running in either party, locally or nationally, get lumped together so when people think republican or democrat, they think about what's going on in Washington, even though that's not necessarily in line with what's going locally. That keeps people from participating at the

local party level. They don't see their involvement, one person, as something that can make in impact or make change"

In the same vein, another gentleman made the following comment during the focus group:

"I don't vote because there's no reason for me to vote. I don't want to compromise just because most minorities vote democrat. I don't believe in some of the candidates and what they say or do because when they get in there, they don't do what they say, so it's like I'm screwed either way so what's the point?"

Interestingly, the same individual who made the comment above is also running for office, contradicting the idea that low political efficacy diminishes political participation. For this individual, despite his apathy at the system that enforces the political process, he continues to be an active participant. Many individuals expressed interest in "helping people" and wanting to "make a difference suggesting that their levels of political efficacy are fairly high. The strategic communication plan would serve as a tool to modify communication efforts to increase and build off of political efficacy levels.

Trust

Another common theme that came up was trust, or rather lack of trust. Members told stories of attending meetings at other organizations and groups and not feeling welcome or waiting to decide whether or not to keep their guard up during initial encounters. While some participants of the focus group displayed high levels of political efficacy, their fear about who they could trust, was hindering them from becoming involved. One young woman made the following contribution during the focus group:

"I got interested in politics and started doing speaking events. I became more involved in activism, [volunteering as a speaker] after the Orlando shooting, women's month, the

women's march talking about trans women. And, I've attended someone Latino advocacy groups, but I always worry that someone will track me down and find out about my dad and gets deported. That's my biggest fear. I do want to get involved, but I don't know how to without endangering my family. But I know the importance of getting involved because then we lose voices like mine."

Establishing trust is important to Latinos particularly because of sensitive issues like immigration, as demonstrated by the response above and many others like it by other participants. The diversity that exists among Latinos lends to a variety of experiences among this group, making it difficult to establish trust through impersonal means, despite their collective identity and pan ethnicity (Barreto, et al., 2009; Jackson, 2009; Min, 2014). In order to establish trust, LDAC should look to framing techniques which can serve to foster trust and in turn has the potential to bridge a gap, enhancing political efficacy levels (Jackson, 2009; Zoch, et al., 2008).

Education

The theme of education came up frequently in LDAC meetings, conversations with ACDP representatives, the conversations with community leaders, and the focus group. Whether it was discussing how to educate the community about the ways policies affect them personally, the conflation of national and local politics, or frustrations about attending meetings where the terminology and jargon used is confusing, education was a regular topic, education was a frequent issue. The literature notes that greater understanding and education of the political system is positively associated with greater political involvement (Hero, et al., 2000) Jackson, 2009). LDAC, ACDP, and community leaders were well-aware of the importance of educating the public in order to mobilize them. During several of the meetings there was discussion about hosting a series of events with the goal of educating Latinos in the community about how to

research candidates, how and where to register to vote, and explaining how certain policies affect individuals. One individual made the following comment:

“We have to do better; education is important. People are intimidated going to the booth because they don’t know the people they are voting for. They figure why should I vote? There are some videos that the voter registration has, maybe in Spanish too, but they’re outdated. So, we need education, in the right language, and we need to bring it to people, in their churches, and show them how to do it. It’s more than sending a pamphlet or making videos for people to find but actually going to people and showing them.”

Educating Latinos about how policies affect them and how the process works is also a way to establish legitimacy, as Woods (2019) noted. Through educational outreach about the workings of the political process, how legislation impacts the individuals, and how the values of the public coincide with those of LDAC, the caucus can establish legitimacy, and enhance mobilization.

Subsequent conversations with focus group participants and community leaders resulted in expressions of catharsis, and some even said, “therapeutic” relief. The ages of the individuals I spoke with (both community leaders and focus group participants) ranged from 21 to early 60s, still, the discussions were fruitful and even carried on long after the interviews and focus group ended. The individuals spoke about being raised in vastly different households, growing up with different family structures, even different cultural backgrounds, and yet they expressed a sense of comfort and solidarity with one another for having the shared identity as Latinos. Many individuals from the focus group made plans to meet again after the focus group. At group discussions at meetings or events, discussions about mutual frustrations with current events mobilized and excited individuals. These interactions demonstrate the role identity plays in mobilization and solidarity.

The themes mentioned above provide direction for the creation of the strategic communication plan. By accounting for these themes in the development of the key messages and guidelines for execution, LDAC has an opportunity to address the obstacles their target demographic face. In applying the literature regarding communication strategies and tactics, establishing legitimacy, acquiring moral resources, and gaining public trust, the strategic communication plan can enhance LDACs efforts in mobilizing and engaging Latinos in Allen County.

Conclusion

Overall, the Latino population has seen tremendous growth—census data shows a 43 percent growth from 2000 to 2010, which was made up of primarily native births (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011; Malave & Giordani, 2015). As the Latino voting population continues to grow in the United States, becoming the largest minority group in the United States, so does our need to understand which political issues matter to them and how their political participation is evolving, particularly for communication and mobilization efforts on behalf of political parties (Fraga, et al., 2012; Malave & Giordani, 2015, p. 3). This study sought to expand our understanding of how democratic messages are disseminated and received by members of the Latino community. Ultimately, the results of this study will support practitioners as they develop efforts to increase participation from the Latino community and improve representation. This study sought to answer two research questions:

RQ1: What obstacles or barriers impact political participation and involvement among Latino voters?

RQ2: How can LDAC address the obstacles or barriers Latinos in Allen County face to engage them politically?

Social Identity Theory provided a backdrop from which to explore the obstacles that Latinos in a primarily conservative area face to participating in local government. By exploring these questions from the perspective of Social Identity Theory, I gained insights about the motivations of Latino voters in a primarily conservative and the impact on their political participation with the Democratic party. Literature on communication strategies and techniques used by organizations and groups with similar structures and goals as LDAC provided a roadmap for constructing a functional and meaningful strategic communication plan.

Latinos in Allen County face similar challenges as those outlined in the literature. Findings identified the following obstacles to participating in local government: opportunities to participate, political efficacy, trust in the individuals leading efforts, and education about the political process. Based on the observations, interactions, and interviews, the opportunity to mobilize the Latino demographic is largely untapped. Latinos seek representation and an outlet to voice concerns, ideas, and become participants in the political process, but need guidance, support, and the resources to do so. LDAC seeks to be this outlet for the Latino community in Allen County.

The strategic communication plan for LDAC is the application of these findings. The literature points to a variety of techniques and strategies that enhance both the quality and delivery of messages. Establishing legitimacy, making use of moral resources, and applying framing techniques are utilized in the construction of the strategic communication plan. The plan will guide LDACs communication efforts by establishing a framework that informs the construction of messages. Using the findings from this study as the basis, the plan will direct LDAC as it frames communication in a way that appeals to the needs and concerns Latinos in Allen County face. Additionally, the findings of this study provide an opportunity develop

communication that acknowledges the challenges and obstacles, providing solutions and steps to overcoming them. Ultimately, the plan will provide a consistent framework from which to build its case for legitimacy, enhance public perception, and maintain engagement from constituents, ultimately leading to increased representation and participation among Latinos in Allen County, and the election of more democratic officials in Allen County.

Future Research Opportunities

Future opportunities for research in this area could explore the intersection of the themes identified in this study. In analyzing the data, it was evident that the themes opportunity, political efficacy, trust, and education intersect with and inform one another. Exploring this intersection to understand the manifestation of these challenges would provide more insights to understanding Latino voters and mobilizing them.

Latino Democrats of Allen County

A Strategic Communication Plan

By Cassey Suthers

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Executive Summary

Establishing clear and consistent communication practices are beneficial for organizations to craft effective messages to their target audience and, in turn, fulfill their mission. This plan outlines a framework for creating and coordinating communication efforts on behalf of the Latino Democrats of Allen County (LDAC).

As a political caucus dedicated to defending the interests, needs, and concerns of Latinos¹ in Allen County, this plan provides a foundation from which to develop messages that communicate LDACs commitment to constituents and to its democratic principles. Through thoughtful and intentional communication, LDAC instills a sense of trust and solidarity with its constituency, enhancing the quality and delivery of messages, and fulfilling its mission. Ultimately, the goal of the Latino Democrats of Allen County is to support the Allen County Democratic party in their pursuit to elect democratic officials—that is, winning elections in Allen County.

Effective and successful communication results from the commitment of LDAC members in applying the standards and guidelines presented in this communication plan. The LDAC board is responsible for following and enforcing this plan through its controlled communication channels (See Communication Channels) and actions. This commitment will enhance LDACs ability to do the following:

- Establish and maintain trust with the Latino community.
- Increase collaboration with fellow caucuses and clubs within the democratic party, as well as community organizations who share common goals.
- Actively engage Latinos in the political process and create awareness of opportunities to become involved, including joining LDAC.
- Increase political representation for Latinos in Allen County by recruiting and electing candidates who represent the needs and concerns of Latinos

Primary areas of focus addressed in this plan include:

- Audience identification
- Goals and objectives
- Key messages
- Key Challenges
- Communication channels
- LDAC Voice
- Guidelines and Standards

¹ The label “Latino” may not be accurate for all individuals in this demographic, but for lack of a better word, is the only way to describe individuals with Latin-American origins. This distinction is important to note as not everyone will identify with this label.

The goal of this plan is to establish a consistent frame of communication to guide the efforts of LDAC. By identifying audiences, goals and objectives, key messages, challenges, and establishing a consistent set of guidelines to follow, this plan will support LDAC in the development and execution of communication aimed at informing, persuading, and establishing connections with its constituency for the larger purpose to electing democratic officials in Allen County and Indiana overall.

Mission Statement

The Latino Democrats of Allen County are committed to providing a voice to the Latino community in an effort to effect change in the political process and elect democratic officials. Through outreach, engagement, and relationship building, we aim to increase political representation for Latinos on issues and policies in the area.

Vision

Our vision is to create a community where Latinos feel safe, supported, and empowered to take an active role in their local government.

Background

The Latino Democrats of Allen County (LDAC) were established in May 2018. With the exception of the Indiana Latino Democratic Caucus which represents Latinos in the State of Indiana, prior to LDAC, there was a lack of outreach and representation for the larger Latino community in Allen County. Factors such as opportunity, political efficacy, trust, and education are factors that contribute to the low engagement and political participation of Latinos in Allen County. Since its conception, LDAC has worked to establish itself as a pillar of democratic representation for Latinos in the area, engaging Latino voters, hosting and participating at community events, building relationships with community leaders, and exploring the issues that concern Latino families and individuals. As the Latino population continues to grow in size and voting power, the ability to effect change in our community becomes greater, and with it, so does the opportunity for Latinos in Allen County to take an active role in local government. As a caucus dedicated to supporting and empowering the Latino community, we seek to be more strategic in our communication to pursue these efforts.

Through extensive research LDAC has developed a strategic communication plan to guide efforts to represent the voices of Latinos and persuade them to become active political participants in Allen County. This plan was developed as a roadmap to crafting communication that acknowledges the constraints Latinos in Allen County face. This document will serve as the guiding force for LDACs communication efforts, establishing a strategic foundation from which to craft its messages and engage with and persuade its audience, gaining their trust and support, and empowering them to take an active role in local government.

Allen County Democratic Party

LDAC operates under the umbrella of the Allen County Democratic Party. The role of LDAC within the party, in short, is to support the election of Democratic Candidates—win elections. The way LDAC achieves this is by engaging and mobilizing Latinos in Allen County to vote, volunteer, and run for office. LDAC represents the Latino constituents in Allen County by bringing forth issues, mobilizing voters, and encouraging qualified individuals to run for office. The ACDP provides LDAC with support in terms of name recognition, party backing, and collaborative resources. LDAC operates independently, while following the guidelines set forth by the ACDP, attending events and representing the Latino community in Allen County in the Central Committee meetings. The Central Committee meetings are comprised of caucus and community leaders (including the president of LDAC), an executive committee (party chairs and vice-chairs), voter registration representatives, the Poll Staffing Chair, Deputy Chair of Technology, and previous chairs who can provide guidance. These meetings provide an opportunity for collaboration and distribution of information that can be carried up to the state party when necessary.

Communication crafted as a result of this plan enable LDAC to provide clear and tangible evidence of its relationship with constituents and its efforts to mobilize both voters and potential political candidates to represent the Latino community. Ideally, these efforts will position LDAC as an influential presence among Latinos in the community and enhance opportunities for collaboration across the state.

Purpose

This Strategic Communication Plan was created by Cassey Suthers with the support and involvement of LDAC founding members. The plan is the result of several months of empirical research with LDAC (members), ACDP volunteers and members, and members of the Latino community in Allen County. The purpose of this document is to provide a framework for the development of communication materials and efforts to serve the goals of LDAC.

The plan identifies the audiences LDAC communicates with, its goals and objectives, the channels it uses to communicate with these audiences, and the key messages found to be relevant to Latinos in Allen County. In addition, the plan will guide LDAC in sustaining positive relationships with likeminded organizations, both in the Fort Wayne community, and under the umbrella of the ACDP. Lastly, it will provide a framework for LDAC to craft communication that addresses the needs of its primary audience and, in turn, persuade and engage them in the political conversation. The implementation of this plan will ensure that communication from LDAC is consistent and relevant, allowing for better analysis and more accurate revisions.

Audiences

LDAC interacts with a variety of audiences. These audiences include like-minded organizations and groups who work in tandem to engage various publics. Constituents are the publics we seek to engage through our efforts.

Party Affiliates and Groups with Common Interests

LDAC communicates with many organizations, of these are affiliates of the Democratic party (Indiana and Allen County)—clubs, caucuses, and groups who fall under the umbrella of the Indiana or Allen County Democratic Party. Additionally, there are groups and organizations with common interests that collaborate on events, projects, and other efforts to mobilize political participants in the community. These collaborators include, but are not limited to, local groups, such as the United Activists, the Hispanic Leadership Coalition, Faith in Indiana, the Fort Wayne Women’s March. While this is not an extensive list, this list does include organizations LDAC has worked with in the past and plan to continue working with in the future.

Maintaining positive relationships with these groups is a component of this plan. LDAC benefits from collaboration with organizations by demonstrating its commitment to the community and strengthening ties with active community members. Collaboration with these groups increases LDACs network, providing an opportunity to reach a broader audience base.

Constituents

On behalf of the Allen County Democratic Party, we represent the Latino community of Allen County, Indiana. Our primary audience is made up of Latinos and non-Latinos interested in increasing representation for Latinos in Allen County.

Goals and Objectives

The goal of this plan is to provide a framework for crafting consistent, relevant, and strategic communication with all audiences. Through intentional messaging that clearly addresses the community’s needs, the quality of communication improves, and with it its delivery. LDAC communication demonstrates a commitment and desire to continue upholding Democratic principles by providing a platform for the Latino community in Allen County to take an active role in government. The plan itself promotes the development of persuasive and informative messages which will engage and empower the Latino community to take an active role in local government and, in turn, further the mission of LDAC.

Objectives

The following objectives support the goal stated above:

- Establish and maintain **trust** with the Latino community.
- Increase collaboration with fellow caucuses and clubs within the democratic party, as well as community organizations who share common goals.

- **Educate** and engage Latinos in the political process and create awareness of **opportunities** to become involved, including joining LDAC.
- Increase political representation for Latinos in Allen County by recruiting and supporting candidates who represent the needs and concerns of Latinos (**political efficacy**).

Assumptions

The success of this plan is based on the assumption that all LDAC communication will follow the guidelines presented in this document and use the channels listed when communicating with audience members. Consistency is a necessary component of this plan.

Key Challenges

LDAC faces a variety of challenges in communicating effectively with the Latino base in Allen County. Latinos in Allen County have pointed to the following obstacles to participating in local government:

- Lack of understanding or education about the political process
- Mistrust of government and politics
- Difficulty identifying opportunities (awareness and accessibility)
- Low levels of political efficacy (“My voice doesn’t matter”; “I can’t make a difference”)

Addressing Key Challenges

As a diverse and multifaceted demographic, the experiences of Latinos in our community vary from person to person depending on factors such as legal status, degree of assimilation, generational experience, country of origin, education level, and more. Recognizing the various challenges that exist will allow us to craft our messages in a way that addresses concerns and establishes trust and legitimacy in our organization, effectively building relationships and garnering support. Additionally, these challenges pose an opportunity for LDAC to craft communication that resonates with this demographic and, in turn, increase awareness in local politics and empower Latinos to become politically involved in Allen County.

Messages

Official messages from LDAC should convey a conversational tone while presenting informative content. Effective messages are clear, concise, and accessible to the lay reader. Communication should contain as little political jargon as possible. In addition to specific content, messages should increase awareness of LDACs efforts, strengthen community identity among Latinos in the area, and educate the public on issues that affect the core demographic.

Messages should seek to empower voters by demonstrating the importance of raising concerns about issues by demonstrating examples of how policies, legislation, and certain measures affect the local community. Additionally, messages should present evidence of instances when

individuals have impacted change in the community through involvement in local politics.

Overall, messages should appeal to Latinos at both the local and national level, in a manner that is appropriate to the channel, to engage, persuade them, and empower them.

Communication Channels

This plan refers to communication through the following channels:

- Website
- Social media
 - Facebook
- Email Newsletters and Blasts
- Events
- Meetings

Website

The LDAC website serves as a first point of contact with constituents and potential members. As a result, it provides information to the public about the caucus' mission, contact information, and social media. <https://latinodemsac.wordpress.com/home/>

Political Candidates

The LDAC website contains interviews (available in both Spanish and English) with Democratic candidates running for seats in Allen County, as well as at the state level. Interviews for candidates are only available when LDAC has an opportunity to meet with the candidate. These interviews are conducted by members of LDAC and present the candidates' platforms in relation to their ability to represent the Latino community. The purpose of these interviews is to provide an unfiltered view of candidates running for office and to address their plan for representing the needs of the Latino community, if elected. Ultimately, these interviews serve as an educational resource meant to provide constituents with the information necessary to make informed decisions when voting in elections.

Future Plans

The LDAC website is exploring an opportunity to publish blog posts about specific topics, issues, and policies that affect the Latino community in Allen County. The blog posts will be authored by members of the Latino community and reviewed/approved by the LDAC board. The goal is to engage members of the community on topics that are relevant to constituents and promote discussion about issues not often addressed. More information regarding this opportunity will be included in this plan when it is finalized.

Social Media

LDAC uses Facebook as the primary social media channel. Facebook provides an opportunity to reach a large network of people at a minimal financial cost. LDAC posts regularly, at least three times a week. Posts shared on the LDAC Facebook page are relevant and informative to all

audiences of LDAC. Examples of posts included current events that are of interest to the Latino agenda, content about upcoming elections, voter registration deadlines, social issues pertaining to Latino representation or disenfranchisement, local issues and opportunities, and sharing events hosted by like-minded organizations. Posts on Facebook demonstrate LDACs commitment to educating and informing constituents about current events and their impact on the community, as well as promote discussion about the gap in representation for Latinos.

The content shared on Facebook is reviewed by LDAC administrators prior to posting. Comments are monitored regularly. Removing unproductive or disruptive comments is done at the discretion of LDAC administrators.

LDACs tone for communication on social media is educational and informative, but never patronizing or presumptuous. Responses to negative or opposing comments should be respectful and avoid instigating further hostility.

Email Newsletters and Blasts

Email Newsletters

A monthly newsletter is sent out to the LDAC mailing list using Mailchimp Customer Relationship Management System. The newsletter is scheduled the first Monday of every month, one week following the monthly meeting. The newsletter contains a short recap of the discussion during the meeting. Included in every newsletter is information about local politics and events, a quick overview of the hot topics in national politics, and time and location details for the next LDAC meeting. The newsletter serves to keep mailing list subscribers informed about what is happening in the community, as well as nationally, and encourage meeting attendance. The newsletter supports the objective of both educating and engaging constituents, establishing a sense of trust between LDAC and its members (and newsletter recipients).

The newsletter is concise and informative with accurate and reliable sources for news articles.

Blasts

Email blasts are typically ad hoc communication due to an event or update that is relevant to share with LDAC audiences. These can include, but are not limited to partner events, candidate meet and greets, volunteer opportunities with LDAC or like-minded organizations, or educational opportunities LDAC audiences would benefit from attending. Email blasts encourage collaborative efforts with groups and fellow ACDP caucuses and clubs by demonstrating LDACs support for local efforts and willingness to work together on common goal.

Like the monthly newsletter, any email blasts from LDAC are concise and have been checked for accurate and reliable information.

Events

LDAC hosts at least one event per year. Events are subject to, but not limited to issues and policies relevant to the Latino community, mobilization efforts and local Democratic campaigns.

The following is a list of events hosted by LDAC since its conception:

- Stop ICE rally
- Meet and Greet with John Aguilera
- Gorditas, Empanadas, Tamales, Oh My! - LDAC Fundraiser
- Power the Latino Vote

The purpose of events is to engage and interact with the community over issues that affect the Latino population of Allen County. Whenever possible, LDAC will coordinate with local groups and organizations to expand audience reach, resources, and demonstrate its ability to drive change through collaboration.

Events hosted by LDAC are purposeful and intentional, whether through advocating for or against policies, providing education about political candidates and the process, creating awareness of LDACs efforts, or registering voters. Events provide an opportunity to interact on a personal level with community members and build trust and community through thoughtful interactions and conversations.

Events provide an opportunity for discussion with community members who have questions, concerns, or are interested in participating in some form in local politics. Additionally, they provide opportunities for future collaborations, membership recruitment, and productive discussion and feedback about ongoing efforts. Events hosted by LDAC should provide opportunities for productive discussion and constructive feedback. All LDAC events include a mailing list sign-up sheet, meeting date information, and resources for getting involved in local politics.

Meetings

LDAC meetings are held monthly on the fourth Wednesday of each month, with the exception of holidays. All LDAC board members are in attendance at meetings and ACDP caucus and club members, as well as community members are invited to attend. The meetings are guided by an agenda, which is created by the LDAC board, in an effort to guide the discussion and manage time effectively. Topics include discussion of key community issues, local Democratic candidates, upcoming events and projects, and opportunities for community involvement. Additionally, during campaign season, LDAC encourages Democratic candidates to attend meetings as guest speakers with the goal of providing an opportunity for outreach with the Latino base. Introductions are made at the beginning of every meeting and new attendees are encouraged to contribute to the conversation and provide feedback.

Future Communication Channels

There is a potential to expand social media presence in the future by adopting the use of applications such as YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter. These channels require a deeper understanding and a reliable commitment to generating regular content.

Communication Matrix

The Communication Matrix demonstrates the intersection of the various communication channels and the objectives listed in this plan. This matrix displays the channel, objective, audience, frequency, status of existing or future communications.

Communication Channel	Objectives	Purpose	Audience	Frequency	Status
Website	Opportunity, Education	Educate and inform about LDAC mission and community outreach efforts	Affiliates and groups; Constituents	Static	Live
Facebook	Opportunity, Education	Provide relevant and timely updates about current events (local and national) and engage with audience members about social and political happenings	Affiliates and groups; Constituents	Post 3x/week	Live
Email Newsletter	Education, Trust	Update members and mailing list subscribers about meetings and other topics	Affiliates and groups; Constituents	Once/month	Scheduled
Email Blasts	Collaboration Opportunity, Trust	Send information about upcoming events, opportunities, etc.	Affiliates and groups; Constituents	Ad hoc	N/a
Events	Collaboration, Political Efficacy, Opportunity, Education, Trust	Engage with the public in serving Latino population of Allen County	Affiliates and groups; Constituents	At least 1/year	Scheduled
Meetings	Opportunity, Trust, Political Efficacy	Discuss and collaborate with audiences about current and future efforts	Affiliates and groups; Constituents	Once/month	Scheduled

Voice

The LDAC voice is casual, yet professional and respectful even when faced with differing and combative individuals/parties. When crafting communication, LDAC will maintain a unified voice on the issues, stances, and discussions carried out regardless of channel.

General Guidelines

Communication should contain informative and relevant information presented in a casual, yet professional and respectful tone using the channel appropriate for the goal of the message (see Figure 1). LDAC representatives should follow the communication standards outlined in this document.

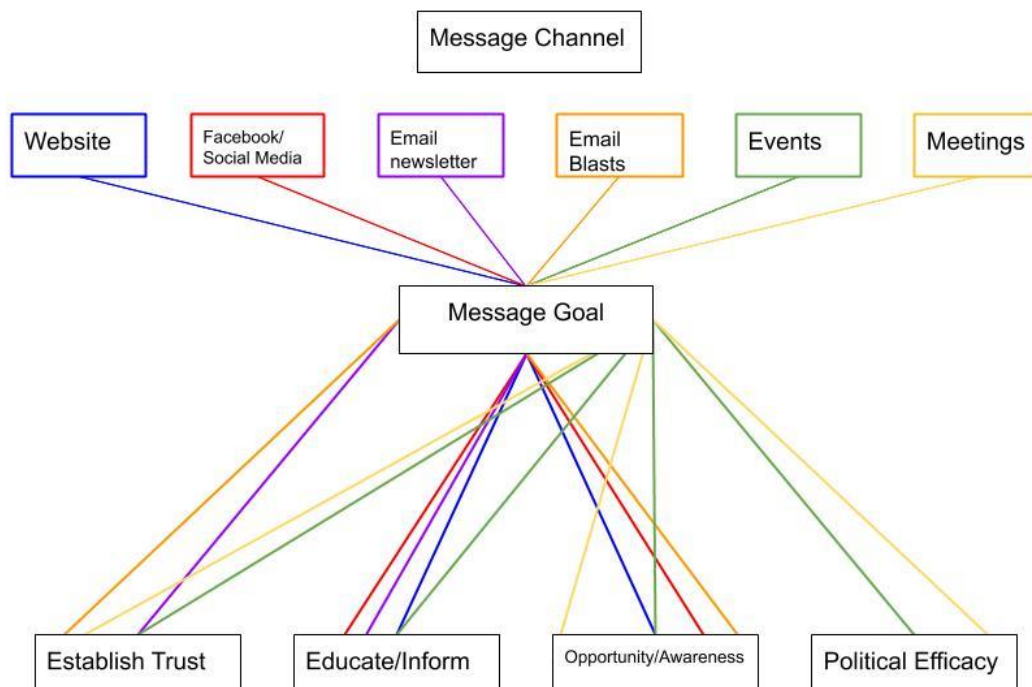


Figure 1: Depiction of Channel to Message Goal Application

General guidelines for communicating with audiences are as follows:

- Express clear and concise messages relevant to LDAC and the community
- Convey a respectful yet professional tone
- Educate and inform about the political process and the benefits of participating
- Encourage participation of all forms regardless of time commitment
- Utilize appropriate communication channels
- Ensure timely communication

Conclusion

This Communication Plan serves as a guiding framework for LDAC communication to its constituents. Effective and successful communication results from a concerted effort from LDAC representatives in using the channels and guidelines presented in this plan. Such commitment and effort will enhance LDACs ability to maintain positive relationships with all audiences, educate and engage Latinos in the political process, create awareness about opportunities for Latinos to become politically involved, and increase political representation for Latinos in Allen County. Overall, the plan will support LDACs mission, ultimately contributing to the successful election of Democratic representatives for Allen County.

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Appendix A.

Community Leader Interview Questions

1. What concerns do you hear from Latinos are when it comes to politics and the party system?
2. What issues are priority for Latinos that you've heard from?
3. How do you go about connecting with voters, Latino voters, who are apathetic?
4. What limitations or hinderances are there for people to get involved with the party or its orgs?
5. When you talk to Latinos, what are the top issues that concern or matter to them?
6. What's one thing we you've done to engage people (Latinos)?
7. What do you hear from Latinos about the impact of their voice impacting policy?
8. What are some of the issues we see Latinos facing our community?
9. Are Latinos in our community strong participants in the political process?
10. How do you think the party is doing in terms of supporting the Latino community and engaging them to participate?
11. Do people, Latinos, feel empowers or that their voice matters enough to vote?
12. What can we do to engage Latino communities?

Appendix B.

Focus Group Questions

1. How would you describe your interest or engagement in local politics up to this point in your life?
2. What motivates you to participate in the political process, either through voting, volunteering, or even running for office?
3. What, if any, obstacles have you encountered in your efforts to get involved? (think support, information available, opportunities...)
4. Have your parents or family's experiences informed your decision to participate or engage? If so, how?
5. Do you agree with this statement – I believe my contribution can make a difference in the political process. Why or why not?
6. What experiences, if any, have influenced your perspective on this?
7. How well you feel your views and concerns are represented by local groups who are vocal in the local political scene?
8. What are the top 3 political issues that are most important to you, and why?
9. Do you see these issues well represented in Allen County? Why or why not?
10. For those who said they aren't involved, or aren't interested, what kind of opportunities would motivate you to become more involved in local politics? Have you seen these anywhere?