

LUCHA's Plan to Increase Voter Turnout

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PHOENIX – LUCHA Arizona is a grassroots, nonprofit organization dedicated to uplifting the community by empowering residents in disenfranchised neighborhoods to have their voices heard on the ballot.

In the final weeks leading up to midterm elections, LUCHA has provided a way for people to learn more about the ballot while giving back to the community. Through an event titled *Burritos and Ballots*, local LUCHA members cook food for those who attend and bring their ballots to vote.

This midterm election is pertinent for progressive progress to take place. For instance, proposition 308 allows all Arizona high school graduates to pay the same in-state tuition as other students, regardless of their legal immigration status. Similarly, propositions 128, 129, and 132 contribute towards voter integrity by keeping the ballot process as it is currently without additional restrictions.

“The problem right now is, in many issues, we’re taking steps back instead of taking steps forward,” explains Enrique Davis-Mazlum, the LUCHA Blue campaign director. “One thing we have to understand about campaigns is that it’s not only the day of the election or during campaign season. It should be a year-to-year process, but you have to empower communities.”

Enrique began working for LUCHA at the end of July but has worked in nonprofit organizations for as long as he can remember. Speaking about these propositions with the community has allowed people to become educated about issues that directly affect them and their neighbors.

Many of those who attend these events are oblivious to the specific measures on the ballot. Thus, organizations like LUCHA are essential to providing that information and access.

“The beauty in community organizing and grassroots organizing is that we do a lot of leg work to make sure folks are educated,” explains Alexis Delgado Garcia, one of LUCHA’s campaign managers. “But a lot of the things on this ballot, our folks don’t have the accessibility to understand or the ability to research each thing for hours among hours.”

After families drop off their ballots and grab food, LUCHA members pair into groups and begin deep canvassing in select neighborhoods, such as Laveen. The goal of this mission is to convince

registered voters to vote. Many residents within these neighborhoods have either never voted or haven't voted in a long time.

Eleazar Martinez, one of LUCHA's deep canvassers, encouraged residents to become more involved. His articulation and master canvassing skills convinced a few citizens to do more research on the ballot and get them to vote.

"Small organizations like this are for the people," Martinez explains. "Every four to two years, [democrats and republicans] will ask you for your vote. But here, we constantly try to help our people."

Most of the residents in the community feel that their voices are underrepresented. Many have decided they would not vote if lawmakers don't have their best interests at heart.

Hazel Villatoro, a recent high school graduate, is likely to fall victim to proposition 300 and does not want to pay three times more than her colleagues to have an education and a brighter future. By encouraging voters to vote yes on proposition 308, she is campaigning for the betterment of her family's future.

"I want to make change for future generations, so they have a more stable and accessible life," Hazel explained. "It's not just for me. It's for my peers, family members, and friends."

Fortunately, canvassing has seen incredible benefits for voter turnout. Thanks to LUCHA, 47% of voters that LUCHA has canvassed have already voted early, which is nearly double the statewide average, according to Community Change Action.