

# Margins in Movement

Toward Belonging in the Inland Empire  
of Southern California

Joshua Clark and Olivia Araiza

RESEARCH REPORT

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### Supplementary Data

Data from the Blueprint for Belonging Regional Survey of the Inland Empire can be accessed at [tinyurl.com/b4bie2020](https://tinyurl.com/b4bie2020)

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# Introduction

**OVERLOOKED. UNDERESTIMATED. NOT L.A.** Never appreciated. These were among the first words the Blueprint for Belonging team<sup>1</sup> heard from grassroots and community-organizing leaders who were asked to describe their region: the Inland Empire of Southern California. But as consistent as these responses were, so too was these leaders' pivot to another type of descriptors: Richness of diversity. Lifting each other up. Great potential. And memorably, one named a specific quality of the region that is underestimated: "our ability to lead."

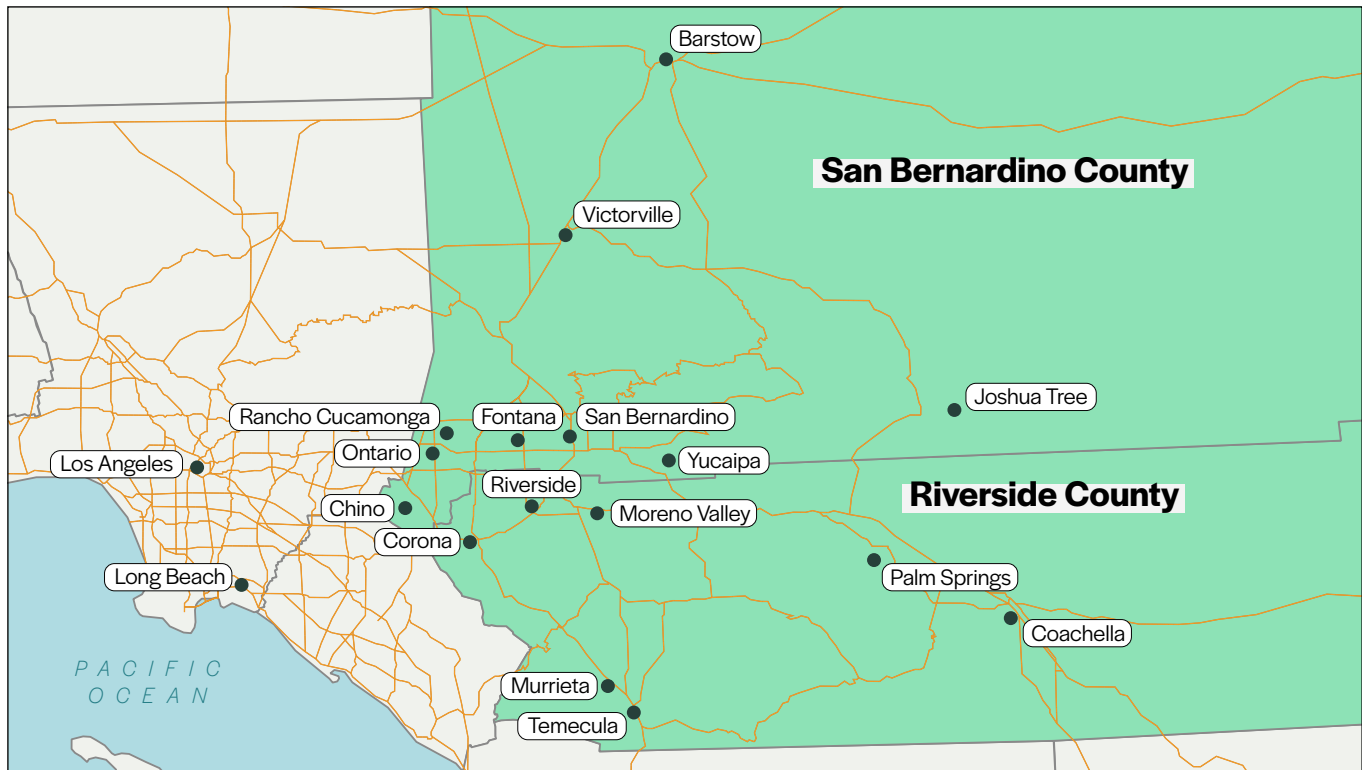
This report chronicles the most significant findings from more than two years of research with the people of the Inland Empire, focusing on that richness and potential, along with the barriers that constrain them. The research was carried out as part of the Blueprint for Belonging (B4B) project anchored at the Othering & Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley. It sought to understand prevailing beliefs, opinions, and narratives across different demographic subgroups in the region on topics including inter-group relations, the idea of community, economic opportunity and inequality, the role of government, and civic participation. The Institute's B4B team developed the research in ongoing dialogue and partnership with nonprofit organizations leading civic-engagement, worker-rights, immigrant-rights, environmental-justice, and other community organizing in the two-county region. Through this collaborative process, we refined research questions and methods to support knowledge and strategy needs of their applied work. In this report, we bring forward the most salient lessons relevant to contending with and transforming narratives and conventions in ways that foster inclusive, active civic identities and belonging.

Our research in the Inland Empire in many ways puts a spotlight on the overlooked and the unappreciated, and positions the "peripheries" at the center, as we describe below. Consisting of San Bernardino and Riverside counties, the Inland Empire itself is often identified as a periphery—"at the margins" in relation to Los Angeles. For decades, the region's story as a place has been linked to L.A.,<sup>2</sup> in what is easy to cast as a dependent relationship, but is actually a symbiotic one.<sup>3</sup> Today the relationship is largely defined by movement—of home seekers relocating to the more affordable Inland Empire, tens of thousands of daily commuters enduring congested highways to reach L.A. workplaces, and billions of dollars of goods passing through the Inland Empire's vast warehousing and logistics industry from the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach to the rest of the country.

These movements have added up to dramatic population growth in the Inland Empire over the past three decades, with the two-county region now more populous than each of 25 U.S. states. Demographers, economists, and planners have taken note, but still mostly with a view to broad patterns and trends, and from the proverbial 30,000 feet. One influential report dubbed inland California, from the exurbs of Sacramento to Riverside County, as the "Third California"—distinguishing it from coastal Northern and Southern California mostly on basis of its rapid population growth and lower housing costs.<sup>4</sup> But this type of label obscures enormous differences across this incredibly diverse expanse of people and communities. Its infelicitous echo of the term "Third World" reminds us of how inchoate interest in inland regions can actually re-marginalize the people of those regions when it draws attention to them only to simultaneously define them as ancillary, and in reductionist terms.

FIGURE 1

## The Inland Empire and its environs



By “Inland Empire,” we include all of the two-county region of San Bernardino and Riverside (set in green), stretching from the eastern edges of the Los Angeles metropolitan area to California’s state line with Nevada and Arizona.

### Overview of the Report

This report brings together results from long-term, collaborative research with the people of the Inland Empire that challenges numerous simplified short-hands about them, moving from the 30,000-foot to the three-dimensional view. The next section of this introduction reviews some recent reductionist takes on the region that are particularly problematic from the standpoint of addressing crises of health, environment, representation, and inequality in the region and the state.

But first, we wish to provide a brief, broad look at what is to come in this report. Following this introduction, the report consists of four additional parts and a brief appendix. Each of the parts (II-V) analyzes our most important research findings, together with a summary of implications and recommendations for practitioners, around a major theme of our Inland Empire research. **Part II** begins by pursuing the

thread of mobility, and how movement of populations has redefined Inland Empire communities over the past decades. It then examines residents’ current sense of belonging, their ideas about what constitutes “community,” and what barriers they perceive to experiencing both. **Part III** takes a closer view of how residents of the Inland Empire relate to one another across lines of difference—especially ethno-racial difference. With a focus on Black and Latinx residents, it highlights beliefs and narratives that are both perilous and promising for building cross-group solidarity and bridging.

**Part IV** recounts residents’ reflections on the landscape of economic opportunities in the Inland Empire, together with their hopes and ideas about what it might take to change them. The longest of this report’s parts, it attends to the considerable nuance and complexity in how low- to middle-income residents of color wrestle with what is fair, right, and possible with respect to the economy. This discussion

transitions to the fifth and final part of the report, in which we examine views and attitudes on government. **Part V** includes residents' primary associations with the idea of "government," the roles they see government playing in their lives, and how they think about engaging it to make change. Last, an **appendix** showcases one application of lessons highlighted across this report, in the form of a core narrative and accompanying set of communications best practices. These were designed to anchor a range of campaigns that put at their center an inclusive, civically active "we" identity. This application was developed by the B4B team and a coalition of community organizations in the Inland Empire, and is grounded in our research and other ongoing collaboration.

## De-Simplifying the Inland Empire

Perhaps the most recent example of the Inland Empire becoming the object of reductive attention came in December 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic tore through Riverside and San Bernardino counties' communities and hospitals with particular ferocity. As case counts more than tripled to over 270,000 in each county from Thanksgiving 2020 to February 2021, both became among the top four large counties nationally for infections per capita.<sup>5</sup> The response in many public commentaries was to link the Inland Empire's extreme spread to pockets of loud opposition to pandemic restrictions in the region.<sup>6</sup> But these narratives depicting the local surge as the predictable outcome for a supposedly "anti-mitigation" region occluded broader and more deeply rooted vulnerabilities to COVID-19.<sup>7</sup>

First, the air that residents breathe in the region's population center is highly polluted, due in large part to the emissions of diesel trucks and other vehicles engaged in the goods-movement industry.<sup>8</sup> Sustained exposure to the ozone pollution these emissions generate renders lungs prone to infection and weakens immune systems. The region is also home to a large number of residents working in goods movement—one of a handful of industries in which activity actually grew during the pandemic, and one that requires workers to leave their homes and be exposed to potential infection. Because blue-collar

jobs in warehouses and delivery services pay low wages, many of these workers also live in multi-family or multi-generational households in which the virus could spread further. And because the industry prefers to employ workers part-time or as contractors, healthcare access is not a given. Here we see how an industry and its norms assemble the kindling for a public-health crisis.

Several elected officials in the Inland Empire also played a role in increasing their constituents' vulnerability to infection by refusing to enforce state public-health rules like mask requirements and restrictions on business operations.<sup>9</sup> As infections spiked in December, San Bernardino County's Board of Supervisors put its energy into preparing another lawsuit challenging the state's regional order for slowing the spread, without offering an alternative of its own.<sup>10</sup> These and other actions and statements by local officials confused, or directly undermined, public-health experts' messages about how the public should protect itself from COVID-19.

The Inland Empire has also been an object of increasing interest from California's statewide civic-engagement and political players, who similarly too often recognize it through a simplifying prism. Here the two-county region is seen not only for its growth, but especially for its changing ethno-racial composition, as now more than two thirds of residents are Latinx, Black, Asian, or Native American (see **Table 1**). As such, the Inland Empire is increasingly a priority target of both nonpartisan mobilization efforts to expand representation of communities of color, and statewide candidate and ballot-initiative campaigns that see the Inland Empire as a "swing" region. It might be said that this latter group sees the Inland Empire as another type of margin: their potential margin of electoral victory. As an article written in the run up to California's 2018 gubernatorial primary put it, Riverside and San Bernardino counties' "largely working class electorate" is a top "electoral prize"—"highly coveted and maddeningly unpredictable."<sup>11</sup>

As an ever-growing share of that eligible voter base is people of color,<sup>12</sup> electoral strategists have tended to take as a given that the region's political future will be increasingly liberal or progressive. This is a

TABLE 1

## Demographic statistics for the Inland Empire

	Population 2019, in millions	Change in raw population 2010–2019	Share of population 2019
Total	4,650,631	+10%	100%
American Indian or Alaska Native	43,820	+1.4%	1.0%
Asian American	321,748	+27%	6.9%
Black or African American	372,576	+10%	8.0%
Hispanic or Latina/o/x	2,422,840	+21%	52.1%
White (not Hispanic)	1,436,845	-7.5%	30.9%

Source: United States Census Bureau.

“demographics-as-destiny” view of politics that sees correlations between ethno-racial identifiers and political preferences as essentially fixed. Where demographic change has already taken place, it sees political change as dependent only upon the composition of the voting electorate “catching up” to that of the general population. Accordingly, the Inland Empire is one of many regions across the country for which political strategists’ operant assumption has been that turnout growth itself will mean improved vote margins for progressive candidates and ballot campaigns.

That widely accepted hypothesis was not borne out in November 2020. To the contrary, Riverside and San Bernardino counties proved challenging terrain for progressive campaigns. There is no perfect proxy for measuring whether greater participation from a more ethno-racially diverse voter population drives election outcomes in a “progressive” direction. But given the large turnout increase from 2016 to 2020, and the public’s familiarity with the presidential candidates and what they stand for, it is notable how small the difference in results of the two presidential elections was. In 2016, 1.32 million Inland Empire voters cast ballots for either Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton or Republican candidate Donald Trump. Leaving aside votes cast for smaller parties, these ballots split 54.2 percent for Clinton and 45.8 percent for Trump.

In 2020, nearly 1.8 million Inland Empire voters cast ballots for either the Democratic or Republican presidential candidate—an increase of 480,000 votes for either Joe Biden or Trump. But these additional votes were no liberal surge; in fact, they split only slightly more favorably for the Democratic candidate than did 2016’s ballot pool. As a result, the historically high-turnout election only nudged the Democrats’ 2020 two-party advantage in the Inland Empire up by a single percentage point, to 54.7–45.3.<sup>13</sup>

Looking beyond the presidential race, Inland Empire voters broke consistently more conservative than the state overall in a series of 2020 ballot initiatives. Progressive measures to reform commercial property tax assessments (Proposition 15), reinstate affirmative action (Proposition 16), and expand local rent control powers (Proposition 21) all ran 5–8 points behind their levels of support statewide (see **Figure 3**). Proposition 15, which would have increased funding for schools and local government by taxing commercial and industrial properties based on market value, came closest to winning, both statewide and in the Inland Empire. Still, it lost in the two-county region by a substantial margin of 41–59.

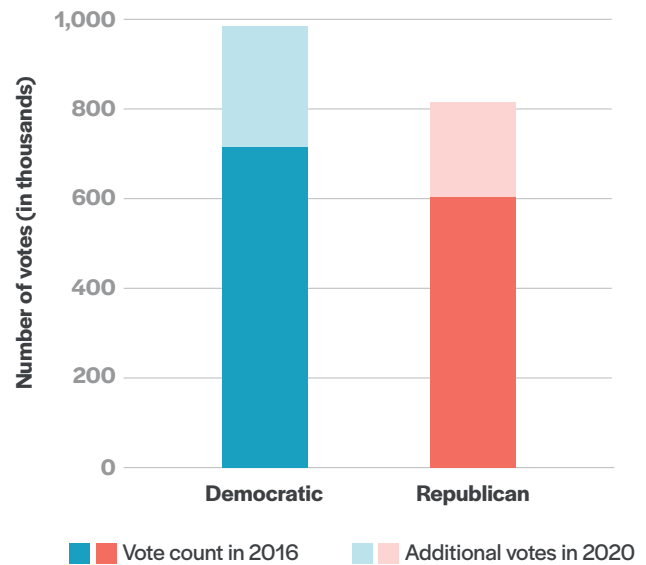
If results like these appear, to borrow from the article quoted above, “maddeningly unpredictable,” we

contend that it is because most political assessments do not engage deeply with the complexities of the Inland Empire and its people. More specifically, too little time and resources have been spent listening to the voices and experiences of residents who are Latinx, Black, or other people of color—even as they are increasingly recognized as the region’s “new majority.” There is a need for research that allows these constituencies to speak openly, in their own words, and in paragraphs. Without such research, we cannot know what ideas are getting traction, what narratives are resonating and being reproduced, and what beliefs are foregrounded in constituents’ civic action-taking.

Perhaps it is too much to expect the kind of long-term commitment and depth of engagement such investigation would require from electoral campaigns. Perhaps. But this commitment and engagement are indispensable when the work is that of organizing and communicating to foster durable, inclusive civic identities that build power for transformative change. It is with that latter work in mind that our research in the Inland Empire was developed.

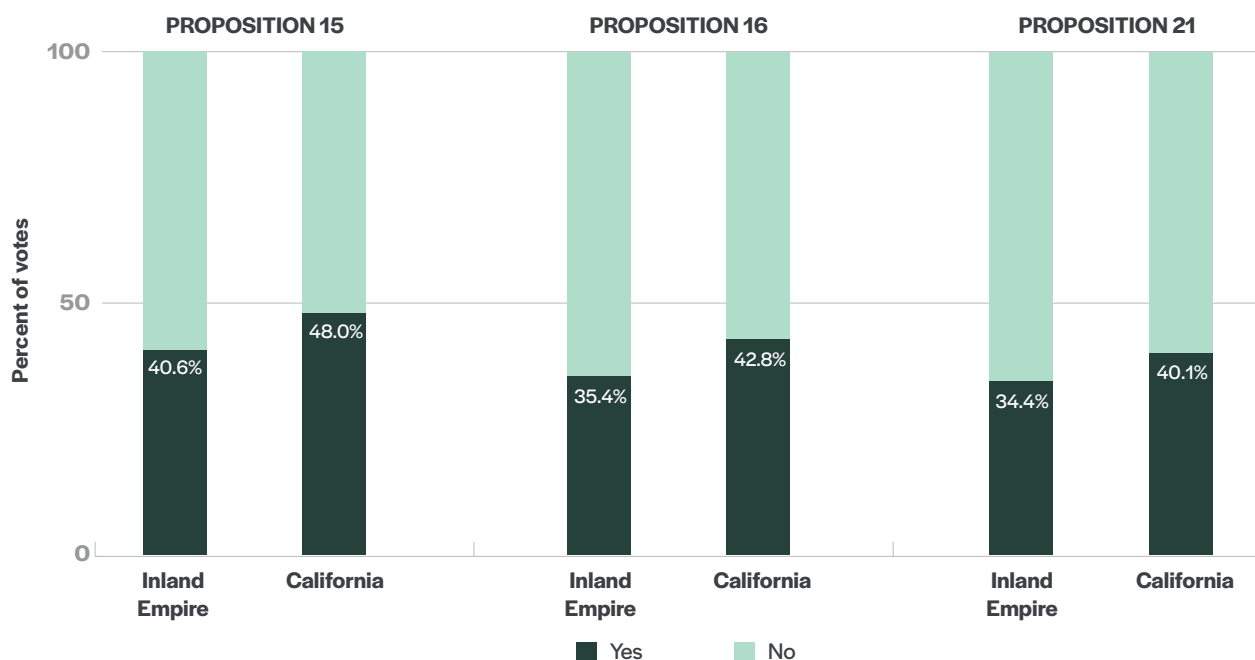
**FIGURE 2**

## Presidential election vote counts in the Inland Empire, 2016 and 2020 compared



**FIGURE 3**

## Results for selected 2020 California ballot measures, in the Inland Empire and statewide





# Overview of Our Research Methods and Participants

This section offers a summary of Blueprint for Belonging’s research in the Inland Empire, on which this report is based. We focus on the methods of our primary data collection with residents of San Bernardino and Riverside counties, which spanned the period of June 2019 through August 2020. But it is relevant to note that secondary research, and ongoing dialogue and engagement with nonprofit and social-change leaders also inform the analysis. This engagement began in the first months of 2019, and remains ongoing.

Our research set out to fill knowledge gaps as discussed above, and to place the “margins” at the center of inquiry. This involved, first, committing to a multi-year, multi-method study examining the two-county Inland Empire region on its own terms, with the depth and breadth that entails. But it also involved putting an intentional focus on the region’s marginalized population subgroups. Specifically, each phase of the research was designed to prioritize accessing the voices and experiences of residents who are Latinx, Black, Spanish-dominant, and/or young people (ages 35 and under).

**TABLE 2**  
**Composition of Inland Empire Focus Groups**

Black women, ages 30-55 years
Black men, ages 30-55 years
Latina women, ages 30-55 years
Black, Latina, Asian, Indigenous, or multi-racial young women, ages 20-29 years
Black, Latino, Asian, Indigenous, or multi-racial young men, ages 20-29 years

**Focus groups.** In June 2019, the project held five focus groups of 90-110 minutes each in the cities of Riverside and Ontario. Each of the groups was composed of 7-10 residents from across San Bernardino and Riverside counties, for a total of 46 participants.<sup>14</sup> The groups discussed topics including the role and effectiveness of government; community needs and well-being; in-group identities and intergroup relations; and economic opportunity and inequality.

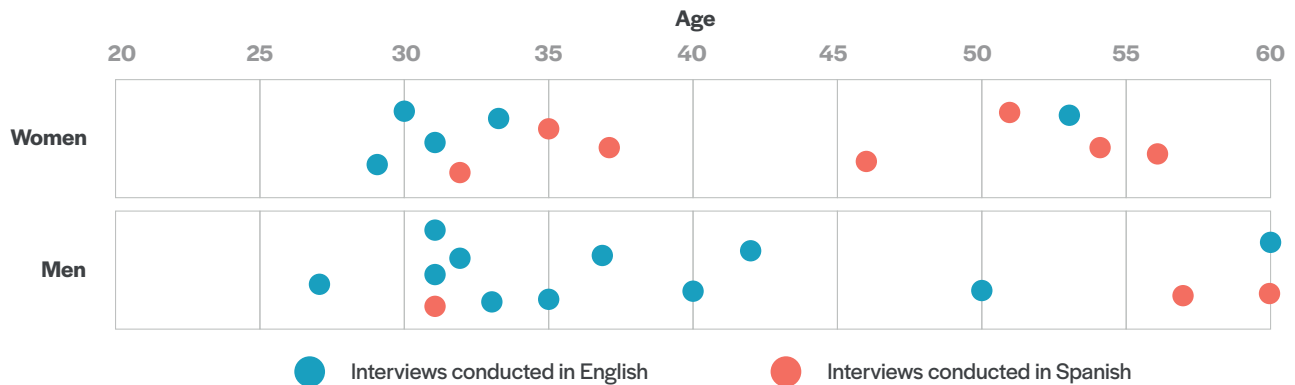
Each of the five focus groups brought together individuals who shared commonalities along lines of ethno-racial identity, gender identity, and age group, as shown in **Table 2**. This type of “segmentation,” or sorting, of participants is a well-established design element of focus groups in the social sciences, and serves purposes both practical and theoretical. On the practical side, composing groups of people with like socio-demographic characteristics tends to foster greater comfort, openness, candor, and ease and equality of participation across participants, especially when discussing topics like intergroup relations.<sup>15</sup>

More theoretically, the focus group as a method of data collection is about more than hearing the opinions of multiple interviewees in a condensed time. Focus groups are fundamentally about facilitating cross-conversations among participants that disclose shared conceptions and understandings, tacit beliefs, associations, and social processes of meaning-making that reflect the wider social milieu of which participants are a part.<sup>16</sup> They reveal “normative discourses” for a given milieu, but also, through interaction, the terms and bases on which those discourses are contested, debated, and potentially re-evaluated and refined.<sup>17</sup> The resulting data can provide a valuable window into the narratives and patterns of opinion-formation that resonate in the wider subpopulation that participants represent, with lessons for how to potentially shift or reconstitute those narratives.

**Individual interviews.** As a complement to our focus groups, the Blueprint for Belonging team also conducted one-on-one interviews with 26 Inland Empire residents during the fall of 2019. These interviews covered mostly the same topic areas as the focus groups, but served at least two critical roles.

**FIGURE 4**

## Distribution of interviewees by age and gender identity



First, they provided the opportunity to speak with members of some groups that were not well represented in the focus groups, such as Latino men and Spanish-dominant residents. Second, one-on-one interviews allowed the research team to investigate whether there were perspectives that could not (or did not) come out in the peer-group setting.<sup>18</sup>

Our interviewees included 14 men and 12 women, all residents of San Bernardino or Riverside County.<sup>19</sup> Of these interviewees, 18 identified as Latinx, Hispanic, or Mexican; 6 identified as Black or African American; 1 identified as Indigenous; and 1 identified as bi-racial, of Black and white descent. Ten of the interviews were conducted in Spanish. The age distribution of interviewees, coded by interview language, is presented in **Figure 4**. Interviews varied in length, but most English-language interviews lasted 45–60 minutes, and Spanish-language interviews were on average slightly longer than an hour.<sup>20</sup>

**Regional surveys.** In summer 2020, Blueprint for Belonging fielded a major survey in the Inland Empire, which was completed by 1,574 San Bernardino and Riverside County residents. Prospective participants were drawn from a pool that included voters and non-voters, citizens and non-citizens, and were contacted by email, postal mail, and telephone. They could complete the survey online, by landline, or by cellular phone, in English or Spanish. The survey covered a range of topics including intergroup attitudes, views on the proper role of government, economic and other policy issues, and experiences with the

COVID-19 crisis.<sup>21</sup> The design and selection of questions for the survey were deeply informed by our qualitative research, as the survey was meant to help gauge the breadth, distribution, and correlations of views expressed in focus groups and interviews. We oversampled the three most populous ethno-racial groups in the Inland Empire—Black, Latinx, and white residents—to ensure statistical reliability of results for these subpopulations.

Simultaneous to the Inland Empire regional survey, Blueprint for Belonging also fielded the same survey in Orange County. The Orange County survey was completed by a similar number of residents, but there the ethno-racial group oversamples were for Asian Americans, Latinxs, and whites. This report makes occasional reference to data from the Orange County survey where differences or similarities between its results and those in the Inland Empire survey are relevant to the analysis.

Finally, both of the above 2020 regional surveys build on the Blueprint for Belonging project’s state-wide baseline survey conducted in December 2017. That survey, known as the California Survey on Othering and Belonging, explored Californians’ attitudes on a broad range of issues related to identity, intergroup dynamics, public policy, social values, the role of government and corporations, and more.<sup>22</sup> Data from the 2017 California Survey on Othering and Belonging are also used as a point of comparison in some sections of this report.

# Communities

## THE POPULATION OF RIVERSIDE AND SAN BERNARDINO

counties has increased dramatically in recent decades, growing from just over 1.5 million in 1980 to 4.6 million in 2018.<sup>23</sup> With this rapid growth has come a transformation in the makeup of the region's communities. Though never nearly racially homogeneous, the two-county Inland Empire was majority white (non-Hispanic) into the 1990s, with whites making up over 60 percent of the population in the 1990 U.S. Census.<sup>24</sup> But between 1990 and 2010, Latinxs accounted for around 80 percent of the region's burgeoning population growth.<sup>25</sup> The two counties also gained a combined 250,000 new Black residents between 1980 and 2010, and 230,000 Asians.<sup>26</sup> By 2017, just over half of Inland Empire residents were Latinxs; two in three were people of color; and one in five was born outside the country.<sup>27</sup>

Much of the migration to the Inland Empire since the 1980s has been fueled by demand for affordable housing. The inland region has long offered Los Angeles metro residents the promise of more space at relatively lower prices. Deirdre Pfeiffer has documented how this promise—together with those of greater safety, peace, and quiet—rippled through LA's Black communities in the 1980s and '90s, through both fliers and word of mouth.<sup>28</sup> As home prices in Los Angeles continued to soar, housing production in the Inland Empire boomed, and demand for construction workers drew additional new residents, many of them of Mexican and Central American origin.<sup>29</sup>

Our interview and focus-group participants echoed the idea that the Inland Empire is a magnet for those seeking "more for less." But they also challenged the region's reputation as affordable. In focus groups, the cost of living and housing affordability were among residents' first and most commonly

## HIGHLIGHTS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

- Inland Empire residents feel a sense of belonging in their neighborhoods and public places at vastly different rates across different cities; discrepancies broadly track cities' economic indicators.
- While the share of white residents who feel housing insecure went up by 20 percentage points since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it went up for Black and Latinx residents by 36 and 33 percentage points, respectively.
- Residents tend to describe what it means to experience community as being about comfort, respectfulness, shared struggles, and mutual reliance and support.
- Study participants widely expressed the desire for stronger connections and communal bonds, but said that the challenges of getting by economically in the region stand in the way.



Construction in a suburban neighborhood in Rialto, a small community bordering San Bernardino. Rialto has grown rapidly in past years due in large part to the area's expanding distribution industry. Photograph by Michael Kirk.

referenced concerns. The predominantly low- to middle-income Latinx and Black participants shared stories of multiple jobs, frequent moves, and as-yet unrealized dreams of homeownership.

Fifteen years ago, these individuals would have fit the profile of new homebuyers in the Inland Empire—but as targets of predatory lending. In the decade of the 2000s, mortgage brokers in the region aggressively marketed subprime loans to first-time Black and Latinx homebuyers, who were subsequently hit the hardest by the 2007-2009 foreclosure crisis. For these communities, the effects of the crisis endure in the forms of erased wealth, income stagnation, and poverty that leave them unable to take advantage of sustained dips in home prices and interest rates today.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, a significant share of Inland Empire residents continued to live at the edges of security when COVID-19 hit, bringing another economic crisis. In our survey of the region, 28 percent of respondents said that, since the arrival of the coronavirus, they had begun to worry about whether they would be able to pay the next month's rent or mortgage. This added to the 13 percent that already worried about housing security prior to the coronavirus, bringing

the total to more than two in five residents who are housing insecure. As **Figure 5** shows, the jump in housing insecurity since COVID-19 has been felt disproportionately by Black and Latinx residents. Even more dramatically, the onset of the coronavirus increased the share of renters in the Inland Empire who feel housing insecure from 20 to 60 percent.

**Currently, I work three jobs and—I don't have any children—but I work three jobs to support the household I'm currently living in with my boyfriend. He works three jobs as well. That goes to the cost of living here in California.**

*[Other participants verbalize agreement.]*

**We live in one of the most affordable areas in the city [that] we live in. It's cheap—very cheap, I would say, compared to surrounding cities. And we still both work those multiple jobs.**

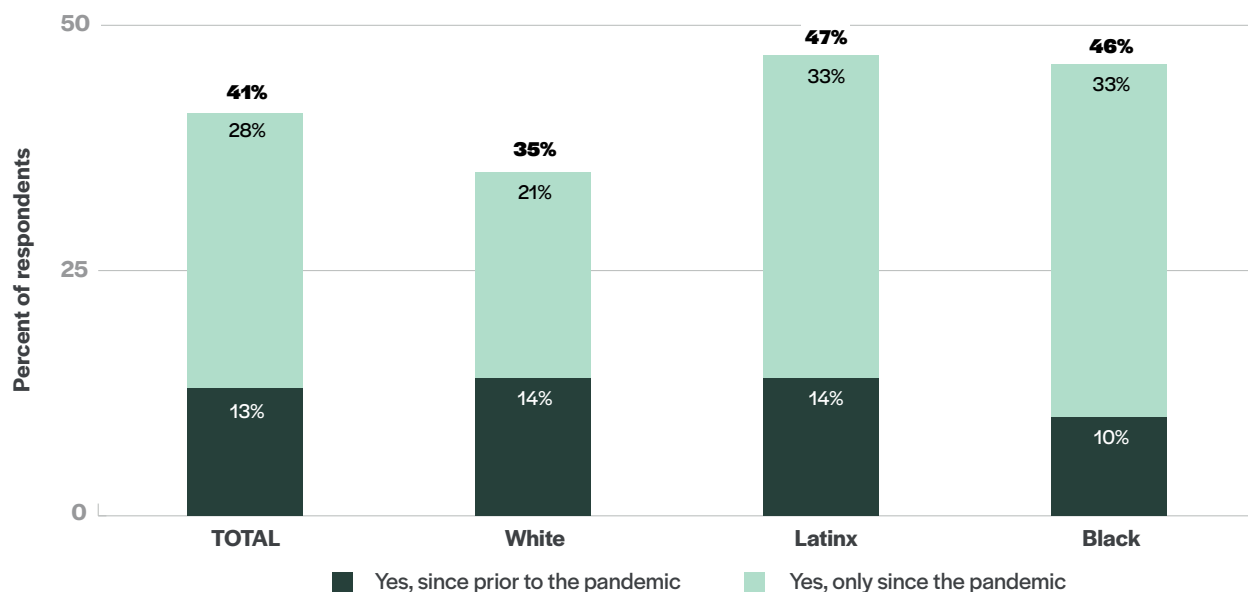
— PARTICIPANT 6, young women of color focus group



**FIGURE 5**

## Housing insecurity in the Inland Empire, before and since COVID-19

Responses to the Summer 2020 B4B Survey Question: “Thinking about the last 12 months, have you ever been worried that you won’t be able to make the next month’s rent or mortgage payment?”



## Belonging in the Inland Empire Today

Just as the foreclosure crisis and ongoing housing insecurity are felt unevenly across the inland region, so too are residents’ subjective experiences of belonging. This sense of belonging is important as both a good in itself, and a gateway to greater agency and well-being among individuals and communities. Decades of research in psychology attest that the need to belong is a fundamental motivator of human activity across the life course. The presence or absence of the social attachments that create a sense of belonging has a strong influence on individuals’ mental and physical health and security.<sup>31</sup> When people feel that they belong, not only do they have a sense of ease, comfort, and acceptance; they also enjoy the capacity to make claims on shared resources; shape collective values and culture; and change structures that impact them.<sup>32</sup> The lack of belonging, then, is a serious and far-reaching form of deprivation.<sup>33</sup>

The Blueprint for Belonging survey asked respondents to say how often they feel a sense of belonging, understood as feeling comfortable, safe, and with a say in the important things happening around them, in a series of different settings.<sup>34</sup> Although over 90 percent of Black, Latinx, and white residents experience belonging “most” or “all” of the time when at home, substantial shares (25–40 percent) usually *do not* feel belonging in their neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, and other public spaces. Notably, schools are the place where the largest share of respondents do not experience belonging most of the time—a troubling finding given the ideal of schools as sites for the building of community bonds.<sup>35</sup>

The shares saying they usually don’t experience belonging in the Inland Empire were relatively steady across race/ethnicity groups, with some exceptions. Overall, 25 percent of residents said that most of the time they do not feel belonging in their own neighborhoods, and 37 percent usually do not feel belonging on the street or in public places. But these figures were

higher for Latinx respondents, especially women. For example, 46.5 percent of Latina women usually do not feel belonging on the street or in public places. When these women were asked the follow-up question of what things made them feel that they didn't belong, almost half said their race, a third said their culture or background, and 27 percent said their gender.<sup>36</sup>

More striking disparities in experiences of belonging exist across residents of different Inland Empire cities. On the southwestern edge of the region, 85 percent of residents of Murrieta and Temecula report feeling belonging most or all of the time in their neighborhoods, and 75 percent say the same for public places more generally. These cities, Juan de Lara writes, "have openly marketed themselves as upscale white-collar communities,"<sup>37</sup> and according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median household income for the two is around \$92,000. Their residents' experiences are in sharp contrast to those of more working-class cities in the Inland Empire's population and warehousing-industry center. There, at the

other extreme, is the city of San Bernardino, where only half of residents usually feel belonging in their neighborhoods, and just 30 percent feel belonging on the street or other public places in their communities (see **Figure 6**). The median household income in San Bernardino is under \$46,000—half that of Temecula and Murrieta.<sup>38</sup> As was true for the region in general, the most common characteristic to which residents of San Bernardino attributed their feeling of not belonging was their race.<sup>39</sup>

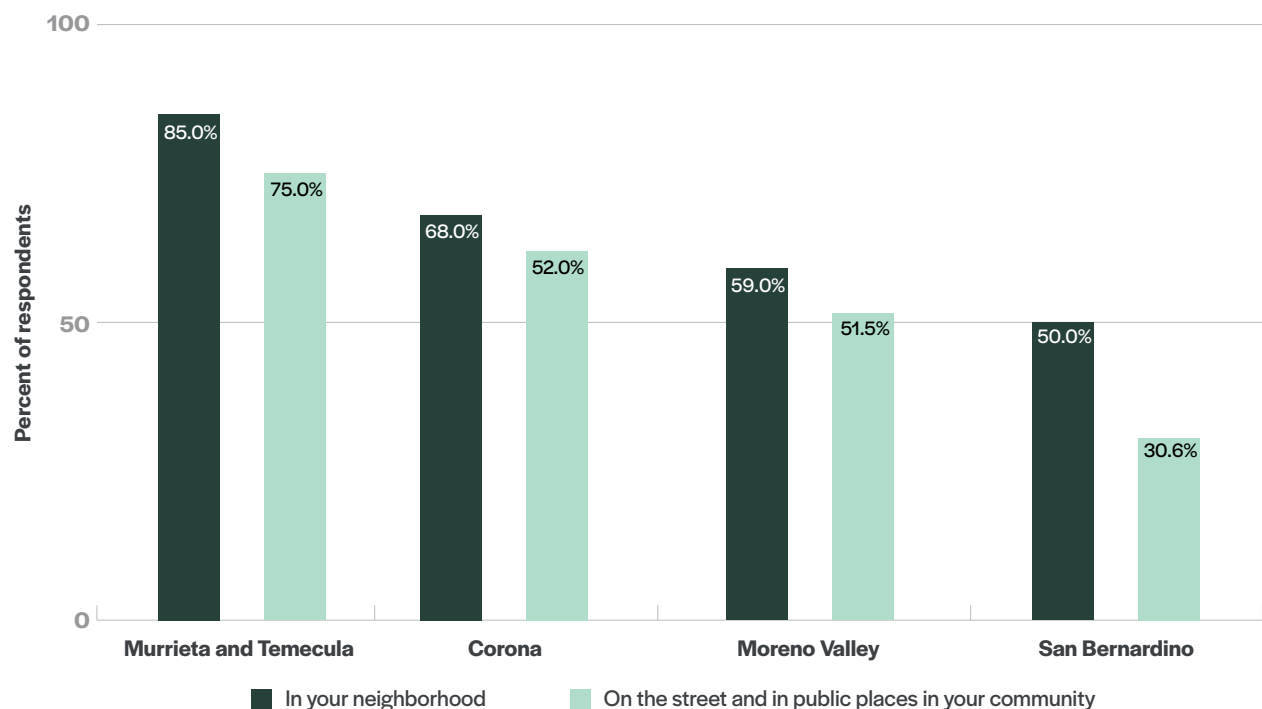
## What "Community" Means to Inland Residents

The above sections described communities in the Inland Empire in terms of growth and change in the population's ethno-racial composition, and experiences of belonging and not belonging. But what does the nebulous notion of "community" mean to residents themselves? How do they conceive of "their community," and the boundaries demarcating where it begins and ends?

**FIGURE 6**

## Varied experiences of belonging across cities in the Inland Empire

Share of Inland Empire residents who feel a sense of belonging "all" or "most" of the time, by city of residence



We explored these questions through open-ended prompts in our focus groups and interviews with inland residents. Overwhelmingly, the first associations that came to their minds were place-based boundaries—community as the people living in a neighborhood, school district, or city. In connection to this, we heard from many residents that one’s specific city is a meaningful and distinguishing marker of identity and community within the larger region, even in the dense metropolitan core of the Inland Empire where outsiders might pass from one city to another without even realizing it.

After the geographic, the next most common coordinates of “community” cited by Inland Empire residents were those of race/ethnicity. “My community” meant, for example, the Black community, Mexican-American community, or Spanish-speaking immigrant community. However, as residents shared stories and discussed how “community” *feels*, it became clear that the ethno-racial definition was often more a shorthand than a fixed boundary marker.

Real community came from feelings of mutuality and looking out for one another, courtesy and respectfulness, and knowing that someone will be there when needed. These were not coextensive with race/ethnicity in the way participants often initially expressed.

**Si estoy en mi casa, en mi barrio... yo no me voy a poder poner hablar con una persona que la vea afuera... No hay la facilidad, no es común, en la comunidad que yo vivo, de nomas acercármele a una persona y hablarle. No sé de qué manera lo van a tomar. En otros lugares, como la iglesia, yo sé que me puedo acercar tranquilamente a hablar con una persona, tener una conversación de cualquier cosa, sin ningún problema. Sin pensar, ellos están bien – la reacción de ellos. Yo creo que es el sentido de estar cerca con una persona de una manera más íntima... que crea ese sentimiento de ser parte de una comunidad.**

Where they were felt in a neighborhood, school, or faith context, there was community. This way of conceiving community makes membership more open, but arguably more demanding; some of those who defined community in this way spoke of not having community, and a sense that it is lost to the “rat race” of a region where everyone is hustling to make ends meet.

Interestingly, several other residents took from this very same hustle a sense of oneness or community with people who they may not know, but who “get it.” Usually described through the idea of “struggle,” these residents see something binding in the common daily experience of working hard to make it in an unforgiving economic context. This shared struggle—not necessarily a shared *project*, but a “we” that struggles in the same way—is a resonant story of “us” across low- and middle-income communities of color in the Inland Empire.

Finally, some narratives from Black Inland Empire residents describe an *absence* of community in a way that highlights prospective intervention points for civic and community leaders. In focus groups with both African-American women and men, participants lamented the lack of a sense of community in their cities or neighborhoods. Their stories contained astute diagnoses of how limited economic oppor-

*If I’m at home, in my neighborhood... I’m not able to go up and talk with someone who I see outside... There isn’t the ease, it isn’t common, in the community where I live, to just approach a person and talk to them. I don’t know how they’re going to take it. In other places, like [my] church, I know that I can calmly approach to talk to a person, have a conversation about anything, with no problem. Without [even] thinking, they are fine – their reaction. I believe that it is the feeling of being close to someone in a more intimate way... that creates the sense of being part of a community.*

— LATINO MAN, 31, Loma Linda

tunity is both precursor to, and consequence of, this missing community. First, the long work hours, commutes, and frequent moves that characterize low-income residents' lives in the region make it difficult to form the kinds of bonds that cohere communities. In turn, the absence of these bonds means that there are few spaces through which Black residents can mentor, share personal connections, or otherwise lift one another up. Here, talk of an absence of community points to residents' awareness of how interpersonal relations and networks serve as conduits of opportunity.<sup>40</sup> The extension and density of those networks grant access, and their boundaries enclose privilege—a privilege that is racialized in the context of *de facto* racial segregation.<sup>41</sup> “Community,” these Black study participants knew, is a critical piece of the infrastructure of economic mobility.

## Conclusions and Implications

This part of the report has illuminated the extent to which the Inland Empire is a region of people in movement, and communities in formation. No community is ever static, of course. But those in the Inland Empire—living a prolonged period of far-reaching change, and for many, instability and unmet expectations—are perhaps more dynamic than most.

In particular, **Part II** spotlighted a number of holes left in the work of weaving the region's population into what residents can feel and experience as a meaningful “we.” Whatever the demographic categories and figures tell us about the Inland Empire's people, what that “we” will be remains undetermined. Neither “destiny” nor guaranteed, it will take the forms given to it by those who do the work of building it.

In our research with low- and middle-income people of color in the region, the desire for deeper community ties is strong. Talk of an absence of community was not cynical, nor driven by insularity or individualism. It came through in narratives conveying senses of loss and longing. Our research suggests that Inland Empire residents are ready to be more connected, and eager to be part of larger local collectives.

Study participants widely expressed commitments to doing their part as well. The ideas of remember-

PARTICIPANT 1:

**[T]his demographic, in this geographical area – understand that we don't have a community.**

PARTICIPANT 10:

**We don't.**

PARTICIPANT 1:

**We're living in somebody else's community.**

PARTICIPANT 3:

**We're nomads.**

— African-American men focus group

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ing one's personal roots (“not forgetting where you came from”), and giving back were widely resonant and universally lauded. So too was talk of “doing it for your city,” or for your community. And a particularly powerful variation on this was the repeatedly expressed idea that people should stand up for, and together with, those who are struggling in the same way, or who need support more than they do. Each of these offers lessons that could be applied in building new narratives of who “we” are in the Inland Empire.

While we have emphasized potential, none of the above is to say that population change in the region has been without tensions. In **Part III**, we turn to questions of inter- and intragroup dynamics in the Inland Empire, and what our research can teach about the prospects for bridging toward greater senses of community and belonging.



# Intergroup Attitudes and Bridging

**THE PREVIOUS PART OF THIS REPORT** began with a broad overview of how the Inland Empire's population has evolved in recent decades at the regional level. It highlighted in particular the region's shift from a majority white to a majority Black and brown population. Naturally, this shift has meant that at more local levels, residents of the region increasingly encounter people who look, speak, or worship differently than themselves. Such diverse areas of California have in recent years been viewed as promising settings for organizing against politics of nativism and othering, and pushing forward progressive policy change. But the fate of this promise will hinge on whether community organizing and strategic narrative can make political operatives' vision of a "new majority" take hold and transform how people in places like the Inland Empire see themselves, each other, and their collective future.

There is also an older, and perhaps still dominant, assumption about places where Black and immigrant populations rapidly come to live near one another, and share public spaces, schools, and job and housing markets. It says that demographic change will inevitably lead to intergroup competition, tensions, and rivalry.<sup>42</sup> In our research in the Inland Empire, Latinx and Black residents themselves often echoed this idea that their two ethno-racial groups are bound to live in tension with one another. "You can see it wherever you go, wherever I go... This problem between them—between these two races," as one Latina interviewee from Moreno Valley put it.

But following such pronouncements, in almost all cases, our study participants told stories that showed that the belief that Black-Latinx intergroup tension is pervasive and irresolvable is grounded more in hearsay than in personal interactions, and in an ab-

## HIGHLIGHTS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

- Where Black and Latinx residents see tensions between their communities, these are based principally on hearsay and stereotypes, not adverse interpersonal experiences.
- Black and Latinx residents are much more likely to perceive themselves as being in competition with whites for jobs than with each other.
- Majorities of Black and Latinx residents of the Inland Empire say that the other group has "too little" political influence, and large pluralities say the same of Asian Americans.
- Black and Latina women in the Inland Empire express views across a number of issues related to race, economics, and power that show they have tremendous potential as agents of Black-Latinx bridging.
- The idea that welfare or social-service abuse is widespread has made inroads in Latinx communities, including in the form of anti-immigrant narratives.
- There is a substantial divide between Latinxs below and above the age of 50 years in the extent to which they see structural and systemic forces versus individual perseverance and hard work as deciding factors in upward mobility for Black Americans and immigrants.

sence—rather than a failure—of cross-group bridging experiences. The following sections discuss and analyze Latinx and Black Inland Empire residents' views of one another's groups, and of immigrants. They spotlight the centrality of conventional narratives about Black-Latinx relations to sustaining ideas of tension, and point to openings for rearticulating these narratives toward bridging. But first, we begin with a broad, large-sample overview of the major patterns in intergroup attitudes in the Inland Empire.

## Perceived Competition between Latinx and Black Inland Residents

Blueprint for Belonging's qualitative research in the Inland Empire uncovered a handful of stories and beliefs that sustain perceptions of tension and competition between Latinxs and Black communities in the region. But before exploring those, it is important to ask: How widely are those perceptions held, and by whom? Qualitative data are critical for getting beneath the surface of an opinion or view, and to help us engage (and change) views that are, or could become, resonant. To understand broadly where and with whom the opinion is most likely present, however, we must begin with data from the project's large-scale survey of the region.

Our Inland Empire survey explored perceptions of intergroup competition and solidarity across a number of tested opinion research questions. Overall, a notably smaller share of the 680 Latinx and 350 Black residents interviewed in the survey expressed zero-sum thinking about their groups' access to resources and influence than one might expect. That is, the trope of Black and Latinx communities being at loggerheads over jobs and representation is not borne out by the evidence in the Inland Empire.

With respect to jobs, Black and Latinx inland residents are much more likely to see themselves in competition with whites than with each other. When presented with the statement, "The more jobs that go to whites, the fewer good jobs there will be for people like me," 36 percent of Latinxs and a 64 percent majority of Black respondents said they agreed. In contrast, just 11 percent of Latinxs felt the same

**Bridging** is a process by which two or more people or groups come together across acknowledged lines of difference in a way that both affirms their distinct identities and creates a **new inclusive "we" identity**. This process involves confronting dynamics or structures that foster division in order to develop a "we" identity that is not only more expansive, but cohesive and durable. Members of this new "we" need not agree on everything; but they should have a **shared empathy and commitment** to one another's experience of belonging .

about jobs going to African Americans, and 37 percent of African Americans said jobs going to Latinxs limit their opportunities.<sup>43</sup>

These findings are consistent with Blueprint for Belonging's 2017 California Survey on Othering and Belonging, but with the data even more pronounced.<sup>44</sup> The earlier statewide survey too found that Black and Latinx Californians perceive whites—not each other's groups—as their main job competitors. But in the Inland Empire in 2020, the shares of Black and Latinx residents who perceive job competition with one another's groups are even smaller, and Black residents are even more likely to feel competition with whites. We cannot know whether place or time is more responsible for these differences.<sup>45</sup> But the two surveys coincide in showing that smaller shares of Latinx and Black Californians feel that their groups are competing for jobs than popular discourse would suggest.

Further disaggregating the 2020 data from the Inland Empire, age has a notable effect on which Black respondents perceive job competition with Latinxs.

It is older African Americans who disproportionately hold a competitive view, with just 28 percent of Black respondents under 50 years old expressing it, and nearly half of those 50 and older saying that “people like me” are competing with Latinxs for jobs. The same pattern holds for Black respondents’ perceived job competition with whites, though the gap is smaller (58 versus 68 percent perceiving competition, for 18-49 and 50+ year olds, respectively). This finding is curious, given that one would expect younger people — who are less likely to be established in the workforce, and more active in job markets—to be most sensitive to job competition. It suggests that the zero-sum, competitive view of work opportunities may have as much to do with generational mindset as position in labor markets; but further research and analysis would be needed to make such a claim with confidence.<sup>46</sup>

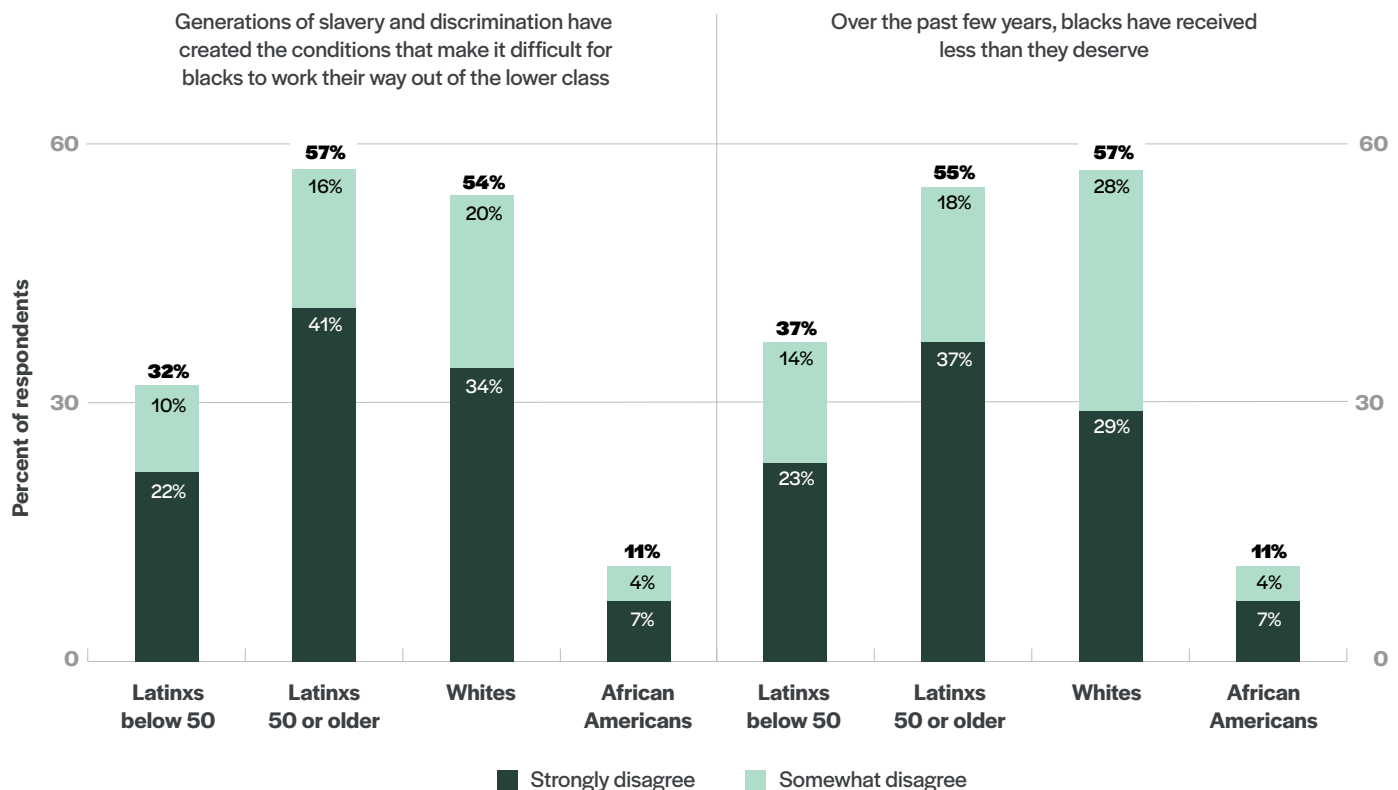
Discrepancy across age groups also shows up in Latinx Inland Empire residents’ attitudes toward Black Americans. A series of survey items gauged the extent to which respondents hold latent anti-Black

sentiment versus recognize the role of historical and structural barriers to opportunity for African Americans.<sup>47</sup> On statements concerning whether “Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class,” and if “[B]lacks have gotten less than they deserve” in recent years, Latinxs age 50 and above are significantly less likely than younger Latinxs to express sympathy around the continuing impacts of systemic oppression.<sup>48</sup> As **Figure 7** shows, the shares who “strongly disagree” with these statements are not insubstantial across Latinxs in general; but the numbers who take this racially resentful position are especially high for the older sub-set.

A final measure of Latinx and Black intergroup attitudes utilized in our 2020 survey of the Inland Empire focused not on labor or economic opportunity, but on political representation. It sought to assess how much Black and Latinx residents feel that they are competing with one another for political space or voice. Here the findings echo the message from the

**FIGURE 7**

## Expressions of racial resentment, by race/ethnicity and age



data on perceived job competition, but perhaps even more loudly. Large majorities of Latinx and Black respondents do not agree that their own group's underrepresentation is due to the other group, but instead that it comes from the overrepresentation of whites.

Survey respondents were asked of a series of different groups whether that group has “too much influence in California politics, too little influence in California politics, or just about the right amount of influence.” When asked about whites, a plurality (47 percent) of all Inland Empire residents expressed that whites have too much influence, including 71 percent of Black respondents, 59 percent of Latinxs, and 31 percent of whites themselves.<sup>49</sup> Just one in ten said that whites have too little influence. This much is not surprising.

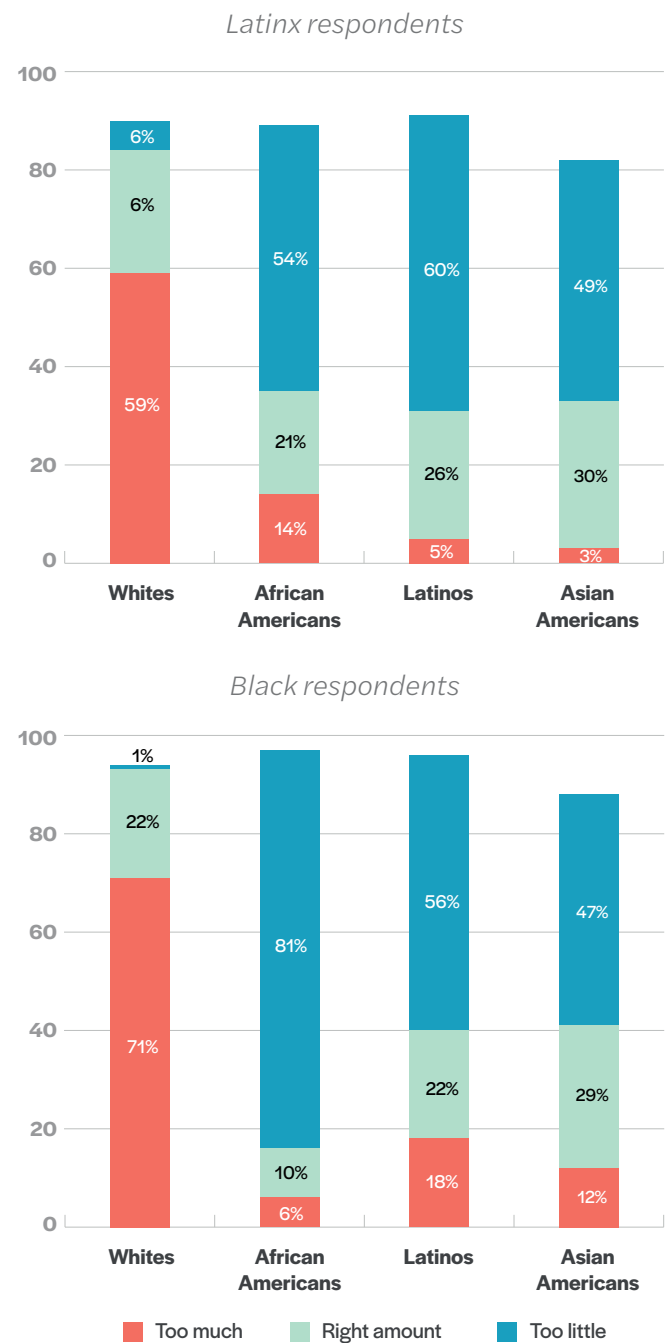
What stands out more in the data are the large shares of Black and Latinx residents who say that one another's groups have *too little* influence in politics. **Figures 8a** and **8b** show Latinx and Black respondents' views on the political clout of each of the four largest ethno-racial population categories in the Inland Empire region. What is evident in these graphs is the widespread sense of solidarity within these groups on the extent to which all communities of color are squeezed out by whites' occupation of political space. It is not only their own groups that Black and Latinx residents see as deserving more influence, but one another's as well.<sup>50</sup>

This awareness and inchoate solidarity around racialized political influence is particularly strong among the Inland Empire's women of color. Notably larger shares of Latina and Black women than men say that whites have too much influence, and that their own and one another's groups have too little. Latinas were also less likely than their male counterparts to express anti-Black sentiment on all four of the racial resentment items mentioned above, and Black women were somewhat less likely than men to say that they are competing with Latinos or immigrants for jobs. Taken together, all of this points to the conclusion that Latina and Black women appear to be the residents most disposed and ready to lead bridging efforts in the Inland Empire.<sup>51</sup>

**FIGURES 8a and 8b**

## Views of Latinxs and African Americans on influence of different groups in CA politics

Residents of the Inland Empire were asked “How much political influence do these groups have?” (Note: “Don't know” responses omitted.)







Study participants described schools, like the one pictured at left, as one of the rare spaces where they had meaningful interaction, and opportunities to work toward common goals, across lines of ethno-racial difference. Unfortunately though, significant shares of inland residents also reported that they usually did not experience belonging in schools.

Photograph by Courtney Hale.

## The Narrative Life of Black-Latinx Tensions

The survey data presented in the previous section show that tensions between Black and Latinx Inland Empire residents are far from pervasive. But even as we keep this “big picture” in mind, it remains important to understand—where tensions *are* present—what underlies and sustains them. For this, we turn to qualitative data from focus groups and interviews, in which we heard inland residents’ stories of in-groups and out-groups, and “us” and “them,” in their own words. These stories offer insights that can inform civic and movement leaders’ strategies not only for impeding potential conflict, but also for fostering bases for a shared Latinx- and Black-encompassing “we.”

In the handful of instances in which Black inland residents spoke of tensions with Latinxs, their comments centered on perceived differences in the two groups’ access to economic opportunity and social status. Specifically, there was a perception that Latinxs receive preferential treatment relative to Black Americans in the workforce and in public spaces. “Right now, it’s [all about] the Hispanics,” said one older African-American man in Riverside. “They got all the jobs. They got all new cars. They buying all the houses. It’s like America’s taken on an attachment towards them, and lacking towards the African American.” Later, the interviewee homed in on the issue of favoritism in the workplace: “I’ve actually been at a job where [employers] would rather have somebody there, paying them less money,” he said. “And these

people [Latinxs] work their butts off—true enough. But... it shouldn’t be no injustice—injustice towards who they should hire. [And] that’s rampant here.”

Social-science research affirms that employers have indeed blended anti-Black racism with hiring preferences for Latinx immigrants in a number of low-wage labor market contexts.<sup>52</sup> Previous research also shows that where Black Americans perceive that their Latinx neighbors enjoy relative economic advantages, they are less likely to consider them potential political allies.<sup>53</sup> This was reflected in the words of another Black interviewee from Corona: “[T]hey don’t have a problem out here. This is their town. We have two different burdens... We don’t share the same struggle.”

What is interesting in these and similar comments from Black study participants concerning Black-Latinx relations is that, in nearly every case, there is a third party implicated in the relationship. The tensions may be expressed as between Black and Latinx people, but the actions criticized come from elsewhere. Statements about favoritism, preferential treatment, “attachment towards them,” and (as heard elsewhere) Latinxs’ “overwhelming popularity” are about how *others* act in relation to Black and Latinx people—not about interactions between people from those groups. And these third parties are actors of a particular kind: they are those with *power* to exercise favoritism in economically and socially consequential ways. This insight offers an opening for organizers and communicators to reorganize and rearticulate the local knowledge expressed into a different story that foregrounds the role of the powerholders who

create competition and scarcity for Black and Latinx communities alike. We return to this point in more detail in **Part III**'s conclusions and implications below.

Like Black study participants, the Latinxs in the Inland Empire who said that the two groups live in tension were also short on examples from personal experience. Most Latinx interviewees—whether English- and Spanish-dominant—said that they did not know many Black people, and interact with them only infrequently around their children's schools. When pressed more deeply on why they perceived tension between Latinx and Black community members, interviewees referred to what are best described as stereotypes, assumptions, and hearsay.

Past research too has pointed to the significant role of stereotypes in shaping intergroup attitudes between Black and Latinx neighbors;<sup>54</sup> but our findings in the Inland Empire were distinct. Whereas those studies often find Latinxs echoing derogatory anti-Black tropes, our interviewees' stereotypes were about the negative things that they assumed, or had heard that, Black Americans think or say about them. In a sense, they were stereotypes about stereotypes, or prejudices of prejudices, taking the form of, "We don't get along because I've heard that they don't like us speaking Spanish," or because "they think we take their jobs." This pattern held across multiple interviewees, and is a case study in how relations—in this case, tensions—can live almost entirely at the narrative level, transmuting through repetition into "reality."

Latinx interviewees' stories of tensions with whites, on the other hand, were often much more tangible. Unlike those about Black neighbors, they almost always involved personal interactions, which revolved around whites talking down to Latinxs, complaining about them to authorities, or otherwise disrespecting or mistreating them. The fact that numerous Latinxs recounted this type of incident to us shows that the lack of similar stories about African Americans was not due to interviewees being reticent to disclose such stories. The contrast reinforces all of the other evidence above, suggesting that what tension exists between Latinx and Black inland residents has little grounding in negative personal experiences or interactions between members of the two groups.

## Latinx Adoption of Anti-Immigrant Tropes

What was far more common than anti-Black invective among our Latinx interviewees was anti-immigrant, and indeed anti-Latinx, rhetoric. Commentaries critical of immigrants or other Latinxs emerged not in the context of discussing community tensions or conflicts, but in conversations about public services and resources. They frequently traded on a long-standing theme in anti-Black, anti-immigrant, and anti-poor discourse—alleged abuse of social safety-net programs like food stamps or temporary cash assistance ("welfare"). Discussions of this purported problem rested on broad generalizations—in some cases extrapolated from specific stories—that set boundaries distinguishing "good" from "bad" immigrants or Latinxs.

Discourse on immigrants in the United States is full of variations on the good/bad binary, each with attendant criteria and narratives. Some hinge, for example, on immigrants' terms of entry into the country, adherence to laws, work ethic, family structure, "family values," commitment to assimilation, and submissiveness, to name a few. In our research in the Inland Empire, the dichotomies drawn by Latinx study participants focused almost entirely on how fellow Latinxs, especially immigrants, access and utilize resources. These participants adopted many elements of the moralizing "up-by-your-bootstraps" narrative of self-reliance that assumes open and fair opportunity structures (i.e. meritocracy), which has been imposed upon generations of U.S. immigrants.<sup>55</sup> They contraposed those who work hard, pay taxes, and more or less follow this "bootstraps" script—people like themselves—against what was repeatedly characterized as "a lot of people"/"*muchas personas*" who overuse, prefer to rely upon, or manipulate a supposedly generous public welfare system.

The prevalence of these talking points among Latinxs speaks to how pervasive the narrative template of the "welfare cheat" has become.<sup>56</sup> Tellingly, often when Latinx interviewees—most of them immigrants themselves—spoke of welfare dependency among Latinxs or immigrants, their comments were in large

part a response to what they said white, conservative, or native-born Americans say about “us.” Take, for example, a 56-year-old Latina interviewee from Yucaipa. She had just finished speaking of the strong sense of belonging she gets from her “Hispanic” neighbors and church community, and then turned to something that made her feel she did not belong:

The Americans were very... [pause] they’re nice. I don’t want to say they’re not. But... they think, ‘You are Mexican, [so] you’re on welfare,’ or, ‘You have a lot of kids because, because it gets you welfare.’ And unfortunately, I can go to whole communities there in Yucaipa... [and] each home has a welfare case open. Be it medical, be it [food] stamps, be it cash [assistance]. But all of them are depending. I think the government has made a dependent community.<sup>57</sup>

Continuing on this topic, within a few minutes, the woman proceeded to reproduce the very stereotype that she had found personally hurtful:

[T]he thinking of the Hispanic who comes from Mexico [is]: ‘I have kids—I have one, they give me \$500; I have another, and they give me \$1000...’ Who wants to work if they have a government that gives them everything in their mouth?<sup>58</sup>

This instance of a Latinx interviewee deflecting an insulting stereotype at other fellow Latinxs and immigrants was not an isolated one. Two different interviewees from Moreno Valley—a 35-year-old woman and a 57-year-old man, both Spanish-dominant—followed up criticisms of the discriminatory rhetoric of Donald Trump or his supporters by saying that they are at least “part right” when they say that “Mexicans are abusing [public] services” or that some people migrate to the United States “just to get [public] benefits.”

Latinx interviewees’ repeated acquiescence to stereotypes about resource abuse almost always set up a distinction between other fellow Latinxs or immigrants and themselves. This pattern made evident the heavy burden that these Latinxs feel to demonstrate and defend their own work ethics and individual self-reliance, likely having had them questioned. But in defending themselves—and thereby casting themselves as the “good” immigrants or Latinxs—

**Pero me he fijado, yo he visto que... [pausa] he oído que los afroamericanos siempre andan acusando que nosotros los latinos venimos a quitarles los trabajo a ellos, y que por eso ellos no encuentran trabajo—por culpa de los latinos. Por eso siempre hay ese conflicto entre ellos.**

*But I’ve noticed, I have seen... [pause] I’ve heard that African American people are always accusing that we Latinos come to take their jobs, and that that’s why they can’t find work—due to the Latinos. That’s why there’s always this conflict with them.*

— LATINA WOMAN, 54, Moreno Valley

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they draw upon and reproduce the very discriminatory images of supposedly deficient others that make their self-defense necessary in the first place. Said another way, they challenge their individual place in anti-Latinx narratives, but while endorsing the basic script.

The prevalence of “good”/“bad” immigrant talk among our Latinx interviewees was not a fluke of the participant pool. Our regional survey data confirm that a substantial minority of Latinxs in the Inland Empire agree with statements extolling the individualist “bootstrap” narrative, and refusing sympathy to the challenges faced by immigrants today. Across a four-part series of items measuring latent anti-immigrant sentiment (using the same language as those on anti-Black sentiment), consistently almost one in three Latinxs downplayed the significance of structural barriers to immigrants’ advancement. For example, 30 percent of Latinxs agreed that, “if immigrants today would only try harder, they could be just as well off as white Americans,” and 34 percent disagreed that in the past few years, “immigrants have gotten less than they deserve.” As with expressions of anti-Black sentiment, there is a strong age effect here, with older Latinxs (50+ year olds) much more likely to take the individualist, “bootstrap” position.<sup>59</sup>

## Conclusions and Implications

This part of our report has brought forward a wealth of data, both qualitative and quantitative, illuminating how Latinx and Black residents of the Inland Empire think about one another, and the relationships between and within their ethno-racial groups. From these, a number of lessons emerge that are applicable to efforts to curtail friction, address tensions, and build ties and a sense of shared fate across these groups—what we call “bridging.” The following short paragraphs summarize those lessons.

- + **African Americans’ perception of resource competition with Latinxs is less widespread than commonly believed, and where it is present, the narrative is ripe for reformulation.** Talk of competition almost always invokes a third figure: one that prefers, favors, or “shows love for” Latinxs over African Americans. The imperative for narrative change here is to name and foreground that third figure, pulling it—and the power and privilege that allow it to confer socially and economically significant favoritism—from the shadows to the center of the story. In current expressions, this figure is read between the lines, whereas it should arguably be understood as the protagonist driving the plot.
- + Hearsay, rumors, and stereotypes factor prominently in Black-Latinx “relations” in the Inland Empire—flourishing in the vacuum left by a dearth of meaningful interpersonal experiences between members of the two groups. **Civic and community organizations are well-positioned to destabilize stereotypes by using local knowledge and credibility to create spaces for intergroup interactions**, including ones in which the stereotypes themselves are examined, discussed, and exposed. Latinx and Black residents in our study commonly spoke of appreciating, and wishing for more, open public events in which “everyone is there.” Where such events can lead to positive interpersonal experiences, these could be part of overcoming negative perceptions or assumptions.
- + **Black and Latinx inland residents lack experience with, or even stories about, people from their two groups coming together to work toward a common goal.** When interviewees were asked if they had heard of such things happening, they said things like, “No, not really. Not out here;” “Firsthand, no. Not secondhand either. I’ve never heard of that;” and, “Outside of co-workers and outside of friends, I haven’t seen it.”<sup>60</sup> **It seems, then, that it is not that programs or campaigns in what we call bridging have failed; it is that they have not been tried. There is need here for experimentation and learning.** Initiatives intentionally designed and explicitly articulated as cross-group collaborations around a shared problem will not only provide inland residents with experiences and stories of bridging. They may also bring to light deeper-seated tensions, allowing for those to be understood and addressed as well. If properly studied and evaluated, they will build the knowledge base for honing future bridging interventions in the Inland Empire and beyond.
- + **Prominent U.S. narratives that laud individual self-reliance and allege widespread welfare abuse have considerable currency in inland Latinxs communities, driving both “us-and-them” divisions and opposition to government services.** There is evidence in our research that the adoption of these narratives is, at least for some, a defensive response arising from Latinx interviewees’ felt need to distinguish themselves as among “the good ones” who do not “take advantage.” But this does not make the repetition of the narratives any less damaging, as the narrow defense of self concedes a powerful cudgel used to attack other Latinxs, immigrants, and Black Americans.<sup>61</sup> Our study’s focus group discussions suggest, however, that some of the adoption of “welfare abuse” narratives may be thin, and thus, changeable. When focus-group participants brought up public-resource abuse, even modest pushback from fellow participants—often grounded in personal experience—led to



considerable refinement of the views expressed. Broad-brush condemnations of “people taking advantage” quickly yielded to more targeted and nuanced criticisms of the functioning of existing systems.<sup>62</sup> **These conversations showcased how the idea of “welfare abuse” can be as much a habit of talk—or a shortcut of thought—as a deep-seated belief.** It is a ubiquitous and persistent story, but a flimsy one when addressed directly.

Introducing a set of studies on Black-Latinx relations a decade ago, scholars Edward Telles, Gaspar Rivera-Salgado, Mark Q. Sawyer, and Sylvia Zamora noted, “Conflict is far from inevitable, and any particular outcome depends largely on the (in)actions of communities and their leaders.”<sup>63</sup> We hope that the above points can serve to structure effective action of leaders in the Inland Empire. Maybe more than anything else, our research with Black and Latinx residents of the region attests that members of these groups have had few occasions for meaningful interaction, much less structured, intentional spaces engagement. There is room to create such spaces—to experiment with *bridging*. Such experimentation could teach lessons that not only shape the future of the Inland Empire, but also provide guidance for places with similar socio-demographic dynamics throughout the country.

# Economic Opportunity and Inequality

**DURING MUCH OF THE UNITED STATES'** largest surge in COVID-19 infections in winter 2020–2021, the epicenter of the virus's spread and deaths was the state of California. Within California, no counties were as consistently near the top of lists of daily new cases per capita as San Bernardino and Riverside. Often the two inland counties ranked numbers one and two. When a photojournalism team from *The Washington Post* went to Southern California to report on the dire stress on medical resources there, its coverage centered on a hospital in San Bernardino County. An article simply titled "Overwhelmed" offers a vivid window into the daily struggles of exhausted health-care professionals and dying patients in a hospital packed near double capacity—scenes that played out across the Inland Empire.<sup>64</sup>

This may seem an odd way to begin the part of this report on attitudes and beliefs about economic opportunity and inequality. But health vulnerabilities like those that COVID-19 exploited are deeply connected to the economic engines of the Inland Empire; decisions about what economic "opportunity" means for, and what it can cost, the region; and the uneven power dynamics underlying these decisions. Those connections are a critical backdrop against which to understand the main empirical focus of this part of the report—how Inland Empire residents understand the forces shaping economic outcomes in the region, and the prospects for changing them.

Specifically, we examine the extent to which low- and middle-income residents hold connections between corporate influence and local inequalities fresh in mind in the ways they talk about, and make sense of, the region's problems and potential solutions. Awareness of unequal opportunities and well-being is prominent in talk about economic conditions in

## HIGHLIGHTS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

- Study participants express widespread dissatisfaction with the variety and quality of jobs available in the Inland Empire, and readily identify local politicians who have courted and incentivized warehouse development as being to blame.
- Large majorities of Black (85 percent), Latinx (77 percent), and white (59 percent) residents believe that government should be responsible for ensuring that everyone has a basic income.
- Residents are far more likely to support government efforts to mitigate inequality if they see extreme wealth as principally a function of inherited or unearned advantage.
- Lack of public trust in government to hold corporations and the wealthy accountable for paying their taxes is a major obstacle to support for reforms to increase taxation.
- Many Latinx and Black residents are ambivalent about increasing taxes on corporations and the wealthy because they doubt that government would invest the revenues in their communities.

the Inland Empire. Residents are overwhelmingly dissatisfied with the region's job market, and with the need to commute out of county for what they see as good work. Many recognize the role of local politicians in shaping the job landscape, and a solid majority believes that corporations have too much influence in politics.

Still, talk of these issues reveals that residents wrestle with contending narratives to explain their circumstances, hold their views together, and motivate action or inaction. When discussing economic inequality, they oscillate between talk of privilege and unequal access on one hand, and faith in the basic functioning of meritocracy on the other. Residents acknowledge that structures and systems underlie corporate power, but often end up narrowing their criticisms to individual corrupt politicians. Perhaps most importantly, they narrate their views on the relationships among economic opportunity, corporations and the wealthy, and government in ways that almost never position themselves and their peers in a place of agency. All of this points to a pressing need for civic leaders in the Inland Empire to articulate and align around a clear and coherent narrative arc connecting all the dots between inequalities of wealth, access, and power. Doing so would be a major step toward advancing civic action for equity and belonging in health, well-being, and prosperity.

## The Economy-Environment-Health Tangle

A number of factors made the Inland Empire particularly vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19; but one is responsible for a much broader range of health risks and negative outcomes. Stated simply, the region has the worst air quality of any place in the country. According to the American Lung Association (ALA), no county in the United States suffers as much ozone pollution ("smog") as San Bernardino,<sup>65</sup> nor as many days per year when ozone pollution is characterized as very unhealthy (the "purple" level on the Air Quality Index). On both metrics, neighboring Riverside County ranks second.<sup>66</sup> Neither county ranks quite as high on particle pollution, but for it too, the ALA grades both of them an "F."



A Frito-Lays distribution center and its container yard abuts a neighborhood in Rancho Cucamonga. *Google Earth imagery.*

The Inland Empire's exceptionally unhealthy air is largely attributable to the overwhelming presence of the warehousing, logistics, and goods-movement industry in the region. Some natural conditions contribute to the pollution: nearly year-round sunshine that catalyzes smog, and surrounding mountains that trap it. But it is the emissions poured unrelentingly into the air by cars, trucks, and trains that make this possible. The diesel big rigs and delivery trucks moving goods to and from the region's massive warehouses bear an outsize and conspicuous role.

The populous southwestern corner of the Inland Empire is home to a huge concentration of warehouses and goods-distribution centers. These have grown in number and size over the past decade, and now cover more than a billion square feet of indoor space in the region. Amazon has more than a dozen facilities in the Inland Empire, including some of its largest fulfillment centers in the U.S. The online retailer is joined by UPS, Walmart, Home Depot, and other "big-box" stores. This regional logistics industry—moving, unloading, and reloading goods from the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach to all points beyond—is characterized by large corporations paying local workers low wages, often under unfavorable conditions of employment.<sup>67</sup> Further, some in the industry have actively sought to cultivate an immigrant and racialized workforce that is highly vulnerable to exploitation.<sup>68</sup>

There are a number of ways in which the warehousing industry has fallen short of protecting workers and their communities from exposure to COVID-19 since the pandemic's onset. Amazon in particular has shown itself to be a bad public-health actor in the region, as a report from Human Impact Partners and the Warehouse Worker Resource Center documents.<sup>69</sup> But as that report points out in its title, much of the logistics industry's damage to the region's health is imposed inside the warehouses—hidden from public view.

That is not the case for air pollution. The region's unhealthy air envelops the Inland Empire's population core, and is an unavoidable aspect of residents' everyday sensory experiences. As the logistics industry continues to expand, warehouses encroach ever further into residential areas, with the noises and smells of diesel trucks creeping right into long-time residents' homes.<sup>70</sup> The type and level of air pollution elevate risks of cancer, asthma, bronchitis, and emphysema, and "make the lungs more susceptible to infection."<sup>71</sup> Public-health researchers have long since shown the connection between the goods-movement hubs' presence in the region and increased cases of asthma and bronchitis episodes in children.<sup>72</sup> Ozone pollution also taxes the immune system more generally, especially the system's development in childhood.<sup>73</sup>

These risks are not unknown locally, and the expansion of the logistics industry in the Inland Empire has never gone on without opposition. Local community leaders and environmental advocates spoke out against the original push to shift logistics operations inland from the ports, publicizing the toll it stood to take on the region's health, and especially that of low-income communities of color.<sup>74</sup> Activists and residents have continued to push back against successive waves of new project proposals and rezoning measures sought by developers. New development initiatives have also made news in the region due to corruption scandals involving public officials. In 2013, federal investigators raided the homes and offices of Moreno Valley city councilmembers in an investigation into whether they had received bribes from warehouse developers.<sup>75</sup> The scandal was widely covered in local media, and led to the successful removal by recall of the mayor and a city councilmember.<sup>76</sup>

In sum, the expansion, and tangible health threat, of warehouse development in the Inland Empire have unfolded largely in public view. They are conspicuous manifestations of the reality of far-reaching, and largely unconstrained and unaccountable, corporate power—right there in inland neighborhoods. Given this, one might expect the region's residents to be particularly attuned to issues of economic inequality, environmental and labor abuse, and corporate power. Our research found that residents are indeed sensitive to these issues, but without consistently connecting them all to one another. The sections that follow discuss the evidence we found on how Inland Empire residents—especially low- and middle-income people of color—are thinking about economic opportunity and inequality in the region, and the narratives they use to organize and make sense of their experiences and ability to make change.

## What Is Opportunity in the Inland Empire?

As local officials and policymakers foster the Inland Empire's warehousing boom, they also promote it to constituents as the opportunity that's right for the region. Warehouse work was first hailed as a replacement for manufacturing jobs lost to deindustrialization, and later as a solution for workers left unemployed in the wake of the housing-market bubble and Great Recession. Not only does the development of warehouses and distribution hubs take advantage of the Inland Empire's geographic proximity to the Los Angeles/Long Beach port complex; it also offers low-skill jobs in a region with relatively lower levels of educational attainment, higher poverty levels, and unstable unemployment rates.<sup>77</sup> Local leaders, planners, and developers see the industry's environmental costs as a necessary "trade off," telling the region's residents that these low-wage, often part-time or temporary jobs are the right jobs—even good jobs—for them.<sup>78</sup>

Participants in our qualitative research made clear that they disagree. In general, when the topic of economic opportunity in the Inland Empire was raised in focus groups and interviews, residents said either



that it was extremely limited, or that it was only to be found outside the region. Younger and older participants alike said that local job markets are dominated by fast-food and service work, and jobs related to warehousing and goods movement.<sup>79</sup> None of these was regarded as offering a living wage in the short term, or upward mobility in the long term. Study participants spoke of it as the norm that low-income residents who work in the region must hold multiple jobs, share housing with extended family or friends, or both. As a 53-year-old Black interviewee from Moreno Valley said:

Moreno Valley has all these warehouses where you can work at Amazon. You're putting in 10-hour days at... [pause] it just now may be \$15 an hour. But still, that's not enough... for the childcare that's \$700... the rent that's \$2,200 a month. How many people do you have to have that's living in this one house that works at Amazon 10 hours a day to cover that?

The alternative for inland residents, participants said, is to commute to a coastal county for work. Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego counties are seen as places of *real* opportunity, and residents point to the volume of daily commuters as evidence of that. Indeed, data bear out that Inland Empire residents who work in coastal counties are more likely to possess col-

lege degrees, have higher average annual earnings, and are less likely to live below the poverty line than those who both live and work in the Inland Empire.<sup>80</sup>

Beyond seeing the job market in the region as inadequate, many residents experience their work situations as actually hampering their prospects for reaching career and life goals. The necessity of working multiple low-wage jobs, or being available for “flex[ible]” work hours in warehousing and goods movement, impinges on time and energy for educational or skills development. In interviews with young Amazon warehouse workers, UC Riverside researchers found that “many college students described their warehouse employment as interfering with their ability to perform well in school.”<sup>81</sup> The researchers conclude that, though these students may approach warehouse work as a short-term income source—not a career path—the work schedules, sleep deprivation, and physical- and mental-health impacts pose serious risks to academic success, and ultimately, chances for upward mobility. Our own study participants also spoke of the fraught cost-benefit calculus of whether to pursue training or higher education, given its expenses—including time away from work—while knowing that the local job market may not be able to reward new credentials even if they were able to earn them.

Containers fill the yards at the Ports of Los Angeles (left) and Long Beach (right), the country's busiest ports. Logistics companies take advantage of comparatively cheap land and low wages in the Inland Empire — and the proximity to shipping infrastructure pictured here — in order to maximize their profits. [Photograph by Andrew Louis.](#)

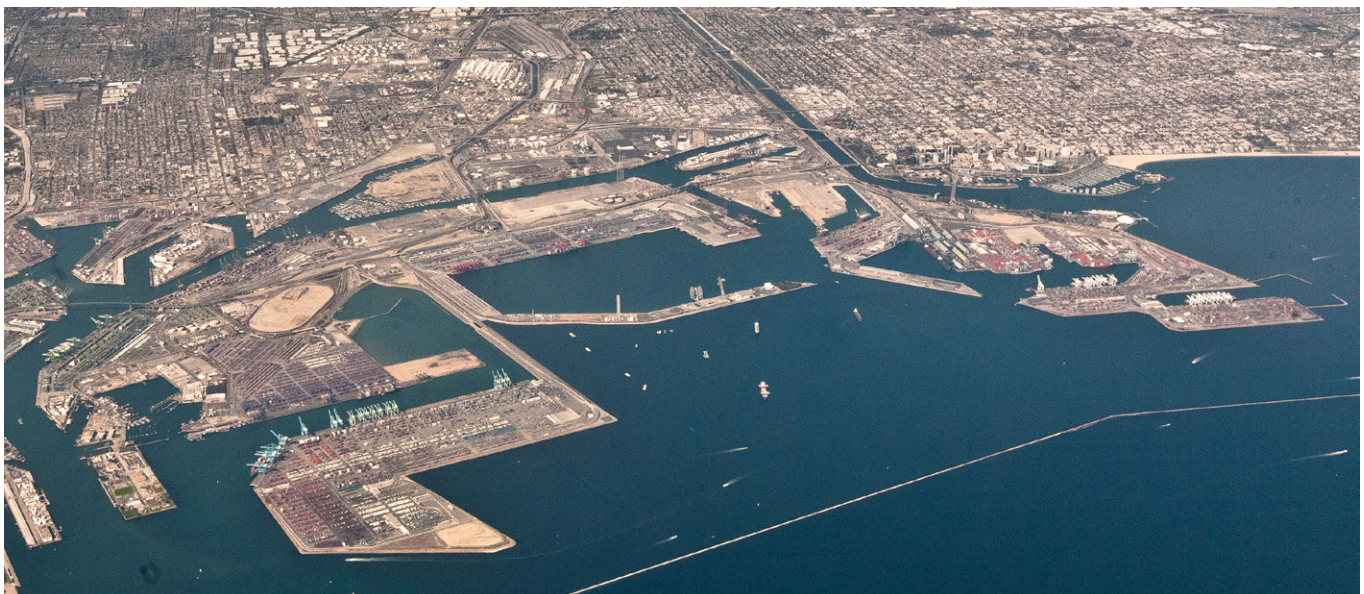
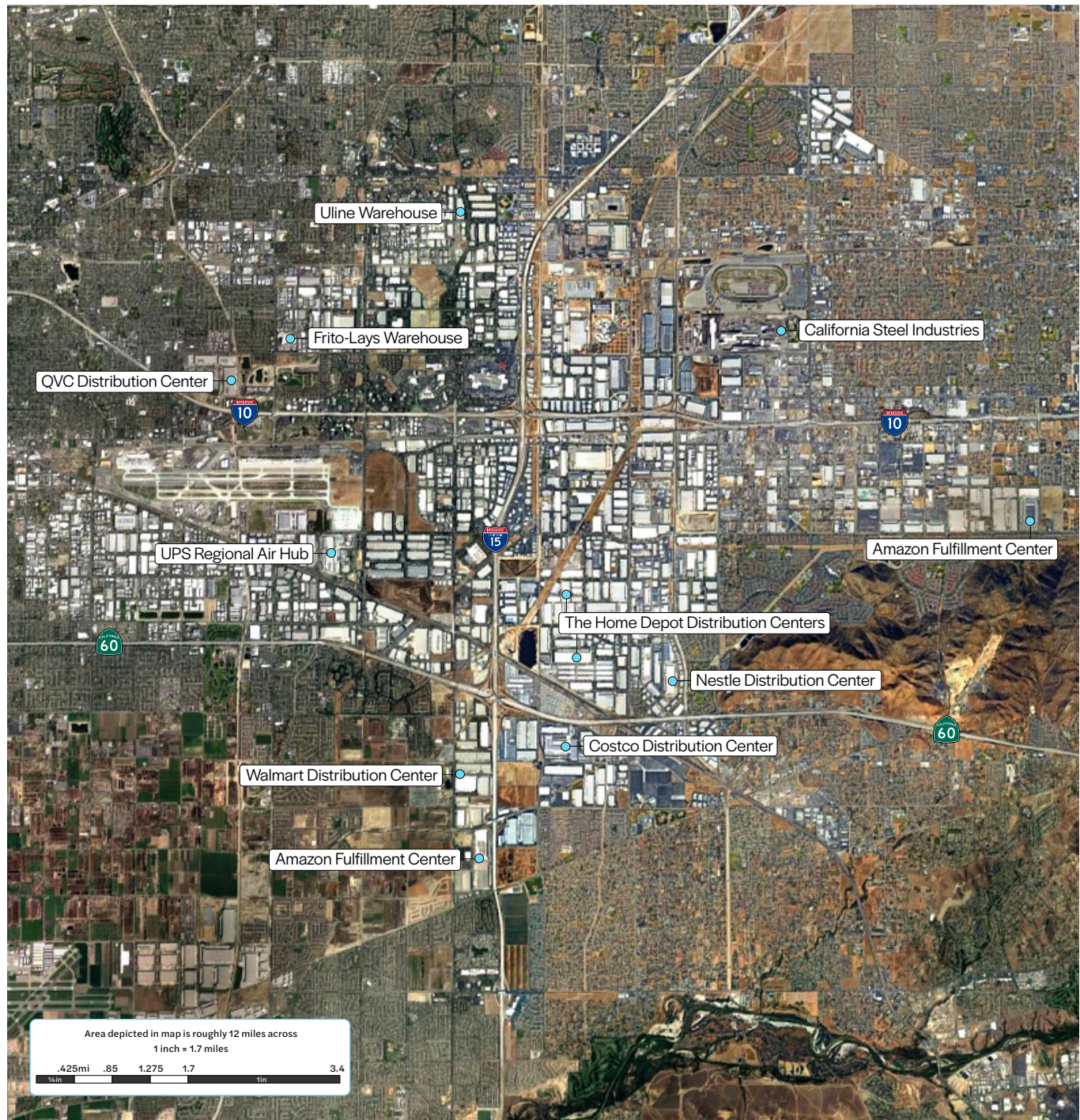




FIGURE 9

## A logistics landscape in northeast Pomona Valley, Inland Empire



A vast web of warehouses and distributions centers straddles the area between Rancho Cucamonga (northwest), Ontario (west), and Fontana (east). As in other parts of the Inland Empire, these facilities intermingle with storefronts, schools, and residential communities. Just some of the many logistics centers in this area are highlighted in the map above.

Heavy truck traffic is a constant on the three major highways pictured here: Interstate 15, running north-south through the region; Interstate 10, running west-east from California's coast to Florida's; and California Route 60.

*Photograph from Google Earth satellite imagery.*



Finally, it is notable that study participants who spoke of the regional economy's lack of opportunity, and its dominance by the logistics industry, readily connected these to local decision makers. Across our focus groups, residents called attention to the fact that warehouse development has been courted and incentivized by government—that this is an active choice. Local officials could just as easily have taken steps to encourage diversification of industries and opportunities in the region, said participants.

The fact that they have not done so is a source of resentment. One participant in our focus group with African-American women spoke with frustration of how the job market has failed to match local training programs. “We have nothing but warehouses, but we have eleventy fifty thousand CNA [certified nursing assistant] schools, eleventy fifty thousand universities with med programs... a culinary school,” she said. “And that is where the politicking... comes [in]. They allow for us to have all these different warehouses, [but] not enough viable jobs.” Later, another participant echoed and affirmed who this “they” is: “Like this young lady said [earlier], when you got a lot of warehouses [with] a lot of CNA [program]s, that doesn't go together. And how does the government play a role in that? Because the city council has to approve the plans.”

Such plans, and their expansion of warehousing and goods movement in the Inland Empire, look unlikely to abate.<sup>82</sup> Since the COVID-19 pandemic, warehousing and logistics is one of the only sectors that has added jobs in the region, fueled by the increasing prevalence of online shopping.<sup>83</sup> As 2021 began, new rezoning proposals sought to continue to push industrial activity and pollution further into residential areas, impacting low- and middle-income communities of color the most.<sup>84</sup> But just as these proposals face local resistance, our research affirms that members of these communities in the Inland Empire are well aware of how local government shapes the labor market in the region. Their accounts diverge from the popular narrative that treats “natural” market dynamics as determining job opportunities. They instead make visible the hand of local government, which they see as intervening on behalf of an industry that provides jobs, but not opportunity.

## Gaps in the Story?: Corporate Power and Workers

While study participants' personal narratives reveal resentment toward local politicians for prioritizing warehouse development, our surveys do not show that the inland population as a whole judges corporations especially harshly. Nor is it clear that Inland Empire residents are more conscious than other Californians of the conditions and struggles of warehouse-industry workers themselves. This despite that it is many of the largest corporate retailers that have so dramatically altered the region's air and communities, and these warehouse workers are among their neighbors.

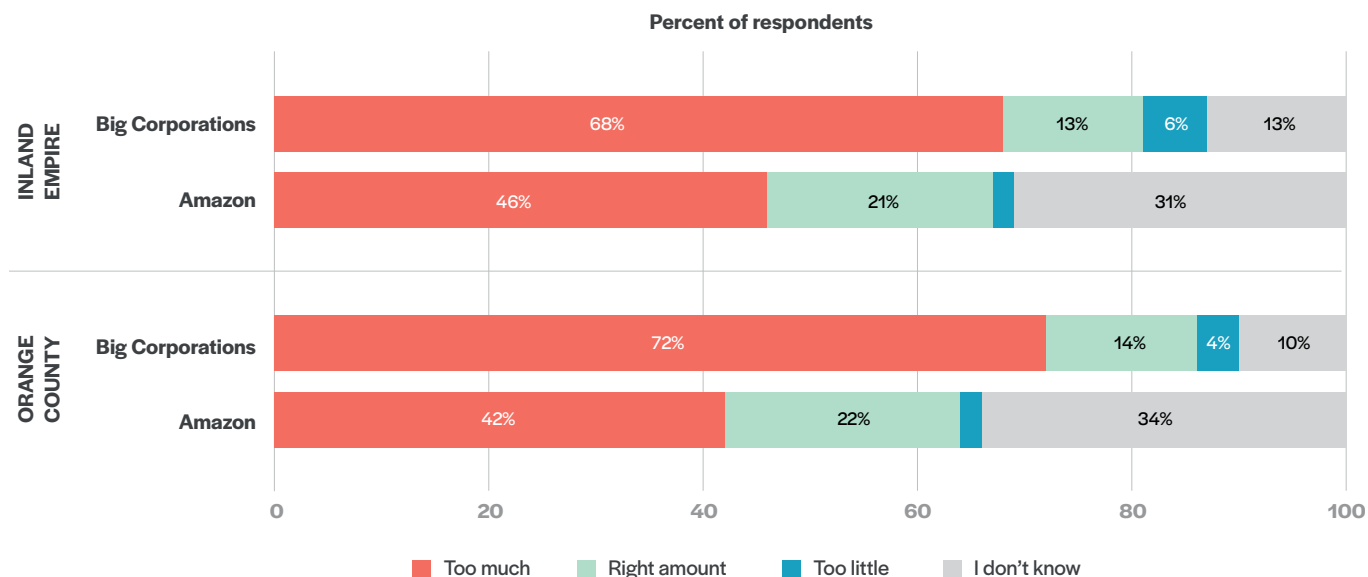
Four months into a pandemic that underscored how “essential” people who work in warehouses or transport goods have always been, Blueprint for Belonging's regional surveys of the Inland Empire and Orange County asked residents how they felt about these workers. A large majority in the Inland Empire, 71 percent, said that they feel more grateful to these workers since the pandemic, with 52 percent saying “much more grateful.” Still, these shares were smaller than those in Orange County, where 78 percent expressed more gratitude toward warehouse, transport, and delivery workers, with 59 percent “much more grateful.”<sup>85</sup> Respondents were also asked for their opinions on how responsible several different factors were for the harm caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of the survey, news of outbreaks in warehouses had been covered widely in the press, and workers had begun speaking out to demand better protections. Still, only 31 percent of Inland Empire residents placed significant responsibility for the coronavirus's harm with “employers that did not do enough to protect their employees,” compared to 41 percent who laid blame with “people who have unhealthy lifestyles or don't take care of their health.”

More Inland Empire residents are dissatisfied with corporations' political clout. Survey respondents were asked to say whether several groups or entities have “too much,” “too little,” or “the right amount” of influence in California politics. For half of the respondents, the list included “big corporations,”

FIGURE 10

## Views on corporate influence in politics

Inland Empire and Orange County residents were asked whether big corporations and Amazon exercise “too much,” “too little,” or “just about the right amount” of influence in California politics.



while the other half were asked specifically about “Amazon, the company.” There was broad agreement across Inland Empire residents that big corporations have too much influence, with 68 percent saying so.<sup>86</sup> But results were far more mixed when it came to Amazon. Just 46 percent of Inland Empire residents said that the online retailer and regional warehousing and distribution giant has too much influence in politics, with nearly one third of respondents saying they “don’t know.” Across all race/ethnicity and age groups, around twice as many respondents answered “the right amount” or “don’t know” for Amazon as did so with respect to “big corporations.”

Together these results imply that, though the generalized criticism of corporate influence may be almost as widespread in the Inland Empire as elsewhere in California, there are limits on how residents apply that criticism and relate it to local dynamics. This is consistent with what the Blueprint for Belonging team has heard from community-based and advocacy organizations in the region. These organizations attest that campaigns to support warehouse workers

and make demands upon Amazon and other major corporations in the region are commonly met with reticence from community members. In the minds of many, what happens inside the warehouses is the workers’ issues—not the community’s.

Finally, prominent narratives about work and the regional character and identity offer scripts that lead even many workers to disengage from struggles over labor conditions. Inland Empire residents know the region as a hardscrabble place, and aspects of its history and labor market engender a sense of regional exceptionalism.<sup>87</sup> Its dramatic population growth is grounded in what a local author described as, “tens of thousands of blue-collar and just barely white-collar families with a lot to lose” who shared experiences and stories of “anxiety, long commutes and flight from gang-dominated neighborhoods.”<sup>88</sup> Today the Inland Empire is a place “where people new to the region... are told, ‘No matter what you experienced before you got here, hard work and grinding is the only way to make it.’”<sup>89</sup> These types of narratives can normalize what would otherwise be unacceptable,

especially as they intersect with personal aspirations and stories of the self that say that one's present situation is short term—a temporary sacrifice, or means to a greater end. This can create either a kind of pride and identification with “the grind,” or a stoic detachment. Either of these lowers workers' likelihood to press demands, giving employers a pass on conditions that for many are neither temporary nor a ladder to something more lucrative or just.

## Views on Government Action against Inequality

Residents from Inland Empire communities of color who we engaged through qualitative research were broadly aware of economic inequality in the region. Many organized their ideas around the notion of privilege, and how inherited wealth, exclusive social and professional networks, and status mediate access to opportunity. Those who enjoy these forms of privilege were described as not understanding, and being disconnected from, “people like me.” At the same time, many of the same residents were ambivalent about redistributive policies, and in some cases, they criticized low-income people for unscrupulous behavior more than they criticized the well-off. This section lays out patterns in how study participants expressed these nuanced perspectives, and highlights ways in which their thinking supports and opposes government action against economic inequality.

It is notable that, when prompted to speak about whether inequality was an issue in the region, participants usually said that it was, but then shifted to other terminology to discuss it. Talk of “privilege” was relatively common, as were references to the middle class, “regular workers,” and the poor. Residents' non-use of “inequality” is itself significant, given how prominent the term is in analyses and campaigns to transform economic realities in the United States.<sup>90</sup> But beyond that, participants' terminological shift from “inequality” to “privilege” tended to lead them to greater criticism of unequal access—or “uneven playing fields”—than unequal outcomes in and of themselves.

Similarly, our region-wide survey finds that a notable share of Inland Empire residents think differently

about different types of policies against inequality. The survey asked respondents a number of questions about the appropriate role of government in the economy. Two of these that are particularly important to examine together are questions about whether respondents believe that government should be responsible for (1) ensuring that everyone has a basic income, and (2) reducing income differentials between high and low earners. We investigated views on these two propositions because both involve relatively strong steps by government to stem economic inequality, but each with different points of intervention that we expected most respondents would find clear and distinct.

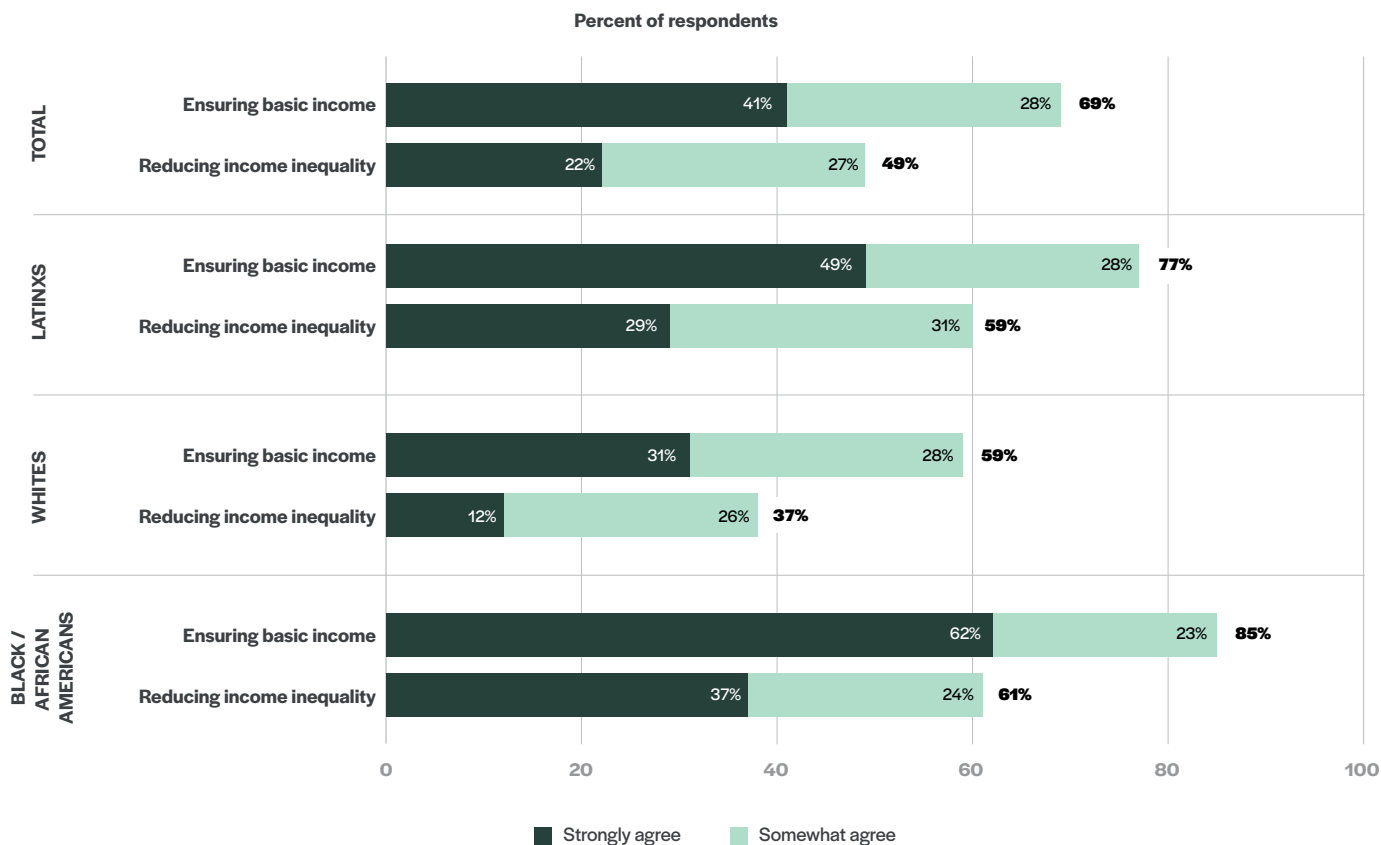
In general, far more Inland Empire residents support government action to ensure that everyone has a guaranteed income than say government should actively reduce income disparity. This is not to say that policy to combat income disparity is unpopular. Overall, 49 percent of Inland Empire respondents said they agree (either “strongly” or “somewhat”) with the proposition that, “It is the responsibility of government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes.” For people of color only, nearly 60 percent agree; and for young people ages 18-29 years, 69 percent agree.

But support is much higher when the proposal is expressed as government helping people meet basic needs—even in the form of a guaranteed income program. On the idea that, “When the economy stops providing for working people, government should be responsible for ensuring that everyone has a basic income,” agreement among survey respondents increased by about 20 percentage points across the board in comparison to the idea that government should reduce differences in incomes (see **Figure 11**). Notably, almost all of the variation comes in the number that “strongly agree.” When looking just at it, we see a sizable existing support base in the Inland Empire for a guaranteed basic income policy. This base is composed disproportionately of young people ages 18-29 years, 58 percent of whom “strongly agree” that government is responsible for ensuring a basic income, as well as Black residents, 62 percent

**FIGURE 11**

## Views on government's role in the economy, by race/ethnicity

Inland Empire residents were asked if they agree or disagree that government is responsible for (1) reducing income inequality and (2) ensuring everyone has basic income when the economy stops providing one.



of whom “strongly agree” (as shown in **Figure 11**). Notably, women anchor support for a guaranteed basic income in both Black and Latinx communities. Among Black women, 70 percent say they strongly agree that ensuring a basic income is government’s responsibility, joined by 57 percent of Latina women.

So what explains the weaker support for an active government role in lessening income inequality? Given that both survey items broach policy proposals that imply increasing incomes for lower earners, we can hypothesize that the misgivings are about government limiting incomes at the higher end. Our qualitative research bears this out. It also sheds light on why low- and middle-income people specifically are skeptical about the idea of reining in—as through taxation—others’ high incomes.

Our first lesson comes from the finding that, when prompted to speak to issues of economic inequality, focus-group and interview participants most often focused on small-scale inequalities from their everyday lives. They spoke of differences between those who earn the minimum wage versus those who can afford their own apartment, or uneven investment in one part of their city versus another.

Despite the presence in their communities of warehouses and distribution centers for some of the largest retailers in the country, their narratives about inequality often foregrounded people who they knew personally as the potential recipients of tax hikes. Where they expressed opposition to the idea of reforming tax laws to make the wealthy pay more, study participants often spoke about their doctor,



local small-business owners, or a relative who had “made it” in the position of “the wealthy.”

To some extent, this primary association of economic inequality with smaller-scale income differences may suggest that the larger differentials that mark our era are too big to contemplate. This is understandable in a country in which the difference between the median household income and the net worth of the richest individual is equal to that between a yard stick and a road trip from Maine to Miami.<sup>91</sup> This kind of extreme inequality is almost unimaginable, forcing most of us to reckon the notion of inequality in terms closer to home. When we do this, however, we are likely to focus on advantages that are many orders of magnitude smaller than the true scale of inequality—and the benefits of which are enjoyed by people more akin to peers. This was the case for several of our Latinx and Black study participants in the Inland Empire.

For many though, the focus on smaller-scale inequalities also reflected a critical, pessimistic analysis of who is and is not vulnerable to government actions like tax increases. As laid out in detail elsewhere, much of the skepticism we heard in the Inland Empire about raising public funds by making “only corporations and the extremely wealthy pay more” in taxes was rooted in the belief that they would not actually do so.<sup>92</sup> Many study participants explained that these elites currently have—and would continue to have—the power to flout tax law altogether, or the

resources and know-how to subvert taxation through workarounds and “loopholes.” Within these narratives, the wealthiest are beyond the system’s reach; therefore, in practice, only people more marginally well-off than the speakers would be impacted by more progressive tax reforms.<sup>93</sup>

Our research finds that this view was widespread among low- and middle-income Black and Latinx residents.<sup>94</sup> So too is the view that, even if the government was able to extract more revenue from the rich and corporations, these resources would never find their way to “communities like ours.” In both cases, residents consistently place the ultimate blame with government or “the system”—not corporations or the wealthy—for their entanglement with big business and extreme wealth. Distrust in government thus undergirds much of the ambivalence, or outright resistance, to progressive tax reforms among many who would—in theory—most stand to benefit from increased social expenditure.

Last, we cannot discount the role of prevalent narratives of meritocracy and the “American Dream” in low- and middle-income Inland Empire residents’ opposition to government action against income inequality. Our interviews with Latinx residents in particular suggest that the idea that most people get what they deserve in light of their work ethic and effort is in wide circulation. Where these interviewees associated high incomes and wealth with hard work and sacrifice, higher tax burdens were interpreted as unfair “punishment.”

This criticism of progressive taxation—like the adoption of some anti-immigrant tropes discussed in **Part III**—rests on the assumption that the United States is a meritocracy. That is, it assumes that opportunity structures are essentially open and fair, and that rewards are distributed on basis of individual effort and



A man walks in a mixed commercial and residential area of San Bernardino, where a cluster of auto repair businesses operate alongside neighborhoods. About 75 percent of residents in this neighborhood are Latinx, and 9 in 10 are people of color.

Lopsided public investment across the Inland Empire region has left many neighborhoods like this one in disrepair and, in turn, many people in working-class communities of color feeling abandoned by elected officials.

Photograph by Matt Gush.

performance rather than status or inheritance. This was evident across many study participants' commentaries that stressed that those who are well-off must have gone through struggle to achieve their success.

But these reflections on the roots of the wealthy—"where they came from"—were also in some cases a turning point. For some study participants, it led them to move from opposing more progressive taxation to delineating who it would be fair to tax at higher rates and who not. Insofar as participants thought of the wealthy as having benefited primarily from inheritance or unearned privilege, they were far readier to increase high earners' taxes. Additionally, talk of "needing to know where they [the wealthy] came from" tended to lead to distinguishing wealthy individuals from corporations, and excluding the latter from participants' objections to tax hikes.

This section has sought to capture the considerable nuance in Inland Empire residents' views on how government should and should not act to address economic inequality, especially the views of low- to middle-income people of color who we engaged in our qualitative research. Overall, these residents tend to see inequality as a problem, but primarily insofar as it affronts values like fairness, hard work, and honesty. Participants often criticized unequal outcomes when they connected the benefits to actors who were perceived as enjoying privilege or having "taken advantage," but rarely in and of themselves.<sup>95</sup>

Such connections between unearned privilege or unscrupulous behavior and unequal outcomes seemed to be understood as the exception. Typically it was assumed that hard work and effort were the most common sources of economic advancement, especially by older study participants. This may have been because much of inland residents' talk about inequality focused on small-scale income advantages enjoyed by people they knew personally. Where the wealthiest and corporations were concerned, study participants portrayed them as beyond the reach of policy intervention. While this engendered some criticism of corporate power, ultimately most resentment was directed at government or "the system"—whether for being corrupt, or an inept dupe of corporations.

## Conclusions and Implications

This part of the report began with the topic of health vulnerabilities in the Inland Empire, and their connection to the development of a labor market dominated by the logistics industry. It showed that residents are dissatisfied with the resulting options for work in the region, and keenly aware of the role of local politicians in delivering only jobs that fail to provide a living wage or prospects of upward mobility. It further showed broader dissatisfaction with unequal access to economic opportunities in the inland region.

But so too has **Part IV** revealed a number of misgivings about, and barriers to support for, policy interventions to mitigate the degree and growth of inequality in the region and state. To expand and strengthen civic advocacy for the kinds of programs that will spread economic opportunity and rein in corporate power would require contending with a number of assumptions and background narratives that undergird skepticism about prospects for change. Our research spotlighted some such narratives, while also uncovering practical lessons for shifting narrative frames. The most notable of those lessons are synthesized below.

- + **Many workers adopt personal narratives that center on their individual work ethic and willingness to make sacrifices**, set against a backdrop of "exceptional circumstances" in the region. **Such narratives can dissuade them from speaking out against harmful practices and structures**, especially if "keeping their heads down" is in the pursuit of higher goals. However, it is also the case that the idea of standing up for others, or for a broader notion of "community," resonates widely. As such, the same commitment and determination workers bring to "grinding it out" might also be activated in the name of defending co-workers and neighbors. **Those aiming to organize collective action might do best to raise issues of fairness and exploitation less from the standpoint of individual self-interest and more for how they affect the whole community.**<sup>96</sup> And when expressing unity and solidarity in hard work and day-to-day struggles, it

is important not to let talk of the region’s exceptionality serve as excuses for what is in fact corporate abuse or irresponsible exercise of power.

✚ Across low- and middle-income residents of color, **the notion of “economic inequality” tends to bring to mind smaller-scale disparities**, often among acquaintances. As a result, the true magnitude of wealth and income differentials in California and the United States often eludes residents’ evaluations of policies to stem inequality. **The scale of inequality in the country is undoubtedly difficult to grasp. But to have an inclusive and democratic public dialogue around the issue will require making its character clear and tangible, including by putting its**

**scale at the fore of the discussion.** Otherwise, Californians will be left to form their opinions and preferences on how to deal with the inequality “iceberg” based only that iceberg’s tip.

✚ **Low- and middle-income earners are resistant to interventions against economic inequality when they see wealth and high earnings as built principally on hard work and personal sacrifice.** This is the case seemingly irrespective of how high are the earnings in question. The prevalence of the assumption that economic rewards correlate with hard work—and that the wealthy, for the most part, have earned it—reflects the hold of the American Dream narrative. In our research with Inland Empire residents of

**TABLE 3**  
**Narratives on taxing “the wealthy” versus corporations**

	ON THE WEALTHY...	ON CORPORATIONS...
Latina woman, age 29, Hesperia	<b>Just because they’re successful doesn’t mean that they have to carry the burden of paying. But I mean, it sounds good to help everybody else. At the same time, I don’t feel like it would be very fair for them. Corporations maybe; but the individual people, no.</b>	<b>INTERVIEWER:</b> <b>Why corporations “yes?”</b>  <b>Because I mean, they’re benefiting, they’re profiting from being able to operate in this community. So I think that they should be able to contribute.</b>
Latina woman, age 35, Moreno Valley	<b>La mayoría de esas personas [ricas] son personas que no ven a su familia, personas que todo el tiempo sus niños están cuidado por una babysitter... No nacieron con dinero.</b>  <i>The majority of those [rich] people are people who don’t see their family, people who, all the time their kids are cared for by a babysitter... They were not born with money.</i>	<b>Las corporaciones sí, porque también evaden muchos impuestos, con donaciones y cosas que a veces son ficticias. En las corporaciones, sí es distinta. Porque también hay mucha explotación. En las corporaciones hay mucha explotación a sus trabajadores.</b>  <i>The corporations yes, because they also evade a lot of taxes, with donations and things that are sometimes made up. With corporations, yes, it’s different. Because there’s also a lot of exploitation. Within corporations, there’s a lot of exploitation of their workers.</i>

color, it was especially notable among those with recent family or personal immigration histories.

**But focus group discussions showed that the meritocracy myth can also be pierced, as when participants brought up personal stories of people who have worked hard their whole lives without prospering financially.** These examples softened participants' reluctance to intervene against inequality, as did other stories that foregrounded the role of inherited or otherwise unearned privilege as the source of prosperity. In the United States, examples of economic fortunes being preordained at birth, and of hard work—especially physical labor—going unrewarded, are legion. When these are recalled, Inland Empire residents evaluate the fairness of proposals like increasing taxes on the rich more favorably.

- + Residents commonly distinguish corporations from the wealthy when they discuss what steps would be fair to take to combat economic inequality. Notwithstanding claims to the contrary, **low- and middle-income Inland Empire residents of color do not tend to regard corporations as people. Whereas the wealthy are carefully evaluated as individuals with potentially sympathetic and relatable origin stories, corporations are not.** Residents are also more likely to talk about corporations as perpetrating exploitation against workers, and of coming from

**The philosophy of the American Dream... that people believe in [is:] if you work hard, you can make it. But in actuality, it's not about working hard. Because somebody could work 15 hours a day and come off the lot with \$150. I saw that in my family where my dad was working overtime. He was working 15 hours a day. And my uncle would work like 8 hours a day and made over two, three million dollars a year. So it depends on where you start.**

— PARTICIPANT 3, young men of color focus group

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outside the community and benefiting from the community. Though certainly not everyone in our study drew these distinctions, where they arose, **each led residents to speak more favorably of increasing corporate taxation, or otherwise expecting corporations to “give back.”**

- + **A final barrier to expanding engagement to stem economic inequality is a lack of trust in government as a vehicle for improving the lives of average people.** Beliefs that government is either unable or unwilling to change the conditions of low-income communities of color in particular often discourage members of those communities from taking action, even where they strongly favor reform. **The idea that any potential increases in public revenue would simply disappear into government coffers—and that “people like us” would “never see it”—is in wide circulation.** Such disillusionment does not come from nowhere. It is grounded in historical and contemporary injustice with which engagement efforts must contend honestly. To resonate with people's lived experience, **these efforts will need to acknowledge and affirm the roots of distrust, while putting forward a plausible vision of how community members can come together to demand a government that serves them, and a plan to exercise oversight and hold public officials accountable.**

The challenges posed by mistrust and disillusionment with government extend far beyond the issue of interventions against inequality. As we show in **Part V**, they lower Inland Empire residents' expectations of government in ways that are disempowering, and that discourage civic participation in general. The perception that “government” means politicians, and politicians are both out of touch and out of reach is widespread. This makes it difficult for many residents to situate themselves and those with whom they feel a sense of community or linked fate in a position of agency vis-à-vis large public institutions. But as we also show, it is possible for residents to overcome their misgivings about taking civic action when they anchor their decisions in ideas about their identity, relationships, and responsibilities within wider communities.

# Levers of Power

**THE PREVIOUS PART OF THIS REPORT CONCLUDED** by highlighting the role that narratives casting government as inherently entangled with elite interests play in discouraging civic action for change. Like any narrative must, these rest on particular ideas about who and what “government” actually is or includes. So what are those ideas? And importantly, what other contending ideas about government and civic action are out there, and how might they fuel narrative and organizing strategies that enliven a sense of agency rather than hampering it?

This final part examines Blueprint for Belonging’s qualitative and quantitative findings from the Inland Empire in order to answer these questions. In particular, we examine what inland residents think about how power is exercised, who has access to it, and where that leaves everyone else. We also show that decisions about whether or not to vote often have less to do with who is on the ballot than with voters’ views of themselves. As elsewhere in the report, our focus is on Latinx, Black, young, and other residents who are often pushed to the margins when power is at stake, but without whose equal representation we will continue to fall short of democratic ideals.

## Thinking about “Government”: Distant and Powerful

As a starting point for understanding how residents think about issues of power, representation, and their access to both, we asked participants in our focus groups and interviews, “When you hear the word ‘government,’ what comes up for you?” As might be expected, this broad prompt led to a wide range of responses across the 72 individuals who heard it. But there were also some notable patterns. In the associ-

### HIGHLIGHTS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

- Around half of Inland Empire residents of all racial/ethnic, gender, and age groups agree with the sentiment that people like themselves “don’t have any say about what government does.”
- Among the most common ideas that low- and middle-income residents have about government is that politicians are out of touch with and “don’t get” average people’s problems because they are rich.
- Roughly equal shares of Inland Empire residents feel “more frustrated” as feel “more grateful” toward state and local government since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Women and young people under age 40 are much less likely than men and 40+ year-old residents to believe they are well informed about politics and government.
- The most common reason that young registered voters sometimes choose not to vote is that they lack confidence in their knowledge about what is on the ballot. It is rarely because they see elections as unimportant or inconsequential.



ations participants raised, we see a picture of simultaneous government absence and omnipresence.

The most common association that the term *government* brought to participants' minds was with elected officials and politicians—whether specific individuals or generic offices. In the discussions of politicians that followed, inland residents depicted government as insular and myopic—motivated by “its” own narrow concerns that have little to do with serving average people. In a number of cases, this type of description began with the primary association of “government” with “politics.” If this association seems banal, it is important to appreciate the colloquial sense in which the term *politics* was being used. By “politics,” here study participants referred to a system presumed to be governed by exclusive relationships (“who knows who”), unwritten rules, petty quarrels, self-interested dealings, and outright corruption. It was the “politics” of scornful statements like “it’s all politics,” and “too much politics.” Based on our study, where government is discussed in the Inland Empire’s Latinx and Black communities, these sentiments are not far behind.

Related to the insularity of government in residents’ narratives is its disconnection from average people and communities. Study participants regularly spoke of government as “out of touch,” or unable to “get” the problems of people like themselves. Interestingly, discussions about “who benefits from inequality” were at least as likely to lead to talk of elected officials as to talk of corporate elites. Although, as **Part IV** discussed, residents tended to leave the wealthiest Americans out of their discussions of inequality, multiple interviewees mentioned the \$175,000 annual salary of members of the U.S. Congress—which had been in the news at the time—and expressed displeasure about it.

Government’s apparent distance from their lived realities made inland residents pessimistic about its likelihood to make positive change for low- and middle-income families. Again, this pessimism was driven by the centering of politicians—especially those holding federal offices—in conceptions of what government is. It is worth noting that several participants made reference to the Trump administration

specifically. The then-president cast a long shadow over thinking about “government;” surely this is true for any president, though perhaps not as much as for Trump. When his administration was named as emblematic of government, study participants emphasized the need to lower expectations, and to place energy elsewhere—turning away from government, for example, to focus on strengthening community bonds and mutual support against attacks that Trump was seen as unleashing.<sup>97</sup>

PARTICIPANT 3:

**We have to bridge the gap of the community [and government], and they [government officials] need to drill down and know about their communities...**

PARTICIPANT 2:

**It’s hard [because] a lot of times, the government officials are... [pause] They’re on a different level.**

PARTICIPANT 3:

**They don’t have the same problems.**

PARTICIPANT 2:

**Yeah... It’s like the person that’s teaching you how to lose weight, but they’ve never had a weight problem. I mean, so, if you’ve never had a real struggle problem, and you went to Yale...**

PARTICIPANT 3:

**How can you give me a program?**

— African-American women focus group

Still, the problem that low- and middle-income Inland Empire residents identified as a “disconnect” between government and community realities was not expressed as unique to Trump. At most, the then-president was treated as a particularly egregious or brazen example of government as wealthy,

self-serving, and unconstrained.<sup>98</sup> Because “it” is out of touch, residents explained, government does not appreciate the different kinds of needs for support and services that exist across diverse populations. This leads to a “mismatch” in what government offers, which is usually oriented toward keeping the least well-off afloat, but not helping people on the cusp of upward mobility to take the next step. Here again, the trope of wasteful “welfare” spending that conservative politicians have pushed for decades sometimes reappeared, woven into an overall narrative that government only cares for the most poor and the most rich.

**INTERVIEWER:**

**Primero, cuando escuchas esa palabra, ‘gobierno,’ ¿en qué piensas?**

*First, when you hear that word, ‘government,’ what do you think of?*

**“En Trump.” [laughs]**

*Of Trump.*

**INTERVIEWER:**

**En Trump. ¿Por qué?**

*Of Trump. Why?*

**“Pues es que él es, ahorita en este momento... es la persona que nos está cambiando todo... Y gracias a él, tenemos ya mucha gente que nos está discriminando. Y por eso, cuando dices ‘gobierno,’ pues es Trump. Es la manzana podrida que está pudriendo a todo lo demás.”**

*Well, it’s that he is, right now in this moment... he is the person that is changing everything on us... And thanks to him, now we have many people that are discriminating against us. And that’s why, when you say ‘government,’ well, it’s Trump. He is the rotten apple that’s spoiling everything else.*

– LATINA WOMAN, 51, Jurupa Valley

In all of this—and across focus groups and interviews—“government” was almost always discussed as external to, other than, or not a part of “the community.” The separation of the two was treated as self-evident. Accordingly, residents rarely spoke of any part of government as “ours,” but for a few exceptions when a city council or other local civil servants were mentioned as part of “the community.”

There was not strong evidence that Inland Empire residents’ attitudes toward government was changing substantially in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. When we fielded our survey of the region in July 2020, government efforts to mitigate the virus’s spread while providing some targeted relief had begun to be evaluated through partisan lenses, but were still not deeply partisanized. Still, only 32 percent of Inland Empire residents reported that they felt “more grateful” toward state and local government leaders “like your mayor or governor” since the pandemic began.<sup>99</sup> More—39 percent—responded that they felt “more frustrated” with state and local government since the pandemic. These numbers remained essentially the same in another poll run in the Inland Empire toward the end of the two-month winter surge in late-January 2021.<sup>100</sup>

Not all reactions to the idea of government led to talk of elected officials though. In many cases, study participants spoke more broadly of governmental structures. Interestingly, when they did, government was characterized not by its distance and disconnectedness, but by its all-encompassing presence across myriad aspects of everyday life. In this pattern, “government” evoked laws, policies, and regulations that organize residents’ activities; some study participants expressed this as “control,” or government being “everywhere.” Even where talk of government restriction and regulation did not paint them as quite this absolute, the power dynamic was most often expressed as unidirectional—as “it” (government) acting upon “us.” As a 31-year-old Corona resident who identified as bi-racial put it, what government brings up is, “Just being in charge. They’re govern-ing. So they’re in charge. Like they’re the ones who get to make the rules and call the shots. And what do you do? You have to abide by it.”



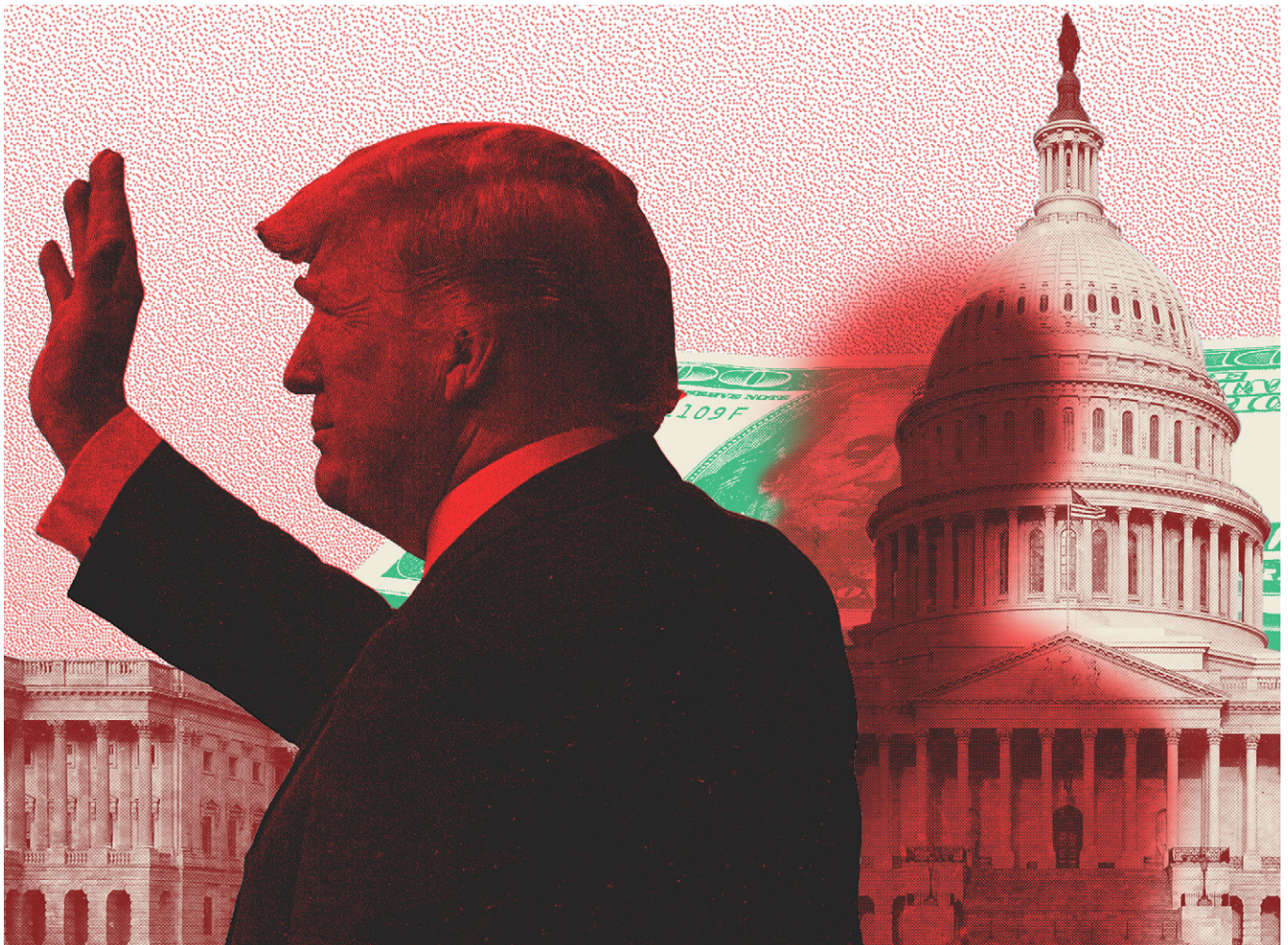
Notable for its absence from these accounts was the idea that the power which government exercises is representative of, or responsive to, residents. These omissions underscore the extent to which talk of government as disconnected expresses the perception of hierarchical power as much as distance. In this sense, being at once absent and encompassing is no contradiction at all.<sup>101</sup>

To gauge how widespread is the feeling that government is unresponsive to average Inland Empire residents, our July 2020 survey probed a particularly strong version of the sentiment. Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement, “People like me don’t have any say about what government does.” Overall, 26 percent of respondents said that they “strongly agreed” and

another 26 percent “somewhat agreed,” meaning that slightly over half of adults in the inland region believe they have *no* say in what government does. This breakdown was roughly the same across ethno-racial groups, gender, age, and partisan identity (if any).

Finally, a number of our focus group participants and interviewees said that what the term *government* evokes for them is taxes. This is not surprising, but it is notable that there was far less mention of the public goods and services enabled by tax revenue. Interestingly, where services came to participants’ minds, discussions tended to shift from talk of “government” to talk of “the city” or “the county.” Here again, we see that “government” has something of a brand problem, with negative associations sticking to the term much more readily than positive ones.

Former president Donald Trump’s actions from the White House cast a long shadow over how some people of color in the Inland Empire thought about “government” in general.



## Feeling Uninformed

In addition to widespread negative sentiment toward government as “disconnected” from average people, a significant share of Inland Empire residents discount their own capacity as potential political actors. Most disturbing is that, unlike with the view that “people like me have no say,” those who seem to discount themselves have distinct demographic characteristics and policy views that may, as a result, be underrepresented.

Our survey asked Inland Empire residents to say whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement, “I think most people are better informed about politics and government than I am.” Sixty percent said that they disagree, i.e. that they think they are at least as well informed as most people. The remaining respondents were split between 27 percent who think they are less informed and 13 percent who don’t

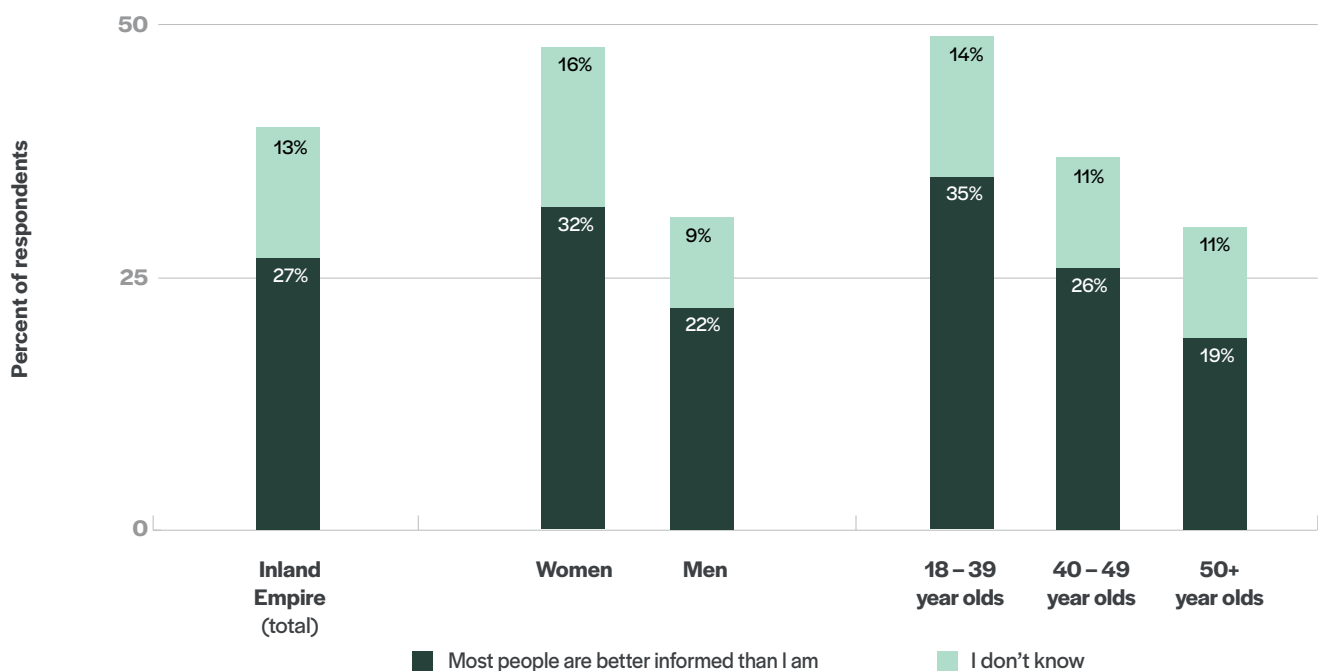
know. There are no major variations in this breakdown across Latinx, Black, and white resident subgroups. However, women are notably less likely than men to assert that they are at least as well informed as most people. Whereas 69 percent of men make that assertion (by disagreeing with the above statement), barely over half (52 percent) of women do.<sup>102</sup> This gender disparity is consistent across all ethno-racial identities. Younger Inland Empire residents are also more likely to doubt their political knowledge, with a particularly sharp divide between those under 40 years old and those ages 50 and above. Finally, Spanish-dominant Latinxs were the group most likely to say that most people are better informed than themselves, with 59 percent agreeing with the statement.<sup>103</sup>

These discrepancies in who considers themselves “less informed” clearly track lines of marginalization in U.S. political life. It was beyond the scope of our survey to test whether and how respondents’ self-

**FIGURE 12**

### Inland Empire residents’ assessments of how well informed they are about politics and government, by gender and age group

Responses to the question: “Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: ‘I think most people are better informed about politics and government than I am?’”





assessments aligned with, or diverged from, their actual knowledge. But numerous other scholars have carried out such experiments. It is a robust finding in psychological literature that men in general are much more likely to be overconfident—overestimating their knowledge.<sup>104</sup> Additional research provides evidence of the negative impact of sexist stereotypes on women’s performance of political knowledge specifically.<sup>105</sup> When we find women reporting that they are “less informed” at much higher rates than men, then, it is difficult not to interpret it as the internalization of a pervasive culture of sexism and denigration of women’s knowledge and agency, especially in the political realm. Similarly, young people and those whose strongest competency is in a language other than English are regularly told in myriad ways that they know too little, and that their knowledge is less valuable or insufficiently refined.

If Inland Empire residents who believe they are less well informed than their peers are in turn discouraged from participating politically, the consequences would go beyond demographic underrepresentation. It would also lead to certain views being underrepresented in political debate, and at the ballot box. This is because the group of residents in the Inland Empire who discount their own knowledge on politics and government is also distinct as to policy preferences, especially related to the role of government in securing material needs. For example, whereas 63 percent of survey respondents who believe they are at least as well informed as most people support a government-ensured basic income program, 82 percent of those who believe they are less informed support the same. More significantly, a 65 percent majority of those who believe themselves less informed say it is government’s responsibility to reduce income inequality, compared to a 40 percent minority of others.

Last, these two groups also diverge on the question of whether government should provide more or fewer services in areas like healthcare and education. Respondents were asked to give a score of 1 to 7, where “1” meant far fewer services and “7” meant far more. Of those respondents who believe they are at least as well informed as most people, 29 percent chose “7,” while 24 percent were at the other end of

the spectrum, choosing either “1” or “2.” For those who said they are less informed on government and politics, in contrast, 39 percent chose “7” and just 5 percent chose “1” or “2”—that government should provide far less services.

We cannot know whether inland residents who feel they are less informed sat out the 2020 elections at higher rates than those who believe themselves to be well informed. But at least as of summer 2020, they were more disposed to do so. First, there is substantial overlap in the Inland Empire survey between those who think others are better informed about politics and those who agree with the statement, “Most elections don’t really matter that much. Things stay the same for people like me no matter who is voted into office.” Further, though large majorities across all subgroups in the survey said they planned to vote in the November 2020 elections, the share was notably smaller for those who discounted their political knowledge. In fact, an even larger share of those who believe they are less informed than others (29 percent) were uncertain about whether they would vote than the share of those who think elections don’t matter much (25 percent).<sup>106</sup> Assuming this uncertainty translated into non-participation, we can see how individuals’ low esteem in their political knowledge can impact how views on government’s role and responsibilities are represented by the final voting electorate. In the next section, we examine in greater detail how confidence and ideas about being political and knowledgeable shape Latinx, Black, and especially young Inland Empire residents’ considerations about whether or not to vote.

## Weighing Whether to Vote

Voting is not the only expression of a person’s political engagement, much less the only way to participate civically. Still, it is a significant one, and understanding how individuals think about whether and how to vote offers a window into their broader dispositions toward civic participation. Notably, of all of the 25 interviewees with whom our team spoke about voting, none blew off the activity as irrelevant or unimportant. And this was not due to our sample being unusually politically active. Of the 25, twenty said that they



were eligible to vote, but only three said that they cast ballots in every election. The rest reported either that they vote most of the time, only in presidential years, or occasionally; or in four of the twenty cases, that they are not registered despite being eligible.

Among the handful who were eligible but not registered, interviewees expressed doubts about the integrity of the electoral system. This included questions about ballots' vulnerability to manipulation, criticisms of the anti-democratic character of the Electoral College, and more general doubts about whether votes cast actually translate into voters' policy preferences. But these types of comments were outliers in the Inland Empire—notably less prominent than in other locales in which our team has carried out research in partnership with voter engagement initiatives.<sup>107</sup>

More commonly, interviewees' discussions of how they decide whether or not to vote began with talk not of the electoral system, but of how they see themselves. They explained non-participation principally in terms of their identities and insecurities around being informed.<sup>108</sup> A number of interviewees began with explicit statements of identity: that they do not think of themselves as political; they are not that type of person. These statements overlapped with the still more-common pattern in which interviewees cast doubt on their preparedness to vote. They said that usually they do not participate because they don't know enough, and therefore would not be able to make informed decisions. Such comments were so recurrent among our young interviewees that it is worth considering some exemplary quotes below.

## Examples of respondents questioning their preparedness to vote

**“I don’t always pay attention to the news... If I voted in the local elections, I feel like I would need to be informed and I don’t take the time to do that.”**

— AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN, 30, Corona

**“I actually haven’t been [voting], only because I didn’t feel that I was educating myself enough into knowing the candidates or the bills or whatever. So I haven’t really been active in that area, but just because I don’t want to just put random things. I want to know what I’m getting myself into.”**

— LATINA WOMAN, 29, Hesperia

**“[F]or me personally, I think it’s a lot of the verbiage and the words in politics that I don’t understand.”**

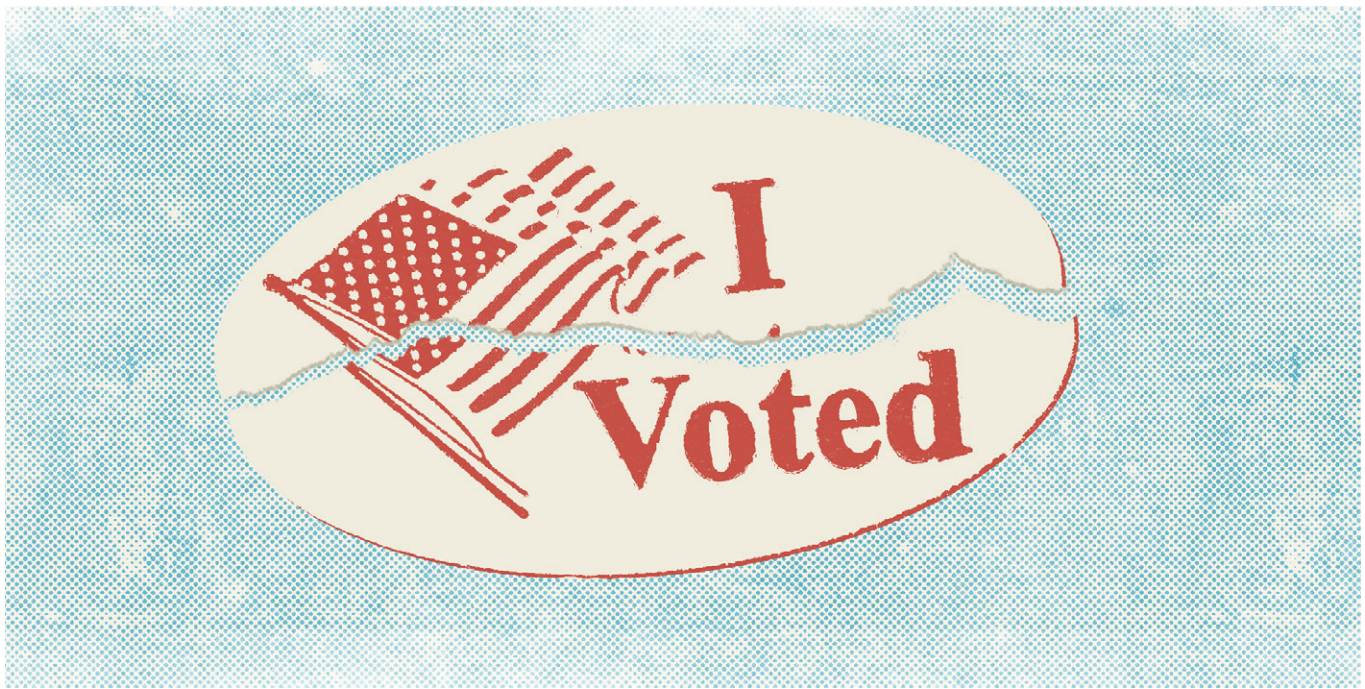
— LATINO MAN, 31, San Bernardino

**“Local [elections], I am terrible at. Usually, I think the packet of information that’s mailed to me is so... thick and so dense. I know my way around a stack of paperwork, but it’s so difficult to understand some of the time. Rather than voting wrong, I’m just like, ‘Oh, I’m not going to go at all,’ which is not right.”**

— LATINA WOMAN, 31, Montclair

**“[S]ometimes like I’ll try to Google stuff and like educate myself [but] it’s kind of hard because some of that stuff, the way they word it... you think that you voted for one thing and then in reality you’re not, because they messed up some words. And so you, like, you might’ve just fucked yourself.”**

— BI-RACIAL MAN, 31, Corona



A few things are worth noting across these and related commentaries about voting. First, these young voters clearly bring a strong sense of responsibility to voting. They refuse to approach it haphazardly—so much so, in fact, that they would rather not vote than vote without “knowing what they’re getting themselves into.” This relates to a second point, which is that these comments take voting and its outcomes to be highly consequential. If it is risky to “just put random things down,” it is because elections *matter*. This affirmation is implicit in all of the discussions of voting highlighted above. It is noteworthy because it contradicts what many assume about voters who do not participate consistently—that they do not grasp or believe that elections are important.<sup>109</sup>

Next, it stands out to us that the feelings of confusion and “not knowing enough” expressed in these passages are highly relatable. If you have lived through a few election cycles in California and never felt them, you haven’t read enough ballots.<sup>110</sup> The difference is that, for these young people, these feelings lead them to self-disqualification. This may in part be a genuine issue of lack of information; but it is surely also an issue of confidence. Civic engagement strategies must approach it as such, including by demystifying not only what is on the ballot, but also over-estimations of the level of knowledge of “the

average voter.” Here again, the evidence hints that internalized othering is at work, with young people presumably comparing themselves unfavorably against an ideal that does not match reality.

Finally, Black and Latinx interviewees who said that they usually vote also foregrounded the idea of being informed. The context of their comments adds another dimension to how this is important for encouraging civic participation. In their case, more consistent voters stressed that they cast ballots only having “done their research,” and not based on political party or bandwagon. These discussions came across as both a defense of their choice to vote and an assertion of their critical thinking and political agency. In contrast to other voters, they said, they do not take things at face value, or would not allow themselves to be taken advantage of or taken for granted. That these are the associations at front of mind when approaching the exercise of voting is telling. It points to a general mistrust and sensitivity to being tricked or fooled as central factors in political participation. These sit alongside the issue of self-confidence in determining whether inland Latinx and Black voters, especially the young, feel prepared to cast ballots.

For civic engagement programs, addressing the issue of unequal participation in elections will therefore

**“So I tend to take a step back if I’m not, if I myself haven’t done the research... It definitely comes down to that. Doing my due diligence.”**

– INDIGENOUS/LATINA WOMAN, 33, Fontana

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mean overcoming multiple obstacles. Thankfully, our research in the Inland Empire also identifies an anchorage for ambivalent voters, and a context for narratives emphasizing their agency: community. The idea that voting was a way of showing up for one’s community was one that resonated widely in the Inland Empire, and this is a consistent and robust finding across a number of our team’s research partnerships to listen to underrepresented voter groups.<sup>111</sup> Latinx and Black voters especially identify with the idea of voting on behalf of community when this implies voting for those who cannot—i.e. people who are disenfranchised due to past convictions or by citizen voting requirements. Notable to the above discussion, this idea of voting for others is also one that can push people who are on the fence about whether or not they are adequately prepared or informed toward exercising their voting rights. The following quote from a 54-year-old Latina woman in Moreno Valley on how she became inspired to participate in elections is illustrative:

I don’t want to go and vote for something that I don’t understand... My siblings, they were telling me to vote... ‘You, that are part of here [i.e. a citizen], in order to help, go and vote’... I used to tell them like this: ‘I don’t understand everything that is being discussed here.’ I read, but because I wasn’t involved, I didn’t understand. They say, ‘Well, you go and vote. And you read a little and study...and vote.’ It was only because of that that I started to vote. But I hadn’t... I had never registered [previously]. I was never interested, nothing. [But] Then my husband says to me, ‘You know what? You should help out by voting – you, you who is a citizen, you should help by voting since you’re a citizen here. You should help by voting.’<sup>112</sup>

## Power in a System Built for ‘Them’

Though the previous section showed that cynicism is not the main driver of abstention from voting, Black and Latinx study participants in the Inland Empire were pessimistic about engaging or influencing power at the highest levels. This is not to say that they feel *powerless*, which is the point of this final section. But they commonly expressed a view of living in a system in which ultimate control is at the top, with those holding the greatest wealth and highest public offices intertwined, out of reach, and making decisions out of view and above the law.<sup>113</sup>

Where study participants experienced their power was at a different level and scale. Feelings of empowerment centered on matters closer to everyday life, at the level of interpersonal interactions, neighborhoods, faith communities, or occasionally children’s schools. Notwithstanding adverse experiences, participants valorized seizing upon opportunities in these contexts to make small positive changes where one can. Their hopefulness came from a focus on building community locally so that people can work together face to face to solve problems and take care of one another.

In aspiring to exercise power over their life conditions through community with others, inland residents eschew the individualism that often grows from the wound of having been excluded from access to “the system” itself. Nonetheless, talk of empowerment at this local level tended to be accompanied by resignation or acceptance that change will not—cannot—be made “higher up.” In fact, in two of our five focus groups, there were participants who advocated for community members to shift energy to mutual aid and community building *in place of* engagement with government. Surely these conversations are taking place in communities themselves.

Thus, to interpret distrust and withdrawal from government as necessarily expressions of individualism—and a rejection of ideas of the public or collective good—is a misdiagnosis. Organizations committed to expanding civic participation and advocacy vis-à-vis government should also be conscious of how some versions of collectivism reinforce the message that underrepresented communities are better



off retreating from these points of engagement. Especially following many positive developments with mutual aid projects during the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers and practitioners will do well to keep track of how narratives favoring change that is autonomous from—and may thereby cede the vehicle of—government are taking hold among those still left outside of full civic belonging.

## Conclusions and Implications

Most of the pressing problems we face as a society must be addressed at a scale that can be reached only through government. And if the solutions designed are to be shaped by principles of equity and inclusion, it will only be thanks to broad-based civic participation and action. There are a number of barriers to realizing such participation, especially for communities that are most impacted by problems ranging from extreme economic inequality to climate change to mass incarceration.

As a study of opinion, narratives, and worldview, this report has focused on barriers to participation that are often overlooked in more policy-centered analyses. It shows that in some of those communities that stand to benefit from policies advancing equity and expanding belonging, there are many who are disillusioned with government to the point of having no expectation that it can improve their lives. As such, many withdraw from engagement with government, and some advocate to others that they do the same. The underlying sources of disillusionment and mistrust have roots that go beyond any particular politician or administration, and we therefore should not expect them to shift with changes in who holds elected office alone. Community and civic actors will need to incorporate a number of lessons into their outreach strategies, and sustain them across campaigns to durably build civic identity, agency, and power.

- + **The idea of “government” clearly continues to have a bad name, including in low- and middle-income communities of color.** It is largely regarded as something to be avoided as much as possible. This disposition is not reducible to individualist or “small-government” ideology. Instead, in this context, skepticism and antipathy

toward government are often rooted in experiences that show “it” to be a top-down authority that fails to provide service, care, or attention to “people like me.” **Such criticisms affirm that government *should* function in the interest of the public good**—enabling and facilitating the wellbeing and advancement of people and communities. In doing so, they are far from individualist. Civic organizations will need to recognize this in order to engage seriously with the cynicism found in communities of color on its own terms.

- + **The perception that government is deeply entangled with economic elites and corporations is a major driver of cynicism about prospects for effecting change through it.** This perception is not wrong; but prevailing narratives may oversimplify the relationship between political power and money in defeatist ways. We find that many focus on a direct relationship between holding public office and enrichment or wealth—either that politicians become rich through public office, or that those who reach elected office are the wealthiest themselves. From there, it is easy to conclude that government will always serve the rich, based on personal economic self-interests. But this partial story fails to **address arenas where change might be made, such as policies that enable big money to distort political incentives and representation.** Reform proposals to curb the role of money in politics exist, and polling suggests that they would find a receptive audience if debated publically.<sup>114</sup> By focusing here, we might provide constituents with a viable route toward change in which to commit energy and action.
- + **Notwithstanding reasons for skepticism, voters from underrepresented communities widely regard election outcomes as consequential—including young people who rarely vote.** For these voters, it is not that they see elections as unimportant; to the contrary, many take voting so seriously that they disqualify themselves from meeting the criteria for participation. In this sense, outreach that stresses the importance of elections is probably solving for the wrong problem. It may also be counterproductive in that



constant reminders that “voting is important” can come across as condescending, out of touch, or preachy—contributing to alienation rather than engagement.

- + Considerable evidence suggests that **decisions about whether to vote**—especially among young people, women, and Spanish-dominant Latinxs—often **hinge on voters’ perceptions of whether they are adequately prepared, especially whether they “know enough.”** If many voters are thereby disqualifying themselves, it is likely that they are overestimating the level of knowledge needed to participate, underestimating their own preparedness, or both. **Civic engagement groups should aim to demystify the ballot itself, as well as the extent to which advanced knowledge is the principal criterion for voting.** That is, there is a need to help voters become better informed; but outreach should also help them to anchor their political agency elsewhere—e.g. in their values, their knowledge of local needs, and their relations and responsibilities to community—than in “political knowledge” in its narrowest sense.
- + A related need is for civic engagement organizations to **develop strategies that enable underrepresented constituencies to adopt a “voter” identity.** Beyond the myriad ways in which racism, sexism, ageism, and other social conventions degrade certain groups’ knowledge, political campaigns specifically tend to prioritize outreach in ways that tell these same groups that they are marginal to civic life and decision making. **While some voters who are relentlessly courted by political campaigns, others are never called upon to see themselves as voters.** The result is a gap in voter identity that must be overcome.
- + **Voting as a way to make one’s community visible and to be a voice for one’s community are highly motivating ideas,** and ones that can overcome misgivings about whether to participate civically. Members of communities that have been ignored, marginalized, and abandoned by successive elected leaders or administrations will, understandably, have trouble marshalling enthusiasm to support the latest candidate, or a partisan “team.” But while “politics” is perceived as small, **the idea of “community” is vast. To vote is much more appealing when it is clear that it means supporting, showing up for, representing, or choosing one’s community.**
- + Finally, civic and movement leaders committed to making policy and systems change must **articulate and disseminate a vision of communal or collective agency vis-à-vis government to their constituency base.** They must make the case, and tell the story, of a relationship between people and government that affirms local experiences and identities, while expanding ideas of what is possible. This is no easy trick, of course, and telling a plausible story may rely on first getting tangible “wins.” But the point is that, **without such a narrative account of “we” engage government to make the future we want, the risk of withdrawal or retreat from government is high**—even among constituencies that are aligned on social-justice values and commitment to the collective good.

# Appendix

The following are components of a “narrative roadmap,” adapted for this publication, that the Blueprint for Belonging project team created in collaboration with civic and community-based partner organizations in the Inland Empire. The roadmap includes a “core narrative” structured around overarching lessons, as well as a series of specific “dos” and “don’ts.” It is an example of one form of translating narrative research findings into tools of application.

## Four narrative elements can help unite the Inland Empire

**1.**

Use place-based  
identification

**2.**

Demonstrate corporate  
extraction of wealth

**3.**

Call out racial  
scapegoating  
explicitly

**4.**

Emphasize collective  
power while acknowl-  
edging cynicism

**1.**

Use place-based  
identification

**2.**

Demonstrate  
corporate  
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of wealth

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Call out racial  
scapegoating  
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**4.**

Emphasize  
collective power  
while acknowledging  
cynicism

**From the High Desert to Temecula, Ontario to MoVal to Coachella, people who stay in the IE are proud of our community.** We're not LA or Orange County, but in our corner of California, we make the most of what we've got. Lately, though, it seems like too many of us are struggling just to keep our heads above water, **being kept stuck in place by big corporations that just want to profit off of us.** We pay taxes that should back into our community, but too many politicians who have been bought are just concerned about filling their pockets instead.

**Some people try explain why we're struggling by pointing to people of other races—saying immigrants take our jobs, or Black people don't work hard enough. But that's not right and we know it.** We all need to get out of this dog-eat-dog mentality. That's how we can force big corporations to treat us fairly. That's how we can take back the government so that it meets the needs of the community. **We can join with our friends and coworkers to demand good jobs, actual benefits, a safe environment, and the possibility of achieving the life that we're striving for. Because if we come together as one, we can rise together.**

## Narrative Dos and Don'ts

SAY	RATHER THAN	NOTES
Riverside communities are taking action.	All our communities are taking action.	<i>Naming specific locations allows audiences to self-locate in the narrative.</i>
Big corporations are profiting off of us, while so many of us struggle to keep our heads above water.	Big corporations are coming into cities and making billions.	<i>Use collective language to describe who corporations are extracting wealth from and the impact that has on people. This makes the issue about fairness, not about getting more from successful groups.</i>
Corporations just want to profit off of us.	The wealthy just want to profit off of us.	<i>“Corporations” conveys the scale of inequity, instead of naming villain as a specific class of people, especially a class of people that many aspire to become.</i>
Too many politicians are just concerned about lining their own pockets while our communities struggle.	Politicians are focused on lining their own pockets while our communities struggle.	<i>Name corruption as the foundation of peoples’ mistrust without making a blanket statement that could undermine action for accountability.</i>
Even though we’re up against a lot, we can come together to demand good jobs and safe communities.	We can come together to demand good jobs and safe communities.	<i>Meeting people where they are ensures that our messages don’t feel trite and removed from reality.</i>



## Endnotes

- 1** Blueprint for Belonging (B4B) is a collaborative initiative led by the Othering & Belonging Institute, in partnership with more than 50 organizations across California, to develop narrative strategy and infrastructure for transformative change toward a just, equitable, and inclusive society. During the period of research covered in this report, the B4B team consisted of Olivia Araiza, Gerald Lenoir, Joshua Clark, and Eli Moore.
- 2** Genevieve Carpio, *Collisions at the Crossroads: How Place and Mobility Make Race*, University of California Press, 2019, especially Chapter 5.
- 3** Juan de Lara demonstrates this point in his, *Inland Shift: Race, Space, and Capital in Southern California*, University of California Press, 2018. See especially Chapter 7.
- 4** Joel Kotkin and William H. Frey, “The Third California: The Golden State’s New Frontier,” Metropolitan Policy Program, The Brookings Institution, 2007.
- 5** By mid-February, the region’s confirmed case count for the pandemic topped 12,000 per 100,000 residents, and San Bernardino and Riverside ranked second and fourth among the United States’ 40 most populous counties for infections per capita. Miami-Dade County ranked first and Los Angeles County third, with slightly more cases per capita than Riverside.
- 6** Ryan Hagen and Beau Yarbrough, “Riverside County residents, conservative officials rally in Hemet to ‘Open California Now,’” *The Press-Enterprise* (Riverside), October 17, 2020, <https://www.pe.com/2020/10/17/riverside-county-residents-conservative-officials-rally-in-hemet-to-open-california-now>; and Gina Silva, “Despite coronavirus pandemic, it’s business as usual in Temecula,” *Fox 11* (Los Angeles), December 9, 2020, <https://www.foxla.com/news/amid-covid-pandemic-its-business-as-usual-in-temecula>.
- 7** Furthermore, notwithstanding some vocal opposition to mitigation efforts, polling demonstrated that the vast majority of Inland Empire voters supported mitigation policies advanced by the state government. Othering & Belonging Institute, “Poll: Anti-maskers small minority of Inland Empire voters,” press release, February 22, 2021, <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/poll-anti-maskers-small-minority-inland-empire-voters>.
- 8** See Part IV for a fuller discussion of this context.
- 9** Jeff Horseman, “Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco’s refusal to enforce coronavirus orders gets national attention,” *The Press-Enterprise* (Riverside), December 18, 2020, <https://www.pe.com/2020/12/18/riverside-county-sheriff-chad-biancos-refusal-to-enforce-coronavirus-orders-gets-national-attention/>; and Silva, “Despite coronavirus pandemic, it’s business as usual in Temecula.”
- 10** Lila Seidman, “San Bernardino County sues Newsom over coronavirus restrictions,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 17, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-12-17/san-bernardino-sues-newsom-over-coronavirus-rules>.
- 11** Phil Willon, “Once an afterthought, the Inland Empire becomes a pivotal battleground in California governor’s race,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 1, 2018, <https://www.latimes.com/politics/la-pol-ca-california-governor-inland-empire-20180601-story.html>.
- 12** Throughout this report, “people of color” refers to all of those people who identify as Latina/o/x or Hispanic, Black or African American, Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native American or American Indian, or Native Hawai’ian.
- 13** This translated into Biden netting almost 59,000 more votes in the Inland Empire than Clinton netted in 2016, as visualized in Figure 2.
- 14** In the only case in which a group was composed of just seven participants, it was because two others (from Victorville and Hesperia) were so ensnared in traffic that they were unable to reach Ontario. Participants able to join the focus groups included

individuals from across the area spanning Chino to Palm Desert, Victorville to Lake Elsinore. But the substantial majority (around 3 out of 4) were residents of either the Ontario-Fontana-Rialto-San Bernardino or the Riverside-Moreno Valley area.

**15** This is particularly true when focus groups are held in the context of a society structured by status hierarchies and material inequality that situate individuals differently based on attributes like gender and ethno-racial identity. It is important to remember that focus groups are not somehow “spaces apart” from their wider social contexts, but are instead embedded within those contexts in ways that shape patterns of participation. For an insightful and nuanced discussion of the multiple contexts that may bear on focus group participation, see Jocelyn Hollander, “The Social Contexts of Focus Groups,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 33, no. 5 (2004): 602-637. More general points about the rationales for segmentation can be found in, David L. Morgan, “Why Things (Sometimes) Go Wrong in Focus Groups,” *Qualitative Health Research* 5, no. 4 (1995): 516-523.

**16** Sue Wilkinson, “Focus Groups in Feminist Research: Power, Interaction, and the Co-construction of Meaning,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 21, no. 1 (1998): 111-125; Lia Litosseliti, *Using Focus Groups in Research*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003; and Phil Macnaghten and Greg Myers, “Focus Groups,” in Clive Seale, Giampietro Gobo, Jaber F. Gubrium, and David Silverman, eds., *Qualitative Research Practice*, Sage Publications, 2004.

**17** Janet Smithson, “Using and Analysing Focus Groups: Limitations and Possibilities,” *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 3, no. 2 (2000): 103-119; and Litosseliti, *Using Focus Groups in Research*.

**18** Interviewees did indeed disclose beliefs and narratives—including stereotypes and criticisms of their in-groups—that were not heard in focus groups, as discussed in later parts of this report. On the complementary benefits of focus groups and interviews, see Lynn Michell, “Combining Focus Groups and Interviews: Telling How It Is; Telling How

It Feels,” in Rosaline S. Barbour and Jenny Kitzinger, eds., *Developing Focus Group Research: Politics, Theory and Practice*, Sage Publications, 1999.

**19** The vast majority of interviewees (23) resided in the southwest population core of the Inland Empire, roughly bounded by Corona, Montclair, the city of San Bernardino, and Moreno Valley.

**20** All one-on-one interviews were conducted by either Alex Aguirre, a B4B graduate student researcher and doctoral student at the University of California, Irvine; or Gerald Lenoir, a B4B team member at the Othering & Belonging Institute.

**21** Though the survey was in the field from the final days of June through the first week of August, the great majority of respondents completed the survey in July 2020. At that time, most of California was four months into pandemic-related restrictions, but was only beginning to see their first significant surge in cases at the scale that states like New York, New Jersey, and Michigan saw in March and April.

**22** For more information and topline results from the 2017 survey, see Othering & Belonging Institute, “California Survey on Othering and Belonging: Views on Identity, Race, and Politics,” April 18, 2018, <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/california-survey-othering-and-belonging>.

**23** In the 1980s, the region’s western population center of Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario saw the fastest growth of any large metropolitan area in the country—growing by an astounding 66 percent. The metro area continued to be among the fastest growing in the 2000s. William H. Frey, “Population Growth in Metro America since 1980: Putting the Volatile 2000s in Perspective,” Metropolitan Policy Program, The Brookings Institution, 2012, p. 4.

**24** Kfir Mordechay, “Race, Space, and America’s Subprime Housing Boom,” *Urban Geography* 41, no. 6 (2020): 936-946.

**25** De Lara, *Inland Shift*, pp. 115-116.

**26** Kfir Mordechay, “Vast Changes and an Uneasy Future: Racial and Regional Inequality in Southern California,” The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles, UCLA, April 2014, pp. 22, 25.

- 27** Center for Social Innovation, California Immigrant Policy Center, and Inland Coalition for Immigrant Justice, “State of Immigrants in the Inland Empire,” Center for Social Innovation, University of California, Riverside, April 2018.
- 28** Deirdre Pfeiffer, “African Americans’ Search for ‘More for Less’ and ‘Peace of Mind’ on the Exurban Frontier,” *Urban Geography* 33, no. 1 (2012): 64–90. This was the most recent, but not the first, Black migration to the Inland Empire. Following World War II as well, Black Angelenos sought social mobility inland, not only because it was more affordable, but also in response to discrimination in LA. Genevieve Carpio writes that, “Due to entrenched racial barriers in housing, African American suburbanization often required movement from Los Angeles to its outermost suburbs”—what was until recently a citrus belt, and in process of becoming the Inland Empire. See Carpio, *Collisions at the Crossroads*, pp. 20, 184.
- 29** Mordechay, “Race, Space, and America’s Subprime Housing Boom,” p. 939. On housing production in Southern California in the 1980s through 2010, see Pfeiffer, “African Americans’ Search for ‘More for Less’ and ‘Peace of Mind’ on the Exurban Frontier.”
- 30** Mordechay, “Race, Space, and America’s Subprime Housing Boom.”
- 31** For a meta-analysis of this body of literature, see Roy F. Baumeister and Mark R. Leary, “The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation,” *Psychological Bulletin* 117, no. 3 (1995): 497–529.
- 32** John A. Powell and Stephen Menendian, “Editors’ Introduction,” *Othering & Belonging* 1 (Summer 2016).
- 33** Baumeister and Leary, “The Need to Belong.”
- 34** This question was the first substantive item on the July 2020 survey, and was prefaced by the request that respondents “think back to the time before the outbreak of the coronavirus” when answering it. This was meant to gauge residents’ sense of belonging under “normal” circumstances, i.e. outside of those brought on by the—at the time—four month-old pandemic context. For complete results, see <https://tinyurl.com/b4bie2020>.
- 35** For the two-county Inland Empire region, overall, 75 percent of residents feel belonging “most” or “all” of the time in their neighborhoods; 72 percent in their workplaces (if applicable); 63 percent on the street or in other public places; and just 60.5 percent in schools (if applicable). See *ibid*.
- 36** Among Latino men, one third attributed their experiences of non-belonging to their race, and one third to culture or background, while a larger share of Latinx men than women said “don’t know.” Respondents were allowed to select as many characteristics as applicable from a list of ten: your age; your gender; your race; your culture or background; your height, weight, or physical appearance; your religion; your language or the way you speak; your sexuality; a disability; and other.
- 37** Juan de Lara, “The Last Suburb: Immigrant Integration in the Inland Empire,” in John Mollenkopf and Manuel Pastor, eds., *Unsettled Americans: Metropolitan Context and Civic Leadership for Immigrant Integration*, Cornell University Press, 2016, p. 140.
- 38** Median household incomes in Corona and Moreno Valley—other cities that are highlighted in Figure 6—are \$84,000 and \$66,000, respectively.
- 39** Of the 57 percent of Inland Empire respondents who said that they usually do not feel belonging in at least one setting, 36 percent said the reason was their race, 26 percent said their height, weight, or physical appearance, and 25 percent said their culture or background.
- 40** This local conception of community strongly echoes the concept of social capital.
- 41** Black focus-group participants made this observation, which has also been studied by, among others, Nancy DiTomaso, *The American Non-Dilemma: Racial Inequality without Racism*, Russell Sage Foundation, 2013.
- 42** For a relatively recent set of papers exploring the layers and nuance in Black-Latinx relations in Los Angeles, see Josh Kun and Laura Pulido, eds., *Black and Brown in Los Angeles: Beyond Conflict and*

*Coalition*, University of California Press, 2014.

**43** Interestingly, even fewer African Americans in the Inland Empire (30 percent) agreed with the version of the statement inquiring as to whether jobs going to “immigrants” means “fewer good jobs... for people like me.” Further, more than two in five (42 percent) said they strongly disagree with the statement suggesting immigrants are taking jobs from people like themselves.

**44** Again, information and topline results from the 2017 survey can be found at Othering & Belonging Institute, “California Survey on Othering and Belonging,” <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/california-survey-othering-and-belonging>.

**45** The 2017 statewide survey did not have a large enough Inland Empire regional subsample to disaggregate the region’s results by race/ethnicity with statistical reliability.

**46** There is an extensive body of scholarly literature on zero-sum Black-Latinx competition—both debating its reality, and discussing Black and Latinx perceptions. A review of much of this literature, with citations, can be found in Rodney E. Hero and Robert R. Preuhs, *Black-Latino Relations in U.S. National Politics: Beyond Conflict or Cooperation*, Cambridge University Press, 2013.

**47** This refers to the “racial resentment” battery, a standardized set of survey questions that has been used to assess subtler contemporary forms of anti-Black racial animus for nearly forty years. For a very succinct discussion of it, and some alternative approaches to measuring racial prejudice in opinion surveys, see Michael Tesler, *Post-Racial or Most-Racial? Race and Politics in the Obama Era*, The University of Chicago Press, 2016, pp. 19-24.

**48** The racial resentment battery uses “blacks” (rather than “African Americans” or “Black Americans”) intentionally, and in the same manner that it has for its decades’ long history. See *ibid.* At the time the survey items were designed, “African American” was used in many sectors of society, but still not dominant. The concern of researchers is that replacing “blacks” with “African Americans” in the items would trigger social-desirability bias—i.e. a

bias in results effected by some respondents being reticent to express their true, racially resentful opinions, because they assume based on the use of “African American” that the survey designers are racially “liberal.” This type of bias would undermine the battery’s ability to do what it is designed to do: capture racist sentiments of individuals who are loath to express them directly. Capitalizing the first letter of “blacks” would not have been contemplated at the time the racial resentment battery was designed, because until very recently, ethno-racial identity terms were only capitalized in English when and if they were demonyms derived from proper-noun place names, like “African American” and “Asian American” are. This rationale for capitalization in style guidelines changed rapidly in 2020. Elahe Izadi, “Why hundreds of American newsrooms have started capitalizing the ‘b’ in ‘Black’,” *The Washington Post*, June 18, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/media/why-hundreds-of-american-newsrooms-have-started-capitalizing-the-b-in-black/2020/06/18/7687a7a8-b16e-11ea-8f56-63f38c990077\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/media/why-hundreds-of-american-newsrooms-have-started-capitalizing-the-b-in-black/2020/06/18/7687a7a8-b16e-11ea-8f56-63f38c990077_story.html); and Chicago Manual, “Black and White: A Matter of Capitalization,” *CMOS Shop Talk*, The Chicago Manual of Style, June 22, 2020, <https://cmosshoptalk.com/2020/06/22/black-and-white-a-matter-of-capitalization>.

**49** It is worth noting that this plurality would become a majority if we excluded from the denominator the 13 percent of respondents who said they “don’t know” whether whites have too much, too little, or the right amount of political influence.

**50** This finding has been largely consistent across other Institute surveys as well. See Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society and Latino Decisions, “Executive Summary: Nevada and Florida Baseline Surveys – Civic Engagement Narrative Change,” March 2019, available at <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/baseline-surveys>; and Olivia Araiza, Joshua Clark, and Gerald Lenoir, “From Estrangement to Engagement: Bridging to the Ballot Box,” Othering & Belonging Institute, September 2020, p. 7.

**51** It is beyond the scope of our findings to explain all of the sources of the gender difference we identify with respect to baseline cross-group solidarity.



However, the conclusion about Black and Latina women's exceptional leadership potential echoes other recent studies, including Institute for Policy Studies and The Black Worker Initiative, *And Still I Rise: Black Women Labor Leaders' Voices/Power/Promise*, Institute for Policy Studies, 2015, [https://and-still-i-rise.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/ASIR4\\_21.pdf](https://and-still-i-rise.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/ASIR4_21.pdf); and Ruth Milkman and Veronica Terriquez, "'We Are the Ones Who Are Out in Front': Women's Leadership in the Immigrant Rights Movement," *Feminist Studies* 38, no. 3 (2012): 723-752.

**52** Roger Waldinger and Michael I. Lichter, *How the Other Half Works: Immigration and the Social Organization of Labor*, University of California Press, 2003; and Angela Stuesse, *Scratching Out a Living: Latinos, Race, and Work in the Deep South*, University of California Press, 2016.

**53** For example, Claudine Gay, "Seeing Difference: The Effect of Economic Disparity on Black Attitudes toward Latinos," *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 4 (2006): 982-997.

**54** An early, seminal example is, Tatcho Mindiola, Jr., Yolanda Flores Niemann, and Nestor Rodriguez, *Black-Brown Relations and Stereotypes*, University of Texas Press, 2002. See also, Paula D. McClain et al., "Racial Distancing in a Southern City: Latino Immigrants' Views of Black Americans," *The Journal of Politics* 68, no. 3 (2006): 571-584; and Helen B. Marrow, *New Destination Dreaming: Immigration, Race, and Legal Status in the Rural American South*, Stanford University Press, 2011.

**55** Some have pointed out that the racial resentment scale discussed in an earlier section may actually capture survey respondents' adherence to this narrative as much as it does their anti-Black animus. See Cindy D. Kam and Camille D. Burge, "Uncovering Reactions to the Racial Resentment Scale across the Racial Divide," *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 1 (2018): 314-320. This is an important point when considering the results on Latinxs' responses to our parallel anti-immigrant resentment battery.

**56** The fact that it was commonly expressed by relatively new immigrants with limited or no English-language proficiency raises the question of whether

the narrative of U.S. welfare cheats has spread to sending countries.

**57** Translated by Clark. The quote in the original Spanish reads: "[L]os americanos eran muy... [pause] son 'nice.' No quiero decir que no son. Pero... piensan, 'eres mexicana, estás en el welfare,' o 'tienes muchos niños, porque, porque te da el welfare.' Y desafortunadamente, yo puedo ir a comunidades enteras allí en Yucaipa... [y] cada casa tiene un caso abierto en el welfare. Ya sea medical, ya sea estampillas, ya sea dinero. Pero todos están dependiendo. Creo que el gobierno ha hecho una comunidad dependiente."

**58** Translated by Clark. The quote in the original Spanish reads: "[E]l pensamiento del hispano que viene de México [es]: 'Tengo hijos, tengo uno, me dan \$500; tengo otro me dan \$1000...' ¿Quién quiere trabajar así si tiene un gobierno que le da todo en la boca?"

**59** On the two items quoted in the previous sentence, 44 percent of older Latinxs agreed with the first statement, and 50 percent disagreed with the second.

**60** See further, Araiza, Clark, and Lenoir, "From Estrangement to Engagement," p. 8.

**61** The narrative of the welfare cheat in U.S. culture is steeped in anti-Black racism, with the most well-known version of the story being that of the "welfare queen," a myth-cum-stereotype about a Black woman from Chicago.

**62** Focus group participants told stories, for example, about mismatches between available services and community needs, and how support structures often evaporate just a step or two short of getting recipients to the point of sustainability or independence.

**63** Edward Telles et al., "Introduction," in Edward Telles, Mark Q. Sawyer, and Gaspar Rivera-Salgado, eds., *Just Neighbors?: Research on African American and Latino Relations in the United States*, Russell Sage Foundation, 2011, p. 3.

**64** Scott Wilson, Jon Gerberg, and Michael S. Williamson, "Overwhelmed," *The Washington Post*, December 18, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com>.

com/graphics/2020/national/california-hospital-covid-capacity. The Department of Defense deployed active-duty military medical personnel to Riverside County in January 2021, to support hospitals operating well beyond capacity. Rebecca Plevin, “Federal military medical team supporting overwhelmed hospitals in Riverside County,” *Palm Springs Desert Sun*, January 8, 2021, <https://www.desertsun.com/story/news/2021/01/08/federal-military-medical-team-aids-overwhelmed-riverside-county-hospitals/6597944002>.

**65** American Lung Association, “State of the Air 2019,” American Lung Association, 2019, <https://www.stateoftheair.org/assets/sota-2019-full.pdf>, p. 24.

**66** American Lung Association, “Report Card: California,” <https://www.stateoftheair.org/city-rankings/states/california>.

**67** The use of subcontracting arrangements and temporary staffing agencies are widespread in the employment of warehouse workers and delivery drivers.

**68** Edna Bonacich and Jake B. Wilson, *Getting the Goods: Ports, Labor, and the Logistics Revolution*, Cornell University Press, 2008; and De Lara, *Inland Shift*.

**69** Among other things, the inflexible productivity quotas that Amazon imposes on workers make it nearly impossible to follow public-health recommendations on handwashing, hygiene, and sanitization of shared workspaces. Human Impact Partners, “The Public Health Crisis Hidden in Amazon Warehouses,” Human Impact Partners and Warehouse Worker Resource Center, January 2021, <http://www.warehouseworkers.org/public-health-crisis-amazon>. See also, Melissa Daniels, “‘Fix it’: Amazon workers demand protections as COVID-19 cases grow in Southern California facilities,” *Palm Springs Desert Sun*, June 23, 2020, <https://www.desertsun.com/story/money/business/2020/06/23/coronavirus-cases-amazon-continue-climb-workers-demand-protections/5245645002>; and Erika Hayasaki, “Amazon’s Great Labor Awakening,” *The New York Times Magazine*, February 18, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/18/magazine/amazon-workers-employees-covid-19.html>.

**70** Paloma Esquivel, “When your house is surrounded by massive warehouses,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2019-10-27/fontana-california-warehouses-inland-empire-pollution>.

**71** United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), “Ground-Level Ozone Pollution: Health Effects of Ozone Pollution,” <https://www.epa.gov/ground-level-ozone-pollution/health-effects-ozone-pollution>.

**72** Laura Perez et al., “Global Goods Movement and the Local Burden of Childhood Asthma in Southern California,” *American Journal of Public Health* 99, supp. 3 (2009): S622-S628.

**73** Zhanghua Chen et al., “Chronic Effects of Air Pollution on Respiratory Health in Southern California Children: Findings from the Southern California Children’s Health Study,” *Journal of Thoracic Disease* 7, no. 1 (2015): 46-58.

**74** De Lara, *Inland Shift*, pp. 55-60. At the same time, according to De Lara, it was not lost on developers that resistance from social movements and community organizations was likely to be less formidable in the Inland Empire than in Los Angeles.

**75** For details on the background and progression of the investigation, see Thomas C. Patterson, *From Acorns to Warehouses: Historical Political Economy of Southern California’s Inland Empire*, Left Coast Press, 2015, pp. 219-220.

**76** The Press-Enterprise, “Moreno Valley: Probe led to his recall, former mayor says,” *The Press-Enterprise* (Riverside), June 8, 2015, <https://www.pe.com/2015/06/08/moreno-valley-probe-led-to-his-recall-former-mayor-says>.

**77** Bonacich & Wilson, *Getting the Goods*; De Lara, *Inland Shift*; and Center for Social Innovation, *State of Work in the Inland Empire*, Center for Social Innovation, UC Riverside, 2018, <https://socialinnovation.ucr.edu/state-work-inland-empire>.

**78** See further, Sheheryar Kaoosji and Veronica Alvarado, “Manufactured Scarcity and the Inland

Southern California Economy,” Othering & Belonging Institute, UC Berkeley, January 2020, <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/manufactured-scarcity-and-inland-southern-california-economy>.

**79** This perception is mostly borne out by research quantifying the top industries in the region, though may underestimate the number of jobs in the healthcare sector. This could be due to our participants not knowing many people who hold “good jobs” in this sector, or otherwise viewing those jobs as out of reach. On jobs in the region by industry, see Center for Social Innovation, *State of Work in the Inland Empire*, p. 10.

**80** Center for Social Innovation, *State of Work in the Inland Empire*, pp. 12-13.

**81** Ellen Reese and Alexander Scott, “Warehouse Employment as a Driver of Inequality in the Inland Empire: The Experiences of Young Amazon Warehouse Workers,” Othering & Belonging Institute, UC Berkeley, December 2019, <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/warehouse-employment-driver-inequality-inland-empire-experiences-young-amazon-warehouse-workers>.

**82** Commenting on the fact that the Inland Empire topped the list of new warehouse deals in 2019, an industry expert said in January 2020, “Every industrial developer is here... It all started here, will continue to be here, and it will remain to be ahead of any other U.S. region for the foreseeable future.” CBRE, “California’s Inland Empire Tops List of Largest Warehouse Deals in 2019,” CBRE Group Inc., January 27, 2020, <https://www.cbre.us/people-and-offices/corporate-offices/los-angeles/greater-los-angeles-media-center/inland-empire-warehouse-2019>.

**83** Notably, even within the subset of goods moving through the warehouses that generate sales tax, only a fraction of the revenue ever finds its way to local cities. Hayasaki, “Amazon’s Great Labor Awakening.”

**84** Megan Jamerson, “Community Members Distribute Petition to Stop Approval of a New Bloomington Warehouse District,” *KVCR News*, February 3, 2021, [https://www.kvcrnews.org/post/](https://www.kvcrnews.org/post/community-members-distribute-petition-stop-)

[approval-new-bloomington-warehouse-district](https://www.kvcrnews.org/post/). Studies show that the siting of new warehouse development is strongly related to the percentage of households of color in an area, with a weaker relationship to household income. Quan Yuan, “Location of Warehouses and Environmental Justice,” *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, open EPUB (2018).

**85** When we placed the same question on a statewide survey of 10,000 California voters in January 2021, again, those in the Inland Empire were slightly less grateful than their neighbors in Orange and Los Angeles counties, and no more grateful than the state as a whole. Berkeley IGS Poll, “Tabulations from a Late-January 2021 Survey of California Registered Voters about the Coronavirus Pandemic,” Institute of Governmental Studies, UC Berkeley, 2021, p. 58, [https://escholarship.org/uc/igs\\_poll](https://escholarship.org/uc/igs_poll).

**86** This rate was consistent when comparing white residents to people of color overall, but the share of Black inland residents who answered “too much influence” was somewhat lower, at 60 percent. Notably, this means that significantly more Black respondents said that whites have too much influence in California politics (71 percent) than said the same of big corporations. For additional results, see <https://tinyurl.com/b4bie2020>.

**87** By “exceptionalism,” we mean the perception that the region is defined by unusual or extraordinary qualities that warrant different expectations or standards than would apply elsewhere.

**88** D.J. Waldie, “The meaning of home,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 24, 2006, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2006-dec-24-bk-waldie24-story.html>.

**89** Kaoosji and Alvarado, “Manufactured Scarcity and the Inland Southern California Economy.”

**90** The finding is consistent with other recent public-opinion research. Spencer Piston reviewed responses to open-ended questions about politics in a major national survey, and found many references to the “rich” and “poor,” but almost none to “economic inequality.” He concludes that, even as it is common to ask about economic inequality

in survey questions, “[W]hen we ask Americans to talk about politics in their own words, they rarely use inequality terminology.” Spencer Piston, *Class Attitudes in America: Sympathy for the Poor, Resentment of the Rich, and Political Implications*, Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 26.

**91** At \$193 billion, Jeff Bezos’s net worth is over 2.8 million times the median U.S. household income.

**92** Joshua Clark, Cristina Mora, and Tianna Paschel, “Will Corporations Pay their Share? Race, Distrust, and California’s Tax-Confidence Gap,” Othering & Belonging Institute, University of California, Berkeley, May 2020, <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/will-corporations-pay-their-share>.

**93** By “progressive tax reforms,” we mean those that would increase the rate of taxation applied to those of higher income or wealth.

**94** It was also easily activated among those who did not express it spontaneously, as explained in, Clark, Mora, and Paschel, “Will Corporations Pay their Share?,” pp. 9-10.

**95** Furthermore, our interviewees were just as inclined to criticize instances of the poor “taking advantage of” or “working” the system as they were with respect to corporations and the rich.

**96** De Lara has also suggested something similar based on his research with warehouse workers. See his, *Inland Shift*, p. 78.

**97** This view was connected to the common perception raised by numerous Black and Latinx residents that Trump had emboldened racism and racists that had previously been “hidden.”

**98** It is ironic that Trump was so often used as an example in general statements about government and politicians, given that he was a figure from outside of party politics, with no prior history of public office or service, and who campaigned on these very qualities.

**99** This was far below the shares that said they felt “more grateful” to doctors, nurses, and hospital staff (73 percent) or warehouse, transport, and delivery workers (71 percent).

**100** Berkeley IGS Poll, “Tabulations from a Late-

January 2021 Survey of California Registered Voters about the Coronavirus Pandemic,” p. 63.

**101** We were surprised that police rarely came up in participants’ talk of government, given that officers are often a tangible representative of government in people’s everyday experiences, and especially in the context of surging police budgets like those seen across the Inland Empire. Ángel Mendiola Ross, “Governing Inequities through Police in the Inland Empire,” Othering & Belonging Institute, UC Berkeley, December 2019, <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/governing-inequities-through-police-inland-empire>. The one notable exception was a discussion of experiences of harassment by police in our focus group with young women of color.

**102** There were individuals who identified as non-binary or gender non-conforming among the survey respondents, but not enough to report statistically reliable disaggregated results for them.

**103** We characterize as “Spanish-dominant” those respondents who opted to answer the survey questions in Spanish when given the choice between Spanish and English.

**104** Mary A. Lundeberg, Paul W. Fox, and Judith Punčohař, “Highly Confident but Wrong: Gender Differences and Similarities in Confidence Judgments,” *Journal of Educational Psychology* 86, no. 1 (1994): 114–121.

**105** Matthew S. McGlone, Joshua Aronson, and Diane Kobrynowicz, “Stereotype Threat and the Gender Gap in Political Knowledge,” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 30: 392-398 (2006). See further the work of Kathleen Dolan challenging how “knowledge” is defined and measured in political science research, and which also reminds us of the continued gendered character of what is constructed as “political.” Kathleen Dolan, “Do Women and Men Know Different Things? Measuring Gender Differences in Political Knowledge,” *The Journal of Politics* 73, no. 1 (2011): 97-107.

**106** Overall, only 14 percent of our Inland Empire survey respondents expressed uncertainty about whether they would vote, with the other 86 percent saying that they would “definitely vote” in the



November 2020 election. That said, it is well known that respondents overestimate their likelihood to vote in pre-election surveys.

**107** Araiza, Clark, and Lenoir, “From Estrangement to Engagement,” pp. 2-3. It is worth noting that our qualitative research was carried out in 2019, before the concerted attack on mail voting launched by Donald Trump and his reelection campaign in 2020. Still, available evidence suggests that voters’ confidence in mail ballots was resilient to these attacks in places like California in which this form of voting has been common for some years.

**108** This is broadly consistent with Lisa García Bedolla and Melissa Michelson’s emphasis on individual civic identity as the central driver of participation, and appropriate target of voter activation programs. Lisa García Bedolla and Melissa R. Michelson, *Mobilizing Inclusion: Transforming the Electorate through Get-Out-the-Vote Campaigns*, Yale University Press, 2012.

**109** A point about methods is worth making here. If each of these interviewees was presented with the statement, “Most elections don’t really matter that much; things stay the same for people like me no matter who is voted into office,” would they not have responded “agree”? They very well might have. And yet, when asked more open-endedly about how they make decisions about whether to vote, this viewpoint is nowhere to be found in their responses. This is a reminder of the importance of hearing people’s own words, and also the need to check against surveys’ capacity to induce and accentuate opinions—not merely to register them. The choice to include a question on our 2020 survey about whether respondents believed others were better informed than themselves in fact came out of our prior qualitative research, and our having heard so many statements of residents’ insecurity about their preparedness to participate civically.

**110** We should note that although some of the interviewees focused specifically on complicated language in ballot initiatives, most were speaking more generally when evaluating themselves as politically uninformed.

**111** Araiza, Clark, and Lenoir, “From Estrangement

to Engagement,” p. 4.

**112** Translated by Clark. The quote in the original Spanish reads: “Yo no quiero ir a votar por algo que no entiendo... Mis hermanos me estaban diciendo que votara... ‘Tú que eres parte de aquí, para que ayudes, ve y vota’... Yo así les decía: ‘yo no entiendo de todo lo que están hablando aquí.’ Yo leo, pero como no estaba metida, no entiendo. Dicen, ‘Pues, tú ve y vota. Y tú lee poquito y estudias... y votas.’ Solo fue con eso que empecé a votar. Pero yo no, nunca me había registrado. Nunca estaba interesada, nada. Entonces, me dice mi marido, ‘¿Sabes qué? Debes de ayudar, a votar. Tú, que eres ciudadana, debes de ayudar ya que eres ciudadana de aquí. Debes de ayudar, a votar.’”

**113** Again, the figure of Donald Trump came up frequently as a case in point, despite that the actions used as examples (e.g. refusing to disclose tax records) were exceptions to longstanding norms and practices. Still, Trump’s activities accentuated these residents’ sense of vulnerability in the belief that “anything can happen.”

**114** Bradley Jones, “Most Americans want to limit campaign spending, say big donors have greater political influence,” Pew Research Center, May 8, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/05/08/most-americans-want-to-limit-campaign-spending-say-big-donors-have-greater-political-influence>.