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The Effects of the Trump Administration on Immigrant Serving Organizations in the Greater Providence Area

Odalis Flores

Providence College

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Odalis Flores '23

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The Effects of the Trump Administration on Immigrant Serving Organizations in the Greater Providence Area



Odalis Flores '23

Majors: Sociology and Global Studies

Minors: Business Innovation and Latin American Studies

Faculty Mentor: Dr.Kara Cebulko, Sociology and Anthropology

Project Overview: I researched Trump-era policies and how the president's anti-immigrant agenda has impacted the immigrant experience in Providence and the surrounding areas (Central Falls & Pawtucket), as well as how it has affected immigrant-serving organizations' ability to fulfill their missions to these communities. I also focused on the pandemic, as these communities, which have the densest immigrant population in Rhode Island, were hit the hardest. Specifically, from the point of view of the organizations as they were the ones that took leadership and worked to provide for these communities when the government failed to do so. As often times, they were left

out of certain benefits such as stimulus checks or unemployment because of their legal status. Leaving them unprotected, at risk and dependent on these immigrant-serving organizations.

Background on the Issue: Long before Trump came to office, scholars, like Leo Chavez (2013) have argued that politicians and the media have created a “Latino Threat Narrative” that constructed immigrants from Latin America as “threats” to American society. But in 2015, when Trump launched his presidential campaign to “Make America Great Again,” he took this “threat narrative” to a new level – calling Mexicans “rapists” and “criminals” and promising to construct a 2,000-mile wall on the U.S-Mexico border to keep immigrants from Latin American out of the country. Other promises included: canceling funding for sanctuary cities, terminating Obama’s immigration executive orders, removing all undocumented immigrants and more. And in 2016, when Trump was elected as President of the United States, his rhetoric became institutionalized, as he put known white Nationalists in his cabinet and took action to fulfill his anti-immigrant campaign promises. Scholarship suggests that these anti-immigrant measures have increased anxiety for immigrants, decreasing their mental well-being, and led to financial and other hardships. As a resident of Central Falls, a city with a large immigrant population, I not only noticed, but felt the fear that my community experienced over their safety and future in this country.

Methodology Used: My primary research method to investigate how immigrant-serving organizations navigate the Trump era (and now, the pandemic too) was qualitative. Specifically, I used semi-structured in-depth interviews with directors and/or other leaders of different organizations that offer services to immigrants. These organizations covered a diversity of issues/areas: legal aid/consultations, education for immigrant children and academic resources for children of immigrant backgrounds. Originally, I had planned to interview six organizations which would have also covered the topics of domestic violence and homelessness. However, due to the nature of the pandemic during the time I was conducting this research, it was difficult to get ahold of representatives for organizations that focused on these issues.

I conducted interviews over zoom which were organized through email. The grant provided was used towards buying materials such as books and transcribing software. I also accessed online articles through PC’s library source as well as kept up current events as new policies and benefits that affected these communities were constantly being rolled out this past summer.

Take Aways: Throughout conducting the interviews, themes such as concern over Trump Policies, fear for the health and safety of these communities, financial barriers and even social-emotional needs were common in all four organizations. These worries that leaders expressed always connected back to Covid-19. Learning about these struggles that others minutes away from me were facing and how vulnerable they have become was both eye-opening and emotionally challenging. Especially because I became more aware of the privileges that I had with not having to live through these experiences myself, rather, I was on the opposite end learning about them. However, I did come to

learn how progressive and supportive Rhode Island has been and continues to be in order to ensure that these families receive not only help, but also the rights that they deserve.