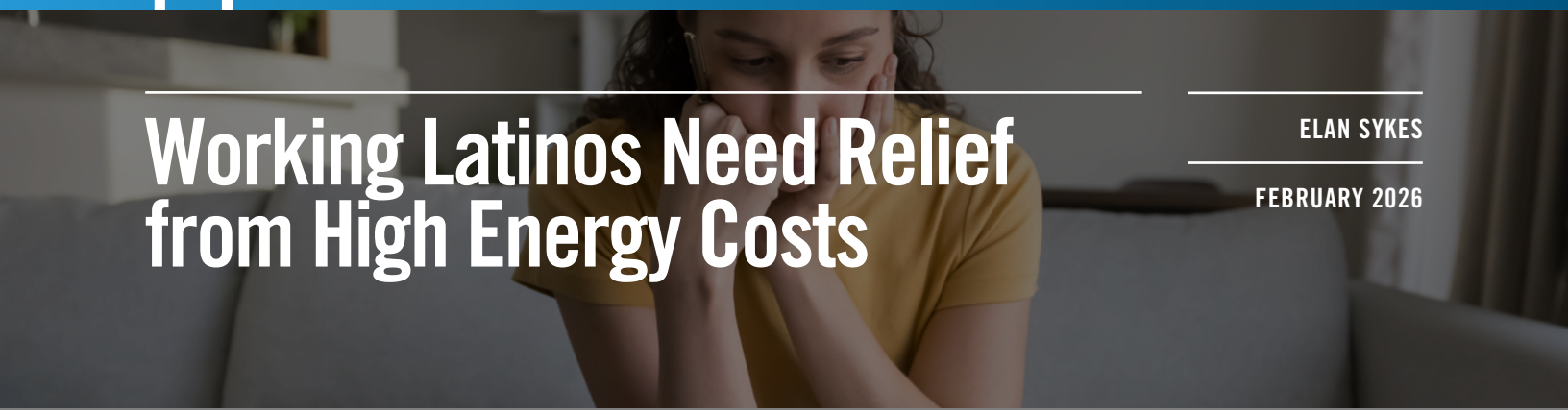
ppi radically pragmatic

Working Latinos Need Relief from High Energy Costs

ELAN SYKES
PROGRESSIVE POLICY INSTITUTE

FEBRUARY 2026

@ppi | @progressivepolicyinstitute | /progressive-policy-institute



Working Latinos Need Relief from High Energy Costs

ELAN SYKES

FEBRUARY 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The November 2025 off-year elections confirmed that the cost of living is still top of mind for U.S. voters. High energy costs, for example, figured prominently in contests in Virginia, New Jersey, and New York. The issue affects all Americans, of course, but puts especially heavy financial burdens on low-income and working-class communities. Many urban Latino families, for example, pay higher energy costs than more affluent surrounding neighborhoods. This report, the second in a series of PPI studies of energy insecurity in America, examines the reasons for this disparity.

It finds that Latinos are twice as likely as their white counterparts to experience energy insecurity. This connotes difficulty in accessing or paying for energy, the hard choices they face between paying fuel bills and meeting other pressing needs, and consequently, the higher risk of utility cut-offs. As PPI has previously documented, working-class Black neighborhoods also face higher energy burdens than surrounding suburbs. We believe these disparities deserve more attention from U.S. energy policymakers.

Building on our study of high energy burdens in Black neighborhoods in Boston, this report explores the same phenomenon in working-class Latino communities of Massachusetts, including Boston, as well as the city of Los Angeles. We identify the lack of modern energy grid and pipeline infrastructure to supply all neighborhoods with affordable and abundant energy as the main cause of greater energy insecurity for working-class Latinos in Massachusetts and California.

These findings pose a challenge to "environmental justice" activists. While rightly stressing the health and environmental risks of pollution in low-income and minority communities, they have failed to focus on the economic costs and opportunities — job growth, innovation, investment, lower prices — of a balanced clean energy transition. What residents of low-income communities want most of all isn't reparations for past injustice but equal access to affordable and reliable energy.

Latinos constituted 19.5% of the population and 10% of voters in 2024.[1] They vary widely in national origin, socioeconomic status, and geographic distribution. A combination of low but rising average incomes and education levels, historical discrimination in employment and housing markets, and the lack of adequate electricity and energy infrastructure mean that many working-class Latino families have lower incomes, less efficient homes and appliances, and higher energy bills than college-educated Americans living in affluent suburbs. Barriers in language, limited financial resources, and poor infrastructure access mean that climate policies like the Inflation Reduction Act provided much less help to energy-burdened minority communities.

In PPI's polling of working Americans, Latino voters broadly support action against climate change and a shift to clean energy resources, but make their decisions about energy based on cost. For them, high fuel bills are central to the broader cost-of-living crisis facing working Americans. To assuage this concern, U.S. policymakers should embrace smarter climate and energy policies that don't threaten them with immediate fossil fuel bans that produce energy scarcity and higher prices.

Our report concludes with the following policy recommendations for shaping a new compact with working Americans on climate and energy, and ensuring that Latino communities don't get left further behind:

- **A Balanced, Technology-Neutral Approach:** Instead of unpopular and premature fossil fuel bans, policymakers should support an energy mix of nuclear, renewables, batteries, carbon capture, utilization, and storage (CCUS), and low-methane natural gas to ensure both emissions reductions and affordable energy.
- **Permitting Reform to Accelerate Clean Energy Deployment:** Congress and state governments should streamline approval processes for renewable energy projects, grid expansion, and pipeline infrastructure to lower costs and improve reliability.
- **Targeted Energy Assistance for Low-Income Families:** Congress should expand and modernize programs like the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) to better serve households struggling with high energy burdens.
- **Community Energy Hubs:** Establishing local government centers where citizens can get information on energy efficiency, clean energy options, and financial assistance programs, modeled on Colorado's resilience hubs and the federal government's American Jobs Centers.
- **Affordable Housing and Improved Quality of Life:** Many Latino households in urban, suburban, and rural communities across the country struggle to find affordable housing and are forced to settle for older, lower-quality housing options in polluted neighborhoods with inadequate power and clean water supplies.
- **Providing neighborhood amenities** like trees, solar shading, strengthened electric distribution grids, and space for a variety of transportation modes would improve the quality of life for Hispanic families currently exposed to disproportionate pollution burdens and extreme weather in unaffordable or overcrowded homes.
  - **Better Jobs, Indoors and Out:** Many non-college Latinos hold outdoor jobs and jobs related to energy technologies, including

construction, agriculture, and delivery logistics. As the American West is already feeling the impacts of climate change, giving firefighters the permits and resources they need to conduct **proactive fire prevention measures** would reduce health and climate impacts on outdoor workers and nearby cities. Offering guidance and technology incentives to **protect against extreme heat exposure** and other climate adaptation challenges to address problems relevant to workers' daily lives.

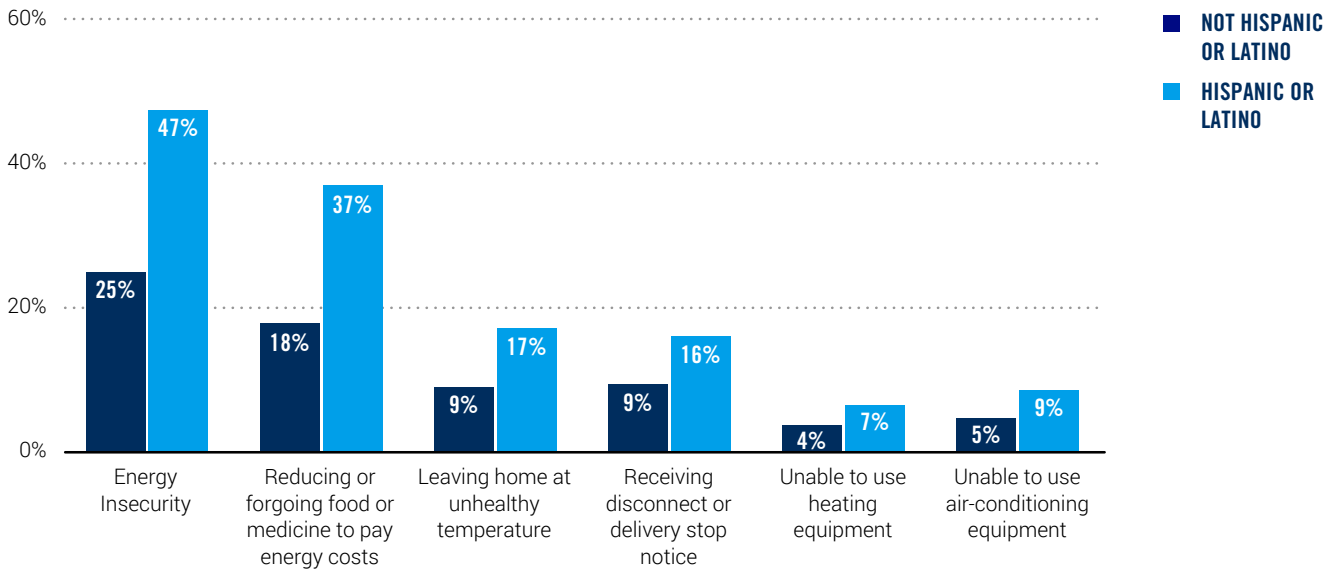
LATINO COMMUNITIES AND ENERGY COST BURDENS

Generalizing about Latino citizens is difficult because they belong to an extraordinarily diverse category. They differ widely by national origin, religion, race, and time and pathway of immigration. On the regional and national level, Latino families are no longer limited to the presumed "heartlands" of traditional border communities in the Southwest and immigrant hub neighborhoods in major East Coast and Rust Belt cities, now living all around the country.

Energy costs and local environmental quality likewise vary widely across different neighborhoods, cities, states, and regions of the country, but even across these differences, empirical data from the Energy Information Administration's Residential Energy Consumption Survey (RECS) and the Department of Energy's Low-income Energy Affordability Data (LEAD) Tool confirm that families in the country's working class Latino communities often pay a larger share of their income in residential energy costs than households living in better integrated neighborhoods or mostly white communities.

Energy insecurity, as measured by the RECS, captures the rates at which different subsets of the population must choose to forgo food, medicine, keeping their home at a safe temperature, or even getting their utilities shut off. In the latest RECS survey, only a quarter of non-Latino families reported any energy insecurity compared to half of all Latino households.[2]

FIGURE 1: ENERGY INSECURITY IN LATINO HOUSEHOLDS

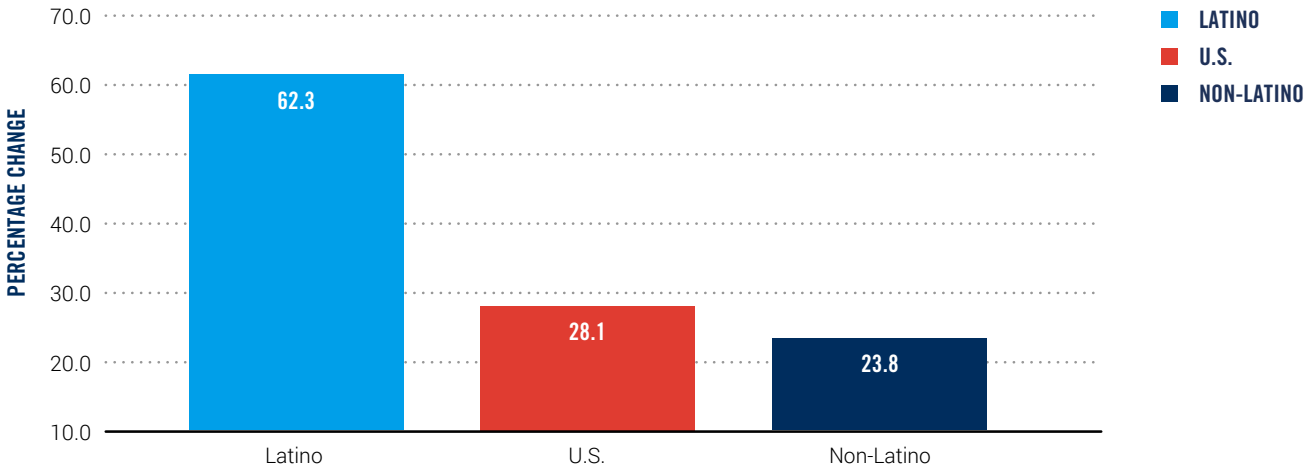


Source: EIA RECS 2020, Household Energy Insecurity (HC11.1)[3]

As public health scholar Diana Hernandez documents, the causes and effects of energy insecurity vary by case, but can be generally summarized as a combination of neighborhood-level infrastructure deficits, individual practices and energy technology choices, and building-level conditions like age and quality of insulation materials, which combine to cause a variety of economic and health harms like those captured in the RECS.[4]

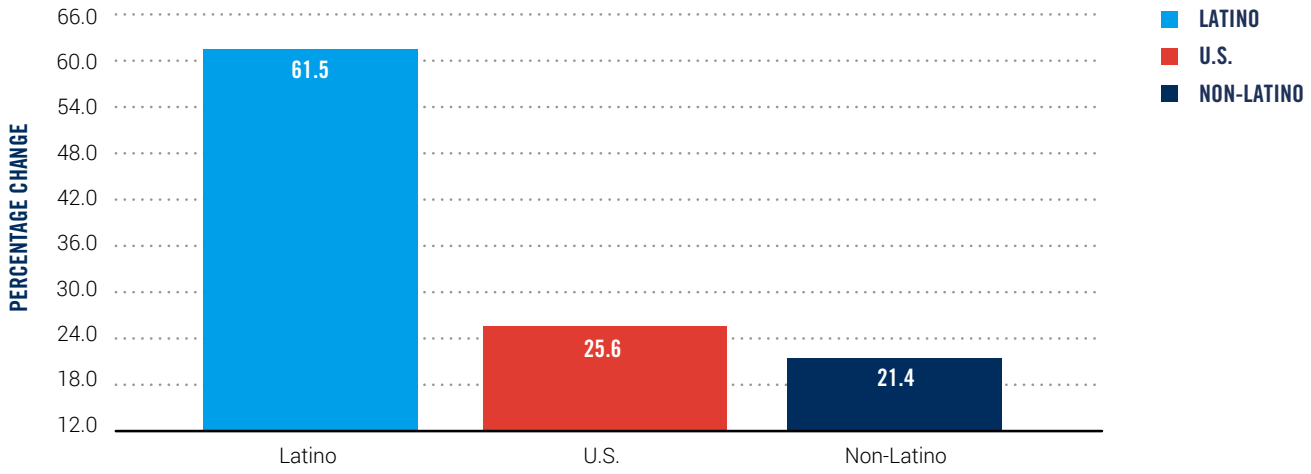
Even amid such disparities, the annual Latino GDP report by David Hayes-Bautista et al. finds that the "Latino Economy" is a dynamic and rapidly growing segment of the broader U.S. economy. As the authors note, real wages and real consumption among Latino Americans are growing much faster than the U.S. economy at large:

FIGURE 2: REAL CONSUMPTION OVERALL GROWTH (2010-2023)



Source: Latino GDP Report[5]

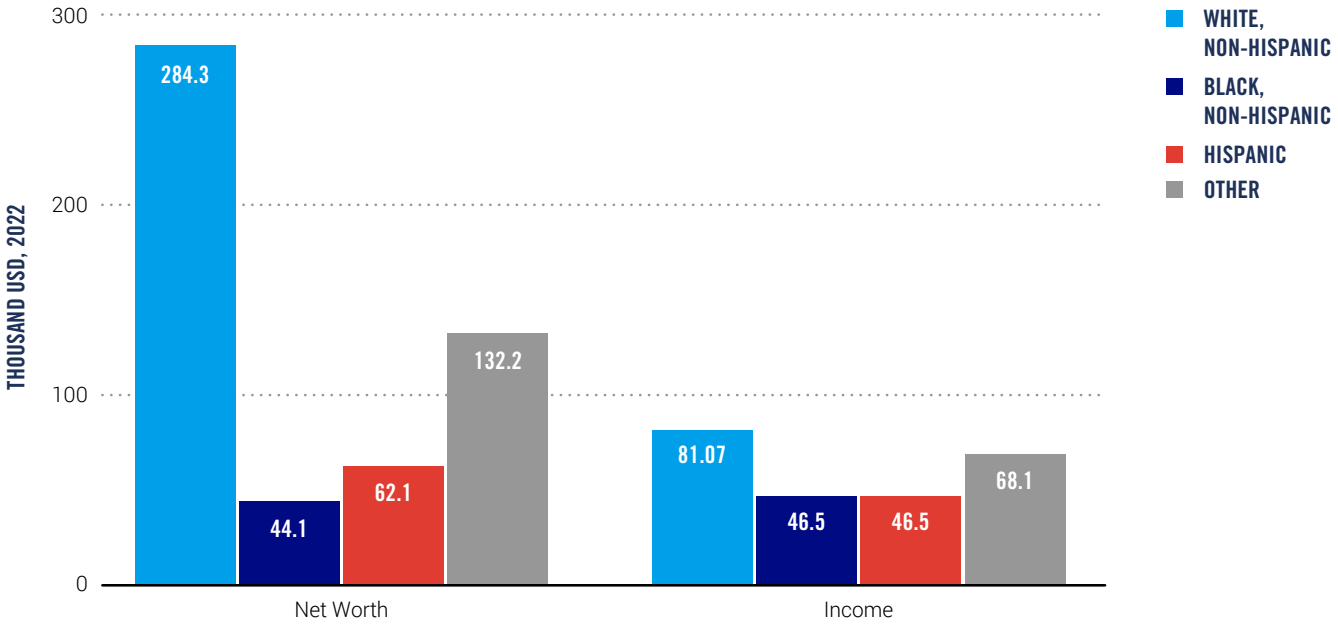
FIGURE 3: REAL WAGE AND SALARY INCOME OVERALL GROWTH (2010-2023)



Source: Latino GDP Report[6]

Despite these significant gains in income and education, Latino households still earn income at roughly half the level of the average non-Latino family and have roughly one-sixth the assets of a white, non-Latino family:

FIGURE 4 : WEALTH AND INCOME DISPARITIES

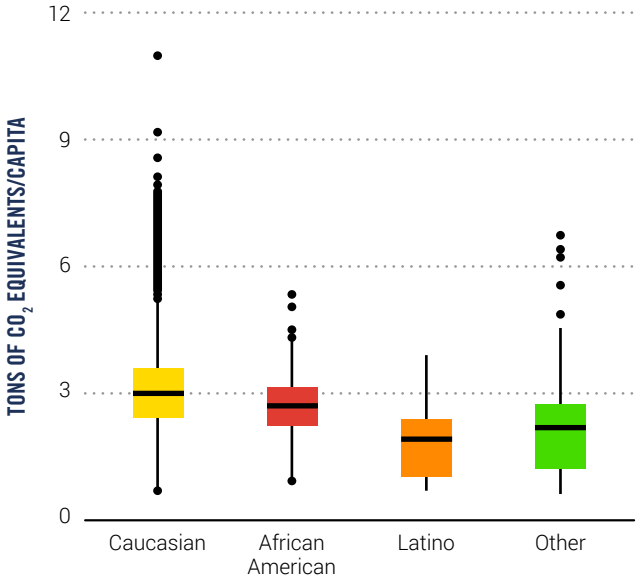


Source: Survey of Consumer Finances, Federal Reserve

Whether they live in an overcrowded city tenement apartment in New York, an average suburban development, or a house in a Texas colonia (unincorporated farm working community), working-class Latino families are more likely to live in older homes with less insulation to protect them from weather and pollution exposure, filled with older and less efficient appliances, and served by less infrastructure built to meet local needs.

In addition to energy costs taking up a higher share of low-income household budgets, energy-inefficient dwellings force households to consume more energy in order to achieve the same level of service provision as they would if they lived in a brand new house served by modern infrastructure.[7] Because of higher prices, Latinos consume less energy and emit less greenhouse gases than the U.S. household average while facing the burden of unhealthy air, water, and soil in their neighborhoods left over from legacy pollution sources.[8]

FIGURE 5: PER CAPITA EMISSIONS



Source: Energy Research & Social Science and Environmental Science & Technology[24]

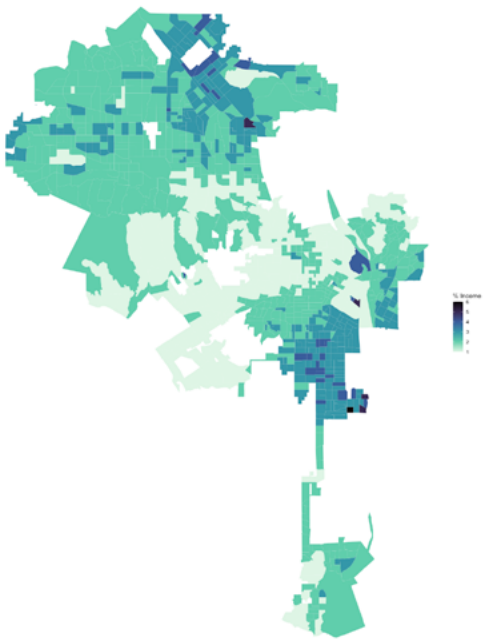
Climate change could increase the range of heatwaves, droughts, and other extreme weather phenomena in a way that poses a particular problem for working-class Latinos. Less efficient and less insulated houses expose their residents to higher economic and health risks, and Latinos live in such homes at higher rates than the U.S. average in neighborhoods less resilient to disasters.[9] Latinos are also more likely to face the risk of heat-related health problems, since they are overrepresented in outdoor farm and construction work. Given these vulnerabilities, working-class Latinos in energy industries, construction, manufacturing, or the trades stand to gain significant economic benefits from a well-designed policy to transition the U.S. economy to clean energy over time.

CASE STUDIES

The following case studies use previously saved data from the LEAD (Low-income Energy Affordability Database) tool's energy cost burden database from before the Trump administration's purge of ethnic and racial data from the dataset. They use LEAD's metric of residential energy cost burden as a share of income compared across census tracts and their ethnic makeup. Below the maps, a linear correlation for energy burden with census tract-level population share for Latinos follows, but these are based on tract-level population share across each city, not individual households. Maps of all CHC-represented districts with simple linear correlation can be found in Appendix I, and maps of all other congressional districts organized by state can be found on the PPI website.

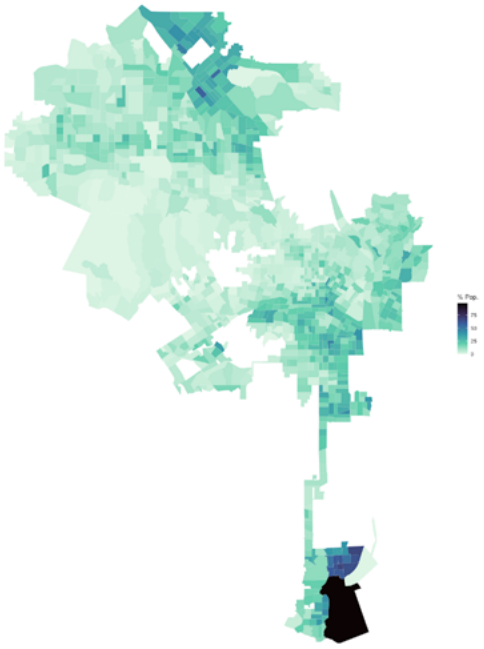
CASE STUDY 1: LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

ENERGY BURDEN (% INCOME)



Source: US Census via tigris and DOE LEAD tool

HISPANIC POPULATION SHARE %

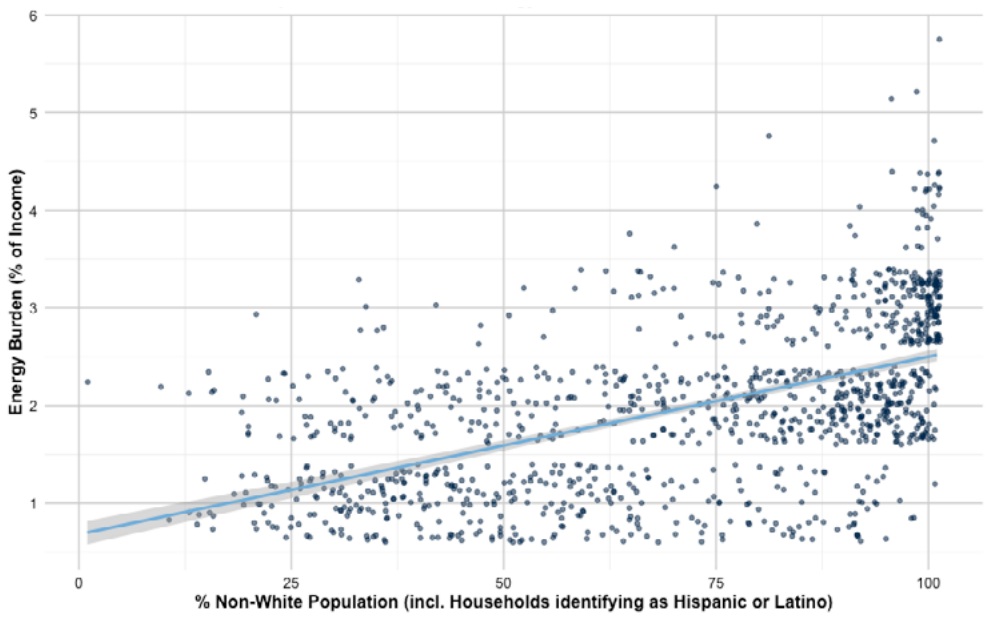


Source: US Census via tigris and DOE LEAD tool

This case study represents an overview of Los Angeles' energy burden as a share of income for all census tracts in the City of Los Angeles (rather than the entire surrounding communities of LA County). California has long struggled to produce new housing developments and investments in power infrastructure due to its strict and lengthy environmental review and permitting law, CEQA (the California Environmental Quality Act). CEQA is in many ways more burdensome than the national equivalent, NEPA, because of its broad applicability and creation of numerous veto points for project opponents, even where NEPA does not apply.

The effect of this suite of regulations is to freeze in place existing power generation systems that fail to supply low-income neighborhoods with high Latino and other minority population shares with abundant, affordable energy.

HOUSEHOLDS OF COLOR POPULATION SHARE ENERGY BURDENS IN LA CENSUS TRACTS

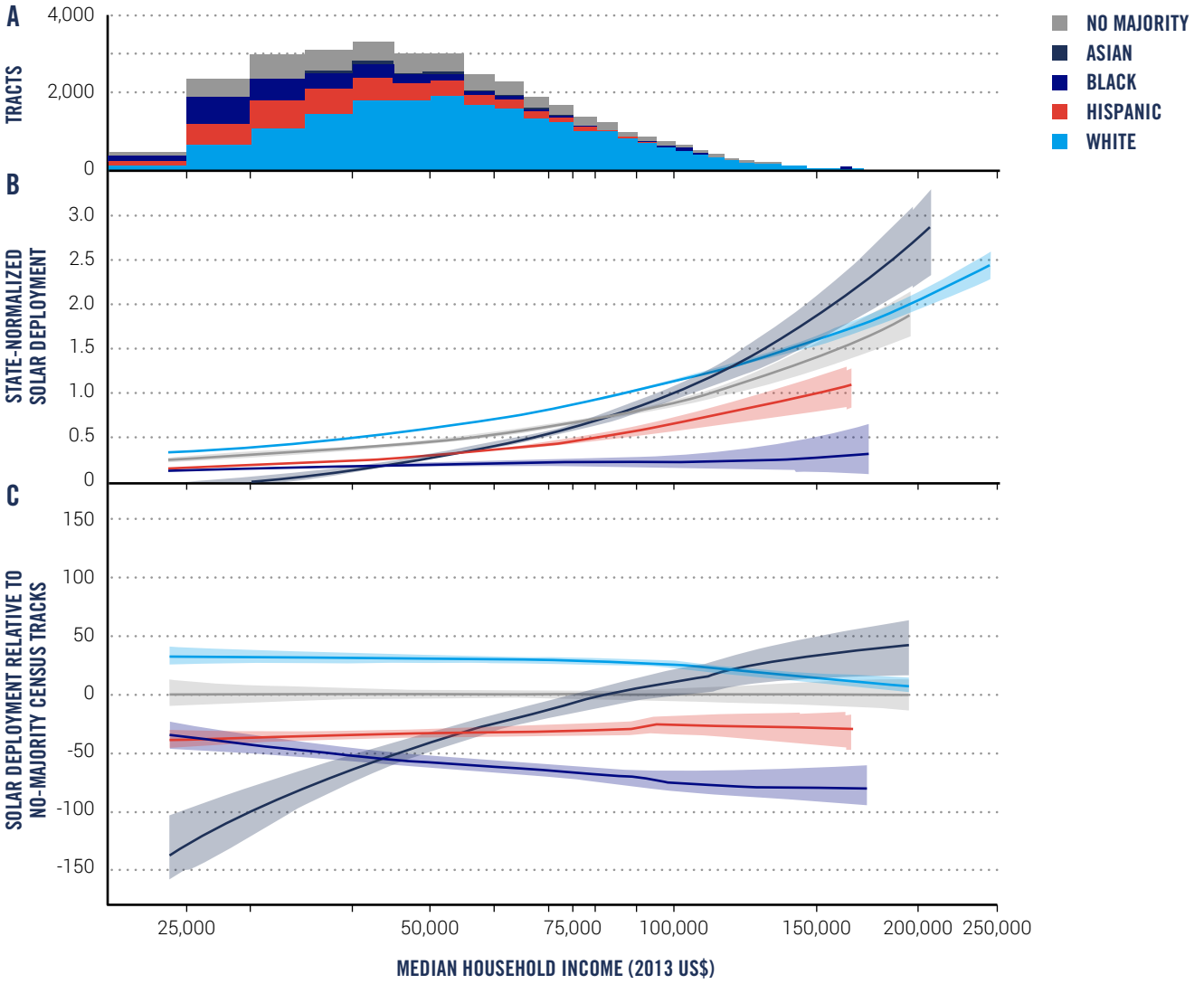


Source: Department of Energy's LEAD Data

LA has ambitious plans to go 100% renewable, but expects to do so while simultaneously encouraging many of its drivers to go electric and using grid-scale battery storage to manage peak loads. Yet access to chargers is limited by inadequate existing local distribution grids, which are not able to expand quickly enough due to the lengthy approval process in California. The result has been a stark disparity in access to EV chargers and rooftop solar. In a 2019 study, "Distributed solar and environmental justice: Exploring the demographic and socio-economic trends of residential PV adoption in California," Lukanov and Krieger found "census tracts that rank in the top 5% of CalEnviroScreen [i.e., the most disadvantaged tracts], are 8.2 times lower than the adoption rates in the bottom 5% of CES scores (the least disadvantaged communities)"[10] To date, only 2.6% of the total residential solar capacity has been installed in the top 10% of disadvantaged CES communities. In contrast, the most affluent 10% boast almost 20% of the total residential solar installed to date."

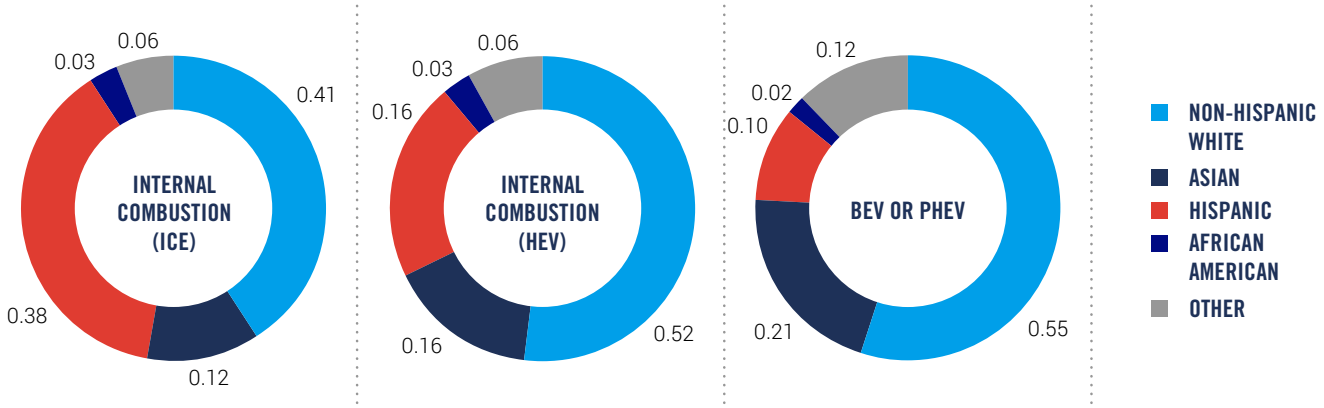
In a national study by Sunter et al, rooftop solar access for black and Latino (30% less) majority-neighborhoods compared poorly to no-majority tracts or white-majority tracts (21% higher than no-majority tracts) in rooftop solar adoption.[11]

FIGURE 6: ROOFTOP SOLAR ACCESS DISPARITIES



The same pattern shows up in access to EV charging infrastructure, where multiple studies have found a disparity between Black- and Latino-majority neighborhoods that lack sufficient access to public chargers compared with white-majority census block groups (CBGs) that are 1.5x more likely to have publicly-accessible chargers.[12] The disparity is even larger when comparing specifically publicly-funded chargers, which show up in white-majority CBGs at a rate 2.2x higher than comparable Latino- and Black-majority neighborhoods.[13] These gaps probably contribute to lower adoption rates of battery electric vehicles in these minority communities. A 2018 paper by Muehlegger and Rapson found that "Hispanic and non-Hispanic whites comprise roughly equal fractions of ICE (internal combustion engine) vehicle buyers in our data at 38% and 41% respectively. But non-Hispanic whites purchase 55% of the alternative fuel vehicles, compared to 10% of purchases by Hispanics."[14]

FIGURE 7: FRACTION OF SALES BY ETHNICITY



Source: Vehicle Drive Technology

Without more recent data, we cannot know whether the growing availability of cheaper EV models and later subsidy programs has helped boost adoption rates, but the combination of fragile local grids, lower EV adoption, a brutal and longstanding Californian housing shortage, and intensifying summer wildfire seasons place California's Latinos in an especially difficult position relative to the state's energy transition strategy.

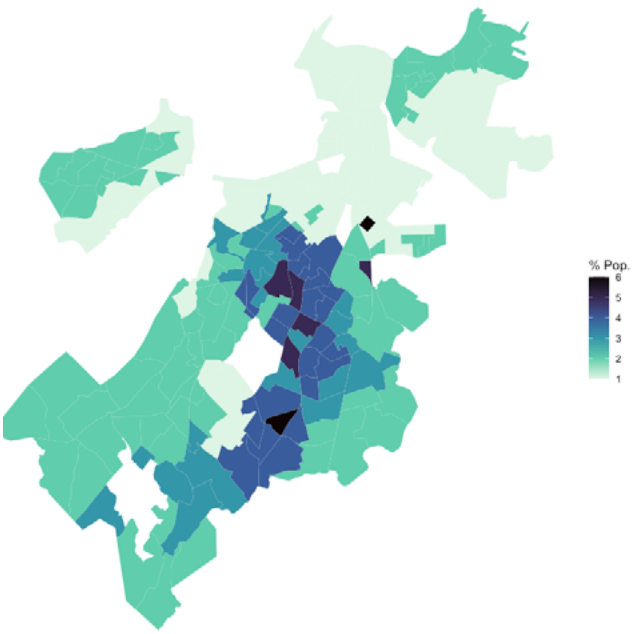
A symbol of how permitting and inadequate energy infrastructure afflict low-income neighborhoods in Los Angeles was "La Sombrita." The Sombrita was a dinky shade installation for bus stops without full-on bus shelters, intended to provide some relief from the sun in places where a full bus shelter could not pass local permitting requirements.

The "sombrita" was such a small stand that it provided comically little relief from shade for its supposed "users." If the sombrita is all the adaptation infrastructure that can be built to help bus riders without triggering municipal and state permitting rules, the future of bus ridership in the Los Angeles metro will decline as temperatures continue to rise. Instead of mass transit expansion of technologies like Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), Angeleno riders should expect only a pittance of shade while standing outside in the heat, waiting for slow and infrequent buses to pick them up.

David James Henry, "La Sombrita Passengers"[15]

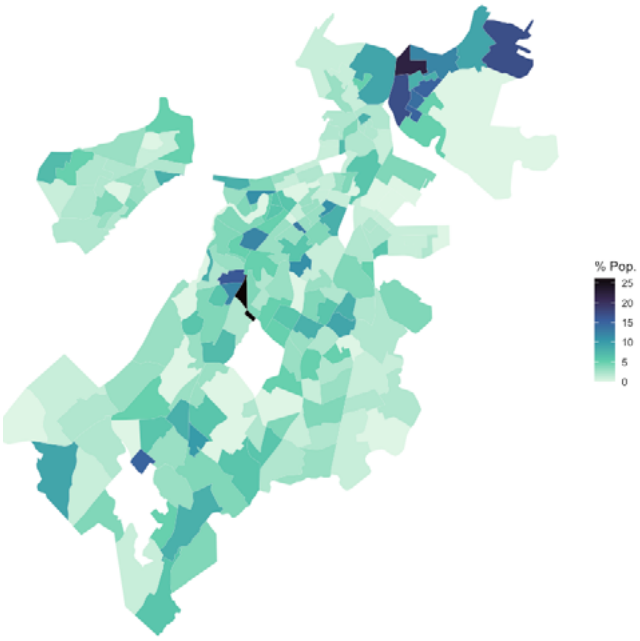
CASE STUDY 2: BOSTON

ENERGY BURDEN (% INCOME)



Source: US Census via tigris and DOE LEAD tool

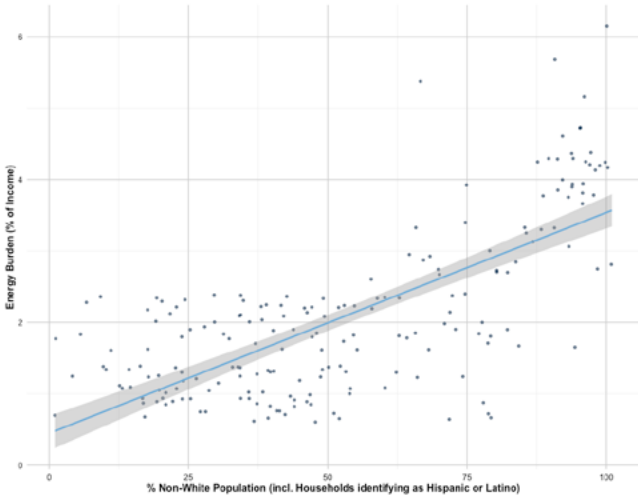
HISPANIC POPULATION SHARE %



Source: US Census via tigris and DOE LEAD tool

In PPI's February 2025 report "Energy Costs Come First," Boston served as the sole case study because of the isolation of its energy infrastructure relative to the rest of the contiguous United States and its subsequent reliance on LNG imports, mostly from Trinidad and Tobago. Boston is not primarily known for its large Latino communities, but the northeastern Chelsea neighborhood serves as a useful reference point for the paper and for the rest of the state of Massachusetts. Unsurprisingly, the LEAD data reflect that neighborhoods populated by white, non-Hispanic households face much lower energy burdens than neighborhoods of color:

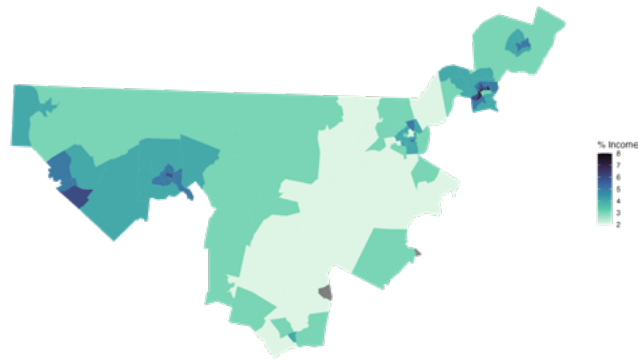
NON-WHITE, NON-HISPANIC POPULATION SHARE ENERGY BURDENS IN BOSTON CENSUS TRACTS



Source: Department of Energy's LEAD Data

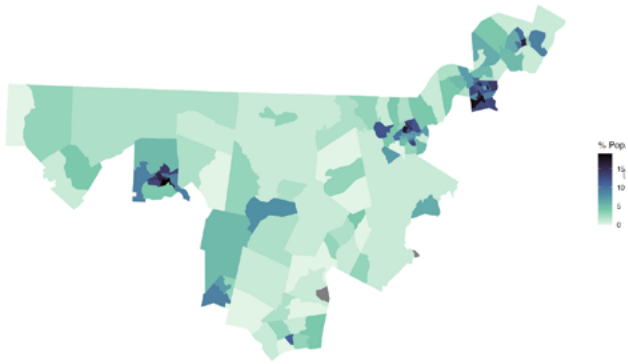
Because the LEAD database only includes Hispanic ethnicity for the white Hispanic population, excluding Afro-Latino and indigenous Spanish-speaking immigrants, this scatter plot shows the entire net non-white population. Across the state, CHC member Representative Trahan's District 3 energy burden map displays the same pattern:

ENERGY BURDENS IN MASSACHUSETTS DISTRICT 03



Source: US Census via tigris and DOE LEAD tool

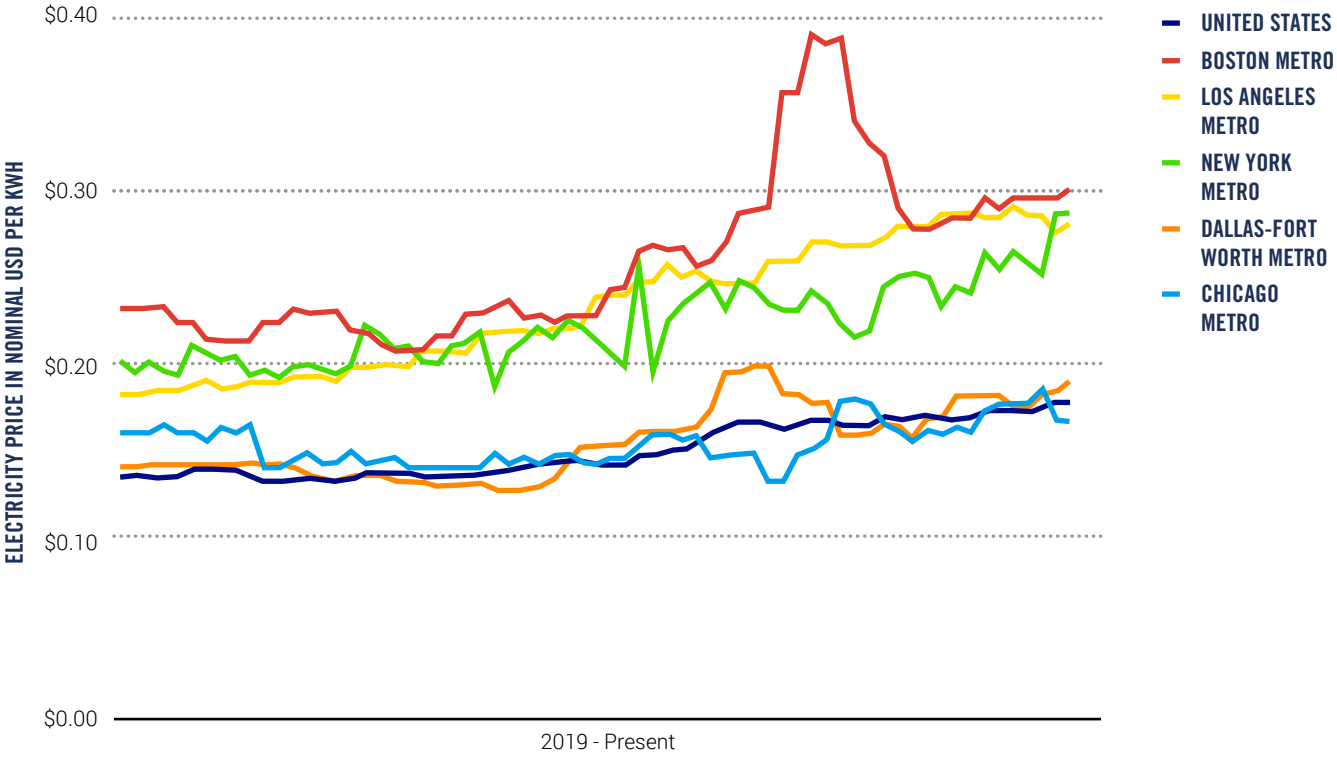
WHITE HISPANIC OR LATINO POPULATION SHARE IN MASSACHUSETTS DISTRICT 03



Source: US Census via tigris and DOE LEAD tool

Boston's reliance on imported LNG caused a major electricity price spike during the European energy shortages caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine:

FIGURE 8: BOSTON'S RETAIL ELECTRICITY PRICE IN CONTEXT

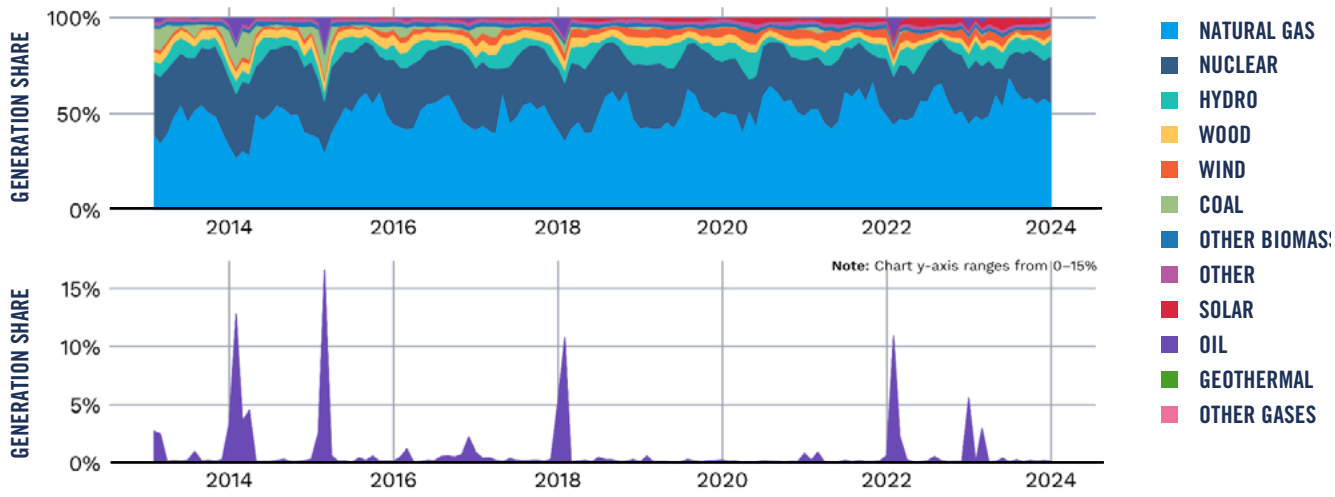


Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

(Notice also the high nominal price of electricity in Los Angeles in the case study above, despite the differences from Boston in regional climate and energy infrastructure access.)

Limited in the ability to import power from New York and Quebec due to permitting difficulties and NIMBYism, the New England grid relies on diesel-fired peaker plants to keep the power on for peak winter consumption days and on locally polluting fuel-oil boilers for home heating.

FIGURE 9: MONTHLY NEW ENGLAND ELECTRICITY GENERATION
WHILE NEW ENGLAND IS INCREASINGLY RELIANT ON NATURAL GAS GENERATION, IT REMAINS CONSISTENTLY RELIANT ON OIL GENERATION DURING THE WINTER MONTHS.



Source: ARBO

Comparing oil-fired power to gas-fired power in New England, PPI and Arbo found the resulting CO2 emissions intensity of New England's oil-fired electricity to be 1.8x higher per MWh compared with the region's natural gas-fired power, whereas SOx (152x higher), and NOx emissions (15x higher) are many multiples higher than the counterfactual expansion of natural gas pipeline capacity.[16] Thus, the winter energy mix in Boston not only exposes the low-income Black and Latino neighborhoods to volatile pricing but also to a 78% higher carbon intensity for an electricity system that releases more local air pollution and causes more health damage to the surrounding urban residents.[17] Residents of the wealthier suburbs surrounding Boston, thus, can consign low-income and working-class neighborhoods to living in polluted hot spots as well as hotspots of higher energy costs, all while patting themselves on the back for "stopping fossil fuel expansion".

In Boston's Chelsea neighborhood, local fights over a proposed substation turned the project into a symbol of the community's "infrastructure burden."[18] Despite the substation[19] receiving permits starting in 2014 in order to address local load growth, the neighborhood opposition[20] from environmental activist groups like Extinction Rebellion, GreenRoot, and the Conservation Law Foundation decried the project as an undue imposition on a Massachusetts-defined "environmental justice community" which already bore too much of a burden from hosting power infrastructure.[21]

> **Some complaints, like the public's concern over flooding preparedness, brought to light solvable technical questions of safety. But the green groups also engaged in the usual delaying tactics, claiming that the utilities and siting boards behind the project failed to meaningfully incorporate community input, representing a confusing and muddled picture of justice.**

Is a substation that meets local reliability needs without emitting any GHGs or air pollutants a true "burden"? Any effective strategy to assure reliable energy to Boston will require the addition of significantly more substations, transmission and distribution lines, their transformers, and renewable energy generation. Complaints of beleaguered communities constantly forced to accept new polluting infrastructure cannot apply to a reliability-enhancing project built to meet the needs of an underserved neighborhood. A new substation isn't an environmental injustice, it means cheaper and more reliable energy for surrounding neighborhoods. For a neighborhood in a deep-blue state, a new substation is a project that should be celebrated for the new capabilities it will bring to the surrounding communities.

REDEFINING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The environmental justice movement has been around for half a century now, growing out of the tail end of the civil rights movement as communities in Warren County, N.C., and eastern Los Angeles discovered and began protesting the harmful effects of pollution sources like toxic waste dumps located disproportionately in their communities. Latino scholars, like Diana Hernandez, anthropologist Devon Pena, and geographer Laura Pulido, have produced richly textured works on contemporary and historical instances of such environmental injustice. Unfortunately, with the exception of public health literature, most of these scholarly interventions documenting environmental injustice are disconnected **from energy policy makers as well as the everyday concerns of the contemporary Latino voter.** PPI polling found that 69% of Latinos consider cost first when purchasing new energy technologies for themselves, and any political attempt to represent them must account for this reality.

While the original environmental movement, circa 1970-2000, fought with local governments and industries on local siting decisions, air pollution, and hazardous waste disposal, the highest priority for green activists today is climate change. It can't be overcome by shutting down a local lead battery recycling plant or a massive coal-fired power plant. Instead, fighting climate change requires a massive deployment of clean energy generation resources, electrical infrastructure to move and manage it, and newly electrified end-uses in homes and businesses. Indeed, the deployment of new generation, grid infrastructure, and end-use electrification (using electric technologies like EVs and heat pumps to replace emissions from transportation, building heat, and manufacturing) require not only a new perspective on the distribution of local infrastructure "burdens" but also on the decision-making procedures for building and hosting all of the new projects that a clean energy transition requires. If each individual transmission line, geothermal well, or battery storage facility becomes an existential fight for the soul of a community according to the framing of far-left justice advocates, the practical allocation of costs and benefits between energy producers, managers, and consumers grinds to a halt.

Instead of fighting new substations or attempts to streamline environmental regulations,[22] environmental justice advocates should acknowledge that an effective climate protection strategy will require much higher deployment of local energy generation and the transmission and distribution infrastructure required to manage it.[23] In contrast, the aims of today's EJ advocates seem almost purpose-built to obstruct climate progress at scale. In a democracy, radical activists would do well to remember that voter priorities on cost of living cannot be ignored in favor of unrealistic crusades to keep fossil fuels "in the ground" or ban zero-carbon nuclear power.

As laid out by scholars like George Hoberg in *The Resistance Dilemma* and Kevin J. Elliot in *Democracy for Busy People*, empowering "the community" to oppose projects often rewards not the imagined beneficiaries — working-class families — but the interests of well-off citizens most likely to have time to show up to stakeholder comment hearings, file complex lawsuits, and pursue their own private preferences. Those members of a local community who are busy with work or family care are also those least likely to actually show up at "stakeholder engagement" proceedings. By vetoing the construction of new energy infrastructure, environmental justice activists counterproductively prolong the life of older polluting facilities like coal and diesel-fired power plants and legacy infrastructure that do indeed burden local residents with local health-harming pollutants, while delaying the very projects needed to transition away from those technologies and reduce local energy costs. Even though the choices of state officials in New York and New England cause Boston to rely on dirtier diesel fuel peaker plants in the winter, opposition by state officials continues on "environmental" grounds. Concerns about environmental justice make more sense in the context of historical fights over government policies that route major highways through or fail to close a lead battery plant in low-income communities. What doesn't make sense is blocking a new electricity substation that grants its surrounding users better grid reliability.

In short, environmental justice activism is trapped in outdated assumptions about contemporary technology and markets, policy tools, and political messaging that have left its supposed beneficiaries — working-class Black and Latino families — with a confusing mix of messages and higher energy bills.

In a November 2024 poll by PPI and YouGov, a small crosstab sample of 86 working-class Latinos found that when considering their own energy technology purchases, a strong 69% majority said they base their decisions on cost compared to only 17% who primarily look to shrink their carbon footprint.[24] Additional polling by Ruy Teixeira of AEI finds Hispanic majority support for an all-of-the-above approach over a quick phaseout of fossil fuels, with 63% supporting a broad energy mix compared to 37% in support of phaseout,[25] and corroborates PPI's finding that cost considerations are the main criteria for personal purchasing decisions.[26]

Rather than outsourcing their energy and climate policies to the environmental left, political leaders should show greater respect for working-class preferences for an all-of-the-above approach to the clean energy transition. This entails using relatively efficient and adaptable legacy fuels like natural gas to integrate higher shares of renewable energy on electricity grids. Most energy experts believe natural gas will continue to serve as a transition fuel that provides crucial stability to a growing grid from which users draw more power for electrified end-uses in heating, cooling, and transportation. Successful transition policy will require the proper deployment of incentives for clean energy technologies and using the assets of the existing energy system in such a way that higher shares of renewable energy can be integrated on a grid that does not just replace old fossil fuel assets, but grows beyond them.

A SMARTER PATH FORWARD: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Permitting Reform to Accelerate Clean Energy Deployment:

- **Congress and state governments should streamline approval processes** with two-year shot clocks for renewable energy projects, grid expansion, and pipeline infrastructure to lower costs and improve reliability.

- **States should expand pipeline and grid infrastructure** that manages and moves energy between generators and users to ensure that low-income and working-class neighborhoods don't lag behind in the energy transition.

  - This change will also ensure working-class Latinos in manufacturing, construction, and extraction jobs with a strong pipeline of work and a clear direction for working-class contributions to the collective efforts of a long-term energy transition process.

A Balanced, Technology-Neutral Approach:

- **Support a broad energy mix** of nuclear, renewables, batteries, and low-methane natural gas to ensure both emissions reductions and cost stability instead of unpopular and rigid fossil fuel bans.

  - Especially in places with high renewables penetration, current grid technology requires the inertial contributions to grid stability offered by ramping-enabled natural gas-fired and nuclear power plants. Instead of attempting to skip the complex step of integrating renewables and battery integration into existing systems, policymakers should recognize the need for modern grids that provide the voltage and frequency control required for the transition to 100% non-emitting power.

- **Embrace advanced energy technology** in the fields of nuclear power, geothermal, and low-methane natural gas with CCUS (carbon capture, utilization, and storage), batteries, and advanced grid technologies like grid-forming inverters and synchronous condensers, which all have a role to play in the future of the country's power systems.

Targeted Energy Assistance for Low-Income Families:

- **Expand and modernize programs like the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP)** to better serve households struggling with high energy burdens.

  - President Trump initially refused to dispense summer LIHEAP funding until NEADA (the National Energy Assistance Directors' Association) and Congress pushed the administration to do so.

  - Ensuring firm legal language and sufficient funding for the existing program may take significant political capital, but reforming the program to streamline dispensation of sufficient funds through Community Energy Hubs (explained below) should remain a long-term Democratic policy goal.

Creation of Community Energy Hubs:

- **Local governments should establish street-level institutions** to provide consumers and service providers with trusted information on energy efficiency, home energy options, and financial assistance programs will create a valuable local marketplace for services and customers.

  - In Latino neighborhoods, such a resource could provide informational materials in Spanish and ensure that citizen engagement with the government begins

with assistance and providing trusted information on relevant programs rather than invitations to formal proceedings of "stakeholder engagement" with public comment on specific one-off projects. sufficient funds through Community Energy Hubs (explained below) should remain a long-term Democratic policy goal.

- Providing contractors and labor with a place to learn about new technologies could aid adoption rates of innovative options that are right for the local community's needs, and ensure a trusted source of information for consumers and businesses alike.

In addition, PPI recommends the following policies aimed specifically at problems disproportionately faced by Latino communities. While the policies are designed to help with these disproportionate problems, PPI supports implementing these policies for their broad applicability rather than narrow identity-based grounds.

- **Make modernizing energy infrastructure simpler, faster, and cheaper.** Lowering the "time tax" of burdensome regulatory approvals for clean energy projects and energy retrofits would benefit busy working-class Latinos. Democratic energy policy must account for working-class voter priorities on cost of living without seeming to make maximalist claims on workers' time in order to win elections, make climate progress, and provide pathways to growth.

- **Spur Construction of Affordable Neighborhoods and Improved Quality of Life:** Many Latino households in urban, suburban, and rural communities across the country struggle to secure adequate homes and are forced to settle for older, lower-quality housing options in polluted neighborhoods with inadequate power and clean water supplies.

  - Enabling the installation of **beneficial neighborhood amenities** like street trees, effective solar shading, strengthened electric distribution grids, and space for a variety of transportation modes would improve the quality of life for Hispanic families currently exposed to disproportionate pollution burdens and extreme weather in unaffordable or overcrowded homes.

- **Improve job quality and safety for people who work indoors and outdoors.** Many working Latinos hold outdoor jobs and jobs related to energy technologies, including construction, agriculture, and delivery logistics.

  - As the American West is already feeling the impacts of climate change, giving firefighters the permits and resources they need to conduct **proactive fire prevention measures**, like those enabled by the Fix Our Forests Act, would reduce health and climate impacts on outdoor workers and nearby cities.

  - Providing OSHA guidance and technology adoption incentives for methods like self-cooling clothing to **protect against extreme heat exposure** would counteract climate adaptation challenges like the risk of heat stroke for outdoor workers in extreme heat and address problems relevant to workers' daily lives.

CONCLUSION

Environmental Justice will only succeed as a movement if it can formulate policy recommendations and mobilize voters by addressing their most pressing concerns rather than attempting to define narrow interests that do not speak to the majority of voters. For the half of Latino households that experience energy insecurity, policymakers and advocates

must account for the paramount importance of affordable and reliable energy.

As Trump and the Republican Party have started to govern, a gap has appeared between their cost-of-living-focused campaign and their unpredictable governing style. President Trump has created an opening for a smarter energy and climate policy by jettisoning "all of the above" approaches and demanding fossil-centric policies. This change not only takes America out of the global effort to slow climate change, but also goes against popular opinion that welcomes clean energy. It also puts the U.S. behind China in the race to master clean energy technologies such as solar panels and electric car batteries. Between the unilateral tariffs raising the cost of consumer goods, abandoning the all-of-the-above approach with an unprecedented attack on wind energy, and the investment uncertainty that comes from an unpredictable executive policymaking process, the Trump administration risks spiking consumer costs and leaving the country's energy systems unprepared for the challenges of the coming decade. With a smarter and more consistent energy policy approach, policymakers could help Latino communities grow and flourish.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elan Sykes is the Director of Energy and Climate Policy at PPI. Elan works on energy deployment, innovation, and decarbonization.

References

1 "Hispanic Heritage Month: 2024," United States Census Bureau, August 15, 2024, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/facts-for-features/2024/hispanic-heritage-month.html; https://catalist.us/whathappened2024/.

2 "Table HC11.1 Household Energy Insecurity, 2020," U.S. Energy Information Administration, August 2025, https://www.eia.gov/consumption/residential/data/2020/hc/pdf/HC%2011.1.pdf.

3 "2020 RECS Survey Data," Residential Energy Consumption Survey (RECS), U.S. Energy Information Administration, accessed January 2026, https://www.eia.gov/consumption/residential/data/2020/.

4 Diana Hernández, "Understanding 'energy insecurity' and why it matters to health," *Social Science and Medicine*, October 2016, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277953616304658?via%3Dihub#sec3.

5 Dan Hamilton et al., "2025 U.S. Latino GDP Report," California Lutheran University and UCLA Health (Center for the Study of Latino Health and Culture), 2025, https://blogs.callutheran.edu/cerf/files/2025/09/2025_USLatinoGDP_FINALrev.pdf.

6 Hamilton et al., "2025 Latino GDP Report."

7 Dominic J. Bednar, Tony Gerard Reames, and Gregory A. Keoleian, "The Intersection of Energy and Justice: Modeling the Spatial,Racial/Ethnic and Socioeconomic Patterns of Urban Residential Heating Consumption and Efficiency in Detroit, Michigan," *Energy and Buildings*, Volume 143, May 15, 2017, Pages 25-34, ISSN 0378-7788, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enbuild.2017.03.028.

8 Benjamin Goldstein, Tony G. Reames, and Joshua P. Newell, "Racial Inequity in Household Energy Efficiency and Carbon Emissions in the United States: An Emissions Paradox," *Energy Research & Social Science*, Volume 84, February 2022, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2021.102365.

9 Marilyn Brown et al., "Low-Income Energy Affordability: Conclusions From A Literature Review," Oak Ridge National Laboratory, March 2020, https://doi.org/10.2172/1607178.

10 Boris R. Lukanov and Elena M. Krieger, "Distributed Solar and Environmental Justice: Exploring the Demographic and Socio-Economic Trends of Residential PV Adoption in California," *Energy Policy*, Volume 134, November 2019, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2019.110935.

11 Deborah A. Sunter, Sergio Castellanos, and Daniel M. Kammen, "Disparities in Rooftop Photovoltaics Deployment in the United States by Race and Ethnicity," *Nature Sustainability*, January 10, 2019, https://www.nature.com/articles/s41893-018-0204-z.

12 Chih-Wei Hsu and Kevin Fingerman, "Public Electric Vehicle Charger Access Disparities Across Race and Income in California," *Transport Policy*, January 2021, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0967070X20309021?via%3Dihub.

13 Hsu and Fingerman, "Public Electric Vehicle Charger."

14 Erich Muehlegger and David Rapson, "Understanding the Distributional Impacts of Vehicle Policy: Who Buys New and Used Alternative Vehicles?" *National Center for Sustainable Transportation*, February 2018, https://escholarship.org/content/qt0tn4m2tx/qt0tn4m2tx_noSplash_36244609f162444f3e55c550dfc22cad.pdf.

15 David James Henry, "La Sombrita Passengers," *Wikipedia Images*, July 18, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Sombrita#/media/File:La_Sombrita_passengers.jpg

16 Arbo analysis of eGrid data for PPI.

17 Arbo analysis of eGrid data for PPI

18 Miriam Wasser, "Battle over controversial East Boston substation officially ends with court decision," *WBUR*, September 12, 2024, https://www.wbur.org/news/2024/09/12/battle-over-controversial-east-boston-substation-officially-ends-with-court-decision.

19 "New East Eagle Substation — Update," Eversource Energy Planning Advisory Committee Meeting, March 16, 2023, https://www.iso-ne.com/static-assets/documents/2023/03/a02_2023_03_16_pac_es_new_east_eagle_station_update.pdf.

20 Miriam Wasser, "Some East Boston Residents Are Wary Of Proposed Electrical Substation," *WBUR*, August 22, 2019, https://www.wbur.org/news/2019/08/22/eversource-east-boston-substation-eagle-hill.

21 "Mystic - East Eagle - Chelsea Reliability Project," Eversource Energy, https://www.eversource.com/content/residential/about/transmission-distribution/projects/massachusetts-projects/mystic---east-eagle---chelsea-reliability-project.

22 Hayley Smith, "Environmental Groups are Outraged After Newsom Overhauls CEQA," *Los Angeles Times*, July 1, 2025, https://www.latimes.com/environment/story/2025-07-01/environmental-groups-outraged-by-newsom-overhaul-ceqa.

23 "Letter Opposing Energy Permitting Reform Act of 2024," Earthjustice, July 30, 2024, https://earthjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/7.30-letter-opposing-energy-permitting-reform-act-of-2024.pdf.

24 Will Marshall, Deborah Mattinson, and Claire Ainsley, "PPI 2024 Election Review And the Way Ahead for Democrats," YouGov, Progressive Policy Institute, December 10, 2024, https://www.progressivepolicy.org/ppi-2024-election-review-and-the-way-ahead-for-democrats/.

25 Ruy Teixeira, "Hispanic Moderates' Big Swing Right," *The Liberal Patriot*, May 29, 2025, https://www.liberalpatriot.com/p/hispanic-moderates-big-swing-right.

26 "Ruy Teixiera Climate Survey September 2024 Crosstabs," YouGov, 53 and 120, https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/rt_climate_2024_sept_crosstabs.pdf?x85095&x85095.

ppi

The Progressive Policy Institute is a catalyst for policy innovation and political reform based in Washington, D.C. Its mission is to create radically pragmatic ideas for moving America beyond ideological and partisan deadlock.

Founded in 1989, PPI started as the intellectual home of the New Democrats and earned a reputation as President Bill Clinton's "idea mill." Many of its mold-breaking ideas have been translated into public policy and law and have influenced international efforts to modernize progressive politics.

Today, PPI is developing fresh proposals for stimulating U.S. economic innovation and growth; equipping all Americans with the skills and assets that social mobility in the knowledge economy requires; modernizing an overly bureaucratic and centralized public sector; and defending liberal democracy in a dangerous world.

PROGRESSIVE POLICY INSTITUTE
1919 M Street NW,
Suite 300,
Washington, DC 20036

Tel 202.525.3926
Fax 202.525.3941

info@ppionline.org
progressivepolicy.org