



The League of United Latin American Citizens

Photo courtesy of LULAC, the nation's oldest and largest Latino civil rights organization.



The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) began in 1929 in Corpus Christi, Texas, when delegates from Alice, Austin, Brownsville, Corpus Christi, Encino, Harlingen, La Grulla, McAllen, Robstown, and San Antonio came together to lay the foundation for an organization that would bring together the various groups that had been working on the rights of Mexican Americans. While LULAC initially brought together three of the best known Hispanic groups in Texas—the Knights of America, the Order of Sons of America, and the League of Latin American Citizens—other groups were reluctant to join. LULAC seeks to promote Hispanic pride in a society that is bilingual and bicultural. Some groups have advocated civil disobedience or even rebellion against Anglo authorities, but LULAC emphasizes assimilation into American culture and loyalty to the United States and its government. LULAC has gone so far as to make “America” its official song, English its official language, and “George Washington’s Prayer” its official prayer. Further, membership is limited to native-born or naturalized citizens of Mexican American

extraction, and members are required to take an oath of loyalty to the government of the United States as well as to its Constitution and laws.

The LULAC moderate approach to politics has left them disdained by some activists who deride them as “middle-class assimilationists.” LULAC, which is largely composed of older, middle-class Hispanic citizens, has met resistance from much of the Anglo community throughout the organization’s history. Sometimes its complaints about inequality were simply ignored. At other times, attempts to organize were met with threats at gunpoint.

The organization was especially active in the years after World War II when members returned from military service and sought to more fully participate in American life. In 1948, LULAC filed suit in the case of *Delgado v. Bastrop ISD*, which helped end segregation in the public schools. The organization also helped end the exclusion of Mexican Americans from juries and party primaries in Texas. Most recently, LULAC has been involved in lawsuits challenging redistricting in Texas that it argued reduced

Hispanic representation in Congress and the Texas Legislature.

While part of the organization’s work involves filing lawsuits seeking the protection of voting rights through the courts, LULAC has also created a number of its own programs. The LULAC Little Schools of the 400 project began in 1957 to teach forty-four basic English words to Hispanic preschoolers. The program became the model for Texas’s Preschool Instructional Classes for Non-English Speaking Children and the federal government’s Head Start program. LULAC has also helped build affordable housing for low-income families and has provided job training through forty-three employment centers in the United States. It has also worked with Fortune 500 companies to create partnerships between these companies and the Hispanic community.

While LULAC has grown to national prominence and maintains an office in Washington, D.C., its Texas roots remain strong. It has an executive office in San Antonio and a large office in El Paso that manages the organization’s finances, membership materials, and group archives. Today, LULAC has more than 900 local chapters or councils that serve their communities through scholarship and other programs. It maintains an active agenda that includes a broad range of issues from foreign policy and marriage equality to energy independence. However, the group remains close to its original promise to “eradicate from our body politic all intents and tendencies to establish discrimination among our fellow-citizens on account of race, religion or social position as being contrary to the true spirit of Democracy, our Constitution and Laws.”ⁱ

i. Cynthia E. Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), Kindle edition, 66–67.