

# Latino Workers, the 2024 Presidential Election and the Future of the Labor Movement

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[journals.sagepub.com/home/laj](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/laj)**Paul Ortiz****Abstract**

In the aftermath of the Presidential Election of 2024, tens of thousands of Latinx workers and their allies engaged in marches, boycotts, strikes, and other forms of collective action against the federal government's anti-immigrant and anti-labor policies. Mass protests in over 100 cities were aimed at President-elect Trump's threat to deport upwards of ten million immigrants. Belying media stereotypes of passivity, political conservatism, and a "Hispanic turn to the right," Latinx workers' struggles inspired small business owners, human rights advocates, social media influencers and others to join in social justice actions in numerous cities. In addition to two national "Day Without Immigrant" events, Latina/o laborers in urban and rural areas organized "stay at home" campaigns weaving together cross-class alliances reminiscent of the New Deal and United Farm Worker Grape Boycott eras. Latinx working-class self-activity, rooted in internationalist experiences and perspectives, helped to revive and reinvigorate the labor movement in the wake of the 2024 Presidential Election.

**Keywords**

Latinx workers, *Juan Crow*, immigrants, 2024 Presidential Election, strikes, boycotts

"We The Migrants Are Planning a Labor Strike This January 11."

The Latino working class registered its anger at the outcome of the 2024 Presidential Election by engaging in a broad array of protest activities including

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hunger strikes, boycotts, rallies, teach-ins, and “stay at home” actions in the weeks after November 7 (Dominguez 2024; Gammage and Terruso, 2025; Mandou 2025; National TPS Alliance 2024; Nishimura 2024; Serrato 2025; Springfield News-Leader 2025, p. 1 ; Vázquez 2024; Vivian 2025). The Migrant Day Labor Network called for a *Day of Action and Solidarity* on Wednesday, December 18 to coincide with the United Nation’s “International Migrants Day.” Announcing immigrant worker rallies in Trenton, Houston, Philadelphia, and other cities, Pablo Alvarado, the co-executive director of the Day Labor Network, declared, “Our fight is not for dignity. Because we already have enough of that, in abundance. Our fight is for respect and equality. Both friends and adversaries benefit from our labor, but you don’t want to accept our humanity. Our fight is ultimately to remind you of this: if you take our labor, you must respect our rights. You must accept our humanity. And if you ignore it, we will make you see it” (National Day Labor Organizing Network, 2024).

Thousands of *Angelenos* answered Alvarado’s call and organized a march on December 18 from *Placita Olvera* near the center of historic downtown Mexican Los Angeles, California (founded in 1781) to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Center to protest Donald Trump’s plans to deport over ten million people after his inauguration. Marchers carried home-made signs reading, “Protecting immigrants and destroying walls,” “The people live, the fight continues!” “Immigrants’ rights are human rights,” and “Migrant workers do the work.” Teacher and union member Angélica Reyes, described herself as an “indigenous immigrant in this continent.” Reyes asked her students at Santee High School, “to reflect on Trump’s election and his threats to separate families” (Macías, 2024).

While it will take scholars some time to fully document the whirlwind of working-class self-activity that swept through the United States in the opening weeks of 2025, the first strikes aimed at President-elect Trump’s vows to incarcerate and deport millions of immigrants were announced even before the beginning of the New Year (Dominguez 2024). Sam Ruiz was one of many Latinx activists who deployed social media to register their dissent against the President-elect’s immigration policies. Ruiz used his TikTok platform of more than 146,000 followers to spread messages in Spanish and English calling for a work stoppage of migrant laborers between January 11 and January 18 (Ruiz 2024). Ruiz captured the Latinx anger surging across multiple social media platforms in the weeks after the election:

When my community speaks, it says it feels like they’re trying to make migrants look like the new modern slaves. So we’re planning a strike 10 days before Trump takes office. A week without work to see if they can turn around and look at our community and how we contribute to this country. We’re stopping as many people as we can. We have truckers, construction workers, field workers, restaurant workers, and hospitality workers. In Las Vegas, we’re creating a pretty big movement and It feels bigger than what happened in Florida with Ron DeSantis after SB1718 was passed. (Elk 2025)

Over 1,000 people rallied in St. Louis on February 2 carrying picket signs saying, “Immigrants Make America Great.” St. Louis resident Rhiannon Castizo, “listed several reasons for attending, including having a husband from Mexico who has a green card allowing him to be in the United States. She also said she works in the landscaping industry and that many coworkers are nervous that Trump’s actions could upend their lives. ‘I think people are afraid,’ said Castizo. ‘They just want to work and provide a good life for their family’” (Gray, 2025). Latino workers, and their supporters used the rally as a springboard to organize a weeklong strike of Latina/o labor and businesses in the greater St. Louis area between February 11 and 18. Businesses participating in the strike include “...clothing boutiques, markets, nightclubs, landscaping workers and bakeries among others” (Munoz 2025). Reflecting on the money he would lose during the weeklong strike, Antonio García, owner of La Tijuana Mexican Store and Taqueria, reflected, “No amount of money can replace peace of mind.” García planned to “dip into his business’ emergency funds to pay his workers. ‘We were going to lose some money that week, but we’re going to gain a lot more.’” As of this writing, over 50 area businesses are participating. Discussing his reasons for participating in the strike, Tyler Garcia explained, “Right now, many of us live in fear. We can be stopped at any moment—legal or not—just because of how we look. Minorities are the backbone of America. We help build this country” (Mahe 2025).

Less than two weeks after the inauguration of Donald H. Trump a national “Day Without Immigrants” protest was held on February 3 (Castillo et al. 2025; Ortiz 2025; Valencia, 2025; TOI World Desk 2025; Vilanova 2025). Latino workers, their families and supporters carried signs at rallies and marches held across the country reading “Immigrants Built America,” “Our Parents Fought for Us, Now We Will Fight For Them,” “Stop Exploitation of Undocumented Workers,” “No More Detentions, No More Deportations, Abolish ICE,” (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement) and other political slogans. Strikes of Latino workers and demonstrations were held in at least “120 cities, 40 states, and Puerto Rico...” (Elk 2025, II). Grassroots participation was so widespread that many businesses shuttered in solidarity with the protests. (Nesbitt et al. 2025). In Kent County, Michigan, Mary Martinez, a restaurant proprietor paid her workers for time off to participate in the protest, stating, “We are hard workers. We have support in this community. We have a business, we have a house, we have a good family, no bad record, so we are good people in this community ... but afraid that this [federal anti-immigrant action] will go to another level” (MacLean 2025).

“We stand with our immigrant communities,” one restaurateur in Redwood City, California explained. “They are the backbone of the food industry. Without them, it wouldn’t exist” (Kaur and Iracheta 2025). Workers and small businesses organized protests in small towns, rural areas, and big cities. Carlos Solorzano-Cuadra, CEO of the Hispanic Chambers of Commerce of San Francisco, California reported that out of “... approximately 11,000 Hispanic/Latino businesses registered in various Hispanic chambers in the Bay Area ... We have approximately 65% of them closed today in support

of the Day Without Immigrants.” Solarzno-Cuadra estimated that nearly half of the 90,000 Hispanic/Latino-owned businesses in California were closed on February 3 in solidarity with “The Day Without Immigrants,” and he concluded that Latina/o communities were “Preparing for the big march in May!” (Kaur and Iracheta 2025).

In West Chicago, one small business posted a sign in English and Spanish stating, “In support of our immigrant people, on Monday February 3, we will be closed” (Channel 5, Chicago 2024). The *Chicago Tribune* reported that “...in the shadow of President Donald Trump’s immigration crackdown, some business owners and workers from Elgin to Chicago Heights took action Monday: They closed their businesses and stayed home from work. The goal they said, was to send a message about the contributions immigrants make to their communities and local economies.” David Fernández, a board member of the area Chamber of Commerce reported on February 3, that “18th Street is empty, no foot traffic. I counted 34 closed businesses in a 2-mile drive on 18th Street between Damen and Halstead...” (Solgin et al. 2025). This resistance had an immediate impact. After Trump targeted “Sanctuary Cities” offering protections to undocumented workers for ICE raids, Tom Homan, Trump’s Border Czar, complained that mobilizations of workers and their communities in cities like Chicago and Denver were making it difficult for the federal government to incarcerate immigrant workers (Draper 2025). “Sanctuary cities are making it very difficult,” Homan noted. “For instance, Chicago ... they’ve been educated on how to defy ICE, how to hide from ICE” (Lazare and Burns 2025; Marcus 2025).

The Day of Action and Solidarity and the Day Without Immigrants actions constitute part of a long history of Latinx labor and political organizing in the United States reaching back to the early nineteenth century (Ortiz 2010; Ortiz 2018; Ruiz 1987; Vargas 2007; Zavella 1987). Latinx communities and their allies organized the historic *El Gran Paro Estadounidense*, on May 1, 2006, in response to Congressional efforts to criminalize workers, some of whom may have been undocumented. This was the largest general strike in the history of the Americas (Ortiz 2018). Between 2016 and 2024, Latino workers contributed to Black Lives Matter protests, numerous “Day without Immigrants” teach-ins, and engaged in union organizing campaigns with the Amazon Labor Union, the California Fast Food Workers Union, home healthcare and many other industries (Ortiz 2024; Sainato 2024). These emerging Latinx freedom movements have also revived a venerable tradition of cross-class solidarity in the United States, hearkening back to years when business, student, and middle-class support of workers played a critical role in the industrial unionism of the New Deal era as well as in the United Farm Worker unionizing drives of the 1960s and later (Metzgar 2000; Ortiz 2002).

Latina/o workers have engaged in direct action due to their enforced marginalization in the United States. Ethnic studies scholars theorize that the state and corporations have colluded to build a *Juan Crow* system of Latinx disenfranchisement in the 21st century that echoes many of the worse elements of the older, anti-Black Jim Crow system. This includes a systematic effort to deny a large portion of Latina/o working class people access to economic security, voting rights, and equality under the laws

to exploit their labor (Browne and Mary 2012; Ortiz 2018; Scott 2017). There are approximately 31.8 million “Hispanics” in the labor force (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2024). Of these, approximately 8.3 million are undocumented workers (Passel and Krogstad 2024). Many others have toiled in the United States for decades under various states of noncitizenship including those with Temporary Protected Status (TPS) (National Immigration Forum 2024).

While millions of Latinos/as are excluded from participating formally in politics, they are anything but apolitical. As the mass demonstrations against Donald Trump’s policies demonstrate, Latinx workers understand the value of their labor to a nation that creates barriers to their ability to earn citizenship, human rights, and “a fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work.” “We have realized the power of our voice and how powerful it is to go out into the streets to tell our truth; this is our home,” Véronica Lagunas asserted during an interview with Cornell University researchers. “I have given so much to this country; I have given 20 years of my life working, contributing, organizing. It is fair and just for us to now have permanent residency in the US” (ILR Worker Institute 2024). Lagunas is an SEIU union member, a TPS worker, and a national leader of efforts to fight sexism and sexual exploitation in the hospitality industry (Centro Ya Basta 2024). Like Véronica Lagunas, Concepción is a union activist, a member of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters in Baltimore, and a TPS worker. Like many workers whose pathway to citizenship has been blocked by the U.S. government, Concepción’s sense of belonging and commitment to struggle transcends his lack of legal belonging. “My home is here. Although I love my country where I grew up, this is home,” he observes. “It has been in this country where I have formed my family, have my job, my house. It’s where I have settled. I fight for TPS and permanent residency so I can stay home and have a bit of security in my life, in my children’s life” (ILR Worker Institute 2024). Individuals who travel from South America, the Caribbean, Mexico—and the Global South generally—to work in the United States, arrive with sophisticated understandings of labor organizing, mutual aid, and human rights (Fink 2023; Heatherton 2022; Hernandez 2022). This is reflected in the work of the National Temporary Status Alliance community organizers who engaged in major get-out-the-vote activities on behalf of Democratic candidate Kamala Harris on the eve of the Presidential Election. José Palma, Alliance coordinator stated, “Solidarity is the heartbeat of our movement, going door to door for Central Americans and the future of TPS” (National TPS Alliance 2024).

Latinx working-class insurgencies in 2024–2025 against the anti-immigrant and anti-labor policies of Donald Trump bely the snapshot political judgement of “Latinos moving to the right.” Some analysts promoted this same narrative to explain higher percentages of Latinos who voted for Trump in 2020 in comparison to the Presidential Election of 2016. The same writers however, failed to discuss Latino working-class enthusiasm for democratic socialist Bernie Sanders during the Democratic primaries even though this support was well-documented during the months leading up to the Democratic National Convention (Gambino 2020; Gamboa 2020; Koran 2019). *Univision* reported that Senator Sanders had “almost triple the

support [over Biden] among California Latinos registered to vote on ‘Super Tuesday’ in California, which hold one third of all the delegates up for grabs in 14 states. Billionaire Mike Bloomberg has similar support to Biden” (García-Ríos et al. 2020). Sanders’ campaign stop in the hard-pressed Central Valley in the fall of 2019 had the feel of a labor rally:

“[Alex] Ramos O’Casey tells the crowd she was born and raised in Fresno, ‘on the other side the tracks,’ by family members from Zacatecas, Mexico who said: ‘Remember mija, we don’t just vote for ourselves, we vote for everyone else who can’. Like Ramos-O-Casey, nearly all of the speakers who introduced Sanders wove Spanish phrases into their speeches, pointing to their families and members of the communities who had come from abroad to find opportunity, but discovered in the Central Valley a new struggle over class and citizenship. It’s a message of social, economic, and environmental justice and Sanders has been speaking it for decades. And here in Fresno it’s found an especially receptive audience” (Koran 2019).

When the election forecasting site *Split Ticket* explored the question “Why Latino Voters Surged for Bernie and Trump,” during the 2020 Presidential Election, the answer was, “Economic populism” (Hong and Sit 2024).

This was exactly the message the Democratic Party failed to amplify in 2024. The Democrats did not register great enthusiasm in many Latino communities because it was the Democratic Party that had “moved to the right” in recent years by failing to achieve progress on issues that mattered most to Latina/o families. Polls found that 81 percent of Latinos supported raising the federal minimum wage (UnidosUS, BSP Research, 2024; UnidosUS 2024). Like most Americans, Latino workers overwhelmingly support the idea of unionization and yet are unable to form unions due to the retrograde state of US Labor law vis-à-vis most other industrial democracies. Most Latina/o workers supported preserving the original Childcare Tax Credit. When the credit was terminated at the end of 2022, President Biden and the Democrats took the blame (Popken 2022). In addition, Latinx people who were able to vote supported an immigration policy that rewarded hard work, keeping families intact, and addressing the root causes that drove people to leave the Global South for the United States. Instead, “The leadership of the Democratic Party has lurched to the right on this issue, adopting Trump’s rhetoric about ‘securing the border’ and embracing core Republican policies” (Lazare and Uhlmann 2025). While Republican gains in the 2024 Presidential Election were overstated in the early exit polls, Clarissa Martinez De Castro, Vice-President of the Latino Vote Initiative at *UnidosUS* unequivocally stated:

“The most potent driver in the election was economic discontent, expressed in Trump’s gains with most demographics. If there is a mandate, it’s on that: raise wages, bring down food, housing, and health care costs. A majority of Hispanic voters supported Harris—including men—and a supermajority rejected mass deportations and abortion restrictions. The mainstream exit polls got Hispanic candidate support wrong, and that is a recurring sampling issue” (Hispanic Federation 2024).

Latino communities responded with dismay at the Israeli invasion of Gaza, and many expected the Biden administration to intervene to end the conflict (Herman

2024; Lozano 2024; Saudi 2024). President Biden's failure to broker a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, along with the United States' role in supplying weaponry and logistics to an invasion that human rights organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch termed a genocide sparked hundreds of protests in Latinx communities throughout the country (Arellano 2024; Espada and Contera 2023; Mejía et al. 2024). The Democratic Party ignored the fact that Latinx people's experiences with violence and U.S.-supported wars that forced many of their families to leave their countries of origin helped drive strong sentiments of Pro-Palestinian solidarity in Latino communities. An Axios-Ipsos Latino Poll conducted in partnership with *Noticias Telemundo* during the presidential primaries found that "Just 16% of respondents said the U.S. should continue to support Israel with arms and funds" (Astrid Galván 2024). Fatima Nieves, a nurse, reflected, "It's not just because I'm Lebanese and Mexican and my own family members have left Lebanon and Mexico because of violence and destabilization. I care because this is a human rights issue and innocent people are continuing to be killed, and that's why there must be an immediate ceasefire in the region" (Aviles 2024). Some Latinos boycotted the 2024 Presidential Election altogether over the Gaza War (Otte 2024).

Given the Democratic Party's high-profile solicitation of billionaires and prominent Republicans during the election season—while they at the same time downplayed core working class issues—it is surprising that Kamala Harris still managed to earn 62 percent of the Latino vote (Hispanic Electorate Data Hub 2024). Latinx workers in unions and workers' organizations such as UNITE HERE, Culinary Union Local 226 in Las Vegas, the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, and Missouri Jobs with Justice knocked on hundreds of thousands of doors and made countless phone calls in support of Vice-President Harris's campaign and progressive state ballot measures on raising minimum wages, sick pay eligibility, abortion rights and other issues (Culinary Workers Union Local 226 2024; Missouri Jobs with Justice 2024; UNITE HERE 2024). Still, it is possible to imagine a scenario where the Democratic Party's continued rightward drift away from the working class will cause its support among Latinos to decline further.

Nearly every analysis of the 2024 Presidential Election forgot to account for the fact that approximately 10 million working-class Latinos were for all intents and purposes excluded from the electoral process altogether. Lumping in middle-class Latinas/os who voted with the millions who could not and then claiming that Latinos as a whole "moved to the right" in 2024 is the equivalent of saying that by voting for Warren G. Harding in 1920, African Americans as a group moved rightwards when millions of Black people were unable to vote due to Jim Crow. Obviously, both claims are absurd, based on anecdotal evidence, and serve to reinforce the status quo.

Latina/o working class insurgencies surrounding the 2024 Presidential Election have reinvigorated the labor movement in several ways. Latina/o workers and their allies have revived labor internationalism, demonstrating that "solidarity knows no borders." Cross-class coalitions of workers, small businesses, and students acting

in defense of the undocumented emphasize that all people deserve dignity and human rights regardless of citizenship status. Furthermore, in a time when the American political system has fetishized great concentrations of wealth, Latino workers have reminded us of the old truism that “labor is the source of all wealth.” Finally, Cristian Céspedes, a local organizer for the International Union of Painters in Las Vegas highlights the necessity of struggle, solidarity, and movement building in a time of antilabor crisis: Speaking at his union’s fall, 2024 convention, Céspedes stated, “Our fight continues against the underground economy and for deferred action to protect workers from deportation. Our union remains committed to advocating for all workers, especially the most vulnerable among us: immigrants. Our union, true to power, is why we stand together” (Painters and Allied Trades 2024, p. 8.).

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