

The Digital Divide and Access to Information:

A Focus on Ohio's Hispanic/Latino Community



Latino Community Report

The Ohio Commission on Hispanic/Latino Affairs (OCHLA) issued this report on August 7, 2020. It was composed by:

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The Ohio Commission on Hispanic/Latino Affairs put forth its best efforts in gathering and providing accurate and current information. This report contains data from the latest research available. Upon request, OCHLA will provide any additional information or data available.

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Introduction

The digital divide is defined as the economic, educational, and social inequalities between those who have computers and online access and those who do not.¹ According to a report published in 2019 by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration of the United States Department of Commerce, the digital divide is shrinking for Hispanic Americans. Internet usage rates for Hispanics have experienced gains in recent years, and while immigrants continued to be less likely to go online than their US born peers in 2017, the differences appear to be shrinking. In fact, second generation individuals born in the US to immigrant parents were nearly as likely to use the internet as those with two US-born parents.² Furthermore, smartphones have become critical tools to bridge the digital gap, as many Hispanics are less likely to own a computer at home or have access to high speed internet. About 25% of Hispanics and 23% of African Americans are “smartphone only” internet user – meaning they lack traditional home broadband service but do own a smartphone. By comparison, 12% of whites fall into this category.³

The adoption of technology by the Latino community and the convenience of mobile devices are important milestones; however, they are not sufficient to address their growing needs for timely information and access to resources. Whether technology is required to search for jobs, complete school assignments, fill out the Census or obtain critical safety information in the midst of a pandemic, the reality is that affordable broadband access and computer hardware are missing in many Latino homes. The lack of literacy skills to navigate digital content, digital exclusion or limitations both in urban and rural areas increase isolation. At a time when everything seems to be going digital, ethnic minorities and New Americans struggle to stay ahead and they work within fragmented efforts to solve the lack of access to technology.

In this edition of the Latino Community Report, we investigate how the Hispanic/Latino community in Ohio accesses the digital space and what factors may impact the effective flow of information. With nearly 456,000 Latinos residing in our state⁴, the community follows national trends and relies primarily on mobile devices and social media platforms for connectivity and information. Like their peers around the nation, they are challenged by having to use mobile phones instead of computers, struggle with data costs that limit accessibility and more often than not have to rely on WiFi spots at libraries or public spaces to stay informed and carry on with life and business. This report will explore national internet and digital access with a brief overview of data about Hispanic Ohioans, particularly those who live in rural areas, since they might be most heavily affected by the lack of broadband/internet access.

¹Digital Divide. Retrieved June 19, 2020, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/digitaldivide>

²Digital Divide is Shrinking for America’s Hispanic Population, NTIA Data Show, Retrieved on June 19, 2020, from <https://www.ntia.doc.gov/blog/2019/digital-divide-shrinking-america-s-hispanic-population-ntia-data-show>

³Smartphones help blacks, Hispanics bridge some – but not all – digital gaps with whites. Retrieved on June 19, 2020, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/20/smartphones-help-blacks-hispanics-bridge-some-but-not-all-digital-gaps-with-whites/>

⁴Ohio Hispanic Americans. (2018). Retrieved April 3, 2020, from <https://development.ohio.gov/files/research/P7002.pdf>

Examples outlining the impact of technology on Latinos are illustrated using the 2020 Census, the 2020 elections and the state’s response to COVID-19. Finally, the report explores the impact that technological adoption has in the Latino community and highlights the existing vulnerability for misinformation among the Hispanic community.

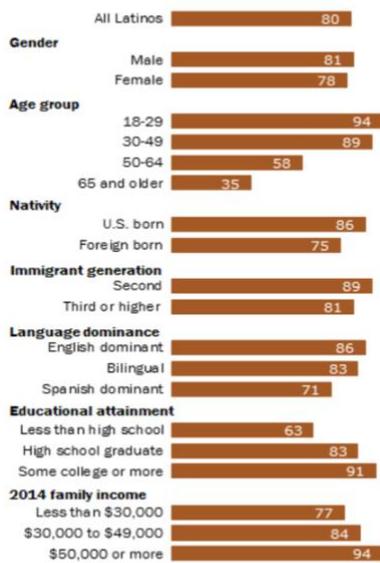
Internet Access Using a Mobile Device

The share of Hispanic internet users who access the internet on a mobile device has risen from 76% to 94% between the years 2012 and 2015. In comparison, the share of white internet users who access the internet on a mobile device remains lower (from 60% to 85%). According to research done by the Pew Research Center, “this may help explain why Hispanics and blacks lag whites in broadband subscription rates. Only 10% of white smartphone owners are considered “smartphone dependent,” meaning that they do not have broadband internet access at home but do use a mobile device to access the internet.”

Hispanic and African American smartphone owners, however, are twice as likely to be smartphone dependent— 23% of Hispanics and 19% of African Americans fall into this group”.⁵

Mobile internet use was more popular among youngest and most-educated Latinos in 2015

% of Latino adults saying they access the internet on a cellphone, tablet or other mobile device, at least occasionally



Note: Those with a high school diploma include persons who have attained its equivalent, such as a General Educational Development (GED) certificate.

Source: National Survey of Latinos, conducted Oct. 21-Nov. 30, 2015.

“Digital Divide Narrows for Latinos as More Spanish Speakers and Immigrants Go Online”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

In the next page, a chart demonstrates the reliance on mobile devices among subgroups. It shows that younger generations are using mobile devices for their internet access and daily activities. They may use it for their own busy and mobile lifestyle and the amount of younger Hispanic and Latino Americans is on an incline.

Mobile Device Use for Internet Among Subgroups:

Overall, 80% of Latino adults say they access the internet using mobile devices. However, mobile device usage decreases as age increases. 94% of Latinos ages 18-29 and 89% of Latinos ages 30-49 use the internet on a mobile device. However, those who are 65 and older are less likely to use a mobile device for internet access (35%).

In addition, about six in ten Hispanic adults with less than a high school education (63%) say they use the internet on a mobile device compared to nine-in-ten (91%) of Latino adults with at least some college experience. 77% among those with a family income less than \$30,000 use the internet on their mobile device compared to 94% who have family earnings of \$50,000 or more.

⁵Brown, A., López, G., & Lopez, M. (2019, December 30). Digital divide Narrows for Latinos. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2016/07/20/digital-divide-narrows-for-latinos-as-more-spanish-speakers-and-immigrants-go-online/>

Although internet usage is increasing among the Hispanic population who own smartphones, it is still a slow increase compared to the general population's internet use. Furthermore, access to a mobile phone and the ability to pay for a mobile phone are determining factors in whether or not Latinos are using the internet.⁶

Like their counterparts across the United States, Hispanic/Latino Ohioans use their mobile devices to find information, stay current, and communicate showing preference for these devices over typical computers and laptops. Key findings from a study done by PricewaterhouseCoopers in an ongoing Consumer Intelligence Series show that Hispanics use mobile devices for the following reasons:

- Hispanics are a more mobile population, meaning that Hispanics are on the move in their daily lives and need devices to accommodate this lifestyle;
- Mobile devices are an affordable and accessible technology;
- Mobile devices are a lower cost way to communicate;
- Cost-effective entertainment;
- A newer level of capability;
- Healthcare and health insurance information access; and
- Privacy concerns in other ways of communication.⁷

There is a culture around sharing and looking up information through social media before buying products. As stated in an article regarding how marketers can use this information to reach Latino consumers, “the Latinx affinity for technology and specific media platforms can provide marketers with a look at what's next through authentic engagement and outreach strategies.” Relative to the general population, U.S. Hispanics are more likely to use social networks to find out about products and services, as well as to share their product and service experiences via social media channels. Nearly 40% of U.S. Hispanics say their friends or neighbors seek advice from them before making a purchase— over-indexing the general population by 10%”.⁸

Ohio Hispanics in Rural Counties

With over 456,000 Latinos in Ohio, the state has seen a growth on the number of Hispanics living in rural Ohio counties over the last ten years. Just like their urban counterparts, they rely heavily on mobile devices and social media to consume information and remain informed on current affairs.

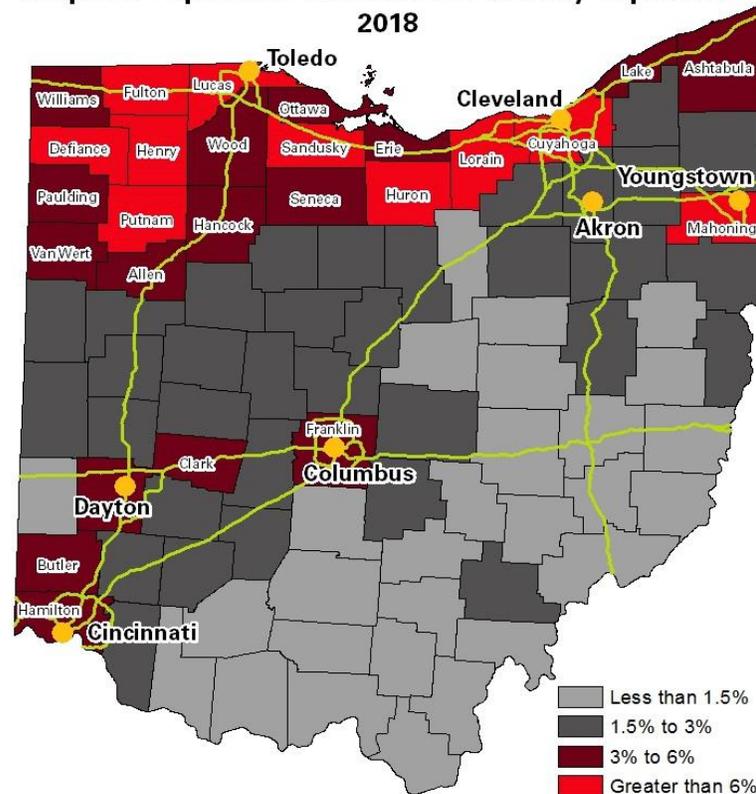
⁶Brown, A., López, G., & Lopez, M. (2019, December 30). Hispanics and mobile access to the internet. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2016/07/20/3-hispanics-and-mobile-access-to-the-internet/>

⁷PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC). (2016). Always connected: US-BASED HISPANIC CONSUMERS dominate Mobile, entertainment, and beyond. Retrieved April 03, 2020, from <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/services/consulting/library/consumer-intelligence-series/hispanics.html>

⁸Malley. (2019). Marketers can reach hispanic community best via social media. Retrieved April 03, 2020, from <https://www.mediapost.com/publications/article/339221/marketers-can-reach-hispanic-community-best-via-so.html>

Hispanics are the fastest growing minority group in the United States and in Ohio. Most Hispanic Ohioans live in urban areas. One out of every three Hispanic Ohioans live in one of the four cities of Cleveland, Columbus, Lorain and Toledo. In Columbus, there are 54,000 Hispanic residents, in Cleveland there are 47,000, in Toledo there are 25,000, and in Lorain there are 19,000 Hispanic residents. The Hispanic population makes up a higher proportion of county populations in the north and northwest sections of Ohio, many of which are rural in nature.⁹

**Hispanic Population as Percent of County Population:
2018**



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In some parts of Ohio, the connectivity required for children to do computer-based homework and for adults to look for a new job, access online education, or training programs does not exist. In fact, more than 300,000 households representing close to 1 million Ohioans, lack access to high-speed internet resulting in a critical barrier. Latino and Hispanic populations that settle in rural communities are further isolated and severely impacted by the lack of connectivity and the small number of non-profits and organizations that serve their needs.¹¹

Ohio's most recent mapping efforts demonstrates that many Ohioans, particularly in rural areas, face connectivity issues. Lack of connectivity has a direct effect on the government's ability to

⁹Ohio Hispanic Americans. Retrieved 2020, from <https://development.ohio.gov/files/research/P7002.pdf>

¹⁰Ohio Hispanic Americans. Retrieved 2020, from <https://development.ohio.gov/files/research/P7002.pdf>

¹¹InnovateOhio. (2020). Ohio Broadband Strategy. Retrieved April 03, 2020, from <https://innovateohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/innovate/priorities/resources/broadband/overview>

engage, involve, and inform its constituents. A real time example is the quickly evolving COVID-19 Pandemic and the need to inform citizenry of critical safety steps. In situations like these, those without internet access are at a greater disadvantage. In March, 2020, Governor DeWine and Lt. Governor Jon Husted commended Ohio high-speed internet providers who announced taking part in the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) “Keep Americans Connected” Pledge to help Americans impacted by disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The following companies who are taking part in the pledge include: Arcadia, AT&T, Bresco Broadband, Cable One, CenturyLink, Charter Communications (Spectrum), Cincinnati Bell, Continental, Comcast, Consolidated Communications, Cox Communications, Frontier, Little Miami, Mediacom, Oakwood, Ohio Rural Broadband Association, Ohio Telecom Association, Sprint, T-Mobile, TracFone Wireless, US Cellular, Van Lue, Verizon, and Windstream. The InnovateOhio website will continue to update their list as more companies join the pledge.¹² These providers pledged not to terminate service to any residential or small business customer for failure to pay during the pandemic; waive late fees for those customers and open their Wi-Fi hotspots to anyone who needs them.

Another example to illustrate the importance of broadband access and connectivity is in the education space. With the closing of schools across the state, internet connectivity has become crucial for telecommunications and distance learning. Additionally, adults seeking alternative employment opportunities often rely on WiFi hot spots to run their searches and overall, more people may have access to information in a timely fashion as a result of the “Keep Americans Connected” Pledge.

Although recent improvements open opportunities, often the Ohio Hispanic community accesses the internet and other services unlike typical internet customers. Hispanic consumers have adopted and embraced mobile technology at an equivalent or greater extent than non-Hispanics across a wide variety of activities.¹³ For example, a Hispanic family in Ohio that has internet access is highly likely to rely primarily on mobile devices for their internet access instead of computers. However, many platforms for learning, jobs, or healthcare are not available for mobile devices or are difficult to use. During the pandemic, mobile devices have become very useful for buying and shipping food during quarantine, reaching families with accurate information through social media, and communicating with their trusted networks to access vital information.

Latino Youth and Education

The COVID-19 pandemic, as an example, has highlighted the already existing reality that working virtually from home through an online classroom may be hard for those who may not

¹²Office of the Governor. (2020, March 13). Governor DeWine, Lt. Governor Husted Praise Internet Providers for Commitment to “Keep Americans Connected” Pledge. Retrieved April 09, 2020, from <https://governor.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/governor/media/news-and-media/dewine-husted-praise-internet-providers-for-commitment-to-keep-americans-connected-pledge>

¹³PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC). (2016). Always connected: US-Based Hispanic Consumers dominate mobile, entertainment, and beyond. Retrieved April 03, 2020, from <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/services/consulting/library/consumer-intelligence-series/hispanics.html>

have a computer, do not have regular access to the internet, or rely on mobile devices for online access. These factors, which normally may go unnoticed but are inevitably evident during school building closures, can hinder children's learning opportunities and make it much more difficult to communicate with their peers and teachers.

Making matters more complex, many parents are monolingual, and lack the education and skills to teach their children. In many cases, older siblings and friends are assisting first generation parents who do not know how to navigate the resources available online. Fortunately, the Ohio Department of Education has built a robust online depository of information to assist those who are working with children and families to complete their academic requirements and bring in support systems to alleviate their needs.¹⁴ But, once again, the success of those support systems depends on the ability of parents to reach out, connect and work with information that is most often available only with reliable internet access.

Additionally, many families and children rely on schools for much more than education, including food and childcare while the parents are at work. Fortunately, different school districts across Ohio are filling in the gaps in the community to provide meals during school closures.¹⁵ If the family does not have a steady income and relied on schools for daily meals, they will struggle more to put food on the table. To meet this concrete need, the DeWine Administration has established systems to allow families to have access to food, and are also offering take home meals for school aged children; however, information on these resources is often shared via social media updates, which again brings to bear the importance of connectivity to access vital resources for families.



The reliance on smartphones has an impact among younger crowds of Hispanic Ohioans and brings hardships when completing education requirements this school year. Not all papers and assignments can be completed using a mobile device or often outdated computers. In addition, a lack of reliable internet access can make it hard to connect, stream, and send in assignments on time, especially if one is sharing internet with others simultaneously in their household. This limits a student's capabilities to use the recommended platforms for virtual learning, complete and finish assignments in a timely manner. As a result, Latino students who may already have challenges staying at the level of their peers, are prone to experiencing greater disadvantages. COVID-19 will have an ongoing

¹⁴Coronavirus (COVID-19) Information for Ohio's Schools and Districts. (2020). Retrieved April 25, 2020, from <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Student-Supports/Coronavirus>

¹⁵Krouse, P. (2020, March 17). Ohio schools to continue feeding children in need DURING closings prompted by the coronavirus. Retrieved April 08, 2020, from <https://www.cleveland.com/news/2020/03/ohio-schools-to-continue-feeding-children-in-need-during-closings-prompted-by-the-coronavirus.html>

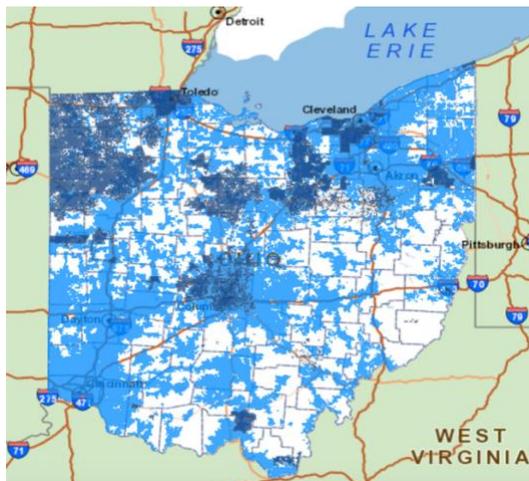
impact and long-term effect on their learning experience for the remainder of the 2020 school year and beyond.

At the university level, the challenge exists as well. Young adults must meet academic requirements with limited resources, often in crowded spaces and stressed home environments, with limited access to their social and academic support systems. To engage all students and take the pressure and priority off of grades, some universities are moving to a pass/fail option for classes. This gives students leeway as they figure out the adjustments they need to learn virtually, and it takes the heat off of school, which is no longer a critical priority for many families during a pandemic.

How Ohio is Filling the Digital Divide

Ohio is also addressing limited access to the internet in rural communities, which affects the growing Hispanic population in Ohio. As stated on the InnovateOhio Broadband strategy webpage, “The DeWine-Husted Administration understands that access to fast, reliable internet services has become a standard of living increasingly necessary for gainful employment, integration into educational programs, and preparation for the kinds of careers we expect to exist in the future”.¹⁶ This is especially important during the COVID-19 crisis where the reliance of internet access for employment, school, and healthcare have become imperative for families across Ohio.

A recent map details that the lack of adequate high-speed internet coverage specifically is affecting rural communities, and that the state is taking the initiative to fill these gaps. Below is the map that shows access for 50 mbps in counties across Ohio. While this kind of internet access may be powerful for streaming services and connectivity for one person, a whole family will struggle to work from home, stream, use tools for school, and use other applications needed throughout the day without buffering and interruptions in their service.



Broadband 50 Mbps Download / 5 Mbps Upload

-  Detailed Service Areas- 50 Mbps Download/ 5 Mbps Upload
-  FCC Service Availability- 50 Mbps Download/ 5 Mbps Upload

¹⁶InnovateOhio. (2020). Ohio Broadband Strategy. Retrieved April 03, 2020, from <https://innovateohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/innovate/priorities/resources/broadband/overview>

Furthermore, government agencies in Ohio and across the nation are increasing their use of social media services to enable citizen interaction, participation, and engagement. Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram provide new avenues for government agencies to communicate and advocate for certain communities. As exemplified by COVID-19, the current situation continues to evolve quickly, requiring state agencies and health officials to provide guidance and resources expeditiously. Twitter, specifically, allows for information to be retweeted among individuals increasing the ability of agencies and organizations to help share current information. Twitter's platform is constantly updating from second to second allowing for news to always be current. Traditional news sources, while reliable, are not able to provide updates as rapidly, hence making social media platforms the answer of the moment.

Being knowledgeable about Hispanic Ohioans' use and reliance of social media and mobile devices for information access creates opportunities for our state government to react and respond. For example, when the first cases of coronavirus were documented in Ohio, the Ohio Commission on Hispanic/Latino Affairs (OCHLA) used its various social media channels to inform the Latino community. An issue that became immediately apparent was the lack of bilingual resources accessible to various minority communities. It became imperative that translated news and materials were accessible to non-English speakers because already vulnerable communities would become even more vulnerable in a time of unprecedented uncertainty. The Latino Affairs Commission team worked closely with the Governor's office and the Department of Health to quickly and efficiently disseminate information regarding the coronavirus. OCHLA also became responsible for translating relevant materials into Spanish and distributing them to the Latino media and community. An [OCHLA COVID-19 bilingual resources page](#)¹⁷ was created on our website with direct link to the state's [coronavirus.ohio.gov](#).¹⁸

The Role of Social Media in Community Engagement

The Ohio Commission on Hispanic/Latino Affairs has relied on social media to increase its outreach capacity for years. Many of our constituents depend on ethnic media outlets, including radio, print, online TV stations, social media, e-zine news outlets, etc. to consume information. Strategies that include bilingual resources, online directories, the use of our Commission's website as a hub for information, our daily output of information through social media, and regular live engagement through video interviews, provide timely and reliable information to consumers.

As a result of our communications strategy the Commission can present into easy to understand language complex directives and government information. Furthermore, the information shared

¹⁷Coronavirus (COVID-19) Resources. (2020). Retrieved April 25, 2020, from <https://ochla.ohio.gov/Coronavirus-COVID-19-Resources>

¹⁸Coronavirus.ohio.gov (2020). Retrieved April 25, 2020, from <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/home>

through our website and social media channels is exponentially increased as more viewers and followers connect with others thus increasing our overall impact. This communication flow increases our ability to support the work of state government, non-profits, and those serving constituents by giving them direct access to critical and timely information needed to meet the needs of Ohio's Hispanic/Latino population.

Government agencies are tapping into social media outlets to directly connect with Ohio's citizens. Important national initiatives like the Census 2020 or the COVID-19 pandemic response have highlighted opportunities and gaps; with a constant variable that reliable information exchange needs to be adapted to the consumers and should consider cultural, language and communication preferences among different audiences. A good illustration is the fact that even before formal communications were established in the state, Hispanic Ohioans were consuming information regarding COVID-19 through WhatsApp and Facebook from their countries of heritage. They learned about hygiene, social distancing, and the potential impact of the pandemic in Spanish ahead of any state led initiative, thus confirming that information exchange is not limited to countries, languages, or regions.

For example, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ohio Department of Health created a hub of information via the webpage <http://coronavirus.ohio.gov/> to house all relevant information regarding the crisis in Ohio. Governor DeWine has been providing regular updates through The Ohio Channel which are then shared via stream through social media (YouTube and Facebook) with regular updates via Twitter. Furthermore, Governor DeWine and many city mayors have been hosting "townhalls" on social media to get closer to constituents. Close Caption in multiple languages and simultaneous Spanish interpreting are the innovations implemented to ensure those with limited English proficiency can access information through social media channels and the internet.

The Ohio Commission on Hispanic/Latino Affairs worked with Governor DeWine's team and the Ohio Department of Health to ensure the statewide coronavirus website had the auto-translate feature in key languages and that critical fact sheets were also available in other languages. Building rapport and reliable information with Latino and other ethnic minorities has been a constant goal of the administration. And although the coronavirus.ohio.gov website has a wealth of information, the main channel for fast and direct information dissemination to the community is through social media. With this in mind, the Commission uses Twitter to give live updates and share information provided by the Governor and the Ohio Department of Health. The Governor and key members of the COVID-19 response team also remain visible in Twitter. OCHLA also used Facebook to share the most pressing information and to encourage its followers to visit its

website for bilingual online directory of Hispanic serving organizations (OLAnet)¹⁹, access to [resource directories](#)²⁰, a resource guide for state agencies bilingual resources and services (Catalogue of Latino Outreach Initiatives)²¹ and general information about the pandemic.

Through social media, state agencies and OCHLA are able to monitor social media feeds and build a reporting and feedback network with key leaders, in order to gauge, respond, and report on the status of the community to government officials and to provide timely support. In other words, connectivity is a critical source of information for the work we carry out as public servants.

The public also relies on social media to engage and seek information. A quick review of OCHLA's social media metrics shows a marked change in outreach and points to exponential increase of information sharing among individuals and trusted networks. In all categories, there are record numbers, especially in the number of followers gained on Facebook. This data reveals not only the community's need for reliable bilingual resources but their reliance on the Commission to deliver this information. It also demonstrates the effectiveness of providing information through social media versus relying only on traditional news outlets and the website.

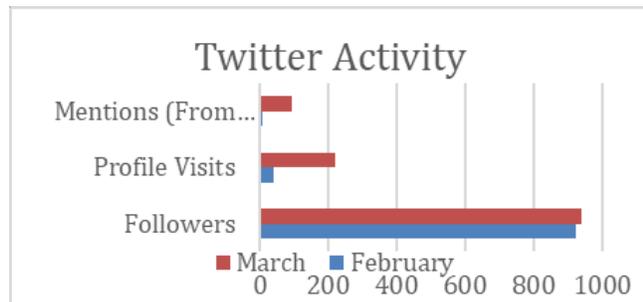
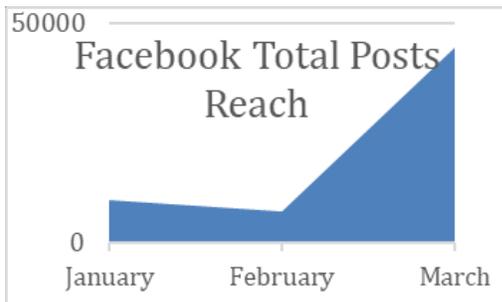


¹⁹Hispanic Serving Organizations - OLAnet. (2019). Retrieved April 25, 2020, from <https://ochla.ohio.gov/Hispanic-Serving-Organizations>

²⁰Latino Community Resources. (2020). Retrieved April 25, 2020, from <https://ochla.ohio.gov/Latino-Community/Latino-Community-Resources>

²¹CATALOGUE OF LATINO OUTREACH INITIATIVES (C.L.O.I). (2020). Retrieved April 25, 2020, from [https://ochla.ohio.gov/Portals/0/Latino%20Community/Latino%20Community%20Resources/2020/CLOI_2020_FINAL_APR15_2020%20\(1\).pdf?ver=2020-04-15-144605-263](https://ochla.ohio.gov/Portals/0/Latino%20Community/Latino%20Community%20Resources/2020/CLOI_2020_FINAL_APR15_2020%20(1).pdf?ver=2020-04-15-144605-263)

Latino Affairs Commission Social Media Statistics February and March 2020



The Need for Bilingual Resources

The COVID-19 crisis in Ohio has also highlighted the need for bilingual resources for Hispanic and Latino communities. Access to information in easy to understand language, explained in both English and Spanish has always made a tremendous difference. When stress levels are high, processing information in an unfamiliar language becomes daunting. For example, “While the state of Ohio and agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have posted coronavirus approach instructions online (including in Spanish), many Latinos in Ohio have limited internet access, as they rely on phones instead of laptops”.²² This is supported by the data and research in previous pages. By nature, the first source of information for a great number of Hispanic Ohioans is not the internet; they will rather rely on radio hosts, online social media outlets, printed ethnic media, and word of mouth to receive and exchange information.

RESOURCES/ RECURSOS COVID-19

BELOW YOU WILL FIND INFORMATION, RESOURCES AND UPDATES ABOUT THE CURRENT COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS) EMERGENCY. THE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES WILL BE UPDATED AS IT BECOMES AVAILABLE. FOR FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK [@OCHLA] AND TWITTER [@OCHLA_OH] FOR THE LATEST NEWS.

A CONTINUACIÓN ENCONTRARÁ INFORMACIÓN, RECURSOS Y ACTUALIZACIONES SOBRE LA EMERGENCIA ACTUAL DE COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS). LA INFORMACIÓN Y LOS RECURSOS SE ACTUALIZARÁN A MEDIDA QUE ESTÉN DISPONIBLES. PARA SEGUIRNOS EN FACEBOOK [@OCHLA] Y TWITTER [@OCHLA_OH] PARA MANTENERSE AL DÍA CON LAS ÚLTIMAS NOTICIAS.

²²Pelzer, J. (2020, March 19). Coronavirus information, services limited for Ohioans who don't speak English. Retrieved April 03, 2020, from <https://www.cleveland.com/coronavirus/2020/03/coronavirus-information-services-limited-for-ohioans-who-dont-speak-english.html>

In addition, call centers, government offices, and other sources of information are primarily operated by English speakers with limited access to interpreters for other languages, which often, if available take a long time to respond thus increasing the number of callers who drop the call after long waiting times. To alleviate this challenge for Spanish speakers during the COVID-19 Pandemic, the state of Ohio has established a bilingual hotline that is regularly monitored. COVID-19 has dramatically expedited outreach strategies and understanding of how Hispanics/Latinos consume and process information. Many agencies and advocacy groups are proactively filling in the gaps and connecting in a more personable and direct way with the public. For example, during the early days of the Pandemic, the Commission's Executive Director stated in an interview: "The Ohio Latino Affairs Commission has set up a webpage with links to information about coronavirus in Spanish. In addition, Lilliana Cavanaugh, the Commission's Executive Director, intends to soon hold daily call-ins for Spanish speakers to go over what happened during that day's gubernatorial press briefing. The Ohio Hispanic Coalition posts Facebook videos in Spanish on a regular basis with the latest coronavirus news and information, as Facebook can be accessed more easily on phones than webpages."²³

Organizations and government agencies are using social media, streams, and setting up services to help Hispanic/Latino and ethnic minority Ohioans during these unprecedented times. County officials are looking at what they can do to offer coronavirus help in different languages. Ethnic media channels are producing regular YouTube and Facebook live chats to engage directly with the public in their native languages. These exchanges provide opportunities to explain complex government guidance and protocols into small chunks of information that are easier to understand. Trusted advocates and familiar voices provide validity to the words of action and caution presented by Governor DeWine and his team of experts, which results in constituents who are better informed and more willing to implement the required changes to keep everyone safe. Work is underway to increase access to bilingual resources in urban and suburban areas of Ohio. In addition, populations in need are turning to apps and other forms of communication to fill this gap. For example, "non-English speakers can use an interpreter through an app called LanguageLine, which costs \$3.95 per minute for audio calls." It's also suggested that Latino and Hispanic Ohioans "could get help from their church, school, or a community organization."²⁴



²³Pelzer, J. (2020, March 19). Coronavirus information, services limited for Ohioans who don't speak English. Retrieved April 03, 2020, from <https://www.cleveland.com/coronavirus/2020/03/coronavirus-information-services-limited-for-ohioans-who-dont-speak-english.html>

²⁴Pelzer, J. (2020, March 19). Coronavirus information, services limited for Ohioans who don't speak English. Retrieved April 03, 2020, from <https://www.cleveland.com/coronavirus/2020/03/coronavirus-information-services-limited-for-ohioans-who-dont-speak-english.html>

2020 Census: Outreach and Online Option

For the first time ever, most people living in the United States are using digital and social media in their everyday lives and the U.S. Census Bureau is offering the ability to fill out the Census online. Along with the versatility of online Census completion, the challenge of disinformation and misinformation has also given rise. As of February 2020, the Census Bureau has made efforts to partner with social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, community organizations, and the public to stop the spread of disinformation campaigns. Rumors that place into question the confidentiality and security of personal information online collected by the Census, whether everyone is required or not to complete the Census, and fear for private data to be shared are among the rumors spread online. In addition, because the Census only takes place every 10 years, this leaves a lot of room for hackers on social media platforms to attack. The Census Bureau has stated that they are taking the following strategies to address those threats: ²⁵

- Working with social media platforms such as Facebook, Microsoft, Nextdoor, Google, and Pinterest to update their policies and terms of service to include census-specific activities;
- Coordinating with YouTube and Twitter to create processes enabling us to quickly identify and respond to misinformation and disinformation;
- Collaborating with other government agencies such as the Federal Trade Commission to protect everyone, and especially the elderly, from scammers pretending to represent the Census Bureau;
- Working with civil society organizations such as the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights and NALEO Educational Fund to ensure they have the resources necessary to combat misinformation and disinformation in targeted communities to promote participation in the 2020 Census; and
- Working with the Better Business Bureau and AARP to protect consumers against possible scams and fraud during the count.

These partnerships will help the Census Bureau counter false information that can lead to an undercount by quickly identifying phony information and respond with factual content. It is important to note that the Census Bureau is taking the necessary precautions by building the first ever Trust and Safety team to protect the count of who is participating. In addition, they are making strides to protect minority communities who have been the target of these disinformation campaigns. Hispanic/Latino Ohioans important contributors to the state's economic growth and vitality. Their participation in the Census allows for resources to be allocated properly in their communities and to obtain representation. Reflecting the growth of this ethnic minority in Ohio will have crucial implications for the next ten years, and the Latino Affairs Commission has been actively engaged with non-profits, leaders, local and state government to ensure that social media is adequately used to place fears to rest and educate the community about the importance of the Census 2020. Special emphasis has been placed on explaining the different stages to the Census completion process, helping them understand the forms and how to report those in their household, and as stated earlier, ensuring that misinformation is replaced with facts and data.

²⁵US Census Bureau. (2020). Census.gov. Retrieved April 03, 2020, from <https://www.census.gov/>

In fact, it has never been easier to reach those with internet access and an ability to use a mobile device to fill out the Census. This is a great opportunity for Hispanic/Latino Ohioans who rely on these devices every day to have their voices heard.²⁶

2020 Elections: Connecting with Latinos

In collaboration with the Ohio Commission on Hispanic/Latino Affairs, Secretary of State Frank LaRose teamed up to translate key voter resources into Spanish, thus making critical information vital to democracy accessible to more Ohioans.²⁷ This partnership exemplifies the impact that can be achieved when organizations come together and combine their skills and assets to better serve the public. These translated materials were shared by both offices on social media and were subsequently reshared by entities that promote civic engagement as well as Latino serving groups in Ohio. Secretary LaRose's office also created informational kits on cyber security to inform about potential disinformation threats on elections, and they consistently use Twitter and Facebook to reach a wider audience and effectively connect in Spanish with Latino and other ethnic minorities. The Latino Affairs Commission is actively engaged in a social media campaign to bring timely information to Latino voters in Ohio.

Furthermore, the Secretary of State's office has taken a proactive approach in preparing for our 2020 elections by establishing a Ready for November Task Force.²⁸ The mission of the task force is to provide updates on the challenges and needs of our county boards of elections to ensure the administration of a safe, secure, and accessible election in the fall, and how the state can help support their efforts. The task force will meet several times over the coming months and will provide updates on how counties are preparing for November, hear from a variety of experts, learn from county elections administrators and what their

Vote-por-Correo en la Elección Primaria 2020

Infórmese cómo solicitar su boleta
Vote-por-Correo en VoteOhio.gov

Su boleta debe ser enviada con timbre postal antes de abril 27, 2020

La votación en persona en **abril 28** sólo estará disponible para las personas con discapacidades y aquellos que no tienen una dirección de correo en su hogar

Frank LaRose
Ohio Secretary of State

²⁶US Census Bureau. (2020, March 11). Census Bureau statement on Coronavirus and the 2020 Census. Retrieved April 03, 2020, from <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2020/statement-coronavirus.html>

²⁷OHIO SECRETARY OF STATE WEEK IN REVIEW FOR THE WEEK ENDING APRIL 3, 2020. (2020). Retrieved April 25, 2020, from https://www.ohiosos.gov/media-center/week-in-review-archive/2020-04-03/?_t_id=1B2M2Y8AsgTpgAmY7PhCfg

²⁸Ready for November Task Force. (2020). Retrieved June 05, 2020, from <https://www.ohiosos.gov/legislation-and-ballot-issues/ready-for-november-task-force/>

needs and requirements are, consider and disseminate best practices, and receive information about the evolving COVID-19 pandemic. Outreach and education for the 2020 elections has and can continue to serve as a great opportunity for the Secretary of State's office and members of ethnic minority communities to collaborate on how to best serve the diverse needs of Ohioans.

Combatting Disinformation Campaigns

Social media and news platforms are designed to deliver information to mass audiences quickly, optimizing for viral content that generates clicks and revenue. As a consequence, they are inherently vulnerable to sensationalist disinformation that seeks to catch the eye and be shared. The messages conveyed through disinformation range from biased half-truths to conspiracy theories to outright lies.

The intent is to manipulate popular opinion to sway policy or inhibit action by creating division and blurring the truth among target populations. Unfortunately, the most useful emotions to create such conditions—uncertainty, fear, and anger (which are further heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic)—are the very characteristics that increase the likelihood a message will go viral. Even when disinformation first appears on fringe sites outside of the mainstream media, mass coordinated action that takes advantage of platform business models reliant upon clicks and views helps ensure greater audience penetration. Bot networks consisting of fake profiles amplify the message and create the illusion of high activity and popularity across multiple platforms at once, gaming recommendation and rating algorithms.²⁹

Since the rise of social media, threat actors, individuals, or other organized groups have exploited the information environment on an unprecedented scale. Unlike the publication and distribution of printed materials, which require publishing houses, editors, proofreaders, promotional advertisements, and bookstores, online information does not require these checks and balances. In addition, many individuals are experiencing a decline in confidence in traditional media news outlets and start to look to social media apps on smartphones as an outlet for conversation, influence, and ideas.³⁰

In the run up to the 2020 election and the 2020 Census, social media outreach becomes increasingly important, especially for minority groups who rely on social media and mobile devices in their everyday life. According to the National Capital Region Threat Intelligence Consortium, state-sponsored disinformation campaigns will likely feature racially and culturally divisive content targeting minority communities—tactics that were employed successfully in

²⁹Nemr, C., & Gangware, W. (2018). Weapons of Mass Destruction: Foreign State-Sponsored Disinformation in the Digital Age. Retrieved 2020, from <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Weapons-of-Mass-Distraction-Foreign-State-Sponsored-Disinformation-in-the-Digital-Age.pdf>

³⁰Public-Private Analytic Exchange Program. (2019). Combating Targeted Disinformation Campaigns. Retrieved 2020, from https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/ia/ia_combatting-targeted-disinformation-campaigns.pdf

2016.³¹ The disinformation campaigns are designed to “exploit the grievances of the minority communities and incite feelings of paranoia or anger”. This works by discouraging these groups from voting. This includes lack of participation in a variety of ways, including participation in the Census and elections. Hispanics and minority groups are affected by the inaccurate information. Furthermore, they may share this information with their group further perpetuating the cycle.

One example of disinformation campaigns is from the 2016 election when a popular Russian “Internet Research Agency” account called itself “Blacktivist” on Facebook and Twitter. This account promoted voter disengagement, advocated for voting for third party candidates, and included content that emphasized not voting as a way to exercise their rights. These social media pages received millions of likes and shares. Blacktivist received 4.6 million likes and 4.8 million shares on Facebook alone.³²

Research done on the 2018 midterm election found that the computational propaganda that occurred during that election included targeted political trolling campaigns, bot-driven censorship, and intra-group harassment. Hispanics in addition to other minority groups in Ohio are vulnerable to these campaigns. Computational propaganda works to silence and splinter under-represented groups, which are critical to our democracy. These disinformation campaigns affect voting in elections as well. With a widespread fear of the coronavirus, there are fewer people wanting to go out and do their civil duty by voting.³³

As previously stated, Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose has implemented a proactive campaign to fight disinformation and cybersecurity threats that are designed to target our elections by creating mistrust and fear. Additionally, the Department of Homeland Security has developed a one-page checklist for campaigns. The checklist assists the public in protecting itself against cybersecurity threats. In addition, there are resources like the FBI’s protected voices video series, an informative series of videos that are aimed at mitigating the risk of cyber influence targeting elections. Facebook launched additional security protections for candidates, elected officials, and political parties, which will adopt stronger account security protections against potential hacking.³⁴

³¹Racheldelange. (2019, November 13). Minority communities: Targets for disinformation ahead of 2020 election. Retrieved April 03, 2020, from <https://www.ncrintel.org/post/minority-communities-targets-for-disinformation-ahead-of-2020-election>

³²Racheldelange. (2019, November 13). Minority communities: Targets for disinformation ahead of 2020 election. Retrieved April 03, 2020, from <https://www.ncrintel.org/post/minority-communities-targets-for-disinformation-ahead-of-2020-election>

³³Rohrlich, J. (2020, March 20). How disinformation About coronavirus could impact the 2020 US election. Retrieved April 03, 2020, from <https://qz.com/1812811/how-coronavirus-disinformation-could-impact-2020-us-election/>

³⁴LaRose. (2020). Campaign Cybersecurity Resources. Retrieved April 08, 2020, from <https://www.ohiosos.gov/campaign-finance/campaign-cybersecurity-resources/>

Researchers and other officials in the study of computational propaganda have suggested many actions to be taken to reduce the effect of these campaigns. Researchers at the Public-Private Analytic Exchange Program have recommended the following interventions:³⁵

- Support for legislation that promotes transparency and authenticity of online political content, such as the Honest Ads Act, which would hold digital political advertising to the same disclosure requirements as those required for political advertisements on television, radio, and print media;
- Funding and support of research efforts that bridge the commercial and academic sectors. Academic research efforts could explore and understand the methodologies that contribute to targeted disinformation campaigns. This research would also identify the necessary tools to analyze disinformation across platforms, and understand what groups are most vulnerable to these campaigns;
- Establishment of an information sharing analysis organization to bring together government entities, research institutions, and private-sector platforms;
- Encouragement of media organizations to promote the need for healthy skepticism by their users when consuming online content; and
- Expansion of media literacy programs to build societal resilience in the face of disinformation campaigns.

Connectivity and the Near Future: COVID-19

Examples such the COVID-19 Pandemic, the 2020 Census and the 2020 highlight the relevance and importance of connectivity and display the widespread reliance on mobile devices for internet access, as well as the crucial need for internet access affordability and connectivity. Virtual spaces have become not only crucial to access information, but also to build civic engagement and community participation as leaders learn to adapt and manage events, a pandemic, and reinvent social environments. As a result, outreach and educational strategies are being revamped to bring timely and culturally appropriate information to Ohio residents directly at their homes through radio, television, print and social media.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Governor DeWine has created strike-force teams to deal with broad issues affecting the function of government and society. Through virtual communications, social media and the internet, information has been gathered, discussed and analyzed to build the required infrastructures that will help Ohio move forward. At the same time, Ohio has effectively been able to contain the radical impact of the pandemic due in good part to an ongoing social media and outreach campaign that relies on the participation of all citizens to ensure the safety of our society. None of this work could be possible without ample access to the internet, broadband, WiFi hotspots and the informal social networks that have driven information throughout Ohio.

³⁵Public-Private Analytic Exchange Program. (2019). Combating Targeted Disinformation Campaigns. Retrieved 2020, from https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/ia/ia_combatting-targeted-disinformation-campaigns.pdf

On April 20th 2020, Governor DeWine announced the formation of the Minority Health Strike Force in response to the fact that the virus has disproportionately impacted minority groups. Members of this working group are advising the Governor's team on needs they see in their communities in addition to best practices, communication and outreach strategies and ways to help those in need.³⁶

In order to explore ways to safely and effectively reopen Ohio's economy, Lieutenant Governor Jon Husted has continuously consulted with industry leaders to help shape public policy that can ensure the health and ability to work safely of employers and employees all around the state. Through this collaboration, workforce leaders and members that have kept essential operations going during the pandemic have communicated best practices to each other and to government leaders. The Ohio House of Representatives has also established a 2020 Economic Recovery Task Force that has received testimony from the business, manufacturing, retail, wholesale, service, and recreational sectors to discuss their experiences and explore ways to rebound Ohio's economy in a safe manner for both employees and customers.³⁷

Through various working groups and collaborations between the public and private sectors, stories of successes and lessons of what must be improved upon have come together to create a path forward. Based on these shared ideas, best practices, and data, the Governor's office has created a Responsible Restart Ohio plan to protect the health of employees, customers, and their families while supporting community efforts to control the spread of COVID-19.³⁸

Conclusion

The recent COVID-19 pandemic, Census 2020 efforts, and Ohio Primary Election have provided the opportunity for government officials to realize the importance of understanding how to connect, inform, educate, and receive feedback from Ohio residents. It is a fact that ethnic minorities, including Hispanics/Latinos depend heavily on technology to actualize and make sense of the world around them. Digital technology has a tremendous impact on the lives of Latinos, and yet, they are limited by the type of devices utilized to access information, relying mostly on mobile technology, and dealing with limitations including internet access in urban and rural settings. Their reality is a microcosm of what other minorities experience and adaptations are needed if we are to succeed in reaching out to ethnic minorities successfully.

³⁶Protecting Against COVID-19 Minority Health Strike Force. (2020). Retrieved June 5, 2020, from <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/MHSF/COVID-19-Minority-Health-Strike-Force.pdf>

³⁷Ohio House 2020 Economic Recovery Task Force. (2020). Retrieved June 5, from <http://ohiochannel.org/collections/ohio-house-2020-economic-recovery-task-force>

³⁸Responsible Restart Ohio. (2020). Retrieved June 25, 2020, from <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/responsible-restart-ohio/>

We are learning that having websites and information online may not be enough to effectively reach and serve the needs of the Hispanic/Latino community. Different communication channels adapted to how people consume information, bilingual materials, trusted advocates and leaders, and more personalized smaller bites of data are needed to quickly understand, process, and implement new behaviors and protect the community. In a rapidly changing environment, particularly as we face the COVID-19 pandemic, ethnic minority leaders are working tirelessly and collaborating with state government and its agencies to strengthen communication channels, information hotlines, and multilingual resources.

Minority groups are the most vulnerable to malicious disinformation attacks, especially when their reliance on social media for news and information is heavy and smartphone usage is high. The proactive work of Secretary of State Frank LaRose to combat disinformation campaigns is a crucial endeavor for Ohio. Among many other state agencies that are adapting to increased virtual communication with its public, the Ohio Department of Education is creatively implementing strategies to provide additional support to the “whole child” and is working diligently to build robust resources to assist students, parents, and community partners in completing the 2020 school year and preparing for the 2021 academic year. The Ohio Department of Health has done a tremendous job building the website coronavirus.ohio.gov with multilingual resources and a hotline to answer questions regarding COVID-19, and the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services is adapting [online resources](#) to meet the needs of Ohio’s residents with supports to alleviate the distress produced by the pandemic.

The Ohio Commission on Hispanic/Latino Affairs and its partners continue to advocate for strategies to meet the needs and those with limited access to technology and Ohioans who are Limited English Proficient (LEP.) This work builds on the existing collaboration among state agencies to ensure that messaging is consistent and adapted to reach vulnerable populations through the most trusted channels possible by engaging key trusted leaders, non-profits, grassroots organizations, and partners that are already deeply engaged in Ohio’s urban and rural communities.

The Commission will continue its work by focusing on efforts that:

- Support efforts to decrease the digital divide in Ohio and increase access to technology;
- Support policies that combat disinformation and work to increase voter engagement and civic participation;
- Build partnerships with state and local governments to develop outreach and communication strategies that address the unique needs of ethnic minorities and LEP to make multilingual resources the new normal;
- Promote the utilization of websites and social media to effectively distribute information;
- Increase outreach and education regarding cybersecurity geared to Latinos and ethnic minorities;
- Utilize social media to build communication and feedback channels; and
- Encourage the engagement of minorities through their trusted channels to increase their civic participation including elections, the census, and public health maintenance efforts.

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