

EARN THE LATINA VOTE



LÚCETE 
Latina

OUR VOICE ★ OUR CHOICE ★ OUR CALIFORNIA

LÚCETE LATINA

Political movement looks to Latina voting power as the guiding light for progressive politics

BY ANDY FURILLO

In the heat of another presidential election year, Communities for a New California (CNC) is leaning heavily on Latinas to frame the stakes for rural and working-class voters when they go to the polls in November.

Whether it's the cost of housing, the quality of water, reproductive freedom, decent wages for honest work or many other issues, women—and especially Latinas, as the CEOs of their own families—wield the power to determine the outcomes of the many state, local, and federal races on the ballot.

Such has been CNC's thinking since it launched the "Lúcete Latina" campaign three

years ago, based on growing numbers that have made Latinas the single largest and perhaps most influential demographic voting group in California.

"I'm grateful that there are people working in organizations like CNC who recognize the value of engaging Latinas," says Araceli García Muñoz, a former CNC staffer and lifelong resident of California's Central Valley who is currently pursuing a juris doctor degree at the University of the Pacific's McGeorge School of Law in Sacramento. "As mothers, as daughters, as tias, we carry a lot of responsibility in our families, and I think we need to understand civic engagement as a part of taking care of

our families. We can't afford to sit on the sidelines."

Latinas now account for 3.2 million of the state's 22.1 million voters, or one out of every six California voters. This has propelled Latinos as a whole to majority status in 16 of the state's congressional districts, including in two with hotly contested seats in the San Joaquin Valley—the 13th District that includes San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, and Madera Counties, and the 22nd District which included Kings, Tulare, and Kern Counties—that could determine control of the U.S. House of Representatives.

CNC organizers have launched major

Araceli García Muñoz, a law student who served as Chief of Staff to a City of Fresno councilmember, says its important for voters to understand the issues and take action.

PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES

"As mothers, as daughters, as tias, we carry a lot of responsibility in our families, and I think we need to understand civic engagement as a part of taking care of our families. We can't afford to sit on the sidelines."

ARACELÍ GARCÍA MUÑOZ

Former organizer at Communities for a New California, student at McGeorge School of Law

SHINING LIGHT ON THE ISSUES

A survey of California Latina voters conducted in July 2024 by Communities for a New California in partnership with Data for Social Good gauged participants' top concerns. Findings included:



54 percent listed high rents as their number one housing concern, making the lack of affordable housing the top issue.



61.5 percent of respondents said their high cost of living was unsustainable, making jobs and the economy the second-ranking concern.



Scan QR Code to see full findings

door-to-door canvassing and phone banking operations to ensure voters in these and other California districts understand the issues at stake.

For Imelda Ramírez, no issue is more important than the fundamental necessity of life—water.

Growing up in Hanford, Ramírez’s family knew the water at home was unfit for drinking. They would never have thought it was the same at her elementary school until tests showed that its water was also contaminated, forcing families to pay for their own bottled water to supply their children for the school day.

These days, Ramírez is asking questions, and if she doesn’t like the answers, she’s doing something about it as the field director of the Community Water Center Action Fund in Visalia.

“We make sure families have the information they need on water issues,” Ramírez says. “My role is to endorse and elect what we’re calling the water champions who will push water policy at the state, federal and local levels, and make sure that we elect the right people who know that water is for communities and not just for agriculture.”

The Lúnete Latina campaign is moving to the forefront to provide voters with a deeper understanding of the crucial issues that families face, and the different positions taken by different candidates.

Who supports a woman’s right to choose what to do with her own body? Who favors raising the state’s minimum wage to \$18 an hour? Who wants the state to create an apprenticeship program to prepare young people for quality jobs at good pay? Who will fight to oppose exclusionary zoning laws that restrict home ownership opportunities for

working families? Who will protect tenants? Who supports the aspirations of immigrants? Who will curb corporate polluters? Who believes that federal infrastructure funds should help protect our neighborhoods from climate change? Who will defend the Affordable Care Act?

To sort out the issues, Communities for a New California is determined through Lúnete Latina to build authentic relationships with Latina voters, listen to their needs and earn their votes to ensure the future for their neighborhoods is clean, safe, just and free.

“All those issues, they are all really abstract ideas,” says Muñoz. “But they are extremely personal to our day to day lives, and they are things that we can have an impact on simply by voting.”

For more information on the Lucete Latina campaign, scan the QR Code below to watch the 15-video Digital Lúnete Latina Video Series.



LÚNETE★



Tap water in Imelda Ramírez’s hometown of Hanford was so contaminated that it was undrinkable; now, with the Community Water Center Action Fund, she advocates for safe, affordable drinking water for all.
PHOTO COURTESY OF IMELDA RAMÍREZ



In order, Latinas’ listed their next most important concerns:

- ★ Healthcare
- ★ Education
- ★ The Environment
- ★ Immigration Reform



78.5 percent said the best way to change society for the better was by voting.



80 percent said they would be looking for candidates’ positions on affordable housing, followed by inflation, affordable health care, homelessness, the environment and democracy.

★ ABORTION BY THE NUMBERS

24% of U.S.

women will have an abortion by the age of 45.

While the number of abortions initially surged after Roe vs. Wade, the rate of abortions has since

steadily decreased.

In 1981, the rate of abortions was

29.3 per 1,000 women ages 15 to 44.

In 2020, that rate had dropped to

14.4 per 1,000 women.

From 2013 to 2018, the fatality rate due to abortion complications was

0.4 deaths per 100,000 legal procedures.

Out of the 619,591 legal abortions

performed in 2018, two women died.

In 2014, 90% of U.S. counties

did not have an abortion clinic. Five states had a single clinic.

In 2019, 58% of women

of reproductive age—40 million women—lived in a state hostile to abortion rights.

REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM

How to combat barriers to abortion and women's health care: a Latina advocate shares her own story

BY ANNE STOKES

Even though Karen Borja's childhood home was behind a Planned Parenthood health center, when it came time for "The Talk," there wasn't much to be said.

"The only real conversation we had was, 'If you get pregnant, please don't come ask for support from me, you won't get it at my house,'" she says. "I understood from conversations (with) my very Catholic, conservative Latina mom that support was not an option."

After leaving home for college, Borja found out she was pregnant. She knew she didn't want to have a child, that her priority was finishing her education and making her community a better place for everyone.

It wasn't until a decade later, just before she started working with Planned Parenthood of the Pacific

Southwest as Director of Legislative and Community Affairs, Borja was finally able to talk to her mother about her abortion story.

"I chose to have my abortion because it was about me, my health care decisions, my health care needs, and my future," she says. "My abortion is not about shame, it's not a decision I made with anyone else in mind except for me and my future. I am today, as a 33-year-old still-Catholic Latina, very proud that was a decision that I made, that I had access to."

★ ROE VS. WADE

On June 24, 2022, the Supreme Court overturned Roe vs. Wade, striking down Americans' constitutional abortion rights and leaving the fate of millions of women in the hands of state lawmakers. Soon thereafter, nearly half of states acted to ban or severely restrict abortion, despite the fact that 61% of Americans believe abortion should be legal and accessible.

Even though leadership in California has committed to protecting abortion rights, out-of-state patients have impacted the state's health care system. For those traveling to California for care, it's a substantial additional hurdle to overcome.

"People who are marginalized are more likely to experience difficulties accessing care and barriers because of cost, transportation, childcare to get to an appointment, language

barriers, lack of access to insurance and other issues," Borja explains. "Abortion bans have always disproportionately harmed Black, Latine, indigenous and other people of color, immigrants, people with low income, and are the product of systemic barriers to care that our communities continue to face in California and outside of California."

★ HOW TO HELP

Despite the systemic barriers to abortion care—lack of local providers, lack of health insurance coverage, lost wages and time off work, childcare, lack of information, transportation and lodging costs, and shame—there is hope. Here is how you can help combat these barriers:

• **Donate to an abortion fund:**

According to the Guttmacher Institute, up to 75% of abortion patients are poor or low income. Find and donate to your local abortion fund at abortionfunds.org.

• **Volunteer:** Give your time at your local women's health center. Planned Parenthood centers provide training and volunteer opportunities to support providers and patients. Visit www.plannedparenthood.org for more information.

• **Vote:** Make your voice heard.

In 2022, California voters passed Proposition 1, the Right to Reproductive Freedom Amendment. It prohibited the state from interfering with or denying a person's reproductive freedom—including abortion and contraceptives—and enshrined those rights into the state's constitution.

"Abortion in California is still legal, safe and protected," says Borja. "There are genuine efforts every day going on to share the opposite of the truth in our state. The more people who have access to the truth, the better we'll all be for it."

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"Abortion bans have always disproportionately harmed Black, Latine, indigenous and other people of color."

KAREN BORJA

Director of legislative and community affairs, Planned Parenthood of the Pacific Southwest

Karen Borja speaks at a recent rally in support of reproductive rights.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KAREN BORJA

HEALTH CARE

How to overcome generations of fear
and build trust in medicine

BY ANNE STOKES

Maricela de Rivera can trace her family's deep-rooted distrust of doctors back a century. Her great-grandmother lost her daughter, an 18-month-old named Rose, when a doctor dismissed her concerns and sent her home with a sick baby.

"That was a trauma that she never overcame, a fear that she passed down to all of her daughters, who passed it on to their children," de Rivera says.

That distrust and fear has cost her family dearly. Her grandmother battled cancer for 45 years, enduring surgery after surgery but forgoing chemotherapy or radiation. After falling down a flight of stairs, her mother's broken leg was never treated; instead she numbed the pain with a lifetime of alcoholism. Even de Rivera herself has struggled with trusting the medical system.

"I had home births, I had a midwife," she explains. "As an overweight Latina ... I did not believe I could walk into a hospital and give birth without coming out having a C-section, or having some medical interventions, or complications that weren't necessary."

But today, as the multicultural health equity coordinator for the City of Long Beach's Department of Health and Human Services, de Rivera works to ensure cultural barriers don't keep people from life-saving medical care.

"When we talk about health and equity based on race and ethnicity, that is very real," she says. "The statistics and the data show us that a person's health outcomes and life expectancy, quality of life, (and) educational attainment are oftentimes directly correlated to, and the result of, race and ethnicity."

★ CULTURAL COMPETENCY

Whether it's language, appreciating traditional practices or even understanding why someone would choose not to see a doctor, acknowledging culture is key to providing comprehensive medical care.

Explains de Rivera, "When you put down someone's cultural practice, when you tell a Chinese immigrant or an immigrant from India that the herbs they traditionally use to stimulate milk production are bad, weird or just wrong, ... they will simply go underground and not tell you. Then you have people who are no longer seeking access to health care."

She also saw examples in her own family. "My mom got zero prenatal care because Latinas in Boyle Heights in East LA did not receive culturally competent care. They were told that their practices were wrong, and bad, so she simply didn't go until she was giving birth. That's certainly a barrier."

★ GENDER BIAS

Latinas also face medical gender bias. Studies have shown that not only are women's symptoms and pains more consistently dismissed than men's, but women are misdiagnosed more often, leading to worse outcomes, including death. The under-representation of women in studies, clinical trials and in providers' medical training contributes to poorer understanding of women's health care needs.

"When I'm sitting with my doctor, ... none of her training was about bodies like mine," de Rivera says.



"It's not hyperbolic to say it impacts every facet of your personhood and your family."

MARICELA DE RIVERA

Multicultural health equity coordinator, City of Long Beach Department of Health and Human Services

★ TIME AND MONEY

According to the National Women's Law Center, Latinas on average earn 57 cents to each dollar earned by white, non-Hispanic men, making the cost of health care—premiums, co-pays, deductibles, and that's if you're insured—more likely to be prohibitive.

"So when you're talking to a Latina, you are talking about a person who may have to, instead of going to a doctor and paying a co-pay, may have to go 10 times," explains de Rivera. "Can you get time off to drive there, be there, and go back to work? Can you pay all of those co-pays for each visit because you've been dismissed so many times?"

She praises Long Beach's efforts to have difficult conversations about race, equity and the way the city is working with community organizations to affect change. That includes the recent formation of its Multicultural Health Care Council, which serves to bring

As Long Beach's multicultural health equity coordinator, Maricela de Rivera works to overcome the cultural-, racial- and gender-based barriers that keep people from life-saving health care.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARICELA DE RIVERA

together different communities, nonprofits and other agencies.

"Every single person who is unhealthy, whether it's because they don't trust medical providers, or because they don't have access to insurance, or whether it's because they can't afford to pay their co-pays, or whether it's because they can't afford the time off, whether it's because they're dismissed or ignored or not believed by their health care provider—which many Latinas aren't—all of that impacts my community," she says. "It's not hyperbolic to say it impacts every facet of your personhood and your family."

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CLEAN WATER

Everyone deserves it:
How these Latina women are fighting for it

BY GAIL ALLYN SHORT

Nearly 20 years ago, Sandra Garcia was working as a farm laborer in Poplar, Calif., when she and others in her community began noticing their tap water had a strange taste.

"We didn't know how polluted this water was. We only knew that the water was dirty," recalls Garcia, now 66. "It didn't look pretty at all, and we were sick. We were having stomach issues and didn't know it was because of the water."

To help, many found themselves having to buy bottled water.

In fact, they later learned the groundwater in the area was contaminated with high levels of nitrates and other dangerous chemicals.

So the mother of six says she decided to take action.

"I got together with several mothers because we were having so many issues related to water, but there wasn't anyone we could go to and ask for help," Garcia says.

Eventually, they reached out for assistance to the nonprofit Center on Race, Poverty, and the Environment and its initiative, the Rural Poverty Water Project.

Garcia says that through the Rural Poverty Water Project, her group traveled to the state Capitol to talk with legislators about the water contamination issues at home.

The Project then helped Garcia in founding the AGUA Coalition; AGUA stands for *Asociación de Gente Unida por el Agua*, or the Association of People United for Water.

Since the early 2000s, community organizer Susana De Anda has studied water quality issues in Garcia's area through the Rural Poverty Water Project. De Anda says she and colleagues soon concluded that something more was needed.

"We felt that for us to really address public health threats when it comes to access to safe and affordable drinking water, we needed to have a nonprofit to focus and

leverage our resources on that issue," De Anda says.

So in 2006, De Anda and Laurel Firestone founded the Community Water Center.

"Community Water Center's mission is to ensure that all California residents have access to safe, clean and affordable drinking water. We believe clean water is a basic human right and that it should never be a privilege," De Anda says.

"The Center exists because in California, for a long time, communities and families and residents were excluded from water planning," De Anda explains. "We believe that if we had had equitable access to water planning in California, we wouldn't be in the situation we're in now."

Specifically, the Community Water Center focuses much of its work on farm workers and underserved communities in the San Joaquin Valley and Central Coast.

"We believe clean water is a basic human right and that it should never be a privilege."

SUSANA DE ANDA
Community Water Center

The Center advocated for passage of the \$1.4 billion Safe and Affordable Funding Equity and Resilience program, known as SAFER, a fund set up to help ensure that water is not only safe, but also affordable for underserved families.

It has also pushed for new water treatment systems and laws aimed at



protecting residents' access to clean, affordable water.

Additionally, the Center works with partners such as the California Water Resources Control Board's Division of Drinking Water, local agricultural communities and other allies to ensure that the groundwater remains protected against contamination.

Garcia says that today, whenever she has an opportunity to talk to candidates running for political office, she asks them about the water issue.

"I always ask, 'What will you do after you're elected? Will you open the door or close the door because I'll need help with water,'" says Garcia. "This has been very

Sandra Garcia had to buy bottled water and find a way to cart it home. Groundwater where she lived was contaminated with high levels of nitrates and other dangerous chemicals; it was making her sick.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SANDRA GARCIA

useful for us in picking candidates or the representatives that we have."

De Anda concurs, saying that residents must go deeper than voting. "It's important to know what candidates and elected leaders stand for," she says. "It's also important to be civically engaged if we want to, and if we can, and hold decisionmakers accountable, because if we don't, other issues are going to take priority."

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CLEAN AIR

Toxins from the Salton Sea were making her sick:
How a young Imperial Valley girl helped convince
state leaders to take action

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

In late 2019, Ana Yaretzi Garcia heard the news: A public hearing on air quality—a critical issue for her—would be held in Sacramento.

To Ana, then 6, it didn't matter that California's capital was 545 miles from her Salton City home in Imperial County. She had to be at the meeting, no matter how far it was. She asked her parents to drive her.

And that's how Ana came to speak about the horrible air pollution associated with the dying Salton Sea, California's biggest lake, at a December 2019 hearing of the California Air Resources Board (CARB) in Sacramento. Her testimony is part of the reason that, in 2022, the state prioritized addressing this ecological crisis.

Among other things, Ana told CARB that Salton City's air is so bad, she and her friends often cannot go out.

"The air has bacteria and it sickens us," Ana says, noting that she and many neighbors have allergic reactions to fetid airborne toxins emanating from the landlocked Salton Sea a few miles away.

With twice the surface area of Lake Tahoe, the Salton Sea was created in 1905 by accident: An irrigation canal that carried water from the Colorado River shattered, sending water into a low-lying area known as the Salton Sink. According to historians, the river flowed unimpeded for 18 months into the sink. The new lake eventually became 15 miles wide and 45 miles long, providing water for agriculture.

In the mid-20th century, the sparkling Salton Sea drew countless tourists. Runoff

from farms kept the lake full, but also polluted it with chemicals. By the 1970s, the lake began to shrink and the pollution condensed, causing bird and fish die-offs. Over decades, the problems worsened and tourists disappeared.

As the Salton Sea recedes, its crumbling lake bed has turned to dry dust—dust that on windy days swirls for miles in the surrounding desert.

Ana, who will turn 11 in August, was healthy when her family moved in May 2016 to Salton City, a town of about 6,000 residents. Shortly afterwards, she began to experience severe allergy symptoms; her eyes swelled and watered, and she had flu-like nasal congestion. Later, her bronze skin turned pale.

Amor Garcia, Ana's mother, did not know what caused her daughter's symptoms. "I became sad and disconcerted," Garcia says.

Ana, it turned out, wasn't alone. When she began kindergarten in 2017 at Salton City's Sea View Elementary School, many of her classmates had the same, or worse, symptoms.

Other parents—and doctors who examined Ana—cited the Salton Sea as the cause.

"When my husband and I bought our home in Salton City, we didn't know these problems existed."

AMOR GARCIA
Mother and air quality advocate

Ana's mother was stunned. "When my husband and I bought our home in Salton City, we didn't know these problems existed," Garcia says.

For now, she and her husband, Juan, cannot relocate. Owners of a small business, they are anchored to Salton City. They also lack funds to move.

But after discovering the cause of her daughter's illness, Amor Garcia joined parent

activists demanding that the Coachella Valley Water District and other agencies launch a concerted effort against the Salton Sea-related illnesses.

"Amor is committed to being an agent of change for improving the health" of all Salton City residents, says Anna Lisa Vargas, an environmental justice advocate with Communities for a New California Education Fund.

At the 2019 meeting, CARB heard public comments regarding AB 617, which created California's Community Air Protection Program, or CAPP.

At that hearing, Garcia echoed her daughter, pleading for CARB to alleviate Salton City's air nightmare. After listening to them and other speakers, CARB added the Eastern Coachella Valley into the program. As a result, local authorities are developing mitigation strategies to help improve air quality in the region, including the Salton Sea Air Basin.

Besides the efforts prompted by AB 617, which was co-authored by Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia (D-Coachella), federal agencies also have vowed to help cleanse the Salton Sea.

Ana and Amor Garcia helped their community to hopefully breathe easier in the future, all because a young girl decided to speak up and make herself heard.

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Amor Garcia and daughter Ana Yaretzi Garcia became advocates for air quality in their hometown of Salton City after Ana developed mysterious allergies.

PHOTO COURTESY OF AMOR GARCIA

EDUCATION

A Fresno school board member encourages parental involvement: How that—and voting—matters

BY GAIL ALLYN SHORT

In 2018, Veva Islas won a seat on the Fresno Unified School District Board. It was her second attempt at elected office.

Islas, who directs a local nonprofit, lost her bid for a seat on the Fresno City Council earlier that year and says she thought she would never try again. Friends, however, convinced her to run for school board.

And she won.

"I know it seems cliché when elected officials say they wanted to run to make a difference. But it really was my interest to try and advance education equity and correct some of the inequities that I was seeing," she says. "That drove me to want to serve."

As a member of the FUSD Board, she and her colleagues oversee the welfare of more than 76,000 students. Specifically, Islas represents students living in south central Fresno; it's an area with a large immigrant population, including a sizable Latino community as well as Hmong, Laotian, Punjabi and other ethnic communities.

South central Fresno is also an area that suffers from poverty and is in need of much economic development, Islas says. As a consequence, many students lack the educational and enrichment opportunities their wealthier counterparts enjoy.

Islas says she knows what it is like to grow up without all of the educational resources she needed at the time.

"That perspective helps me to understand the necessities of immigrant families who may have parents like mine who didn't have a lot of educational experience and understand what it's like to really grow up in poverty," she says.

In response to the disparities, Islas says the school district has implemented a number of programs over the years to help young children from minority and underserved communities achieve greater academic success.

"Here in Fresno, we've expanded our afterschool programming. We've also invested in early education, which are actually educational opportunities even before kindergarten, pre-K and transitional kindergarten."

This includes the existence of early learning child development centers that support working parents of infants, toddlers and pre-K children.

"This also was the first year we significantly expanded our summer programming, which included not just recreation, but a lot of enrichment programs for our students," she says.

Moreover, FUSD manages the Office of African American Academic Acceleration (A4) that aims to improve educational outcomes for Black children and youngsters in other demographic groups.

Additionally, the district offers English Learner Services for children learning English as their second language, she says.

Islas knows firsthand that voting in school board and other elections can make a difference in the kinds and quality of programs and services that children receive. To help their children, parents need to vote.

"Their voice and their vote matters," she says. "If they care about the safety of their children, the quality of their education, what they're taught in school, the books they're reading, the opportunities they have to explore higher education and be counseled and have safe places to play at recess, then absolutely their voices can make a huge difference in changing the things they don't like."

Even parents who, because of their immigration status, are unable to vote in elections should speak up to those in public office, she says. "Their voice still makes a huge difference because I, as an elected official, know that many of my constituents aren't able to vote for me. But they definitely



"That perspective helps me to understand the necessities of immigrant families who may have parents like mine who didn't have a lot of educational experience and understand what it's like to really grow up in poverty."

VEVA ISLAS

Fresno Unified School District board member

help me to stay informed about the issues that are impacting their children and think of ideas for how to address those issues."

In the end, Islas says more parents should be involved in their children's education. "What I've observed is that those students with parents who are engaged and involved are generally the students who are more successful."

Veva Islas, a board member of the Fresno Unified School District, understands the educational barriers that children who grow up in poverty can face.

PHOTO COURTESY OF VEVA ISLAS

LUCETE

COLLEGE READINESS

From the Central Valley to the World:
Inspiring students to reach for the stars

BY ANDY FURILLO

If you're a high school or community college student who wants to expand your higher education options, you might want to get in touch with Ruth Rodríguez.

That is, if she hasn't already gotten in touch with you.

Rodríguez is the University of Oregon's assistant director for regional recruitment. Her territory includes the San Joaquin Valley, and she's been working for two decades to prepare high school students for the next step of their education and inform them, their parents, and their counselors about all of the college choices available to them.

Even though the default choices of state schools in Merced, Turlock, Fresno and Bakersfield are all terrific, Rodríguez wants everybody to know that there is a whole other world of universities out there waiting for them, but that heightened preparation and knowledge of opportunities may be in order.

"In the Central Valley, students tend to look and stay local," Rodríguez said. "If they do look outside the valley, it might be to UCLA or the Bay Area. They often see going to an out-of-state school as out of reach, an impossibility. I encourage students to think that they have options."

Rodríguez's recruitment territory also includes the Sacramento Valley and the Central Coast of California. She believes that high schools need to ensure that their students are ready to go anywhere they are willing and able to attend college. She adds that "We do not lack talented students in the Central Valley. We just need to make sure high school counselors are helping

students take the right classes and engaging in extracurricular activities that university admissions offices assess to balance out their student bodies.

"Schools need to provide what students need—the AP and honors classes, the extracurricular activities, student organizations, sports," Rodríguez said. "Those are all things colleges want to see on an application. If students don't have those opportunities at their high schools, that's fine—they need to tell the colleges that on their applications. The Central Valley is behind on a lot of that."

A recent study by the Public Policy Institute of California reported that only 57 percent of high school graduates in the San Joaquin Valley go on to college compared to 65 percent statewide. The big reasons for this shortcoming include failure to complete college prep courses, finances, campus proximity and perceptions of access.

Rodríguez, who grew up in Hilmar and now lives in Turlock, feels strongly that considering out-of-state options could close the gap. Many well-known, out-of-state universities accept up to 60 percent of their applicants, compared to the five-percent-or-lower rates of some top California colleges. Not only is it easier to get in, but some out-of-state schools—such as the University of Nevada and the University of New Mexico—have financial assistance plans that can even make them more affordable than California schools if students are adequately prepared.

"That's my job," Rodríguez said, "to encourage students to open themselves up to the world and reach for the stars."



"We do not lack talented students in the Central Valley. We just need to make sure high school counselors are helping students take the right classes as well as engaging in extracurricular activities."

RUTH RODRÍGUEZ

Assistant Director for Regional Recruitment, University of Oregon

Ruth Rodríguez has been helping students get ready for college for more than 20 years.
PHOTO COURTESY OF RUTH RODRÍGUEZ



YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Invest In Me: Elevating the next generation of women leaders

BY ANDY FURILLO

In the tenuous years of adolescence, where everything is possible and unforeseen disaster lurks around every corner, sometimes all it takes for a young person to gain their footing in the world is an example of success.

A business leader. A teacher. A coach. A mentor with life experience to emulate. Even a friend or a peer who flashes a determined sense of direction. All of these modeling modes and more are staples in the young women's empowerment offerings contained in a northern San Joaquin Valley program called Invest In Me.

"We truly believe that when youth in general—and young women in particular—are connected to their community, when they feel valued and seen, they are more willing to be involved, to feel connected to the leadership in the community, and to see their own potential to lead," says Invest In Me Founding Executive Director Erica Ayala.

As they feel their power, the young women in the Stanislaus County city of Patterson who gravitated toward Invest In Me are now investing themselves in shaping their community's future. Every October, they organize interactive candidate forums that foster communication between Invest In Me participants and their prospective elected officials.

"We call it 'Meet Your Local Candidates,'" Ayala says. "And we call it 'Meet Your Local Leaders' in non-election seasons. This gives them the opportunity to connect with elected and appointed officials, voice their opinions, and learn about voting at a young age."

About 100 women have participated in Invest In Me programs since Ayala founded

"We truly believe that when youth in general—and young women in particular—are connected to their community, when they feel valued and seen, they are more willing to be involved, to feel connected to the leadership in the community, and to see their own potential to lead."

ERICA AYALA
*Founding Executive Director of
Invest In Me*

the organization in 2013. The goals of the organization are to instill in young women a sense of civic engagement, leadership, empowerment and well-being. Its programs allow participants to grow personally and professionally, find their voice, work collaboratively toward positive social change, and realize their potential as they transition towards higher education and their careers.

As they overcome barriers, gain self-confidence and achieve their goals, many



Invest In Me participants develop into influential leaders.

"By intertwining the threads of mentorship, skill-building, and civic engagement," the organization says on its website, "we not only prepare our participants for the challenges of today but also empower them to be the architects of a more promising, inclusive future."

Born and raised in Patterson, Ayala, 38, is a current board member of Communities for a New California's board of directors. She went to college at Stanislaus State and obtained her master's degree at St. Mary's College in Moraga, with her thesis: "The Importance of Investing in and Empowering Young Women."

Ayala sees the payoff of her life's work in the successes of the scores of women who have empowered themselves and become their own examples of inspiration.

Over 100 young women have participated in the Invest In Me program since Erica Ayala founded it in 2013.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ERICA AYALA

"We see these women thriving, doing their own things, seeing that their voice matters, and that they have a role here as mentors," Ayala says. "They're creating leadership pipelines in our area where there is such a need for it."

For more information about Invest In Me, go to www.investinmeca.com.

LUCETE



The Lúcete Latina video program highlights stories of California and Central Valley women who are leading the way to uplift their neighborhoods.

Scan the QR Code above to watch the 15-video Digital Lúcete Latina Video Series.



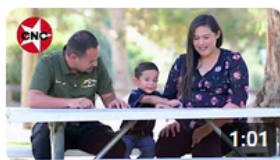
Lúcete Latina (English)

CNC Education Fund •



Lúcete Latina (Spanish)

CNC Education Fund •



Lúcete Latina: Samantha Valadez, Affordable Housing

CNC Education Fund •



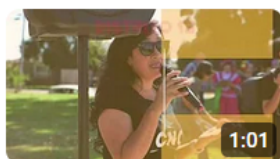
Lúcete Latina: Mayte Ruiz Garcia, Seguridad Económica

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Lúcete Latina: Cassandra Gutierrez, Civic Engagement

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Lúcete Latina: Rosa Inguanzo, Justicia Ambiental

CNC Education Fund •



Two recent polls reveal significant insights into the voting preferences of California's Latino and Latina populations.

Key findings are below. Scan the QR code at right for details.



★ Since 2000, **California has seen the largest increase in citizen voting age population** within Latinas in the country.

★ **1 of every 6 registered voters in California is a Latina woman.** Those **3.2 million Latina women** hold the power to decide who represents us in Sacramento and Washington, D.C.

★ The candidates who **authentically engage Latina voters** and demonstrate a plan to address the issues negatively impacting the families and loved ones of Latina women will not only **earn the votes of Latina women**, but also earn the votes of Latino voters as a whole.





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TÚ VOTO ES PODER, LÚCETE!

★ In order to vote, you must be registered. ★

But once you are, you can vote in all state and local elections and don't need to re-register unless you move, change your name or your political party preference.



ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS:

- **You must be a United States citizen** and a resident of California
- **18 years old or older by election day** (16- and 17-year-olds can pre-register to vote)
- **Not currently serving a state or federal prison term** for the conviction of a felony
- **Not currently found mentally incompetent** to vote by a court



TO REGISTER ONLINE, YOU'LL NEED:

- **Your California driver's license** or identification card number
- **The last four digits** of your social security number
- **Your birth date**



TO REGISTER IN PERSON, YOU CAN:

- **Get a voter registration application** at any DMV office or your county elections office.
- **Many libraries, post offices and government office** may also have applications.
- **For same day voter registration** (less than 15 days before an election), go to your county elections office or a vote center to conditionally register and vote with a provisional ballot.
- **To request a voting application** by mail, call the toll-free voter hotline at **1-800-345-VOTE (8683)**.

Register to vote online at <https://registertovote.ca.gov>.
Unsure of your voter status? Check it at <https://voterstatus.sos.ca.gov/>.