

# LEARNING FROM NUESTRO TEXAS:

A Community-Centered Human Rights  
Campaign for Reproductive Justice in  
the Rio Grande Valley



**NATIONAL LATINA  
INSTITUTE** FOR  
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH  
*Salud | Dignidad | Justicia*

**CENTER  
FOR  
REPRODUCTIVE  
RIGHTS**



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## CENTER FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

For more than 25 years, the Center for Reproductive Rights has used the power of law to advance reproductive rights as fundamental human rights around the world.

We envision a world where every person participates with dignity as an equal member of society, regardless of gender. Where every woman is free to decide whether or when to have children and whether to get married; where access to quality reproductive health care is guaranteed; and where every woman can make these decisions free from coercion or discrimination.

## NATIONAL LATINA INSTITUTE FOR REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health (NLIRH) is the only national reproductive justice organization dedicated to advancing social justice and human rights for the 28 million Latinas, their families, and communities in the United States. NLIRH builds Latina power to guarantee the fundamental human right to reproductive health, dignity and justice. We elevate Latina leaders, mobilize our families and communities, transform the cultural narrative and catalyze policy change. Our vision is to create a society in which Latinas have the economic means, social capital, and political power to make and exercise decisions about their own health, family, and future.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In 2011, the Texas legislature slashed the state's family planning budget by two-thirds and restricted providers' ability to participate in low-cost women's health services. In combination with federal health care and immigration policies, this move created additional, and often insurmountable, barriers to reproductive health care—care that the United Nations defines as a universal human right—for low-income Latina immigrants living in the Texas Rio Grande Valley.

In response to the alarming and deteriorating conditions facing women in the Valley, the Center for Reproductive Rights (the Center) and the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health (NLIRH) collaborated with Latina activists of NLIRH's Texas Latina Advocacy Network (TX LAN) in the Rio Grande Valley to launch a campaign that would integrate international human rights language and accountability mechanisms into a locally led movement for reproductive health care access. Known as *Nuestro Texas* (Our Texas), the campaign ran from early 2013 through May 2016. The campaign's purpose was to bring visibility to individuals most impacted by state and federal policies that placed significant barriers in the way of low-income immigrant women's ability to access reproductive health care.

Important impacts resulting from the *Nuestro Texas* campaign include:

- An increase in activists' self-concept as agents of change and their capacity for leadership, community mobilization, and advocacy
- International awareness of, and responses to, human rights violations not commonly thought to exist in the United States
- An increased ability among policymakers, organizational allies, and the media to see and communicate about the interconnected human rights violations experienced by those living in the Valley

The purpose of this case study is to highlight the value of using the human rights framework in a domestic grassroots social justice campaign, articulate some of the lessons and questions that arose along the way, share the success of the campaign's strategies with other progressive social justice and human rights organizations, and inspire new examples of human rights-based organizing and advocacy.

*“There were women of all ages and people who came to listen to our testimony [at the human rights hearing]. Most importantly, the human rights experts were attentive as we tried to touch their hearts...We were just giving our testimony so they would understand the need and that there is poverty and discrimination here in the Valley.”*

*- Nuestro Texas Activist*

## THE NUESTRO TEXAS MODEL

Nuestro Texas consisted of five key strategies. When combined, these strategies provide a template for a human rights-based, grassroots organizing and advocacy model that may be applied to other social justice issues and communities in the United States. The campaign's five key strategies include:

- Listen First: Human Rights Documentation
- Invest in the Grassroots
- Develop Communications and Messaging with Impacted Women at the Center
- Advocate for Policy Change
- Raise International Awareness of U.S. Human Rights Violations

The campaign was developed around two core, interconnected commitments:

- **The Centrality of Women in the Community:** Nuestro Texas documented the lived experiences of women in immigrant communities in the Valley to shed light on barriers to reproductive health care access. The campaign built upon the activities of the NLIRH's Texas Latina Advocacy Network and invested resources in raising awareness, recruiting new activists, and supporting policy and legal advocacy. The campaign's partners developed strategic communications and messaging—in reports and in print, online, and social media—that focused on what women in the Valley had to say about their experiences as well as their self-agency and personal and community strength. The women around whom the campaign was centered were able to share their stories at the local, national, and international level; mobilize other community members; and influence the way ally organizations, and even policymakers, understood the impact of state and federal policies. These strategies centered on building the individual and community power of the women engaged and strengthening their resolve and determination to serve as agents of systemic change.
- **The Human Rights Framework:** The campaign articulated a human rights analysis throughout, ensured genuine participation of community members, and facilitated engagement with international human rights accountability mechanisms. Activists and partners provided testimony and reports to U.N. bodies, met with official U.N. experts, and held a human rights hearing and rally. Through these activities, Nuestro Texas stakeholders were able to draw attention to discrimination on the basis of income, gender, and immigration status as well as other violations marginalized under U.S. law.

Three major reports were developed and distributed during the course of the campaign as vehicles to support and amplify the campaign's core commitments. The reports include:

- *Nuestra Voz, Nuestra Salud, Nuestro Texas: The Fight for Women's Reproductive Health in the Rio Grande Valley* (November 2013)



- *Nuestro Texas: A Reproductive Justice Agenda for Latinas* (January 2015)
- *¡Somos Poderosas! A Human Rights Hearing in the Rio Grande Valley* (September 2015)

Nuestro Texas was overwhelmingly described by activists, partners, and allies as “inspiring” and “authentic.” Starting with and keeping the women and their stories at the center of the campaign’s messaging and community engagement activities built credibility and attracted community members, allies, and funders to join and provide support. Another successful tactic was using universal human rights language and strategies, including: (1) holding governments accountable through human rights laws and mechanisms, especially those tied to human rights treaties ratified by the United States, (2) alerting human rights groups and experts to the existence of the women of the Valley and their fight to hold the United States to universal standards, (3) explicitly linking issues to human rights violations to broaden support for the campaign’s goals beyond traditional reproductive health care access allies, and (4) integrating the concept of borderless rights into activism efforts, strengthening participants’ sense of empowerment and self-agency.

Nuestro Texas is not the first U.S. initiative to blend a commitment to a human rights framework with a grassroots campaign centered around those experiencing human rights violations. However, it represented a new level of success in terms of strategy and collaboration with partner organizations. Each partner organization’s contributions to the campaign were essential to its success. These include NLIRH’s history of support and authentic engagement with the local community and its policy expertise and relationships in the state, and the Center’s deep knowledge of international human rights mechanisms, capacity for legal analysis and advocacy, and strategic communications resources.

## LOOKING AHEAD

The experience of Nuestro Texas points to the unique value of a joint campaign by partners with complementary experience, skills, and commitments to both the human rights framework and authentic grassroots organizing and advocacy. As concern for the protection of human rights in the United States intensifies, this case study is intended to inspire dialogue, investment, and action to develop new models for human rights organizing and advocacy that will help bring the country into closer alignment with its international human rights obligations.

*“I learned from Nuestro Texas that I have great value. That I am a very important woman. That my voice can be heard in many places. And I am grateful to Nuestro Texas, because I am standing here with more strength, more energy, and I continue to fight every day.”*

*- Nuestro Texas Activist*

# INTRODUCTION



**SALUD  
DIGNIDAD  
JUSTICIA**

 NATIONAL LATINA INSTITUTE FOR REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH  
INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE LATINAS PARA LA SALUD REPRODUCTIVA  
[www.LatinaInstitute.org](http://www.LatinaInstitute.org)

**¡NO A LA  
DESCRIMINACIÓN!**

## A HUMAN RIGHTS HEARING IN TEXAS

On March 9, 2015, 17 women stepped up to a microphone one by one at a hearing in the town of McAllen in the Texas Rio Grande Valley. They told an audience consisting of seven human rights experts from the United States and Mexico, allies and staff from several local and national nonprofit organizations, local and state policymakers, and hundreds of members of their own community about the devastating hardships they faced by a lack of access to reproductive health care services. In spite of being recognized by the United Nations as a universal human right, women's reproductive health care—including cancer detection services, such as mammograms and Pap tests; treatment for illness; birth control; pre-natal care; and abortion—has never been easy to obtain for the Valley's women and families, most of whom live in poverty and many of whom lack documented immigration status. However, in recent years, state and federal policies have made accessing reproductive health care even harder.

## THE NUESTRO TEXAS CAMPAIGN

The human rights hearing in March was a high point in the Nuestro Texas campaign, which was initially launched in early 2013 by leaders of the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health (NLIRH) and the Center for Reproductive Rights (the Center) to bring international attention to the experiences of the Valley's women and to amplify the impact of long-standing grassroots activism by NLIRH's Texas Latina Advocacy Network (TX LAN). Conceived of after budget cuts by the Texas legislature in 2011 had gutted a statewide network of reproductive health providers, Nuestro Texas was jointly run through May 2016 and uniquely blended grassroots-led organizing and advocacy with sophisticated communications strategies and engagement with international human rights mechanisms.

## IMPACT AND OPPORTUNITY

The purpose of Nuestro Texas was to bring visibility to the individuals impacted by and organizing against state and federal policies that were hindering or preventing low-income immigrant women's access to reproductive health care. While policy change was an overarching goal, the campaign's aim was solidly grounded in the knowledge that current U.S. policy related to reproductive justice,<sup>1</sup> immigrants' rights, and a social safety net would require a far-reaching vision to support activism and change cultural norms over the long term. A retrospective evaluation revealed several important impacts of the campaign—on activists' self-concept and capacity for leadership, mobilization, and advocacy; on the international human rights community's awareness of and response to human rights violations in the United States; and on policymakers, organizational allies, and media representatives who learned and communicated in new ways with the public about the interconnected human rights violations experienced by those living in the Valley.

**The purpose of this report is to highlight the value of the human rights framework in a U.S.-based grassroots social justice campaign, articulate lessons and questions that arose, share the success of the campaign's strategies with other progressive social justice and human rights organizations, and inspire new examples of human rights organizing and advocacy.**





# BACKGROUND

## THE SETTING

The four counties of the Texas Lower Rio Grande Valley—Hidalgo, Cameron, Willacy, and Starr—encompass rural, suburban, and urban communities along the U.S.-Mexico border. Ninety-two percent of the population of 1.3 million is Latino.<sup>2</sup> More than one in three Valley residents live below the federal poverty line.<sup>3</sup> In 2013, when *Nuestro Texas* launched, an even higher proportion (38%) lacked health insurance.<sup>4</sup> A general lack of public transportation and the long distances that exist between Valley communities and affordable health care providers further increase the cost and difficulty of accessing medical care.<sup>5</sup>

The Valley is also home to a large number of community leaders and activists with deep roots in fighting for immigrants' human rights. The National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health's (NLIRH) Texas Latina Advocacy Network (TX LAN), *Nuestro Texas*' grassroots partner, counts more than 500 women as members who meet weekly in chapters throughout the region. Since 2007, TX LAN has been working as an extension of NLIRH's community mobilization strategy in Texas and has been organizing, educating, and leading advocacy campaigns for reproductive justice, including women's access to reproductive health care and immigrants' rights.

## THE HUMAN RIGHTS CONTEXT

The Valley's women and their families have experienced negative health outcomes, even death, due to a lack of access to reproductive health care. Barriers to accessing such care result from a confluence of three factors:

- U.S. Health Care Policy:** Texas has the highest rate of uninsured individuals in the country.<sup>6</sup> At the time of the battle to pass comprehensive national health care reform in 2010, there were over 6.2 million Texans without health insurance, the large majority of whom were Latinos. While the Affordable Care Act (ACA) helped reduce the number of uninsured, it excluded financial subsidies for undocumented immigrants and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients.<sup>7</sup> A U.S. Supreme Court ruling in 2012, which allowed states to refuse to expand federal Medicaid to make health insurance affordable for low-income residents,<sup>8</sup> permitted the exclusion of yet another segment of the population from health insurance coverage. Texas was one of the states that refused the Medicaid expansion, leaving low-income residents without critical health care.<sup>9</sup>
- U.S. Immigration Policy:** Many rights afforded to U.S. citizens are denied to individuals who enter or remain in the United States outside of legal channels whether for work, safety, or to rejoin loved ones. These immigrants and their families are subject to the ebbs and flows of enforcement policies and practices, which may include a lack of access to legal rights and protections, health care, education, and government benefits. They are also subject to deportation raids in their homes and public buildings. As a result, many women in the Valley must choose between getting the care they need and risking deportation if a medical appointment requires that they travel across a network of dozens of interior checkpoints throughout Texas, which extend up to 75 miles north of the Mexican border.
- Entrenched Fiscal and Social Conservatism in the Texas Legislature:** For decades, family planning providers have offered free or low-cost reproductive health care services at clinics in underserved and uninsured communities throughout Texas. Then in 2011, the Texas legislature cut the budget for family planning services by two-thirds and restricted providers' ability to participate in low-cost women's health services.<sup>10</sup> Two years later, the legislature passed HB2, a highly restrictive anti-abortion law, which resulted in a months-long closure of the Lower Rio Grande Valley's only remaining abortion clinic, Whole Woman's Health.<sup>11</sup> While the U.S. Supreme Court later overturned key provisions of HB2,<sup>12</sup> many of the clinics that were forced to shut down under the law remain closed, and the policy climate remains extremely hostile to women's access to abortion and other reproductive health care services.



## A RELEVANT MODEL AMID CHANGING POLICIES

Since the end of the Nuestro Texas campaign in May 2016, the landscape related to state funding, access to all health care, including reproductive health care, and policies and practices related to immigration has shifted.

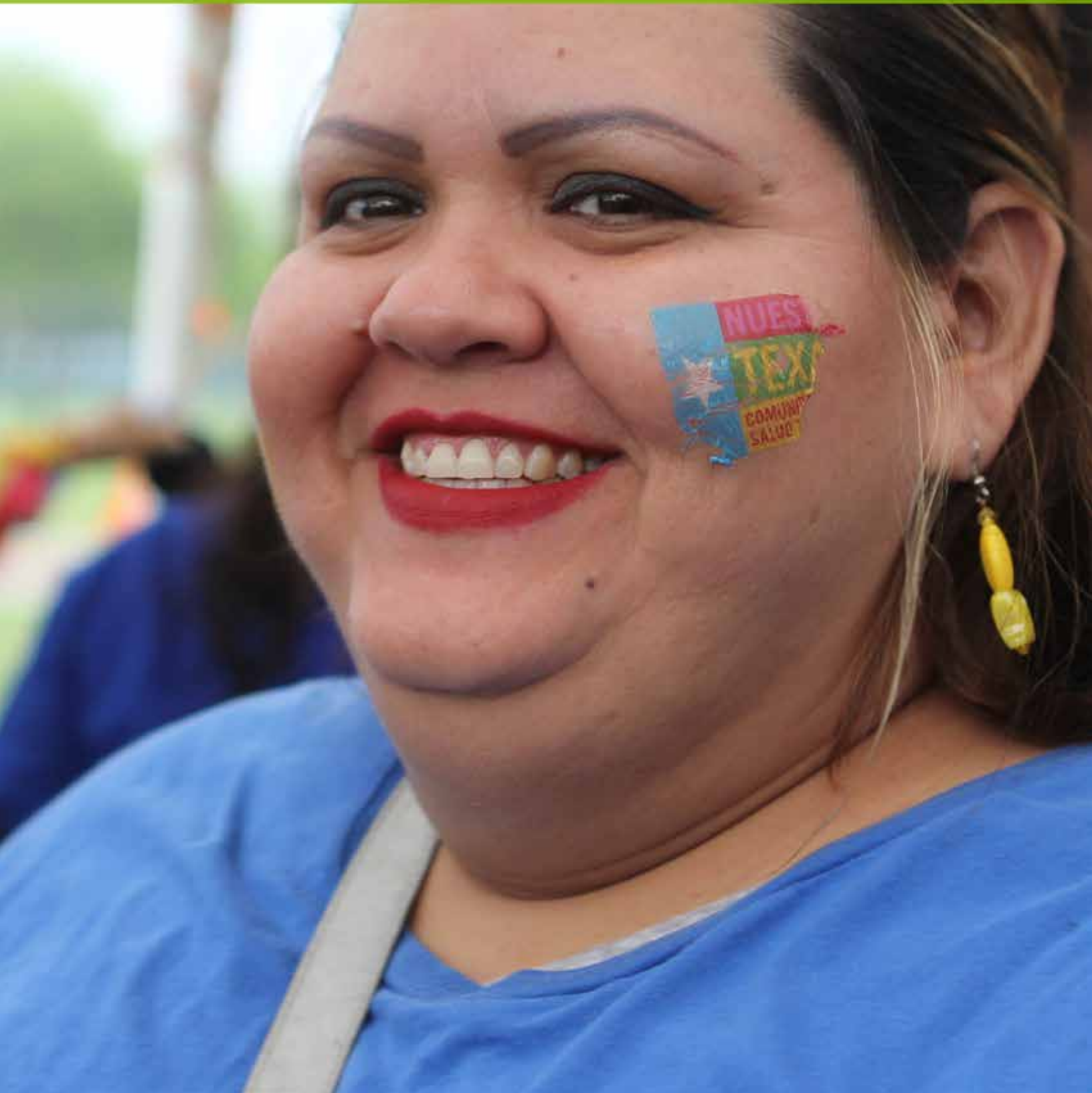
Today, DACA participants face new threats to their status and indiscriminate deportation raids are common. Additionally, the ACA has been hobbled by claims of religious exemption and funding reductions.<sup>13</sup> In this constantly changing environment, the lessons learned from using a human rights framework to advance a grassroots advocacy campaign are relevant in ongoing efforts by TX LAN and many social justice movements in the United States today.

*“Before the campaign, women were afraid that they would not be heard. Now they...visit lawmakers. They let them know why they need this service and how it has personally affected them and their community. I’ve seen an empowerment in women who have made changes in their lives.”*

*- Nuestro Texas Activist*



# THE NUESTRO TEXAS MODEL





## PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

The idea of Nuestro Texas originated from a desire by the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health (NLIRH) and the Center for Reproductive Rights (the Center) to deepen their partnership through work that would combine their respective strategies and capacities and further their organizational missions to advance reproductive rights, health, and justice.

National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health (NLIRH)	Center for Reproductive Rights (the Center)
Organizational Missions	
<p>NLIRH builds the power of Latinxs<sup>14</sup> through community organizing, civic engagement, and training and leadership development. It is a national organization with headquarters in New York City and Washington, D.C. and field offices in New York, Virginia, Texas, and Florida. The Texas Latina Advocacy Network (TX LAN) operates as part of NLIRH's community mobilization strategy and is an extension of NLIRH's voice and advocacy presence on the ground.</p>	<p>The Center uses the power of law to advance reproductive rights as fundamental human rights around the world. It is a global organization with headquarters in New York City and field offices in Washington, D.C. and on four other continents.</p>
Unique Contributions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deep connection with the local Latinx community and years of grassroots organizing.</li> <li>• On-site staff and experienced community leaders.</li> <li>• Relationships with Texas-based policymakers and organizational allies.</li> <li>• Activists with authenticity and credibility in speaking to media and policymakers about issues that directly affect them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comparatively large organizational capacity.</li> <li>• Legal and policy advocacy expertise.</li> <li>• Sophisticated communications capacity.</li> <li>• Relationships with human rights experts, academic researchers, and allies.</li> <li>• National and international human rights strategy expertise and experience leveraging a human rights framework for international, national, and local attention.</li> </ul>

## CORE COMMITMENTS AND STRATEGIES

Nuestro Texas was grounded in two core commitments:

- **Centrality of Women in the Community:** The Nuestro Texas campaign documented the lived experiences of women in immigrant communities in the Valley who had been personally impacted by the Texas family planning budget cuts to shed light on barriers to reproductive health care access. The campaign built upon the activities of TX LAN and included leadership and advocacy trainings, rallies, and other community actions to build awareness and recruit new activists. Efforts were also designed to support policy and legal advocacy to inform and influence court decisions likely to have an impact on legislative policy at the state and federal level.

The campaign's branding promoted several core messages, including self-agency, empowerment, and personal and community strength. The campaign's partners exercised consistent and coordinated attention to developing strategic communications and messaging—in reports and in print, online, and social media—that focused on what the women in the Valley had to say about their experiences. The campaign emphasized the women's power, capacity, and resourcefulness in battling multiple systemic barriers.

- **Human Rights Framework:** The language and normative framework of human rights, which affirms the dignity and intrinsic worth of all people, was central to the campaign's strategy. This framework draws on normative principles contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights treaties, some of which have been ratified by the United States.<sup>15</sup> The use of this framework also allowed for engagement with international human rights accountability mechanisms (e.g., human rights treaty monitoring processes).

The use of the human rights framework to bring reproductive health care access to the attention of the international human rights community was an unusual and innovative approach for a U.S.-based campaign. Activists and partners provided testimony and reports to U.N. bodies, met with U.N. experts, and held a human rights hearing and rally. By articulating a human rights normative analysis throughout the campaign, and by engaging with these human rights mechanisms, Nuestro Texas stakeholders were able to draw attention to discrimination on the basis of income, gender, and immigration status, as well as other rights violations that are often marginalized under U.S. law. And community members were able to mobilize and increase their leadership capacity throughout the process.

Nuestro Texas integrated five key strategies to put these core commitments into action:

- Listen First: Human Rights Documentation
- Invest in the Grassroots
- Develop Communications and Messaging with Impacted Women at the Center
- Advocate for Policy Change
- Raise International Awareness of U.S. Human Rights Violations

## A NEW CASE STUDY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING

Though innovative, Nuestro Texas is not the first U.S. initiative to blend the use of a human rights framework and accountability mechanisms with a grassroots campaign centered on those experiencing human rights violations. However, it is representative of a new level of success in terms of strategy and collaboration among the partner organizations, and offers lessons for future U.S. human rights advocacy efforts.

### **Reproductive Rights are Human Rights**

All individuals have reproductive rights. Reproductive rights include the right to make fundamental decisions about one's life and family, to access the reproductive health services necessary to protect one's health, and to decide whether and when to have children.<sup>16</sup>

These rights are grounded in fundamental human rights guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international and regional human rights treaties, including those ratified by the United States, and the U.S. Constitution.<sup>17</sup> They include the rights to life, health, equality, privacy, information, and education, as well as freedom from discrimination, violence, and torture or ill treatment.

Human rights are universal. Because human rights extend to everyone within a nation's territory, regardless of nationality,<sup>18</sup> human rights standards include equal access to reproductive health services for immigrants and migrants.<sup>19</sup>

# PUTTING THE NUESTRO TEXAS CAMPAIGN INTO ACTION





## NUESTRO TEXAS TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

- **December 2012:** National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health (NLIRH) and the Center for Reproductive Rights (the Center) conduct interviews and focus groups with women in the Valley to document the experiences of women in immigrant communities in the Valley and amplify their stories.
- **January 2013:** NLIRH and the Center partner to launch Nuestro Texas. Building on the prior organizing and messaging work of NLIRH's Texas Latina Advocacy Network (TX LAN), the campaign's central messaging focuses on "*las poderosas*" ("powerful women," as community activists with TX LAN are known) and personal and community strength. The campaign expands support for community organizing and grassroots leadership development.
- **Mid-2013:** The partners expand the scope of Nuestro Texas and, through the presentation of women's stories, bring the issue of barriers to reproductive health care access for immigrant communities in the U.S. to the attention of U.N. human rights treaty bodies and experts. Policy advocacy begins. These strategies continue throughout campaign.
- **November 2013:** The first Nuestro Texas report is published in print and online. Entitled *Nuestra Voz, Nuestra Salud, Nuestro Texas: The Fight for Women's Reproductive Health in the Rio Grande Valley*, the report centers on women's experiences, dignity, and strength.
- **November 2013-July 2014:** The partners and activists conduct a Texas tour, hosting briefings with local partners and elected officials in Austin, San Antonio, El Paso, Houston, Corpus Christi, and other communities in the Rio Grande Valley.
- **March 2014:** A NLIRH TX LAN staff member provides testimony to the U.N. Human Rights Committee in Geneva regarding the findings of the Nuestro Texas report and the stories of impacted women in the Valley, in conjunction with the Committee's review of U.S. compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- **January 2015:** The partners publish a legislative blueprint entitled *Nuestro Texas: A Reproductive Justice Agenda for Latinas*. Activists and NLIRH policy staff distribute the blueprint at the beginning of the Texas legislative session.
- **March 2015:** The activists and partners hold a human rights march, rally, and hearing in McAllen, Texas.
- **June 2015:** NLIRH, the Center, and the U.S. Human Rights Network host a Nuestro Texas Congressional Briefing in partnership with Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard and Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren in Washington, D.C.



- **September 2015:** The partners publish a report recounting the human rights hearing and associated events entitled *¡Somos Poderosas! A Human Rights Hearing in the Rio Grande Valley*.
- **December 2015:** Nuestro Texas activists are invited to present information to the U.N. Working Group on Discrimination against Women in Law and Practice.
- **January 2016:** Led by NLIRH, advocacy organizations draw on women's stories to file an *amicus curiae* brief in the U.S. Supreme Court case *Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt*; activists hold a rally outside the Court during oral arguments.
- **May 2016:** The Nuestro Texas campaign officially ends; however the TX LAN activists have taken ownership of it to continue its sustainability for themselves.
- **June 2016:** An outside evaluator conducts a retrospective evaluation of the campaign's processes, strategies, and impact.

Some facets of Nuestro Texas were natural outgrowths of earlier actions and strategies; others developed simultaneously. In order to convey the full campaign in a way that is easy to understand, the following discussion of the Nuestro Texas campaign is divided into five key strategies.

## LISTEN FIRST: HUMAN RIGHTS DOCUMENTATION

Nuestro Texas began and remained driven by the experiences of women in the Valley whose lives, families, and neighbors were directly affected by the state's 2011 family planning budget cuts. From the start, the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health (NLIRH) and the Center for Reproductive Rights (the Center) applied a human rights framework to the campaign, listening to and amplifying the women's voices in order to re-center public discussion away from questions of "costs and benefits" and toward the rights, resilience, and power of those most impacted.

In coordination with NLIRH's Texas Latina Advocacy Network (TX LAN), NLIRH and the Center launched the Nuestro Texas campaign and recruited 188 women willing to share how budget cuts had affected them and their families. They then worked with allies in nonprofit organizations and academic institutions to conduct one-on-one interviews and focus groups to collect participating women's stories. Researchers analyzed the data gathered through this process, and along with the partners, they shaped the themes and findings into a professionally-designed, accessibly-written report detailing the women's experiences. The report, entitled *Nuestra Voz, Nuestra Salud, Nuestro Texas: The Fight for Women's Reproductive Health in the Rio Grande Valley*, was published and disseminated in print and electronic formats beginning in November 2013. NLIRH and the Center developed a dedicated website and produced videos of campaign activities and the women's stories. They also invested in increasing staff capacity to support expanded organizing in the Valley.

By telling their stories of struggle and the power they found through activism, many women who had previously been uninvolved or quiet participants in TX LAN came to see themselves as leaders and agents of change. Nearly every activist reported an impact from Nuestro Texas on her self-concept. **The concept of human rights that transcend borders changed the understanding that many women in the Valley had about their experiences and their right to speak up, regardless of their immigration status.**

*"[Using the human rights framework, we] educate the community that we are born with rights and free will, we are the keepers of our bodies, and that nobody else can make decisions regarding our rights. Politicians cannot interfere with our rights."*

*- Nuestro Texas Activist*

*“There has been a movement of leaders who have organized and equipped themselves to raise their voice...things they previously did not do. They were afraid that they would not be heard and would be ignored. Now they are organizing and participating in activism. They visit lawmakers. They let them know why they need [reproductive health care] and how [not having] it has personally affected them and their community. I’ve seen an empowerment in women who have made changes in their lives.”*

- *Nuestro Texas Activist*

## INVEST IN THE GRASSROOTS

Nuestro Texas built upon NLIRH’s Texas Latina Advocacy Network (TX LAN)’s longstanding organizing and advocacy efforts. The organizational partners provided consistent investment in building community members’ capacity and expanding their roles as leaders in the campaign. These investments included:

- Staff and financial support for community mobilization, rallies, and other community actions developed by the women themselves to build awareness and recruit new activists.
- New opportunities for women interested in sharing their stories in the media or before policymakers and human rights experts.
- Leadership and advocacy trainings.
- Intensive preparation for advocacy events.

**Because of this support, campaign activists reported that they felt the partner organizations**

**trusted and respected their leadership and were committed to bringing resources and support to empower more people to become new and more effective leaders.**

Clear communication with activists aided the campaign’s success and women’s involvement. NLIRH and the Center communicated information about the campaign’s goals, strategies, and next steps to the activists in clear, easily accessible terms. TX LAN leaders, in turn, found innovative ways to educate and mobilize their family members and neighbors. For instance:

- After Nuestro Texas kick-off events throughout the state, TX LAN members built or strengthened activist hubs in four cities outside the Valley, with leaders committing to adopt Nuestro Texas strategies in their communities.
- Activists found ways to disseminate the campaign’s human rights framing and engage new community members, such as distributing Spanish-language copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at community events.
- Activists made presentations at churches to reach new audiences. After a pastor invited her to speak about reproductive health, one activist explained, “The use of human rights language opened this door.”
- Activists conceived of the idea to have an International Women’s Day march and associated community building activities for residents and visitors the day before the human rights hearing in March 2015.

With the tools and information they needed, community activists took ownership of the Nuestro Texas campaign and felt entitled to shape and sustain it themselves.



## DEVELOP COMMUNICATIONS AND MESSAGING WITH IMPACTED WOMEN AT THE CENTER

Strategic communications and messaging were integral to the development and implementation of Nuestro Texas from the beginning. Together, these tactics played a significant role in what people learned and acted on during the campaign and what they remembered after it officially ended.

The National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health (NLIRH) and the Center for Reproductive Rights (the Center) developed several reports highlighting the human rights, dignity, and power of the women in the Valley, all while shedding light on the human rights violations they experienced as a result of restrictive Texas and U.S. reproductive health care and immigration policies. These story-based reports were professionally designed, user-friendly, and employed a human rights analysis. Funders also expressed interest in the collaboration; several funders traveled to the Rio Grande Valley to witness the human rights hearing and one funder authored a piece on her foundation's blog about the model partnership and collaboration that the Nuestro Texas campaign fostered. **The Nuestro Texas reports engendered pride among community activists, organizational allies, and supporters; they also attracted engagement by current and potential allies, educated policymakers, media representatives, and the public, and garnered interest and support from funders.**

The values of “*Comunidad, Salud, y Familia*” (Community, Health, and Family) as well as “*las poderosas*” (“powerful women”), a term associated with the Nuestro Texas and NLIRH's Texas Latina Advocacy Network (TX LAN) activists, were featured prominently throughout the campaign. They were used in materials and on t-shirts worn by activists at organizing and advocacy events to convey the campaign's core messages of self-agency, empowerment, and personal and community strength.

**This campaign branding, which had been adopted from messaging developed by NLIRH and TX LAN prior to Nuestro Texas, resonated with and inspired countless community members and other stakeholders.**

Another impactful communications tool was storytelling. Videos of the Valley women re-telling their stories were uploaded to a Nuestro Texas website<sup>20</sup> (now hosted by NLIRH) that was established to describe the campaign, host resources, educate visitors, and encourage engagement. One activist remembered her video bringing a U.S. Congressional representative to tears as she watched the woman recount experiences she and fellow community members faced in the Valley. **Activists found that being able to show policymakers videos, via their cell phones, of women telling their stories was particularly helpful when conducting advocacy visits.**



*“I can now give examples of what I’m talking about. I can tailor my message depending on the group; they have shown us how: ‘This is the language you can use and the words that you can use with this type of person. For this other type of person, this is language and words that might have more impact.’ The tools they have given us have helped us identify how to deliver a particular message and how to respond to questions.”*

*- Nuestro Texas Activist*

NLIRH and the Center issued press releases and submitted letters to the editor often focusing on new report releases and organizing and advocacy events. Activists and NLIRH and Center staff spoke to reporters, on radio shows and podcasts, and on television programs with local and national coverage. **The combination of the authenticity of the women’s voices and a strategic communications approach resulted in the campaign and individual women’s experiences being widely reported in both media sources traditionally focused on progressive movements as well as mainstream outlets that do not typically include such coverage.**

*“They had a beautiful, colorful [report in the style of a magazine]. It was really powerful for people to see themselves in those beautiful photos. It made me feel good and filled with pride.”*

*- Nuestro Texas Activist*

## ADVOCATE FOR POLICY CHANGE

Throughout Nuestro Texas, partners supported the women's capacity to conduct policy and legal advocacy at both the state and federal level, centered around their stories and built on their grassroots activism. To support the campaign's overarching goal of enacting policy change:

- Activists provided testimony in state legislative hearings regarding the impact of the funding cuts and the importance of funding for women's preventive health care in 2013 and 2014.
- NLIRH submitted a letter on behalf of, and relaying the experiences of, the women of Nuestro Texas to the Texas Health and Human Services Commission in October 2014.
- Activists and local NLIRH staff conducted visits to elected representatives in their offices in the Valley, in the state capitol in Austin, and in Washington, D.C. They distributed the 2015 legislative blueprint and showed videos from the Nuestro Texas website.
- Activists provided public testimony to the Texas Senate Finance Committee in 2015, which was considering further changes to reproductive health policy and funding.
- Partner organizations, along with the U.S. Human Rights Network, held a congressional briefing in Washington, D.C. to elevate this work nationally.

*"I rely on their information, because they're the ones who know what's going on in the Valley. If it weren't for the work that they're doing, and the reports and the information that I get from them and some of their allies, I wouldn't be able to advocate or say anything about the Valley. But I can, because I have information from Nuestro Texas, and I know that same information goes to the other senators in the Valley."*

- Texas state Policymaker

Nuestro Texas materials and human rights messaging helped policymakers articulate the need for policy change to their legislative peers and broadened the audience they could engage in discussions about the fundamental human right to reproductive health care access. **Nuestro Texas policy advocacy increased state policymakers' awareness and understanding of the impact of state and federal policies on women's lives.**

Because court decisions impact policy, Nuestro Texas also included a legal advocacy component. A locally-based TX LAN staff member provided expert witness testimony at the trial court level to expose the impact of HB2, Texas' highly restrictive anti-abortion law. A van full of poderosas from Texas drove across state lines into New Orleans to rally outside the federal courthouse when the appeal was argued there. When the HB2 challenge made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court in the form of *Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt*, advocacy organizations led by NLIRH filed an *amicus curiae* brief in the case drawing upon the stories that women from Texas shared about their relevant experiences. Nuestro Texas activists also participated in a rally and spoke before a national audience outside the U.S. Supreme Court while the oral arguments for the case were occurring.

## RAISE INTERNATIONAL AWARENESS OF U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

When Nuestro Texas began, the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health (NLIRH) and the Center for Reproductive Rights (the Center) expected to create one report detailing women's stories that would be shared through various means and would strengthen community organizing and advocacy efforts. **However, widespread attention to the original report, the resonance of the human rights framework in Valley communities, expanded staff capacity for community organizing, new opportunities to leverage relationships with allies, and adoption of policies hostile towards immigrants and women's reproductive health care access, led them to expand their original vision and the scope of the campaign.** As part of this expanded vision and scope, NLIRH and the Center engaged strategically with the U.N. human rights system, primarily by sharing women's stories and related information with U.N. human rights treaty bodies and other human rights mechanisms.

In particular, the women's stories became the foundation for reporting on how the United States is meeting its obligations under the three human rights treaties that it has ratified. From 2013 through 2015, activists and the Center shared the experiences and stories of the women of the Valley in shadow reports, letters, and testimony to the following U.N. bodies: (1) the U.N. Human Rights Committee during its review of U.S. compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), (2) the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination during its review of U.S. compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and (3) the U.N. Committee Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment during its review of U.S. compliance with the Convention Against Torture. A NLIRH staff member and TX LAN leader based in the Valley also provided testimony to the U.N. Human Rights Committee in Geneva in 2014 in conjunction with the United States' ICCPR review.



In addition to human rights treaty reporting, the Center presented information and stories from the campaign to the U.N. Human Rights Council in the course of the United States' Second Universal Periodic Review in 2015. Activists also submitted information from the campaign to the U.N.

Working Group on Discrimination against Women in Law and Practice in preparation for that body's fact-finding visit to the United States and during the Working Group's meeting with Nuestro Texas activists in December 2015.

NLIRH and the Center also organized a human rights hearing in McAllen, Texas on March 9, 2015. At the hearing, family members, people from local communities, Nuestro Texas partners, allies and activists from near and far, and seven international human rights experts listened as 17 women testified about the impact the Texas family planning budget cuts were having on themselves, their families, and others in the community.

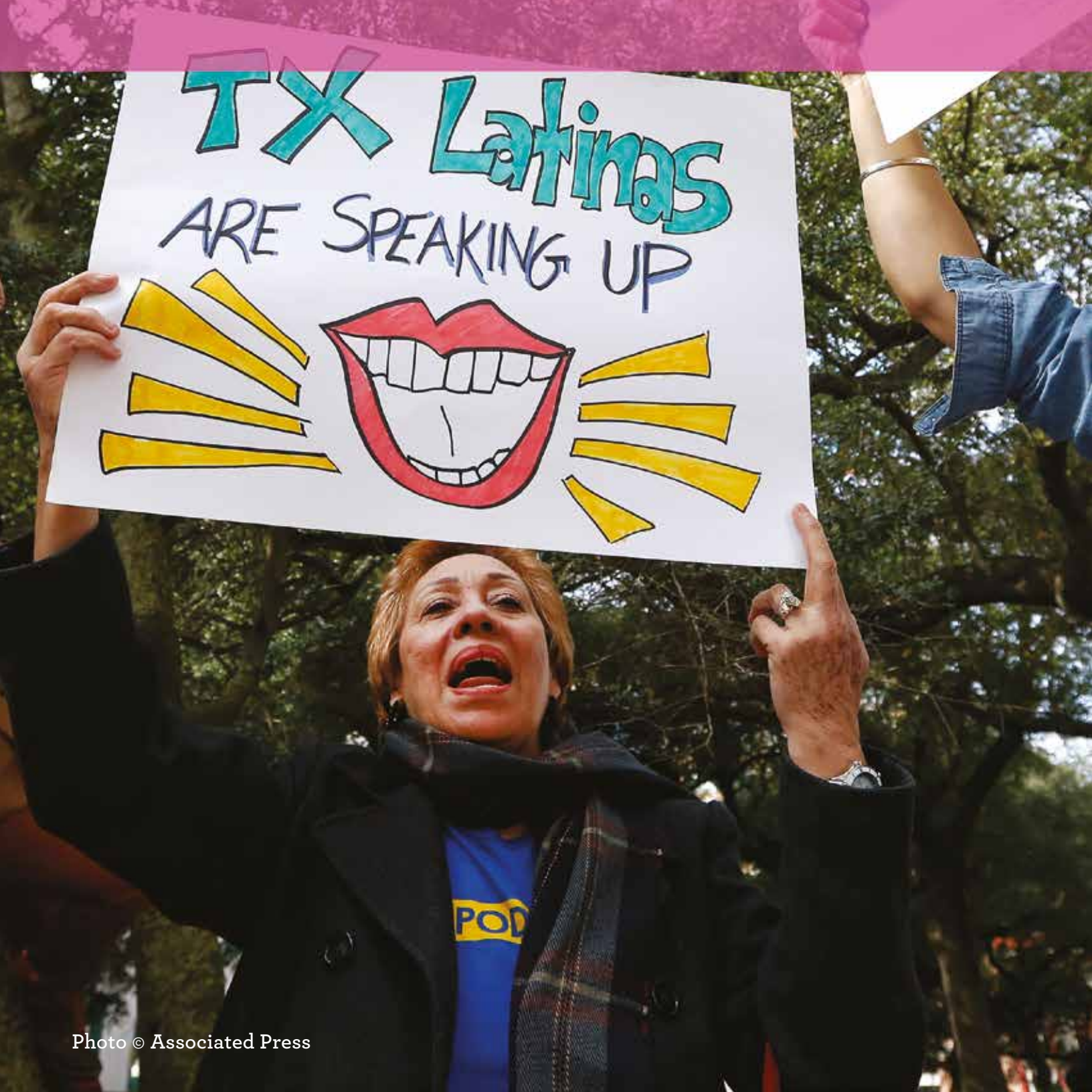
In addition, three Texas lawmakers provided encouraging messages via video. The testimony took place during a two-day event that included a community-led march, rally, and meeting where human rights experts met the campaign's activists and learned more about TX LAN's model for organizing and leadership development. The hearing and other events showcased the empowerment, creativity, and resilience of the women of the Valley in the face of many challenges to their basic human rights.<sup>21</sup>

**This engagement raised awareness among U.N. human rights experts of the barriers to reproductive health care faced by immigrant women living in the Valley, built an important international record of rights violations in this region, and resulted in a set of specific recommendations from human rights experts and the international community for policy reform in Texas.** For example, the U.N. Human Rights Committee recommended that the U.S. facilitate immigrants' broader access to adequate health care, including reproductive health care services.<sup>22</sup> In the course of the United States' Second Universal Periodic Review by the U.N. Human Rights Council, several countries recommended that the United States provide universal health care to all residents, regardless of citizenship status.<sup>23</sup> Nuestro Texas also was featured in a 2016 report by a member of the U.N. Secretary General's Independent Accountability Panel as an illustration of the strength of a campaign that combines community engagement with social accountability mechanisms.<sup>24</sup>

*"I found it very powerful that [the women testifying] were talking about themselves and their neighbors and the lack of access to reproductive health care, and that they talked about [needing] to take care of their own health for their families. Here were women who had some friends who had died and their kids had become foster kids. They were really rooted in their role as mothers and as part of families. It was powerful messaging, because it was really authentic, in that this was the way the community saw this issue."*

*- Human rights expert reflecting on the March 9, 2015 human rights hearing*

# TAKING STOCK: THE IMPACT OF NUESTRO TEXAS



## The Impact of Nuestro Texas in Context

The U.S. policy context made it unrealistic for Nuestro Texas to fully achieve its policy aims by the end of the campaign. However, the impacts cited in this section have been identified as critical building blocks for sustainable change in systems, social norms, and a community's sense of power, without which legislative gains, effective policy implementation, and a sustainable expansion of individuals' access to specific rights are not likely to occur. Two complementary frameworks for how social change happens are helpful in understanding the impact of the Nuestro Texas campaign:<sup>25</sup>

- The Grassroots Theory of Change describes a process in which individuals are mobilized around an issue and provided with tools to shift social norms, strengthen their base of support, and build their capacity for advocacy with decision makers. This increased capacity leads to further shifts and increase in support which, in turn, enable grassroots activists to catalyze changes in policy and conditions.<sup>26</sup>
- The Large Leaps Theory of Change explains a process that begins with framing an issue, mobilizing new actors, and garnering media attention followed by strengthening alliances, building visibility, and increasing support. These actions lead to shifts in social norms and increased political and public will for an issue. Ultimately, activists are able to change policies and conditions.<sup>27</sup>

There were many impacts resulting from Nuestro Texas. Below are the most significant outcomes cited by multiple campaign stakeholders.<sup>28</sup>

**Women in the Valley experienced greater visibility regarding the issues they face and their ability to organize for change.** Many activists said that they and others in their community felt a sense of “coming out of the shadows” in relation to the struggles they were facing in accessing reproductive health care access given their economic and immigration status. Moreover, visibility led to further activism, as hearing others' stories influenced women, their spouses, their children, and older members of the community to become involved in a campaign that encompassed multiple issues touching their lives, even if reproductive health care was not a personal concern at that moment.



After participating in Nuestro Texas events, organizational allies said they understood more about the lack of women's access to health care and the impact of policies on their lives. Nuestro Texas also was highly effective in raising awareness among international human rights experts and treaty monitoring bodies, and it inspired responses from those bodies. A Mexican-based human rights expert who participated in the human rights hearing in the Valley in 2015 was inspired to replicate the event, hosting the first women's human rights tribunal in Mexico City with the Mexican reproductive rights advocacy organization, *Grupo de Información en Reproducción Elegida* (GIRE), in May 2016.

*"We are in a country where we deserve equality and to respect one another, our opinions, and way of thinking. More than anything, it is about respecting that we are all equal, that we are human, that we are citizens, and have the same rights."*

- *Nuestro Texas Activist*

**Nearly every activist said the campaign changed the way she saw herself.** The concept of universal human rights changed the understanding that many women in the Valley had about their experiences and their right to speak up, regardless of their immigration status. More than one woman said her involvement in Nuestro Texas had led to a male partner's interest in the activities of the campaign and in his own health care, and increased respect. By telling their stories of struggle and determination, women who had previously been uninvolved or quiet participants in the National Latina Institute for

Reproductive Health's (NLIRH) Texas Latina Advocacy Network (TX LAN) came to understand themselves as leaders and agents of change.

**Grassroots community mobilization and leadership grew.** Nuestro Texas attracted new participants to TX LAN in active, sustained engagement. After the campaign, participants in activist focus groups credited the campaign's emphasis on leadership development and education with building their confidence in leading and helping to engender a sense of solidarity within the broader community. All of the focus group participants felt strongly that they were "true leaders" of the campaign, and that they were not simply following plans set forth by the partners. When Nuestro Texas officially ended, activists said they intended to continue to use the name and strategies to fight for "our Texas," to make the state a better place for future generations. As of the publication of this report, activists still regularly distribute a Spanish version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at their meetings, and an organization, the *Frontera Fund*, co-founded in 2016 by a woman inspired by her participation in Nuestro Texas, continues to link allies and community members to resources and opportunities for activism.

**The human rights framework of Nuestro Texas linked social justice movements, organizations, and strategies.** Throughout the campaign, allied organizations working on immigrant rights joined in dialogue and actions related to abortion access, reproductive health care, and human rights. Similarly, economic justice organizations and LGBTQ<sup>29</sup> activists joined conversations about human rights, immigrant rights,



and reproductive justice.<sup>30</sup> Understanding the necessity for intersectional, cross-issue, work led to new collaborations, such as the Human Rights Coalition of South Texas, which was launched by a Nuestro Texas ally to support a range of human rights in border communities. In addition, Nuestro Texas drew international attention to linked human rights issues in the United States. Experts in the human rights movement and members of U.N. treaty monitoring bodies learned how immigrant women in the United States were being denied the right to reproductive health care access, and used their leverage to bring attention to the Nuestro Texas campaign and issues facing women in the Valley throughout their respective spheres of influence.

**Nuestro Texas successfully framed the conversation in the media, making clear connections between human rights, reproductive rights, and immigrant rights.**

A media analysis conducted on 102 pieces of earned media about Nuestro Texas, its publications, and the campaign's related advocacy activities<sup>31</sup> found that by keeping women's experiences as the central focus, Nuestro Texas helped raise awareness of laws and policies restricting access to reproductive health care in Texas and the individuals whose lives were most impacted. The majority of coverage (62%) articulated the connection between human rights and the work of Nuestro Texas to expand reproductive health care access, and a similar percentage (60%) made the link between immigration policy and access to reproductive health care.

**Nuestro Texas softened the ground for policy influence by supporting community members' participation in the policy process and increasing policymakers' attention on the need for responsive policy.**

Activists reported an increased sense of power in the policy process, even as policymakers and other stakeholders acknowledged that the political environment, especially in Texas, prevented Nuestro Texas from reaching its ultimate policy goals. One state policymaker, and many Nuestro Texas stakeholders, believed that the campaign had a role in positive legislative policy decisions, including the partial restoration of Texas family planning funds in 2013 and in later years. The campaign also helped raise awareness and strengthen relationships that partner staff and activists had with four Texas state representatives and two members of the U.S. Congress. In interviews, three veteran policymakers affirmed the value of the campaign's community mobilization, advocacy, and messaging in laying the foundation for increasing support among their legislative colleagues and constituents and, they hope, for concrete policy gains in the future.

*"The Nuestro Texas campaign tools helped inform members of Congress about why women's health should be, for example, prioritized when people talk about immigration reform. There are examples of how the women's stories were integrated into legislators' talking points or even into their sponsorship of legislation."*

*- Nuestro Texas Partner*

**Organizational learning from the Nuestro Texas campaign strengthened the capacity for authentic collaboration among partners and their respective commitments to reproductive justice and human rights movement-building strategies.**

NLIRH and the Center for Reproductive Rights (the Center) launched Nuestro Texas with mutual respect and a commitment to leverage their distinctive strengths and resources. They learned from each other's processes and priorities and, at times, adopted new priorities and strategies for the campaign within their own organizations. Key lessons include:

*"The most significant change for NLIRH was bringing what had been a human rights 'framework' into a more tangible campaign with real strategies. It became much more of a tool, rather than just a set of principles that had been underlying a lot of the overarching frame and narrative of [our] work but hadn't been translated into actual, specific work."*

*- Representative of NLIRH involved in Nuestro Texas*

- Authentic power-sharing — between the organizational partners, and between partners and grassroots community activists — was critical for making Nuestro Texas a campaign that many called "inspiring."
- A partner with local and state roots was critical for establishing credibility among policy makers, local ally organizations, and the media.
- Funding was important. It made the professional quality of the reports, adequate staffing, and large non-local attendance of the human rights hearing and surrounding activities possible.

*"Even though the Center has been doing human rights work for a long time, I think this was the campaign that really broke through and showed what it meant, for example, to center those most [impacted]... and give them a platform, so that they are empowered to advocate for themselves."*

*- Representative of the Center involved in Nuestro Texas*



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# REFLECTIONS ON THE CAMPAIGN





The Nuestro Texas campaign offers many lessons for U.S. social justice and human rights activists. It also raises questions for ongoing discussion.

### What is the value of investing in a human rights-based approach to social justice in the United States?

The human rights framework of Nuestro Texas (1) highlighted opportunities to hold governments accountable using human rights laws and mechanisms, especially those tied to human rights treaties ratified by the United States; (2) alerted human rights groups and experts to the existence of the women of the Valley and their fight to hold the United States accountable to universal standards; (3) explicitly linked issues in a way that broadened support for the campaign's goals beyond traditional reproductive health care access allies; and (4) integrated the concept of borderless rights into the campaign participants' activism, strengthening their sense of empowerment and self-agency.

At the same time, there was a risk of political backlash from Texas state legislators who have associated the use of a human rights framework with an attempt at international control of the United States or individual states. However, the majority of Nuestro Texas stakeholders expressed a belief that the benefits outweighed this risk, citing the remarkable enthusiasm the campaign generated and the potential it had to bring together allies for a stronger movement.

**Lesson learned:** Some stakeholders felt the lack of an integrated evaluation strategy made it difficult to discern whether the Nuestro Texas model achieved its goals or had a unique impact. The retrospective evaluation commissioned at the end of the campaign gathered dozens of stakeholders' insights, assessments, and impressions of the campaign and included extensive documentation and media analysis. However, integration of an evaluation plan during the planning phases of the initiative would have made a more robust analysis at the end possible. Future initiatives should integrate an evaluation component from the outset to better measure the impact of said campaign.

## How does a human rights framework change cultural and political norms?

Framing women's experiences in terms of internationally recognized human rights gave many women, their families, and community members a new sense of self-worth, and validated the importance of speaking up about their experiences. Partners' dissemination of human rights-based campaign messaging to media outlets led to a different kind of reporting; instead of stories about individual victims of circumstance, most media reports were about women speaking up and acting

together to change the policies causing hardship for them, their families, and their community.

Nuestro Texas also laid groundwork for changing political norms: the human rights framework gave policymakers and allies new language to broaden support beyond traditional audiences of the campaign's core issues.

*"If you're asking whether adding human rights to advocacy for reproductive health care access allows us to reach that goal more quickly or effectively or cost-effectively, that is the wrong question. Changing laws and policies will affect health systems and access, but when people act as claimants of human rights, it's really about allowing people to live lives of dignity."*

*- Nuestro Texas Organizational Ally*

**Lesson learned:** Partners expressed concern that activists and allies would have expectations of policy change in the short term. At the same time, others felt that the "aspirational" nature of the campaign was one of its strengths. Any campaign with similar goals and strategies should be clear about short- and long-term expectations for results and how long investment in the campaign will be sustained.

## What mobilizes communities for reproductive justice?

Nuestro Texas was overwhelmingly described by activists, partners, and allies as "inspiring" and "authentic." Keeping the women and their stories at the center of community engagement and messaging built the credibility of the campaign and attracted community members, allies, and funders to join and support the campaign. Leveraging new human rights mechanisms to call attention to the women's lives at national and international levels further contributed to mobilization.

**Lesson learned:** A concern raised by allies was that community members could feel exploited if the excitement that their stories generated became more important than the actual needs, goals, and leadership of the people most impacted by the injustice highlighted in those stories. It is important for organizations in any similar campaign to communicate early, often, and effectively how stories will be used, how risks will be mitigated, how anonymity will be protected (if that is important, as it was for many women of the Valley), and what might realistically be lost or gained as a result of a storyteller's openness.



### What is important for a strategic partnership to be successful?

Each partner organization's contributions to the campaign—NLIRH's history of support and authentic engagement with the local community and in Texas, and the Center's deep knowledge of international human rights mechanisms, legal capacity, and strategic communications resources were essential to the campaign's success.

**Lesson learned:** Occasionally, extra effort was required to maintain each partners' commitment to equitable power and input into each aspect of the campaign. Honest conversations throughout the duration of the campaign helped address the occasional need to better align resources and expertise to meet mutual goals. Stakeholders were unwavering in their assessment that the benefits of pairing a relatively lean national organization with a robust cadre of community-based leaders with local credibility and a well-resourced national organization possessing international human rights and legal expertise outweighed the challenges. Their dedication to power-sharing, transparency, and learning from each other were key to the campaign's success.

# THE WAY FORWARD





Nuestro Texas helped inspire, unite, and build the capacity of Latinas and their communities in the Texas Rio Grande Valley to lead a movement for positive change. Evidence shows that information about the campaign has reached audiences well beyond the direct stakeholders and original geographic focus, including health care providers based outside of the Valley and convenings of community health providers and social justice organizers in Texas and other states. The National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health's (NLIRH) Texas Latina Advocacy Network (TX LAN) had successfully mobilized long before this campaign. However, accounts of activists, allies, partners, and policymakers as well as signs of its broad and lasting reach all point to the unique value of a joint campaign by partners with complementary experience, skills, and commitments to both the human rights model and authentic grassroots organizing and advocacy.

**While the Nuestro Texas campaign has concluded, the urgency to protect and reassert human rights in the United States has intensified. This case study is intended to inspire dialogue, investment, and action in developing new models for human rights grassroots organizing and advocacy to move toward the full realization of human rights for all communities.**

*“The Nuestro Texas campaign was something very important in my life. I learned how to raise my voice so that people would listen, and I learned that every one of our voices could be heard. When they told me that I could do a video for Nuestro Texas, I didn’t hesitate. It wasn’t easy, but I did it. My goal was that my voice would be heard by many women, and then they would be able speak without any fear. Nuestro Texas had a big impact on me...I know that it helped a lot of women a great deal. And it continues in the lives of every woman.”*

- Nuestro Texas Activist

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Photographs of individuals in this report were taken during the Nuestro Texas campaign and are used with the permission of the campaign.

Korwin Consulting, an evaluation and planning firm, advances social justice solutions by identifying community strengths, building organizational capacity, and evaluating impact. More information on Korwin Consulting is available at [www.korwinconsulting.com](http://www.korwinconsulting.com).

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- Sophie Punkar, Evaluation Assistant

## ENDNOTES

- 1 NLIRH defines reproductive justice as all people having the economic, social, and political power and means to make decisions about their bodies, sexuality, health, and family, with dignity and self-determination.
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- 4 Sarah Varney, *Texas' Struggling Rio Grande Valley Presses for Medicaid Expansion*, KAISER HEALTH NEWS (May 21, 2013), <https://khn.org/news/texas-border-counties-medicaid/>.
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- 8 Nat'l Fed'n of Indep. Bus. v. Sebelius, 567 U.S. 519 (2012).
- 9 U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE IN THE UNITED STATES: 2016 18 (Sept. 2017), <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2017/demo/p60-260.pdf>.
- 10 See ¡SOMOS PODEROSAS!, *supra* note 5, at 9. As of April 2018, four states prohibit the use of family planning funds for abortion counseling and referral, and 11 states restrict certain providers from receiving state funds. This legislation is typically aimed at providers who also offer abortion services, namely Planned Parenthood, but it has a broader impact on all specialized family planning providers. See also *State Family Planning Funding Restrictions*, GUTTMACHER INSTITUTE (Apr. 1, 2018), <https://www.guttmacher.org/state-policy/explore/state-family-planning-funding-restrictions>; *Title X in Your State*, NATIONAL FAMILY PLANNING & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH ASSOCIATION (Nov. 2017), <https://www.nationalfamilyplanning.org/pages/issues/nfprha-interactive-map>; Kari White et al., *The Impact of Reproductive Health Legislation on Family Planning Clinic Services in Texas*, 105 AM. J. PUB. HEALTH 5, 851-58 (2015).
- 11 H.B. 2, 83d Leg., 2d Spec. Sess. (Tex. 2013).
- 12 Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt, 136 S.Ct. 2292 (2016).
- 13 See, e.g., Miriam Jordan, *'Dreamer' Plan That Aided 800,000 Immigrants Is Threatened*, NEW YORK TIMES (Aug. 27, 2017), <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/27/us/politics/dreamers-trump-lawsuit.html>; *The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Condemns Ending of Undocumented Youth Program*, U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS (Sept. 8, 2017), <http://www.usccr.gov/press/2017/09-08-DACA.pdf>; Kristen Bialik, *ICE Arrests Went Up in 2017, With Biggest Increases in Florida, Northern Texas, Oklahoma*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (Feb. 8, 2018), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/02/08/ice-arrests-went-up-in-2017-with-biggest-increases-in-florida-northern-texas-oklahoma/>; *Affordable Care Act (ACA)*, GUTTMACHER INSTITUTE, <https://www.guttmacher.org/united-states/contraception/affordable-care-act-aca> (last visited Apr. 16, 2018); Adam Sonfield, *Despite Leaving Key Questions Unanswered, New Contraceptive Coverage Exemptions Will Do Clear Harm*, GUTTMACHER INSTITUTE (Oct. 17, 2017), <https://www.guttmacher.org/article/2017/10/despite-leaving-key-questions-unanswered-new-contraceptive-coverage-exemptions-will>.
- 14 Conscious of the importance of gender equity, NLIRH utilizes the gender-neutral term “Latinx,” which challenges the gender binary in the Spanish language and embraces the diversity of genders that are often made invisible.
- 15 The U.S. voted in favor of U.N. adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Among the international human rights treaties ratified by the U.S. are the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1992, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in 1994, and the Convention against Torture (CAT) in 1994. For a complete list of human rights treaties ratified and not ratified by the U.S., see *Status of Ratification Interactive Dashboard*, OHCHR, <http://indicators.ohchr.org/> (last visited Apr. 6, 2018).
- 16 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), U.N. GAOR, 21st Sess., Supp. No. 16 at 52, arts. 2(1), 3, 6(1), 17, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966) [hereinafter ICCPR]; International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, G.A. Res. 2106 (XX), Annex, U.N. GAOR, 20th Sess., Supp. No. 14 at 47, art 5(e)(iv), U.N. Doc. A/6014 (1966) [hereinafter ICERD]; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, G.A. res. 34/180, U.N. GAOR, 34th Sess., Supp. (No. 46) at 193, arts. 1, 10, 12, U.N. Doc. A/34/46, 1249 (1980) [hereinafter CEDAW]; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), U.N. GAOR, 21st Sess., Supp. No. 16 at 49, arts. 2(2), 12, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966) [hereinafter ICESCR]; International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, Egypt, Sept. 5-13, 1994, *Programme of Action*, Principle 8, ¶ 7.2, U.N. Doc. A/CONF.171/13/Rev.1 (1995) [hereinafter ICPD Programme of Action]; Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, China, Sept. 4-15, 1995, *Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action*, ¶¶ 89-92, U.N. Doc. A/CONF.177/20 (1995); World Conference on Human Rights, June 14-25, 1993, *Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action*, ¶ 18,



- U.N. Doc. A/ CONF.157/23 (1993). See also Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment No. 22 (2016) on the Right to Sexual and Reproductive Health (Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)*, ¶ 5, U.N. Doc. E/C.12/GC/22 (2016) [hereinafter CESCR General Comment No. 22] (“The freedoms include the right to make free and responsible decisions and choices, free of violence, coercion and discrimination, regarding matters concerning one’s body and sexual and reproductive health. The entitlements include unhindered access to a whole range of health facilities, goods, services and information.”); Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment No. 14, the Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health (Art. 12)*, ¶ 21, U.N. Doc. E/C.12/2000/4 (2000) [hereinafter CESCR General Comment No. 14] (“The realization of women’s right to health requires the removal of all barriers interfering with access to health services, education and information, including in the area of sexual and reproductive health.”); Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right of Everyone to the Enjoyment of the Highest Attainable Standard of Physical and Mental Health*, GAOR, 61st Sess., ¶ 17, U.N. Doc. A/61/338 (Sept. 13, 2006) (affirming that all women are entitled to reproductive health care services that are available in adequate numbers; accessible physically and economically; accessible without discrimination; and of good quality).
- 17 ICPD Programme of Action, *supra* note 16, ¶ 7.3 (“[R]eproductive rights embrace certain human rights that are already recognized in national laws, international human rights documents and other consensus documents. These rights rest on the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. It also includes their right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence, as expressed in human rights documents.”).
  - 18 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, G.A. Res. 217 (III) A, art. 2, U.N. Doc. A/RES/217(III) (Dec. 10, 1948) (“Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”); Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), 64th Sess., Feb. 23-Mar. 12, 2004, *General Recommendation No. 30, Discrimination Against Non-Citizens*, ¶ 3, U.N. Doc. CERD/C/64/Misc.11/rev.3 (2004) (while noting that voting rights may be confined only to citizens, “human rights are, in principle, to be enjoyed by all persons. States parties are under an obligation to guarantee equality between citizens and non-citizens in the enjoyment of these rights to the extent recognized under international law.”).
  - 19 The U.S. has ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), which imposes a binding duty on the U.S. to eliminate discrimination in the right to health. ICERD, *supra* note 16, ¶ 47, art. 5. The right of non-citizens to access healthcare is affirmed in the CERD Concluding Observations to multiple state parties, including the United States. See *Concluding Observations on the combined seventh to ninth periodic reports of the United States of America*, ¶ 15, U.N. Doc. CERD/C/USA/CO/7-9 (Aug. 29, 2014). See also CESCR General Comment No. 14, *supra* note 16, ¶ 12, 34; CESCR General Comment No. 22, *supra* note 16, ¶ 16, 22.
  - 20 NUESTRO TEXAS, <http://www.nuestrotexas.org/>.
  - 21 See generally *¡Somos Poderosas!*, *supra* note 5.
  - 22 Human Rights Comm., *Concluding Observations on the Fourth Periodic Report of the United States of America*, ¶ 15, CCPR/C/USA/CO/4 (Apr. 23, 2014) (recommending that the U.S. “identify ways to facilitate access to adequate health care, including reproductive health-care services, by undocumented immigrants and immigrants and their families who have been residing lawfully in the United States for less than five years”).
  - 23 Human Rights Council, 13th Sess., *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: United States of America*, ¶ 176, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/30/12 (July 20, 2015).
  - 24 INDEPENDENT ACCOUNTABILITY PANEL, 2016: OLD CHALLENGES, NEW HOPES: ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE GLOBAL STRATEGY FOR WOMEN’S, CHILDREN’S AND ADOLESCENTS’ HEALTH (2016), [http://www.iapreport.org/downloads/IAP\\_Report\\_September2016.pdf](http://www.iapreport.org/downloads/IAP_Report_September2016.pdf).
  - 25 For concise discussion and further practical application of these and several other relevant theories of change, see SARAH STACHOWIAK, PATHWAYS FOR CHANGE: 10 THEORIES TO INFORM ADVOCACY AND POLICY CHANGE EFFORTS (2013), [http://orsimpact.com/DirectoryAttachments/132018\\_13248\\_359\\_Center\\_Pathways\\_FINAL.pdf](http://orsimpact.com/DirectoryAttachments/132018_13248_359_Center_Pathways_FINAL.pdf).
  - 26 See SAUL D. ALINSKY, RULES FOR RADICALS: A PRAGMATIC PRIMER FOR REALISTIC RADICALS (1989); DOUGLAS P. BIKLEN, COMMUNITY ORGANIZING THEORY AND PRACTICE (1983). For documentation related to the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health strategic plan and theory of change, see *Strategic Plan*, NATIONAL LATINA INSTITUTE FOR REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, <http://www.latinainstitute.org/en/strategic-plan> (last visited Apr. 9, 2018).
  - 27 FRANK R. BAUMGARTNER AND BRYAN D. JONES, AGENDAS AND INSTABILITY IN AMERICAN POLITICS (1993).
  - 28 The insights and observations in this report are based on a retrospective evaluation process that included extensive review of print and online materials, media reports, 24 stakeholder interviews, and two activist focus groups in the Valley involving 13 women, ages 25-68. The data was almost

exclusively qualitative in nature. The need for a more robust and early evaluation process in future work is raised in the Lessons section. This report is intended to be a brief case study. Nuestro Texas partners have many examples for each of the impacts presented here in the full internal retrospective evaluation report completed in April 2017.

- 29 Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer.
- 30 Among the diverse groups who joined as allies in some aspect of the campaign were: NARAL ProChoice Texas, Planned Parenthood Texas Votes, Progress Texas, ACLU of Texas, Center for Public Policy Priorities, Texas Women's Health Care Coalition, Texas Freedom Network, the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, and the US Human Rights Network. Local groups who were involved at various points in the campaign included Movimiento del Valle, Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid, South Texans for Reproductive Justice, Aquí Estamos RGV, Access Esperanza Clinic, and Fuerza del Valle. The Mexican Consulate of McAllen also participated in events that Nuestro Texas organized during the visit of the UNWG/DAW.
- 31 Earned media is defined here as coverage that required an entity other than a Nuestro Texas partner organization to make a decision to run.



**NATIONAL LATINA  
INSTITUTE** FOR  
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH  
*Salud | Dignidad | Justicia*

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FOR  
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RIGHTS**