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**Campaigning on an Environmental Justice Platform:**

Irmalinda Osuna for Upland City Council, District 3

Jenny Bekenstein

In partial fulfillment of a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Environmental Analysis  
Fall 2018

Pitzer College, Claremont, California

Readers:  
Professor Brinda Sarathy  
&  
Professor Susan Phillips

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## **Introduction**

As I was walking out of the office on one of the final days of my summer job in Boston, a coworker explained to me that she was headed to volunteer on a political campaign. When she told me that her candidate was Ayanna Pressley, I admitted that I had no idea who that was. What I didn't reveal was that I hadn't realized that there were even going to be elections this year. My coworker strongly recommended that I volunteer on a political campaign someday, and advised that it be for someone who I truly believe in.

About a week later, having arrived back in Claremont, I received a forwarded email from Professor Brinda Sarathy with information about Irmalinda Osuna's campaign for Upland City Council and an invitation to the campaign kick-off that upcoming Saturday. Attached was a note from Professor Sarathy that read, "Another one for you! You will be great for this!!" Due to my apparent disinterest in politics, I was not convinced that I would be great for this. I was not sure I would even go to the kick off until 11 o'clock the night before, at which point I figured I might as well see what all of the local politics hype was about.

The next morning, I woke up to a text from Irmalinda, personally confirming that I had downloaded the canvass application on my phone and that I knew where to go. We gathered at Irmalinda's home for an orientation, then split into canvassing teams. I went in a team of four, with Irmalinda as our lead speaker. I practiced using the phone application and inputting the data while listening to her converse with residents about her platform. Irmalinda was having so much fun that day, and her energy was contagious; everyone we spoke with agreed to support her. She became more confident with each interaction, feeding off of residents' interest as she expressed her passion for Upland in English and Spanish.

Upland is a city in San Bernardino County, California of about 77,000 people. The racial makeup of Upland is 41% White (non-Latinx), 41% Latinx, 9% Asian, and 5% Black. Thirty-four percent of Upland residents speak a language other than English at home, and 19% of Upland's residents are foreign born. As of 2017, Upland had a median household income of \$65,349, with 14% of the population living below the federal poverty line. For the 2018 elections, 14,500 Upland residents were registered to vote as Democrats, 13,978 as Republicans, and 10,210 as No Party Preference.<sup>1</sup>

Upland is a part of the Inland Empire, a metropolitan area east of Los Angeles. The Inland Empire was once a major center of agriculture, but it has since been developed into a residential and commercial hub to accommodate a growing population and the industries in the Los Angeles area. Many of the residents that I met canvassing in apartments were new to Upland. Between 2010-2017, Upland's population grew by 4.5%, as it is a destination for people fleeing the rising cost of living in central Los Angeles. In 2017, there was an average of 1,748 housing units per square mile, 45% of which were occupied by renters.<sup>2</sup> The majority of the high-density housing and apartment complexes in Upland are located below Foothill Boulevard, whereas more spacious homes are typically located in the northern part of the city.

My second Saturday canvassing, Irmalinda and I headed out as a pair. I had yet to say a word; I continued to be in charge of recording data while Irmalinda did all of the talking. We met newcomers who had just moved to Upland because rent in Los Angeles was getting too high. We met mothers who were suffering from the high cost of preschool, or the "fake food" that schools

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<sup>1</sup> "San Bernardino County Weekly Report of Registration." *San Bernardino County Elections Office of the Registrar of Voters*, 12 Dec. 2018, [www.sbcounty.gov/uploads/rov/DistrictSummary.pdf?\\_=1544715601980](http://www.sbcounty.gov/uploads/rov/DistrictSummary.pdf?_=1544715601980).

<sup>2</sup> "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Upland City, California." Census Bureau QuickFacts, United States Census Bureau, [www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/uplandcitycalifornia/RHI725217#RHI725217](http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/uplandcitycalifornia/RHI725217#RHI725217).

were feeding their children. We met residents complaining of cockroaches in their apartments and dangerous bumps in their sidewalks. We met people outraged by the City Council's decision to sell the local parks and take away their already limited access to green space.

I didn't care about local politics until my experience working on Irmalinda's campaign because growing up I couldn't conceptualize how my town's Board of Selectmen actually affected the community I lived in. There just weren't many injustices in the suburbs of Boston: my public school was great, there were low crime rates, and we had plenty of access to green space. Admittedly, I was not really paying attention, but I never felt like my parents and my peers' parents were advocating for anything important at our annual Town Meeting. Additionally, my political consciousness came of age while listening to my parents talk about how much they hated George W. Bush, which I do not think fostered curiosity or enthusiasm for the subject.

It wasn't until the first days that I went out canvassing with Irmalinda that I recognized the importance of a representative who would advocate for their community. I admired Irmalinda for giving each person her undivided attention and valuing their interests. From stress over rising water rates to the desire for a movie theater in downtown Upland, residents needed to be heard by a receptive governing body. I saw that Irmalinda was committed to connecting with all Upland residents, regardless of whether they were able or would choose to vote for her, and I decided that this was an effort that I wanted to be part of.

The next weekend I had the role of speaking for the first time, which was accompanied by an entirely new bundle of nerves and adrenaline. A turning point for me came when instead of knocking on the door and praying that nobody would be home, I started to want residents to open the door. I like to learn about other people's lives, and once I got over the initial anxiety, there

seemed to be no better way to get to know the residents of Upland than to peek into their homes and hear what they had to say about local politics. The positive conversations energized me, while the less receptive responses always gave me something new to think about. I quickly became addicted to canvassing.

Depending on the person I was speaking with, I think that being a reformed apathetic helped me connect with residents, many of whom were similarly disinterested. Politics are really intimidating. There are a lot of politicians in the government and no one really knows what they do all week or what they talk about in their meetings. Laws, bills, resolutions, measures, and propositions can be hard to interpret and conceptualize. Many political initiatives take so long to actualize and there are so many confounding variables that no one knows what really works. There are some people who do somehow seem to understand what is going on but can only express it in words that most people cannot comprehend and usually in tones that turn people off from trying. For the rest of us, politics are a confusing mess and all we have to interpret them is the distant memory of our high school history teachers describing the Electoral College.

For these reasons, when I spoke with residents who felt weary or indifferent to politics, I agreed with them. It was special to be able to connect with other people my age who felt the same disillusionment with politics as I did, and I longed for them to experience the optimism I felt growing while working on the campaign. I expressed that I couldn't have cared less about politics before meeting Irmalinda, but that I believed candidates like her could make politics more accessible, participatory, and inclusive. I encouraged them to call Irmalinda, or I invited them to join the campaign for a day so that they could decide for themselves.

After the first few Saturdays canvassing, we decided we could go on Sundays too. Then I decided that I could go out on my own. I committed to going for at least two hours each weekday, and as many hours as possible on the weekends. In addition to canvassing, we held ice cream socials at each of the local elementary schools to speak to parents picking up their children. We passed out flyers at the grocery store, we went to campaign texting parties, and we held promotional events for local businesses. Later in the campaign, we fit in a second evening canvassing session on the weekends. The final few weeks before the election, I was canvassing around 30 hours a week (including lots of breaks for camaraderie). My excitement to knock on doors and encourage people to vote only grew over time.

## **Overview**

In this paper I will share the story of Irmalinda's campaign in the context of environmental justice, women in politics, and political activism. I connect scholarly work to my primary research and interweave quotes from Irmalinda, volunteers on the campaign, and Upland residents who I met canvassing. I also include my personal reflections. The purpose of this document is to serve as a resource for the group of women who worked on Irmalinda's campaign and who continue to advocate for social and environmental justice in Upland.

I begin with the events in spring and summer of 2018 that led Irmalinda to realize that the Upland City Council was not properly representing all Upland residents. I open with a discussion of the City Council's decision in April 2018 to file a brief against the California Sanctuary State Bill 54, and another proposal in July to develop Cabrillo Park into new homes. These decisions propelled Irmalinda's activism and ultimately inspired her candidacy. I then contextualize these

particular events in Upland, within the broader scholarship on environmental justice in Los Angeles and the United States.

Next, I focus on the significant role of civic participation in the environmental justice movement and in Irmalinda's campaign. I explain the role of City Council, and the direct influence of City Council's decisions on their constituents. I discuss that in 2018, Irmalinda was one of the many women and women of color to run for political positions and that many of them, like Irmalinda, were new to politics. In the end, the 2018 elections broke the record for the most women elected to Congress, with 108 in total. I highlight that many of these female candidates are environmental activists and used their political platform to advocate for environmental justice.

In analyzing the role of women in politics, I draw on scholarship and news articles to explore the opportunities and challenges posed by running for office as a woman. I discuss motherhood and conclude that the female candidates in 2018 used their motherhood to their advantage, but did not let motherhood define them. In the final section of this paper, I highlight testimonies from student volunteers who worked on the campaign as well as my own personal reflection to discuss the importance of the relationships created through Irmalinda's campaign. I explain how the experience fostered a community of volunteers and how these social ties strengthened a shared commitment to the campaign, something which is also reflected in scholarship on social movement organizing.

### **SB 54 Makes Upland a More Inclusive Community**

A small group of like-minded women, all 10+ year residents of Upland, California, found one another for the first time on April 23rd, 2018. Among them was Irmalinda Osuna, who,

unknowingly at the time, would run for Upland City Council in the November 2018 midterm elections. On this night, the city of Upland held its monthly City Council Meeting at City Hall. On the meeting's agenda was the issue of supporting Attorney General Jeff Sessions' lawsuit against the California Values Act, or California's Sanctuary State Bill, Senate Bill 54 (SB 54). SB 54, signed by governor Jerry Brown in October of 2017, ensures that no state or local resources are diverted to fuel any attempt by the federal government to carry out mass deportations, and that schools, hospitals, and courthouses are safe spaces for everyone. The law took effect in January 2018.<sup>3</sup>

In accordance with SB 54, Chief Douglas Millmore of the Upland Police Department (UPD) authorized a Chapter in January stating that "all personnel make professional commitments to equal enforcement of the law and service to the public," and assures that the role of the UPD is "serving the entire community and recognizing the dignity of all persons, regardless of their immigration status." The Chapter declared that "the primary jurisdiction for enforcing federal immigration laws concerning unlawful entry into the United States remains with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and not with the Upland Police Department or other local or municipal law-enforcement agencies." Under this statement, the UPD shall not suspect a person is undocumented, shall not ask a person their immigration status, and shall not provide ICE with confidential information unless the information is available to the public.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> De León, Kevin. *Senate Bill No. 54*. California Legislative Information, 10 Oct. 2017, [leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201720180SB54](http://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180SB54).

<sup>4</sup> Millmore, Douglass P. "Upland Police Department Chapter 10 Section 32: California Values Act, Immigration Enforcement." *ICE Out of CA*, 27 Dec. 2017, [www.iceoutofca.org/uploads/2/5/4/6/25464410/upland\\_police\\_department\\_policy\\_chapter\\_10.32.pdf](http://www.iceoutofca.org/uploads/2/5/4/6/25464410/upland_police_department_policy_chapter_10.32.pdf).

In March 2018, Sessions sued the state of California for passing SB 54, alleging that this California law is unconstitutional.<sup>5</sup> Cities across the state began to discuss supporting the lawsuit against SB 54 in various ways: Yorba Linda's City Council filed a brief stating its support, and Los Alamitos' City Council adopted an ordinance that would exempt itself from SB 54. In April, the Huntington Beach City Council, a charter city with independent authority, voted to sue the state itself. This ruling made Huntington Beach, and all 121 of California's charter cities, exempt from complying with SB 54.<sup>6</sup>

On April 23rd, Upland City Hall was packed. Forty-eight people spoke in favor of joining the lawsuit against SB 54, stating that the bill would perpetuate criminal activity associated with undocumented immigrants and create confusion for local law enforcement. During the five hours of public testimony, many emphasized that it is against the law for people to come to the United States without going through the formal immigration process. Some speakers shared anecdotal stories of unpleasant encounters they had with people they perceived to be undocumented immigrants or stories they had heard about undocumented immigrants on the news. Of the forty-eight who spoke against SB 54, just sixteen of them identified as residents of Upland.

In contrast, twenty-four of the thirty-five people who spoke in support of SB 54, including Irmalinda and the people she organized with, identified as long-term residents of Upland. Another six identified as residents of the bordering cities of Ontario, Claremont, or Montclair. During her two minute window to speak, Irmalinda stated, "I came with some other Upland residents to deliver some facts, some research-backed data that I provided for you over

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<sup>5</sup> "Justice Dept.'s Suit Against California." *The New York Times*. 7 Mar. 2018, [www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/03/06/us/politics/document-justice-lawsuit-california.html?mtrref=undefined](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/03/06/us/politics/document-justice-lawsuit-california.html?mtrref=undefined).

<sup>6</sup> Emerson, Sandra. "Upland Will File Brief Supporting Lawsuit against California's Sanctuary State Law." *Daily Bulletin*, 25 Apr. 2018, [www.dailybulletin.com/2018/04/24/upland-will-file-brief-supporting-lawsuit-against-californias-sanctuary-state-law/](http://www.dailybulletin.com/2018/04/24/upland-will-file-brief-supporting-lawsuit-against-californias-sanctuary-state-law/).

the weekend to read, and hopefully this will help you make an informed decision. Not on the fear, the hate, all this stuff you heard tonight because honestly, what kind of democracy is this if you are going to make a decision based on this stuff?”<sup>7</sup>

Irmalinda had created an “ICE Out of Upland” Facebook page and met up with fellow constituents in favor of SB 54 to prepare for the meeting. They presented data that disputed the claims that undocumented immigrants carry out high levels of criminal activity and benefit from public funds, while emphasizing that immigrants contribute immensely to the economy and that they are unable to receive public benefits because undocumented residents are not citizens. Irmalinda’s team also argued that SB 54 is outside of the scope of municipal politics and the duties of the Upland Police Department. They warned that filing a lawsuit against SB 54 would incite fear in the immigrant community, threaten people with undocumented family members, and contribute to an overall culture of hate and divisiveness in Upland. Irmalinda concluded, “Enough of this fear and this hate, this vicious fear and hate, because that is dividing our country, dividing our communities, and your job is to keep us together. No matter what, keep us together. And listen to the local community. I beg you.”<sup>8</sup>

In the end, Upland’s City Council decided to file a brief in support of Huntington Beach’s lawsuit against SB 54. The decision was made based off of the City Council’s desire for clarification in the Upland Police Department, as SB 54 puts new limits on state and local law enforcement’s ability to help the federal government enforce immigration law. The City Council

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<sup>7</sup> Upland City Council Meeting, April 23, 2018 <https://uplandca.swagit.com/play/04232018-1796>

<sup>8</sup> Upland City Council Meeting, April 23, 2018 <https://uplandca.swagit.com/play/04232018-1796>

claimed that SB 54 confuses the role and duties of the Upland Police Department. Mayor Debbie Stone concluded, “our police force needs our support more than ever.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Save Cabrillo Park**

On July 12th, Irmalinda was back at Upland City Hall to speak against the city’s proposal to develop Cabrillo Park into a single-family housing tract. Cabrillo Park is a 16-acre park, equipped with six soccer fields, a playground, and walking paths. The city met with the Lewis Group of Companies, a real estate developer, to propose a trade: Cabrillo Park in exchange for a new 45-acre sports complex which would be built above the 210 freeway, about 2.5 miles away. The new sports complex would host 12 soccer fields, two baseball fields, a concession stand, and comparably more parking than Cabrillo Park. It would be well-lit at night and open for more hours to the public. The sports complex would be a regional attraction, bringing more people from neighboring cities to Upland. The Lewis Group assured the town that they would pay for the construction of the complex and that the maintenance costs would not burden Upland taxpayers.

Alternatively, the Lewis Group proposed to fund the construction of the new sports complex by developing ten acres of Cabrillo park into tract homes, and relocating the remaining portion of the park, including an upgraded public playground, along 11th street. The Lewis Group and the City Council members in favor of the swap argued that the new sports complex would be larger and offer more amenities and parking than Cabrillo Park. They complained that Cabrillo Park is run-down, poorly maintained, and filled with homeless people.

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<sup>9</sup> Upland City Council Meeting, April 23, 2018 <https://uplandca.swagit.com/play/04232018-1796>

Irmalinda had found out about the proposal through a neighbor a few weeks prior, and immediately notified residents in her community. She created a “Save Cabrillo Park” Facebook page and website, where she laid out the facts, City Council’s rationale, the benefits, and the costs of the new sports complex. She stood outside of Stater Bros, the grocery store nearest to Cabrillo Park, handing out flyers about the proposal. She drafted a petition for people to sign in opposition to the project and created an online ‘Impact Survey’ to collect public input on how the proposal may impact residents, both of which were to be presented to City Council. For the next three weeks, Irmalinda and volunteers knocked on doors and put up signs requesting people contribute their opinions. By the time they presented their data to the City Council, they had collected over 100 petition signatures and 65 survey responses.

### **Environmental Injustices in Los Angeles**

The environmental justice movement was recognized in the 1980s as a growing response to unequal environmental benefits and burdens according to a person’s race and socioeconomic status; both people of color and low-income people experience greater environmental and health risks in their neighborhoods and workplaces compared to white people and affluent people. Environmental racism describes environmental inequities that disadvantage individuals and communities based specifically on race, and are reinforced by governmental, legal, economic, political, and military institutions.

In his 2000 piece, “*Grassroots Activism and Its Impact on Public Policy Decision Making*,” Robert Bullard, a founding scholar of environmental justice, emphasizes that environmental racism is entrenched in society; “environmental racism is as real as the racism found in housing, employment, education, and voting” (Bullard, 559). It accompanies and

encompasses racism in public health, worker safety, land use, transportation, housing resource allocation, and community empowerment. Environmental injustices manifest on a broad spectrum; provision of green space, maintenance of air quality, exposure to toxics, protection from extreme weather and fire, and access to nutritious food, among others. Bullard maintains that institutional racism denies people of color and low-income people the economic and political mobility to move away or protect themselves from environmental hazards.

Los Angeles, as is the case for many cities, has a history of polluting communities of color and immigrant communities through industrial and commercial activities. In her 2000 piece, "*Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California*," Laura Pulido argues that the historical development of urban space is inherently racialized and contributes to modern environmental injustices. Pulido explains that through suburbanization in the late 1800s and early 1900s, white people secured these relatively cleaner environments outside of the city. White, affluent communities fled the inner city to the outskirts, where they were protected from industrial land uses by the 1904 zoning code.

Meanwhile, oil rigs, rail yards, and factories were all allowed to locate in neighborhoods where people of color and immigrants were concentrated. White flight pulled tax dollars from the city infrastructure, resulting in dirtier environments for people of color, recent immigrants, and low-income people who could not afford to relocate. This trend has continued in the Los Angeles area through the rise in distribution centers, constructed to accommodate the demand in the logistics industry and the increase in goods sold by companies like Amazon and Costco. Due to its proximity to the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, the freeways, and the Ontario Airport,

the Inland Empire hosts the largest conglomeration of distribution centers and warehouses in the world, most of which are located throughout communities of color.

Pulido assures that environmental injustices are made possible by the existence of racial hierarchy, and the failure to problematize white privilege in the environmental justice conversation dismisses the decisions made by the government and industry that privilege white people at the direct expense of people of color. Along with decentralization, Pulido illustrates the history of the government housing people of color and immigrant laborers in the “ghetto” or “barrio” during WWII, the institutionalization of redlining practices, and the construction of the Los Angeles freeway system built through communities of color as a part of Los Angeles’ foundation for environmental injustices.

Environmental injustices are not only manifested in the presence of toxic, polluting industries, but also as lack of environmental amenities. Along with the warehouses, the Inland Empire attempts to accommodate a growing population with dense housing options; apartments and gated communities are replacing land that was once used to mine rock, cultivate citrus, or host dairy cows. The subsequent decrease in vacant land has turned green spaces into a scarce resource, and the proposal to sell Cabrillo Park is just one contribution to a long list of environmental injustices tied to increasingly dense housing in greater Los Angeles.

### **Green Space is Important**

Green spaces, such as nature conservation areas, recreational parks, sports fields, walking trails, street trees, and community gardens, are considered an important community resource and environmental amenity because of their social, environmental, economic, and mental and physical health benefits. Parks provide a venue for social interaction and community activities.

People who live close to parks are three times more likely to get the recommended daily amount of exercise, which, especially when performed outside, has been proven to reduce stress and depression. Green spaces –particularly those with trees –filter air, remove pollution, attenuate noise, cool temperatures, infiltrate stormwater, and replenish groundwater. In the case of community gardens, they can provide food. With these benefits, green spaces increase the property values of nearby homes. (Jennings)

A City Council’s job is to ensure that these spaces are equitably, or at least equally, distributed throughout the residential areas of their city. Unfortunately, there is overwhelming evidence that access to public green space in metropolitan areas across the country is stratified by income and race. Jennifer Wolch’s 2005 study, *“Parks and Park Funding in Los Angeles: An Equity-Mapping Analysis,”* which examines the distribution of park land in Los Angeles, showed that areas where 75% or more of the population was Latinx had 0.6 park acres per 1,000 people, and areas where the majority of the residents were Black had 1.7 park acres per 1,000 people. In comparison, areas where the majority of the residents were white had 31.8 park acres per 1,000 people. (Wolch 17)

An issue to consider in the allocation of public park land, Wolch wrote, is the “inequity stemming from the physical and socioeconomic character of communities of color” (Wolch 5). Whereas white, affluent communities tend to have yard space in their homes and access to private recreational venues such as golf, swim, or tennis clubs, communities of color and lower-income people may live in apartments or on small plots of land, and cannot afford to pay the membership fees to join a sports club. Considering the issue of access, in conjunction with the fact that there are more people per capita in low-income housing arrangements, communities of

color and lower-income communities have a greater need for proximate and proportionally sized areas of green space. “Thus,” Wolch states, “even a strictly equal distribution of parkland would not lead to equal recreational and leisure opportunities for residents” (Wolch 5).

### **Irmalinda and Professor Sarathy Save South Upland’s Green Space**

“This will significantly disenfranchise the high density of residents who live in apartments and don’t have the luxury of their own personal backyard; local parks are essential to community well-being, leisure,” Irmalinda wrote of the proposal to develop Cabrillo Park on the “Save Cabrillo Park” Facebook page. Cabrillo Park is located in an already high-density area; it is surrounded on three sides by apartment complexes. “Adding more homes will increase traffic congestion, noise, air and light pollution,” she wrote.<sup>10</sup>

The new sports complex, proposed to replace Cabrillo Park, would be located in North Upland, directly above the 210 freeway, in a relatively higher-income, less densely populated area. Cabrillo Park is used heavily by nearby residents, youth soccer leagues, and elementary school students who attend Cabrillo Elementary School, which is located right across the street from the park. Moving the park could potentially create accessibility issues for residents who walk to Cabrillo Park and may not have a reliable method of transportation to go to the new sports complex. Irmalinda expressed that developing 10 acres of the 16 acres of Cabrillo Park, which is located in a “park-poor” area, and move that green space to an already “park-rich” area, would exacerbate the disproportionate distribution of green space in Upland, and “further divide the economic status between North and South communities.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “Save Cabrillo Park” Website. <https://sites.google.com/view/savecabrillopark/home>

<sup>11</sup> “Save Cabrillo Park” Website. <https://sites.google.com/view/savecabrillopark/home>

Out of the 65 people who filled out Irmalinda's survey, 57 reported that they were concerned that replacing the soccer field with new tract homes would lessen the green space needed by their community. Forty-seven presumed it would increase traffic congestion, 45 agreed it would destroy the natural habitat, and 43 were concerned it would overcrowd the local schools. Thirty were concerned it would lower their home value. Fifty-four people were concerned that their kids will exercise near a freeway and breathe exhaust fumes (agitating asthma, etc.) Fifty-six citizens were concerned that relocating the soccer field above the 210 freeway would create a transportation hardship for kids located south of Foothill, and that the city taxpayers would incur the financial burden of maintaining the sports complex.<sup>12</sup>

The Lewis Group was founded in Claremont in 1955, and the company takes pride in its long history of contributions to the local community.<sup>13</sup> In the planning stages of the Cabrillo Park proposal, the Lewis Group consulted with the Robert Redford Conservancy for Southern California Sustainability at Pitzer College (RRC), an organization with a mission to educate the next generation of environmental change-makers.<sup>14</sup> Brinda Sarathy, Professor of Environmental Analysis at Pitzer College, Director of the RRC, and a central organizer for social and environmental justice in Upland, was invited to the decision-making table from the beginning. Through this connection, Sarathy leveraged her position at the RRC and subsequent relationship with the Lewis Group to emphasize the consequences of their proposal to develop Cabrillo Park.

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<sup>12</sup> "Save Cabrillo Park" Facebook page. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/savecabrillopark/>

<sup>13</sup> Lewis Group Of Companies - Real Estate Developer, [lewisgroupofcompanies.com/our-company/](http://lewisgroupofcompanies.com/our-company/).

<sup>14</sup> "Robert Redford Conservancy for Southern California Sustainability." *Office of the Treasurer*, [www.pitzer.edu/divestment-climate-action-model/robert-redford-conservancy/](http://www.pitzer.edu/divestment-climate-action-model/robert-redford-conservancy/).

Sarathy wrote a detailed memo urging City Councilmembers Sid Robinson and Gino Fillipi to consider the health risks associated with traffic-related air pollutants (TRAP) in the siting of the new sports complex. “Based on the scientific evidence, it would be inappropriate to evaluate the merits of this project by means of simple quantification (i.e. more sports fields are better than fewer sports fields), or an assumption that all physical exercise and activity are beneficial (i.e. more kids getting exercise is a good thing). In this case, context matters,” wrote Sarathy.

Sarathy stressed that while there are no legal protections in the way of developing the park close to the freeway, increasing exposure to TRAPs is associated with elevated levels of asthma, bronchitis, impaired lung development, heart conditions, and fetal problems. Children, pregnant women, and elderly women, all of whom would likely frequent the sports complex, are the most vulnerable to the health impacts of air pollutants. In the memo, Sarathy offers strategies and best practices to decrease pollution exposure near their sources; the scientific and public health community recommends that the sports complex be located at least 700-1000 feet from the freeway and to include mitigation designs, such as a vegetative buffer, in order to minimize TRAP exposure.

Sarathy warns that the City Council must think progressively on this subject: "As a longer history of public policy, public health, and planning in the United States demonstrates, however, the commonplace or lawful existence of something does not necessarily make it right, healthful, equitable, or sustainable in the longer-term." Lastly, Sarathy provides a framework for the Upland City Council members to engage the public and consult with nearby residents affected by this project “to ensure that a project such as this is truly for the public good.”

The Lewis Group was concerned about their reputation in Upland and public shaming from residents, and Sarathy strategically spoke in terms that the developer understood; this proposal would curtail their credibility in the community. At the July 23rd monthly City Council meeting, the City Council announced that it would take the development of Cabrillo Park out of the plans for the sports complex. Pertaining to their decision, Irmalinda stressed, “City Council, I urge you to take into account all of the concerns raised today, which are many, and the attachments that I am submitting and hope you will make the required revisions. Most importantly we are counting on your commitment to help protect and preserve all our parks from future real estate endeavors.” Eleven additional residents thanked the City Council and the Lewis Group for having taken Cabrillo Park “off the chopping block, at least for now.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Mothers Have Always Been Leaders in Environmental Justice**

Tracy Perkins, who studies women’s environmental justice activism in “*Women’s Pathways Into Activism: Rethinking the Women’s Environmental Justice Narrative in California’s San Joaquin Valley*,” declares that “most scholarly work on women’s participation in environmental justice activism supports the following narrative: apolitical women personally experience a specific environmental problem and are motivated to become activists in order to protect the health of their families” (Perkins 77). Women’s participation in environmental activism is viewed as an extension of their motherly duties to keep their children safe.

The rationale behind this narrative, scholars claim, is the alignment of caring for the environment with the stereotypical role of women as “nurturers.” In her research, “*Elaborating on Gender Differences in Environmentalism*,” Lynette Zelezny studies gender roles and

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<sup>15</sup> Upland City Council Meeting, July 23, 2018. <https://uplandca.swagit.com/play/07232018-1199>

socialization and how they relate to environmental attitudes and behaviors. Zelezny provides an analysis of behaviors in environmentalism across various ages and 14 countries and found that women, regardless of age or nationality, reported stronger ecocentrism, environmental concern, and pro-environmental behavior than men. She hypothesizes that women are socialized to be more compassionate and nurturing towards other beings and the environment, whereas men are socialized to be independent and competitive. For this reason, Zelezny argues that maintaining these gender expectations has encouraged women to take the lead in environmental activism.

In *'Political Hermaphrodites': Gender and Environmental Reform in Progressive America*, Adam Rome reveals the historical construction and reinforcement of environmental activism as feminine through popular culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Men who advocated for the environment were described as “political hermaphrodites” in the 1870s and 1880s. (Rome 441) A cartoon in an early 1900s San Francisco newspaper cartoon depicted John Muir, a well-known advocate for the preservation of wilderness in the United States, as a woman. This type of rhetoric which defines environmentalism as feminine has consequently reserved environmental activism as women’s work and deterred men from environmentalism since before the beginning of the official movement in the 1920s.

Rome explains that women who were active in environmental movements in the 1900s did justify their work as an extension of traditionally feminine responsibilities. Facets of environmentalism – health, beauty, and future generations – were encompassed under the women’s role. Their presence and voices in the movement invoked anxiety among men who wanted to support conservation but who did not want to be considered effeminate for sharing the same opinions with women and did not want to work with women. To women, it was “an

eminently proper thing for women to interest themselves in the care and destination of garbage, the cleanliness of streets, the proper killing and handling of meats, the hygienic and sanitary condition of the public schools, the suppression of stable nuisances, the abolition of the vile practice of expectorating in public conveyances and buildings, the care of milk and Croton water, the public exposure of foods, and in fact everything which constitutes the city's housekeeping” (Rome 444). Additionally, women used urban environmental issues as a common argument for suffrage, arguing that women needed the vote to fulfill their responsibilities as “municipal housekeepers” (Rome 442).

Motherhood has continued as an important theme in environmental justice activism. This can be seen today in the identities of environmental justice advocates, such as the “Mothers of East Los Angeles,” (MELA) an organization founded in 1986 by Latina mothers protesting the construction of a prison in their community in East Los Angeles. Since stopping the prison project, MELA has tackled a variety of issues and become a leading advocate for local environmental health. In the early 1990s, MELA was one of the few organizations dealing with land use and quality of life issues. In 1991 alone, MELA successfully fought and won battles against the construction of the prison project in East Los Angeles, an incinerator in Vernon (for which they sued the Federal Environmental Protection Agency for failure to provide an Environmental Impact report for the project), and a treatment plant for hazardous waste in Huntington Park. They engaged the community by spreading information about the danger of these projects and mobilized through protests, petitions, and attending important hearings to make their voices publicly heard.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Sahagun, Louis. “The Mothers of East L.A. Transform Themselves and Their Neighborhood.” *Los Angeles Times*, 13 Aug. 1989, [articles.latimes.com/1989-08-13/local/me-816\\_1\\_east-los-angeles](https://www.latimes.com/1989-08-13/local/me-816_1_east-los-angeles).

Today, MELA focuses mostly on environmental justice in Los Angeles, most recently working to improve the air quality at seven schools in Boyle Heights. They work on health education campaigns, raising money for scholarships, and informing the community about environmental injustice through mass demonstrations, community and legal hearings.

### **Not Just Municipal Housekeepers**

While socialization and feminization of caring for the environment play a role in women's environmental leadership, Perkins counters the "municipal housekeepers" stereotype that women are "politically naive and primarily motivated by concerns based in the home, and less capable of holding and acting on abstract political commitments than men" (Perkins 77). Through Perkins' case studies of activist women in the San Joaquin Valley, she reveals that most women have some political experience before becoming environmental justice advocates, they respond to issues beyond those that directly affect their families, and are motivated by more than the need to protect their children. Women, she counters, may also be motivated by "prior experiences of activism, recruitment efforts from friends and social movement organizations, the precedent of role models, the effect of broad historical upswings in activism, negative interactions with government bodies, and the influence of educators, organizers, family, and friends who help women understand that the personal problems that they and others experience are, indeed, larger social problems" (Perkins 77). She argues that women are not limited to political engagement which strictly aligns with their role as a mother or homemaker, but that extends to a greater social consciousness and desire for a just society.

For Irmalinda, the proposal to develop Cabrillo Park triggered a response because of the immediate impact it would have on her family, but this was not her introduction to political

action or environmental justice activism. Irmalinda frequently attends protests that address social justice issues and advocates for unions. Before her own campaign for City Council, she worked on other political campaigns and attended a Democratic convention. In November of 2016, at the height of the conflict over the Dakota Access Pipeline in North Dakota, Irmalinda drove to Standing Rock to stand in solidarity with the Sioux tribe. Accompanied by her sister and nephew, Irmalinda spent six days protesting the construction of the pipeline. While this particular pipeline would not directly threaten Irmalinda or her family, it was a crisis of environmental injustice that Irmalinda and her sister felt they needed to respond to. Irmalinda's activism is largely inspired by her sister; "My sister is so progressive," she would say, "my sister makes me look conservative."

Similarly, with the SB 54 lawsuit, Irmalinda organized on behalf of the immigrant community, even though her family members are U.S. citizens and are not affected by the status of Upland as a sanctuary city. Nonetheless, Irmalinda is the creator and administrator of the ICE out of Upland Facebook group. With this, it is clear that Irmalinda and many other female environmental activists' environmental and social concerns extend beyond the health and safety of their own families to encompass the well-being of their community.

### **Environmental Justice Demands a Seat at the Decision-Making Table**

For Irmalinda, the greatest disappointment of the park proposal was the city's lack of communication and transparency in the decision-making process. Irmalinda lives directly across the street from Cabrillo Park, and the city did not consult or notify her about the proposal. After finding out through a friend, Irmalinda asked her neighbors if they had heard about the proposal; none of them had. Only because of Irmalinda's uproar did the City Council Planning Commission schedule one provisional planning meeting on July 12th to discuss the park

proposal before voting on it on July 23rd. The meeting was scheduled at 5:00 PM, making it difficult for working people to attend.

After the City Council's made the decision to not develop Cabrillo Park, those who fought for the park, while relieved, were not convinced by the City's cooperation. "What guarantee do we have that you won't sell it or do something else later?" questioned Justin, an Upland resident, at the July 23rd City Council meeting. "What guarantee do we as residents have that you won't pull this again? I really think you need to let us vote and when and where, and to whom. Memorial Park is a great example. You guys never came to us, you just decided. You did the same thing and if it wasn't for residents, Cabrillo Park would have been probably been turned into apartments or condos. I really think you need to start let us voting on whether you sell our park land."<sup>17</sup>

The speakers expressed concern that the city did not take into account the importance of Cabrillo Park as one of the only green spaces in south Upland, nor did they properly communicate their plan with the public. Many mentioned that they fear the City Council will go forward with developing a different park. "Just because we saved this park doesn't mean others are not at risk," a resident stated. Another suggested, "Take the money you were going to use to build the other field, maintain the field that is already there."<sup>18</sup>

Bullard includes "exclusionary practices that prevent some individuals and groups from participation in decision-making or limit the extent of their participation" (Bullard 558) as one of the main injustices that provoked grassroots community resistance against environmental

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<sup>17</sup> Upland City Council Meeting, July 23, 2018. <https://uplandca.swagit.com/play/07232018-1199>

<sup>18</sup> Upland City Council Meeting, July 23, 2018. <https://uplandca.swagit.com/play/07232018-1199>

injustice. In other words, having a place at the decision-making table is one of the founding demands of the environmental justice movement. Likewise, in his 2008 piece, "*Parks and People: An Environmental Justice Inquiry in Baltimore*," Maryland, Christopher Boone emphasizes, "Marginalized groups not only had to bear the disproportionate burden of toxics but also the humiliation of not being heard by decision-making bodies and regulatory agencies. Their protests highlighted the fact that unjust procedures can be as harmful and unjust as uneven distributions of hazardous wastes. The same applies for the allocation of amenities. A just distribution of parks does not constitute justice unless the procedures to allocate them are just as well" (Boone 770).

"For this reason," I explained to an employee of the Lewis Group whose door a fellow volunteer and I later knocked on while canvassing, "it isn't fair to develop Cabrillo Park, one of the few green spaces in District 3, in exchange for a better sports complex in District 4, which is a relatively affluent community." The employee, who lived down the street from Cabrillo Park, was actually really excited about the new sports complex because of its new amenities, despite the fact that it would be further from his house. He defended the Lewis Group, explaining that they are a locally-based, responsible company that has the community's interest in mind and continues caring for their projects for decades. "The problem," we explained to him, "was never that the Lewis Group wanted to create a sports complex in Upland. To develop is, of course, the motive of a developing company. The problem was the City Council's lack of transparency or community engagement throughout the decision-making process."

At the July 23rd City Council meeting, Irmalinda called out the City Council's overall reluctance to inform citizens about the development of Cabrillo Park or involve them in the

decision-making process, “[There is] the issue of transparency and why we can’t vote on these matters. In regards to civic engagement, I have said it before, I urge you to do a better job and use all of the available tools to have meaningful engagement with residents. Not only what is minimally required. Slow the process down, conduct multiple meetings, send mailers, go above and beyond to ease the concerns and give assurance to the community. We look forward to the many meetings you will conduct and hopefully you will schedule them at a more suitable time for those who cannot make this hour.”<sup>19</sup>

### **City Council Makes Relevant Decisions**

The City Council is the governing body of the City of Upland and has the power to make all laws and regulations with respect to municipal affairs, subject only to the limitations of the State and Federal Constitutions. The City Council is comprised of an elected mayor and four elected representatives, all of whom serve four-year terms. The City Council appoints the City Manager and the City Attorney, both of whom serve at the City Council’s discretion. Their website states that the duty of the City Council is to “represent the interests of the citizenry and is responsible for establishing policy for the delivery of services necessary to meet the needs of the community.”<sup>20</sup>

The City Council authorizes contracts and expenditures according to an annual budget, enacts local laws and city policies, and approves all ordinances and resolutions as necessary for the benefit of the community. With this, the City Council has the power to decide whether to support sanctuary city laws such as SB 54, or to sell park land, such as Cabrillo Park. City

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<sup>19</sup> Upland City Council Meeting, July 23, 2018. <https://uplandca.swagit.com/play/07232018-1199>

<sup>20</sup> “City of Upland.” *City of Upland*, ci.upland.ca.us/.

Councils also make relevant decisions about traffic and bike lane infrastructure, parking rules, solid waste disposal, water, and the allocation of funds to public buildings, such as public libraries.

In many Upland citizens' opinions, the support for the lawsuit against SB 54 and the proposed sale of Cabrillo Park to the Lewis Group demonstrated that the City Council was not working in the interest of all Upland residents. Irmalinda was among the group of dissatisfied constituents, and she felt empowered by her previous success with Cabrillo Park. She recognized the power in her ability to organize the community and potentially sway the City Council's vote in the future.

At the time, the City Council elections were four months away. Those who stood alongside Irmalinda in support of SB 54 and in opposition to the new sports complex realized there was an opportunity to make real progressive change in Upland. Having experienced Irmalinda's energy and dedication to the causes, they encouraged her to pursue her skills as a community leader. As such, on July 30th, just a week after the City Council announced that they would not develop Cabrillo Park, Irmalinda posted a live video in the Save Cabrillo Park Facebook page announcing, "We saved Cabrillo Park, now we need a seat at the table. I'm running for Upland City Council, District 3."<sup>21</sup>

In the video, Irmalinda stated, "I am doing this because I think there are some problems with our local civil political process. Number one, we need to increase civic engagement. We need to do a better job at communicating proactively to the residents on important matters such as this one. It should not take three weeks of pushing hard to try to get the communication out."

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<sup>21</sup> "Save Cabrillo Park" Facebook page. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/savecabrillopark/>

She continues, “How many of you actually go to the city website to get information, how many of you get to be involved with some of the details? It is difficult. We work long hours, long commutes, we are very busy, we need to make it an easy process for communities to get the information that they need, especially when it is something this important.”<sup>22</sup>

Irmalinda was not running for City Council unassisted. Two women, who were equally passionate about making progressive change in Upland, volunteered to be Irmalinda’s campaign managers. They encouraged Irmalinda to run and dedicated the next four months to working as her advisors. Both women channeled their devotion to social justice into working on Irmalinda’s campaign, and through the process, the three became close friends. Additionally, the people who were inspired by Irmalinda’s campaign to save Cabrillo Park, and the many people who later became inspired by her platform, supported Irmalinda along the way. “People nudged me to run,” she laughs, “I get my energy from the support I have from the people around me.”

### **District Voting Facilitates Local Representation**

“Did you know that Upland has been partitioned into four districts?” Many times, Irmalinda and other canvassers would introduce her platform with this question, accompanied with an image of Upland’s new district map. “This is the first time that you are able to vote for someone who lives in your community.”

In 2001, California passed the California Voting Rights Act (CVRA), which made it easier for a protected class (a group of people with a common race, gender, or religion who qualify for special protection under the law) in California to prove that their votes are being diluted in “at-large” elections. The CVRA is modeled after the Federal Voting Rights Act

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<sup>22</sup> “Save Cabrillo Park” Facebook page. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/savecabrillopark/>

(FVRA) of 1965, but demands fewer requirements to establish a voting rights violation. For example, unlike the FVRA, a protected class does not have to be geographically compact or concentrated to warrant a violation of CVRA. Additionally, the CVRA does not require proof of intent on the part of the voters or elected officials to discriminate against a protected class. The CVRA eliminates the “totality of circumstances” test set forth in the FVRA, precluding introduction of other evidence as to why preferred candidates of the protected class lost elections, which makes CVRA litigation purely a statistical exercise. If a transition to district voting follows notice from a challenger, the challenger is entitled to receive up to \$30,000 as a reimbursement for the cost of the notice.<sup>23</sup>

For cities such as Upland, “at-large” elections meant that the five City Council members would be elected by the entire city and were to represent the city collaboratively. In December of 2016, Kevin Shenkman of the Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project (SVREP) notified Upland that their at-large elections violate the CVRA. SVREP is the largest and oldest non-partisan Latino voter participation organization in the United States. It is a 501(c)3 national nonprofit organization whose objective is to increase civic participation amongst Latinos. Their motto is “Su Voto Es Su Voz” (Your Vote is Your Voice). Kevin Shenkman, a Malibu-based lawyer, sends letters to cities on behalf of SVREP, alleging that the cities’ current systems of elections diminish the impact Latino residents have on municipal elections.<sup>24</sup>

To establish a violation under the CVRA, a plaintiff must show that racially polarized voting occurs in elections for members of the governing body of the political subdivision or in

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<sup>23</sup> “California Voting Rights Act.” *Wikipedia*, 24 Jan. 2011, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/California\\_voting\\_rights\\_act](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/California_voting_rights_act).

<sup>24</sup> Allen, David. “District Elections, Voters Shake up Chino, Pomona, Upland.” *Daily Bulletin* 11 Nov. 2018, [www.dailybulletin.com/2018/11/11/district-elections-voters-shake-up-chino-pomona-upland/](http://www.dailybulletin.com/2018/11/11/district-elections-voters-shake-up-chino-pomona-upland/).

elections incorporating other electoral choices by the voters. Racially polarized voting occurs when there is a difference between the choice of candidates preferred by voters in a protected class and the choice of candidates preferred by voters in the rest of the electorate. In Upland, the SVREP determined racially polarized voting by comparing the historic demographics of the city to those of the City Council. Upland is 41% Latino, yet a Latino person had never served on the City Council. This same case has been made against neighboring cities in the Los Angeles area and in San Diego; whereas Latinos comprise a large portion of the population - and in some areas, the majority - this demographic is not reflected in the makeup of local government.

Before the CVRA took effect in 2002, just 28 California cities used district voting. By spring of 2018, 88 out of California's 482 cities and over 165 school districts had switched to district election systems because of CVRA violations, and 20 more were in the middle of a legal dispute pertaining to the matter. Shenkman and other lawyers have sent hundreds of letters accusing cities and school boards in the Los Angeles and San Diego area of racially polarized voting. As of 2018, a city or school board had yet to successfully defend a CVRA challenge. The cities that have attempted to challenge the lawsuit, such as the cities of Anaheim and Palmdale, ended up paying \$2 million and \$4.6 million as a result of their settlements.<sup>25</sup> Noting the monetary consequences of defending the CVRA challenge, Upland voted unanimously to voluntarily switch to districts in time for the 2018 elections. The switch cost Upland \$65,000; \$45,000 in legal fees to the SVREP and \$20,000 to hire the consultants to develop the boundary maps. Many cities have paid over \$100,000 for the switch.

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<sup>25</sup> Abcarian, Robin. "Meet the Malibu Lawyer Who Is Upending California's Political System, One Town at a Time." *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles Times, 14 May 2017, [www.latimes.com/local/abcarian/lame-abcarian-shenkman-voting-20170514-story.html](http://www.latimes.com/local/abcarian/lame-abcarian-shenkman-voting-20170514-story.html).

In his 2010 book, *Seeking Spatial Justice*, Edward Soja argues that justice has a geography and that the equitable distribution of resources, services, and access is a basic human right. In his analysis, he includes district elections as a form of spatial justice, “the search for increasing spatial justice can take many forms. A primary goal is fair geographical distribution of society’s resources, especially with regard to level of need. The carless poor, for example, have greater need for public transit than the rich. Other priorities include establishing fair political representation as shaped by electoral districting, maintaining the openness of public space, resisting purposeful territorial segregation (as in apartheid) or colonial domination...” (Soja 220). Just as inclusion in the decision-making process is vital to achieve environmental justice, Soja argues that fair political representation as shaped by electoral districting is integral in achieving spatial justice.

Critics of the shift to districts argue that the money it costs to map the districts would be better spent advocating for minority candidates, and that because of the enormous financial cost involved in defending against – much less losing – such claims, the majority of jurisdictions that receive a demand letter switch to district elections without analyzing their election system to determine whether there is, in fact, racially polarized voting. They criticize the fact that lawyers like Shenkman charge \$30,000 for drafting a 2-3 page letter. Some say that the districts may end up dividing the city, the City Council, and the city’s resources. They argue that the city should work as a unit and use resources collectively in order to maximize benefits for the entire city.

For Irmalinda, the new districts made all of the difference in her decision to run for City Council. District elections made running both mentally and financially feasible, and allowed Irmalinda to engage with a larger proportion of her constituents. The costs of the flyers,

literature, and lawn signs are expenses that often fall on the candidates themselves, which limits many people's ability to run. As a means of appealing to voters, district elections give human interaction an opportunity to triumph over money. "If there is one thing we can all agree on, it is that we need to get money out of politics. I never would have run if it weren't for Upland having been partitioned into four districts," Irmalinda stated, "This redistricting is going to revolutionize voting."

### **1992 and 2018: The Years of the Women Running for Political Office**

In 1992, Patty Murray was elected as a Senator in Washington State, running on the platform of "just a mom in tennis shoes." Twelve years earlier, Murray had gone to the Washington State capital in Olympia to protest budget cuts at community colleges, where a male legislator told her, "You can't do anything, you're just a mom in tennis shoes." With 28 Congresswomen sworn in, 24 to the House of Representatives and four to the Senate, this marked the biggest increase in women's Congressional representation in the history of any U.S. election. Prior to these elections, just two women held seats in the Senate. 1992 claimed the title "Year of the Woman."

In an interview for Timothy Egan's 1992 *New York Times* article, "*Another Win By a Woman, This One 'Mom,'*" Murray described, "I've watched women come into politics thinking they had to become a man to succeed." At the time, Murray could not self-identify as a "feminist" or a "liberal," – though she resonated with both ideologically – because she did not want to receive backlash from her constituents. People told her to run as "Pat" so that voters would not know she was a woman. People asked her, "What will you do with your kids?"

Twenty-six years later, Patty Murray holds her seat in the Senate and has been touted as “The Most Underestimated Feminist in DC.”<sup>26</sup> In October, 2018, *Fortune* interviewed Murray about her experience serving as one of the first female Senators. “I ran because I got mad. I got mad at how women were being treated and disrespected. I felt that if the United States wants to have policies that work for all of us, women have to be a part of that process and that decision-making. I have watched from the demonstrations right after the inauguration, all the way until today. Women coming out to speak about healthcare, fighting today on issues of choice, throughout all of that, women have felt incredibly responsible for making sure they don’t sit at home and gripe about it, but they get out and get involved. And that’s what brought me to the United States Senate, it’s what will bring other women to the United States Senate this year.”

In the November 2018 elections, 108 women – 85 in the House of Representatives, 23 in the Senate – were elected to Congress, exceeding the previous record of women candidates who ran for and were elected to seats in Congress. Patty Murray’s reasons for running in 1992 –anger about the way women are treated, lack of representation, and the desire to take action –continue to be relevant motivations for women running for office in 2018.

In an interview with *Vox*, Michele Swers, a professor at Georgetown University who studies the growing number of women in Congress, describes the parallels between the 1992 and 2018 elections. In 1992, many Congresspeople were retiring, as was the case for over forty Republican House members in 2018. This opened up spots for new candidates to run and neutralized the advantages that are typically held by incumbents. Like Murray, “ordinary” or “outsider” women who had not been previously involved in politics decided to run in 1992,

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<sup>26</sup> Sarasohn, David. “The Most Underestimated Feminist in DC.” *The Nation*, 29 June 2015, [www.thenation.com/article/most-underestimated-feminist-dc/](http://www.thenation.com/article/most-underestimated-feminist-dc/).

similar to the many new female faces who ran in the 2018 elections. Some of the 1992 incumbents had been involved in scandalous activities (an explanation for some of the retirements) and voters were actually looking for people who did not have a political background to ensure a clean record. A portion of the scandals were attributed to sexual harassment and infidelity amongst male politicians.

This sentiment of distrust toward the current politicians was evident in many residents' reactions to being canvassed in 2018. We encountered many people who were completely apathetic about the elections because of their resentment towards politicians. "I am not voting for anyone because I don't know any of the candidates. I don't know who to trust," expressed a 48 year-old Democrat. Some would even say, "I don't trust any politicians." One 26 year-old man declared, "I am of the belief that, if our votes counted, they wouldn't let us vote," insinuating that voting citizens do not have any control or say in political processes. People are adamantly boycotting voting; they would declare, "I don't vote anymore," or "I'm not interested this year," usually while shutting the door.

On the other hand, many people I talked to while canvassing were motivated to elect women because of Trump's sexist "grab them by the pussy" rhetoric and the recent flood of sexual assault allegations in the #MeToo movement. In October, there were intense reactions to the Senate's nomination of Brett Kavanaugh as Associate Justice of the Supreme Court despite Christine Blasey Ford's sexual assault allegations during the confirmation hearings. "We have got to get that rapist Kavanaugh out of there" mentioned Tony, a 72 year-old Democrat, "We need to get those geezers out of there. We need to get some new faces. As many women as we can. Like Kamala Harris, oh god, she is a superstar on the rise, you know, our Senator." Upon

realizing that Irmalinda is a woman, some people would halt the conversation with, “I’ll definitely vote for her. I am only voting for women this year.”

Women in 1992 were motivated to run for political positions to reshape policy, focusing on medical care and women’s rights. In 2018, “You see a lot of Democrats and Democratic women who are running saying they were pushed to do this because of the Trump administration threatening health care,” said Swers. Additionally, in spite of Trump’s efforts to narrowly define gender and use the powers of the federal government to roll back civil rights for gay and transgender people, LGBTQ candidates ran in record numbers in 2018. The majority of the women and LGBTQ candidates ran as Democrats, signaling a shift since the 1992 elections, when women ran for both Democratic and Republican seats. Swers argues that while 1992 was the “Year of the Women,” 2018 deserves the title “Year of the Democratic Woman.”<sup>27</sup>

Other analysts have declared 2018 the “Year of the Black and Brown Women,” as women of color candidates increased by nearly 75% since 2012 elections.<sup>28</sup> Over 400 Black women ran in the elections and the first two Muslim women and the first two Native American women were elected to Congress. Black and Latina women were elected for positions, such as the U.S. Representative from Massachusetts and governor of New Mexico, that had never before been occupied by a woman, let alone a woman of color. Across the country, the 2018 elections boasted progress in political representation for women and women of color.

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<sup>27</sup> Zhou, Li. “The Striking Parallels between 1992’s ‘Year of the Woman’ and 2018, Explained by a Historian.” *Vox Media*, 2 Nov. 2018, [www.vox.com/2018/11/2/17983746/year-of-the-woman-1992](http://www.vox.com/2018/11/2/17983746/year-of-the-woman-1992).

<sup>28</sup> Blackwell, Angela Glover, and María Teresa Kumar. “If 1992 Was The Year Of The Woman, 2018 Is The Year Of Black & Brown Women.” *Bustle*, 13 Nov. 2018, [www.bustle.com/p/if-1992-was-the-year-of-the-woman-2018-is-the-year-of-black-brown-women-13127116](http://www.bustle.com/p/if-1992-was-the-year-of-the-woman-2018-is-the-year-of-black-brown-women-13127116).

## Aggressive, Ambitious Women

Having decided to run for City Council a bit late, Irmalinda's campaign was limited on time, resources, and funds. In a Facebook post of her in front of her truck decorated in OSUNA signs, Irmalinda captions the photo, "That moment you run for office on a shoestring budget. 🦊

#trulygrassroots #PeoplePower #irmalinda2018 #d3represent #UplandProud #WeAreUpland #NotMeUS #capolitics #womeninpolitics #Suena #Lucha #Love #Rise #Vote# Osuna2018 #cityofupland #UplandDistrict3"<sup>29</sup>

Ultimately, Irmalinda's campaign was truly driven by the #PeoplePower of friends, volunteers, and students. Unintentionally, almost all of the volunteers were women. Irmalinda used social media and an "Irmalinda for Upland City Council District 3" Facebook page to increase her campaign's publicity and reach more voters. On the page, she posted pictures of the canvassers each time we would go out together. As many of the photos reveal solely women's faces, Irmalinda would add captions such as "These Women Rock," "Girl Power," or "When Women Work Together, It's A Bond Unlike Any Other."<sup>30</sup>

Many women connected with this sentiment and celebrated Irmalinda for being a woman. In a video endorsing Irmalinda, one resident said, "Yo voy a votar para Irmalinda Osuna porque ella va a ser un cambio muy grande y muy fuerte para nosotras las mujeres que viven aquí en Upland. Espero que ya gane porque ella va a ser la mejor mujer que tenemos para el Distrito 3 de aquí de Upland." (*I am going to vote for Irmalinda Osuna because she is going to be a large,*

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<sup>29</sup> "Irmalinda for Upland City Council District 3" Facebook photos. [https://www.facebook.com/pg/Irmalindaa/photos/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/Irmalindaa/photos/?ref=page_internal)

<sup>30</sup> "Irmalinda for Upland City Council District 3" Facebook photos. [https://www.facebook.com/pg/Irmalindaa/photos/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/Irmalindaa/photos/?ref=page_internal)

*strong change for us, the women who live in Upland. I hope that she wins because she will be the best woman that we have for District 3 here in Upland.)*<sup>31</sup>

For others, “Girl Power” was unappealing. A few days before the election, a post in the “UPLAND POLITICS” Facebook group generated a lot of attention. A citizen posted, “Stepping in dangerous water here, but looking for factual reasons to vote for either Ricky Felix or Irmalinda Osuna for District 3. And please, no name calling or childish comments.” Among the citizens’ comments, a suspected internet troll wrote, “I would also like to express my opinion on this ideal of woman power unite. Men still count in my book! Inclusivity should also include men. The aggressiveness is a poor taste in my opinion. Couldn’t imagine what this candidate would bring into city hall with those that surround her. Remember we have a long history of candidates that surround themselves with groups that can bring negative impact on our city.”<sup>32</sup>

This sentiment was explicitly confirmed by other residents; when using a text banking system to remind voters to vote for Irmalinda on election day, a voter responded, “How will I be impacted by her winning. I don’t really like women in leadership roles.”<sup>33</sup>

In her 2004 study, “*Do Women Lack Ambition?*” Anna Fels finds that women hate to promote themselves. “For them, ‘ambition’ necessarily implied egotism, selfishness, self-aggrandizement, or the manipulative use of others for one’s own ends” (Fels 51). Thus, women are less likely to take credit for their work, bargain a promotion, or negotiate a higher salary. Men, on the other hand, consider ambition to be “a necessary and desirable part of their

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<sup>31</sup> “Irmalinda for Upland City Council District 3” Facebook videos. <https://www.facebook.com/Irmalindaa/videos/1984624711599182/>

<sup>32</sup> “UPLAND POLITICS” Facebook post. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/707400549390360/permalink/1377987755664966/>

<sup>33</sup> “Irmalinda for Upland City Council District 3” Facebook photos. [https://www.facebook.com/pg/Irmalindaa/photos/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/Irmalindaa/photos/?ref=page_internal)

lives” (Fels 51). These gendered perspectives have shaped workplace behavior and established a perceived “ambition gap” between women and men. Historically, women’s perceived lack of ambition has been used to excuse the scarcity of women in powerful and higher up jobs, including political positions.

Ironically, as women do start to work their way up the professional or political ladder, they are criticized for being *too* ambitious. In their 2016 *Washington Post* article, “Why women’s representation may suffer when Hillary Clinton is attacked as ‘ambitious’ and ‘unqualified,’” Jill Greenlee points out that Bernie Sander’s campaign manager, Jeff Weaver, “suggested that Clinton’s ambition was a destructive force,” when he spoke of Hillary Clinton on the night that Sanders won the Wisconsin primary. “Don’t destroy the Democratic Party to satisfy the secretary’s ambition to become president of the United States,” Weaver warned.

Women are heavily discouraged from advancing their careers, and face obstacles in their workplace or candidacy that may lead them, and women around them, to opt out of trying. Greenlee, Holman and Vansickle-Ward analyze Weaver’s statement, “Scuffles like these are highly unlikely to change the overall trajectory of the race, but they are troubling for this key reason: Attacks on female candidates as being “ambitious” or “unqualified” are exactly the reason that so many qualified women don’t run for political office in the first place.”

To argue that women are less ambitious than men places the blame on individuals rather than addressing the internalized sexism and structural discrimination that encourages women to stay passive in regard to their job position and salary. This fear of self-promotion is affirmed when overwhelmingly qualified women such as Hillary Clinton, who served as the First Lady for eight years, a New York Senator for eight years, and the Secretary of State for four years, are still

condemned for aspiring to powerful positions. Similarly, when an Upland resident associated Irmalinda's campaign with "aggressiveness" because of its female participation, this implied that women are not welcome to advocate for themselves in leadership positions and may discourage women from engaging in politics at all.

### **Campaigning on an Environmental Justice Platform**

In addition to having more women candidates run for office, another historical aspect of the 2018 elections was the inclusion of environmental justice in the political conversation. In the United States, where the current administration denies the validity of climate change, the president's plan for job creation is to revive the coal industry, and where states that have made it illegal to say the word "climate change" in schools, discussing environmental issues in politics is considered progressive. To address environmental justice, the intersection of environmental issues with racial and socioeconomic inequality, then, might be considered radical. Irmalinda is among many women candidates, such as Rashida Tlaib, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, and Keldra Roy, who have been leaders in environmental justice activism and who are now using their political voices and platforms to advocate for environmental justice.

In 2013, people in the Detroit area observed petroleum coke pollution (petcoke), a byproduct of the Canadian tar sands oil processed at the Marathon refinery in Southwest Detroit which was likely to be exported and burned as a fuel in other countries. The petcoke was seen in big black piles along the shoreline south of downtown Detroit and as a black cloud of dust when the wind picked up the fine particulate matter.

Though the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality claimed that petcoke was not toxic, Rashida Tlaib, who at the time was a representative of southwest Detroit in the

Michigan House of Representatives, gathered her own samples in order to verify that it did not pose a health risk. Through chemical tests, Tlaib found that petcoke contains vanadium and selenium, which are safe in small doses but could potentially lead to respiratory and cardiovascular problems if ingested in large amounts. In response, Tlaib worked to pass an ordinance to contain the petcoke, and though it did not pass in 2013, her discovery mobilized Detroit City Councilmember Raquel Castañeda-López to work on a separate fugitive dust ordinance, which passed in 2017, four years later. The ordinance regulates the storage and transportation of the petcoke and reduces dust from storage by requiring the companies to sweep the streets and clean trucks before entering neighborhoods.<sup>34</sup>

For the November 2018 elections, Tlaib’s campaign for Congress centered around environmental issues, particularly focusing on Michigan’s ongoing water crises. Detroit, the city Tlaib would represent, has faced water shutoffs for years; Flint has suffered from water contamination since 2014, exposing more than 100,000 residents to lead poisoning; and communities in Kalamazoo County are facing water restrictions after discovering high levels of chemicals linked to cancer and liver disease in their water.

On her website, Tlaib highlights environmental protection as a main priority. “Here in Southeast Michigan we’ve got a lot of big polluters getting away with poisoning our community. They think because we’re not the richest communities, and because of the color of our skin, that they can get away with it. But I’m raising my family in this community and I’m not going to let them poison our air and pollute our water and dump waste on our soil.” Tlaib’s progressive

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<sup>34</sup> Kubota, Bill, and Detroit Public Television. “Detroit Battles 'Fugitive Dust,' and Scores a Rare Environmental Win.” *CityLab*, 12 Jan. 2018, [www.citylab.com/environment/2018/01/how-detroit-beat-fugitive-dust/550241/](http://www.citylab.com/environment/2018/01/how-detroit-beat-fugitive-dust/550241/).

agenda expands to a \$15 minimum wage, universal health care, and abolishing ICE. On November 6th, 2018, Tlaib was elected as the Congresswoman of District 13 in Detroit. She is the first Palestinian and Muslim woman elected to the U.S. Congress.<sup>35</sup>

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the 28-year old Congresswoman of New York City's 14th congressional district, elected in November 2018, also campaigned on environmental justice. She states on her website that "climate change is the single biggest national security threat for the United States and the single biggest threat to worldwide industrialized civilization." She aims for the United States to be free of fossil fuels by 2035. "Right now, the economy is controlled by big corporations whose profits are dependent on the continuation of climate change. This arrangement benefits few, but comes at the detriment of our planet and all its inhabitants. Its effects are life-threatening, and are especially already felt by low-income communities, both in the U.S. and globally."<sup>36</sup>

Both Ocasio-Cortez and Ilhan Omar, a Minnesota Congresswoman, also elected in November 2018, advocate for a Green New Deal. "I reject the false dichotomy created by the fossil fuel industry between having jobs and a clean environment. We must ensure that those employed in the fossil fuel economy have access to employment in the green economy. A Green New Deal will create millions of jobs for workers in both rural communities and low-wealth communities," Omar states on her campaign website.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> "Rashida for Congress." *Rashida for Congress*, Rashida for Congress, [www.rashidaforcongress.com/](http://www.rashidaforcongress.com/).

<sup>36</sup> "Ocasio 2018: Vote November 6th." *Ocasio 2018: Vote November 6th*, [www.ocado2018.com/](http://www.ocado2018.com/).

<sup>37</sup> "Ilhan Omar | DFL-Endorsed Candidate for Congress." *Ilhan Omar | DFL-Endorsed Candidate for Congress*, [www.ilhanomar.com/](http://www.ilhanomar.com/).

In Irmalinda's case, her activism around Cabrillo Park was a main talking point throughout her campaign, as it demonstrated her commitment to an equal distribution of resources in her community. "What, only rich people can play soccer now?" exclaimed a 32 year-old man who resides in an apartment adjacent to the park. "Cabrillo Park is like, a landmark in Upland," said a 20 year-old who grew up playing in the park. This was the general reaction to the Cabrillo Park proposal. Very few people, despite Irmalinda's efforts to inform the community, were aware of the city's plan to sell the park, even those who live right next to it. Most people were not surprised that the city would disregard the value of the park to the nearby residents. "Of course they wanted to sell the park," people would react, showing their contempt for the City Council. "The problem with the current City Council is that they treat Upland like a business, not like a city where people live," stated a 35 year-old woman.

Just as Tlaib could appeal to people affected by polluted water in Michigan, and Ocasio-Cortez could appeal to the communities of Throgs Neck, College Point, and City Island that are affected by erosion and rising sea levels in New York, Irmalinda was able to connect with Upland residents about the near loss of Cabrillo Park. There is no climate change denial in communities suffering the immediate effects of rising sea levels, wildfires, extreme drought, or other climate-related threats to their homes. In the same way, environmental justice is tangible for communities like Upland, who, over the years, have seen their green space rapidly disappearing.

### **What will women do with their kids?**

Many of the women who campaigned on an environmental justice platform in the 2018 elections are mothers. These environmental, more-than-just-municipal-housekeeping activists

turned the long-standing conception that mothers are not suitable to be politicians on its head. As Senator Murray commented in 1992, she was advised to suppress her womanhood and pressured to defend her motherhood. “If you run, what will you do with your kids?” Historically, mothers have always been scrutinized in the workplace, including political office. “To understand why, you have to look to American gender stereotypes,” explains Andie Kramer, author of *Breaking Through Bias: Communication Techniques for Women to Succeed at Work*, “On the one hand, we tend to believe that a good mother is available to her kids 24/7 and thus, almost by definition, is an inferior worker. On the other hand, if a mother shows competence and commitment at work, she's viewed as a bad mother and therefore deeply unlikable” (Kramer xxvi).

This discrimination is affirmed by the motherhood “penalty,” described by Michelle Budig in her comparative study of the wages of mothers and fathers. Among full-time working women, married mothers earn 7% less per child (76 cents to a married father’s dollar) than unmarried, childless women (96 cents to an unmarried, childless man’s dollar). Budig references Stanford sociologist Shelly Correll’s experimental research which explains that “describing a consultant as a mother leads evaluators to rate her as less competent than when she is described as not having children” (Correll 1298).

On the other hand, “Fatherhood,” Budig explains, “is a valued characteristic of employers, signaling perhaps greater work commitment, stability, and deservingness” (Budig 13). Among full-time working men, fathers receive a fatherhood “bonus;” an average 6% increase in earnings for married fathers versus unmarried, childless men. As political figures, “male candidates have long been able to use their children to appear more youthful, human and charming,” states Kate Zernike in her September 2018 *New York Times* article, ‘And I’m a

Mom.’ Mothers, who run for political office, on the other hand, are thought to have abandoned their children.

Paradoxically, women candidates without children are criticized even more than women with children, as they are rejecting their traditional duty as a woman to be a mother. In her 2010 study, *“Voting For Mom: The Political Consequences of Being a Parent for Male and Female Candidates,”* Brittany Staisburg concluded that “Voters rate childless female candidates substantially lower than childless male candidates, mother candidates, and father candidates. Childless women also lose the traditional ‘female advantage’ on child-care and children's issues” (Staisburg 1). Thus, the trajectory for women running for political positions is bleak; mothers are criticized for not giving their entire lives to their children, while women without children are criticized for not being mothers. For this reason, women have tended to wait until children were out of the house to run for office, setting them back in their ability to gain experience and work their way up the political ladder. If women chose not to wait, they were advised to keep their kids out of the picture.

### **The Year of the Mothers**

In their 2016 *U.S. News* article, “A Mother for President,” Rachel VanSickle-Ward and Jill Greenlee discuss the elevation of Hillary Clinton’s motherhood at the 2016 Democratic National Convention, declaring it “a central plank in the effort to convince Americans to elect our first woman president.” In the 2018 elections, mothers running for political office followed suit. Rather than fear that their status as mothers would make their candidacy less credible, women used motherhood to ensure their dedication to the well-being of their community and their investment in providing a better future for all. “In this year’s election cycle, motherhood has

become an asset to be flaunted in progressive campaigns, resolving a decades-old tension for women seeking to enter electoral politics,” Annika Neklason states in her 2018 *Atlantic* article, “Moms Running for Office Are Finally Advertising Their Motherhood.”

As aforementioned, female candidates of all ages, backgrounds and marital/mother statuses advocated for the environment in the 2018 elections. Further, many mother candidates specifically intersected their motherhood and environmental justice within their platforms. In step with Perkins’ thesis which “rejects stereotypes that denigrate the political abilities of housewives and mothers,” (Perkins 77) women proudly introduced their motherhood and environmental activism to the political scene in 2018. Mothers skillfully utilized their political and professional positions to bridge a nexus between environmental advocacy and politics to defy the conceptualization of female environmental activists as solely mothers and housewives.

Kelda Roy, who ran for governor of Wisconsin, produced an ad called “Our Girls,” in which she tells the story of learning about the prevalence of Bisphenol A (BPA), a neurotoxin and endocrine disruptor, in children’s products. While sitting with her two daughters, and breastfeeding her infant, she discusses her activism around banning BPA through writing Wisconsin’s 2010 “BPA Free Kids” Act.

Among Rashida Tlaib’s priorities listed on her website: “Environmental protection to keep our families safe and healthy. I’ll fight to undo the terrible cuts the Trump Administration has made to the EPA’s budget and hold polluters accountable, not give them a license to poison us. I don’t tolerate bullies, and I’m not going to let them poison my kids or yours.” Here, Tlaib exposes her investment in the issue of pollution in her community by tying it to the health of her own children.

Irmalinda channeled her motherhood towards her initiative to create job opportunities for the youth in Upland. “Yo tengo dos hijos. Y no hay nada. No hay oportunidad,” (*I have two sons. And there isn't anything. There is no opportunity.*) she explains while speaking to a Spanish-speaking resident. “Yo estoy corriendo para ellos porque a mi me preocupa mucho la comunidad. No nos esta representando.” (*I am running for [my sons] because the community concerns me. It is not representing us.*)<sup>38</sup>

Rather than boasting about her twenty years of experience working at Hewlett-Packard or showing off her endorsements from the Sierra Club, the Service Employees International Union and the Arbol Verde Preservation Committee, Irmalinda prioritized being a mom during her open statements at a candidates' forum, “I am fairly new to politics but I am not new to local community involvement. First off, my husband and I have been together for 28 years, we have two amazing sons going to college. We have been a part of District 3 for 15 years and I have to say, given my background, it is an honor to be a resident of Upland. Growing up, raising our family in District 3, our kids went to Upland public schools all the way from elementary to high school. And I have been involved in the community as a PTA Board member doing volunteer work, fundraising and also yes, a Band Mom for the legendary Upland Highland Regiment Band. Again, while working a full time job.”<sup>39</sup>

In the 2018 elections, women passed on the pearls and the strict archetype of female politicians and decided to be themselves instead. “And after years of being told to put on a suit and recite their résumé — and smile! — female candidates are revealing themselves in more

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<sup>38</sup> Video from canvassing on September 29, 2018.

<sup>39</sup>The Upland Report. “Irmalinda Osuna District 3 Opening Statements.” *YouTube*, YouTube, 6 Oct. 2018, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5Dj9rS3ilQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5Dj9rS3ilQ).

complex ways. They aren't running as men, but they aren't exactly running as women in a stereotypical way. They're running as individuals — something like the voters they are trying to reach," states Zernike, in her 2018 *New York Times* article, "Forget Suits. Show the Tattoo. Female Candidates Are Breaking the Rules." This year, "women are "arguing that motherhood not only doesn't disqualify them, it makes them more qualified."<sup>40</sup>

### **Activism Cultivates Connections and Commitments**

"Most people think that what draws people into movements is their commitment to an issue," Dr. Hahrie Han explains at her October 2018 talk, *People on the Move: Organizing for Climate Change*. Han argues that this is not usually true. "People are in situations where they are experiencing a life transition and they wanted to find something new. And someone invites them to a meeting in their church, or in their community, and they show up, the first time they show up is because they don't want to make Brinda mad, or because they are curious about meeting new people in their church or something like that, but then something happens at that meeting that makes them want to come back. and then over time not only do their views on the issues become transformed but also their sense of, because of who I am and what I believe, what must I do? Their sense of what actions they want to take become transformed. That is the story of transformation that underlies a lot of these movements."<sup>41</sup>

Han, a political scientist at the University of California, Santa Barbara, specializes in the study of civic and political participation, collective action, organizing, and social change, particularly as it pertains to social policy, environmental issues, and democratic revitalization,

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<sup>40</sup>Zernike, Kate. "'And I'm a Mom.' Candidates and Voters Warm to Kids on the Trail." *The New York Times*, 12 Sept. 2018, [www.nytimes.com/2018/09/12/us/politics/women-midterms-children.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/12/us/politics/women-midterms-children.html).

<sup>41</sup> Pitzer College. "Hahrie Han: People on the Move: Organizing for Climate Change." *YouTube*, YouTube, 8 Nov. 2018, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=tv1Q1FiOAsk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tv1Q1FiOAsk).

and has published three books about social and political activism. In her talk, she proposed, “The challenge then, in a way, if we think about people-powered movements, is how do these groups of people reconfigure the resources they have and develop the power they want? What are the resources that people-powered movements have? They are rich in relationships, and rich in commitment. How do you turn those kinds of resources into power?”

Upon reflection, many of the student volunteers who worked on Irmalinda’s campaign wrote about being initially nervous or apprehensive about the social aspect of the campaign, or that they were distrustful of politics. One student wrote about canvassing, “Before knocking on the door, I am rehearsing this line in my head over and over, practicing what I am going to say so that I will not mess up. There is a sense of pressure to deliver the initial introduction as smoothly as possible in order to gain the trust of the community. I feel intimidation swell up within my body as I wonder who will be answering the door and how they react to my presence and message.”

Another student wrote, “When I first heard about this assignment, I felt intrigued but emotionally conflicted. On one hand, I really enjoy classes that have an interactive, social, and outside of the classroom component that feels meaningful. However, I felt conflicted about getting involved in politics because it somehow seemed inaccessible, like something other people get involved in but something that isn’t for me (beyond voting). I used to shy away from strongly supporting a candidate because I’d never agree with all of their positions and tactics and it often felt like I was choosing the least bad option when I was voting.”

In her talk, Han emphasizes that “awareness is not the same as action.” As students, many of us feel submerged in theory but deprived of praxis. Working on the campaign gave students

the opportunity to practice social justice in a tangible way. Almost all of the students write that their initial anxiety went away after their first few days canvassing, and that in the end the campaign was a rewarding experience. One student wrote, “I have learned that getting engaged with political movements is not a huge and intimidating endeavor; it is engaging with the people around you to better your community.”

Others expressed feeling empowered by the campaign, “Being involved in Irmalinda Osuna’s campaign is the first time I’ve felt like I have tangible power to have an effect on the government/how things are run. It’s the first time I’ve felt like I can do something that will affect power structures instead of just raising attention.” For some volunteers, working on Irmalinda’s campaign, which was oriented around social justice, was a method of coping with the Trump administration’s recent rollbacks of civil and human rights. The campaign became an outlet for frustration with local and national politics; it helped us all feel a little less helpless.

Finding this tangible power, doing something for a worthy cause, and coming together to work towards social and environmental justice feels great, but it may be the “coming together” aspect of the experience that keeps people coming back and sustains their activism. Han emphasizes, “The most successful social movements in history don’t just draw on people’s existing relationships, but they create new ones. So you are actively creating new relationships, and that is where the momentum comes from within the movement.”

Irmalinda, intentionally or not, ensured that the campaign always revolved around community-building. Volunteers met at her house before going out to canvass, where they would discuss any news around the campaign and map out the plan for the day. On busy days, people were sprawled throughout Irmalinda’s kitchen and living room; some filling out sticky notes,

some working on any technical difficulties with the political data app, but most chatting and getting to know each other. There were core volunteers who would canvass every weekend, and there were also new volunteers almost every week. Friends, students, and supporters would arrive from other districts and cities to canvass for Irmalinda, and many would end up coming back the next weekend.

Volunteers were generally sent out in pairs so that everyone had a support system in the process. Between navigating the maps, juggling the literature, and interacting with intimidating residents, it helped to have someone to talk and laugh with between houses. After each canvassing session, the volunteers always convened at Irmalinda's house for lunch to input data and share our heartening, disheartening, and strange experiences. Everyone had stories to share.

Over lunch, we would write down any important issues that the residents brought up for Irmalinda to be aware of and research, add people to the texting list, and follow up on any action items. We shared new canvassing tactics and speaking points, and brought up any weaknesses in our strategy that we could improve upon. We would celebrate covering one more neighborhood in District 3 and connecting with new residents. Towards the end of lunch, when people would usually start trickling out, Irmalinda would invite people to stay by asking, "Okay, who wants coffee?"

In their testimonies, students reflected on the relationships that they built while working on the campaign. One student, who refers to Irmalinda's campaign as "The Osuna Movement," reflects, "The Osuna Movement was a release – feeling like we were doing something – which helped make our lives better as volunteers. I found myself being very happy about making a difference in this election, and it certainly helped with my anxiety come Nov 6th. But at some

point, Donald Trump is likely to go away, and this need for release will evaporate. The most sustainable technique the Osuna Campaign utilized was social enjoyment. In turning her living room into campaign headquarters, and by having her generals be her good friends Karen and Prof Sarathy, volunteering became another way to be around good friends, write notes together, and meet new cool people. I did not expect to want to canvass as much as I did – after all canvassing is typically ineffective altruism. Measuring by Quality Adjusted Life Years, my time is technically better spent working a job that can pay for mosquito nets than canvassing for a city council candidate. However, by the 2nd time around, canvassing wasn't a job - it was a fun way to learn, be productive, socialize, and devote my heart to something. Just like the participants in most other effective movements I came because my organization was getting involved, and stayed because I was enjoying myself.”

Personally, I always stayed for coffee. As I expressed in my introduction, I tried out canvassing for the first time because my professor invited me to do so. I took interest in Irmalinda's platform and canvassing, but what I didn't realize until later was that I truly enjoyed starting my Saturdays and Sundays off meeting and spending time with people. I wanted to work towards environmental and social justice in Upland, but I also wanted to hang out with the group.

Irmalinda greeted volunteers by exclaiming their name and offering a welcome hug. As they left, she walked them to the door to thank them for offering their time and to hug them goodbye. She would always express gratitude towards all of the volunteers, constantly reminding us that we energize her and keep her going. This genuine appreciation made volunteers recognize that they were valuable to the campaign and that their time and energy were well spent that day.

A woman from Upland who volunteered on the campaign commented on meeting Irmalinda, “I immediately knew she had something. She let me learn that I could step out of my comfort zone, big time, when she asked if I would stand outside Stater Bros. and hand out fliers to Upland residents about the issue with park. I just KNEW I couldn't do it; (I'm an introvert, for crying out loud!) Irmalinda never doubted me and, though I signed up for a 1 hour shift, I ended up staying for 3 and I found my groove.”<sup>42</sup> The campaign encouraged self growth for volunteers while also acting as an outlet for them to contribute to a greater cause. The combination of individual empowerment, group collaboration, and the flow of gratitude kept volunteers coming back.

In addition to following through for the group and enjoying feeling valuable myself, what kept me committed to the campaign was that it was so much fun. Many weekends, we would talk for hours after canvassing, and usually we would just stay through the afternoon until we went out canvassing again in the evening. Sometimes Irmalinda would dance to her favorite music, and other days we would take naps on the couch. In the final weeks before the election, I was at Irmalinda's house everyday, canvassing in the evening, and going to events or putting up lawn signs in the campaign truck at night. Afterwards, we would eat dinner or have a drink to decompress and follow up with the people we had canvassed. Irmalinda's husband and two sons joked that the house wasn't theirs anymore, it was the campaign's.

A woman commented on the relationships she made through volunteering on the campaign, “Truly, I have found my people. I now have the privilege of knowing and being friends with some of the most passionately committed, amazing people you could ever hope to meet. I

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<sup>42</sup> Facebook post 1. Name and link omitted for privacy.

already knew (name of volunteer) but now I have (names of volunteers) to count among my friends. Most of all, thank you, Irmalinda Osuna, for bringing all of us together, for the movement you started (which we will keep going), and for gently pushing me to do things I never thought I could.”<sup>43</sup> Another woman concluded, “Best of all, it introduced me to a wonderful community of people. I know we will continue to do great things in Upland - I feel like I've found my tribe!”<sup>44</sup>

One student wrote, “Upon reflection, it is clear that relationships keep political movements alive. This campaign was special for me because I got to spend time with motivated, and inspirational women.” All of these comments tie into Han’s thesis: “It is the lotus work of relationships that people have that tend to hold people together.”

### **Get Up(l)and Vote!**

Irmalinda’s two opponents in the City Council race were Gino Filippi and Ricky Felix. Filippi was one of the four at-large City Council incumbents, and he had served on Upland’s City Council for eight years. He grew up in Upland with his family who has grown wine grapes in the area since 1992, and went on to become a winery consultant, wine writer, and the co-owner of the J. Filippi Winery. In his campaign, Filippi discussed about the progress he has made in improving Upland’s finances during his term. Many residents argue that he did so by favoring relationships with businesses, and expressed that they do not feel as though they have benefitted from the decisions that Filippi made as a City Council member.

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<sup>43</sup> Facebook post 2. Name and link omitted for privacy.

<sup>44</sup> Facebook post 3. Name and link omitted for privacy.

Ricky Felix grew up in Southern California and owns a small air conditioning inspection company in Upland. Felix's hook is that he is a "regular guy," who hopes to create a bright future for his children and family by reducing crime and homelessness in Upland and improving the parks. On his website, he stated that he hopes to be the voice of the people because "People matter, things don't."<sup>45</sup> He had run for City Council in the at-large elections in 2016 and lost. Afterwards, Felix began attending every City Council meeting. He started his 2018 campaign early, and pushed through until the end.

All of the candidates put a lot of energy into the campaign and canvassing. A method of educating the public about the elections and gaining name recognition for the candidates was to place signs with the candidate's name on people's front lawns. While canvassing, one of the questions we would ask supporters was if they would be willing to let us put a lawn sign up. The signs served to inform people about the elections and encourage people driving by to research the candidates or support who their neighbors are supporting. By the end of October, lawn signs had flooded the streets of Upland.

A few times, we would run into the other candidates' canvassers on the same street or see their cars and signs in the same neighborhoods. Sometimes we would meet supporters who would take down the other candidate's lawn signs to put up Irmalinda's, and vice versa we would see our lawn signs replaced by those of the other candidates. Some of our lawn signs disappeared for unknown reasons. One resident said that someone took hers down.

In the week before the elections, Irmalinda ran into her neighbor at the grocery store whose home she had canvassed early in her campaign. They recognized each other and began to discuss

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<sup>45</sup> "Ricky Felix 4 Upland." *rickyfelix4upland*, [www.rickyfelix.com/](http://www.rickyfelix.com/).

election day, and the neighbor told Irmalinda that Felix had gone to her house while canvassing. In addition to promoting himself, Felix mentioned that Irmalinda “is a socialist.” In Upland, which is split between moderately liberal and conservative thinkers, an association with socialism could be a huge turn off for many voters. Upon Irmalinda’s confrontation, Felix defended calling her a socialist by saying, “Well, aren’t you?”

Irmalinda advocated for non-partisan inclusion throughout her campaign, arguing that local issues cannot be divided by political parties. She would openly tell people that she is herself a Democrat, but that she stopped paying attention to party affiliation when she realized that there were concerns pertaining to the Upland City Council that she could agree on with both Democrats and Republicans. Irmalinda responded to the socialist incident with a post on Facebook of her posing in front of her sign on the lawn of the neighbor she had run into at the grocery store, who had decided to take down Felix’s sign to put Irmalinda’s up.

On election night, we gathered at a volunteer’s house to watch the national election results and celebrate the campaign. The night was full of warm conversations, yummy food, and cuddling under blankets on the patio. A lot of volunteers and friends stopped by, and a few of us stayed there until past 3 o’clock in the morning, waiting for the San Bernardino County voting website to update the counted votes. We shared and listened to stories from each others lives, always having been too busy talking about the campaign to discuss our histories. Four of us fell asleep on the couch.

When we woke up, the most updated count informed us that Irmalinda had most likely secured second place. Over one month later, the county was still counting mail-in ballots and provisional votes, and the gap between first and second place closed slightly each time the

website updated. In the end, Irmalinda lost to Ricky Felix by 163 votes. Ricky Felix received 1,517 votes, Irmalinda received 1,354 votes, and Gino Filippi received 980 votes.

### **The Process is Imperative**

On November 26th, Irmalinda was back at Upland City Hall to speak. “As an analyst by trade I like to look at what is the issue, who are the stakeholders, and in this regard, the City of Upland, the citizens are the stakeholders in this matter from an economic, from a financial standpoint,” she started off.<sup>46</sup> At this meeting, the outgoing Council was voting on whether to rehire their current city manager, Jeannette Vagnozzi. the City Council thought Vagnozzi was most capable for the job. Citizens and some of Vagnozzi’s old employers vouched for her qualifications and experience, her commitment to the position, and the great work she has done for the city of Upland.

While Irmalinda had no bias towards or against the proposed city manager, she and many others opposed the fact that the City Council of mostly “lame ducks,” Council members who were going to be replaced by the newly elected Council members in just two weeks, were going forward with the hiring process instead of allowing the new City Council to decide who to hire as the city manager. Irmalinda emphasizes, “The process is really imperative. It is to make sure that the process is fair, objective, it is equitable and inclusive so that we are not selecting someone based on a great reference and some statements.”<sup>47</sup> Other citizens opposed to the idea reminded the City Council that there is no rush in hiring a new city manager and argued that

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<sup>46</sup> Upland City Council Meeting, November 26, 2018. <https://uplandca.swagit.com/play/11262018-1176>

<sup>47</sup> Upland City Council Meeting, November 26, 2018. <https://uplandca.swagit.com/play/11262018-1176>

there is a risk that the new Council hire someone else, in which case the city would have to pay two city manager salaries.

Irmalinda suggested a more democratic hiring process: “The processes should be as follows: we need to form a selection committee that is unbiased, perhaps outsiders that will make sure they are looking at the process in an objective manner, and secondly we need to establish a set of criteria,” she continued, “In order for us to do that, we need to allow the new Council Members to determine what the mission, values, objective of this city is. So we are really getting ahead of ourselves. I urge you to allow some time for the new Councilmembers to reflect on what our values and mission are. What are the questions we need to ask? So that going forward there aren’t any questions or doubts or mistrust that clouds our city.”<sup>48</sup> In the end, the City Council voted to rehire Jeannette Vagnozzi.

### **Conclusion: Continued Activism to Make Upland a More Inclusive Community**

For the 2018 elections, Upland, California was partitioned into four new voting districts. Upland, a city whose residents are 41% Latino, had previously never had a Latino person serve on the City Council, a misrepresentation in the City Council which was classified as “racially polarized voting” under the California Voting Rights Act. With the district elections, two Latinos were elected as the City Council members for District 3 and District 4, the two districts with the highest concentration of Latino residents. Thanks to the new districts, the 2018 City Council election was the first time that Upland residents were able to vote for a representative in their immediate community.

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<sup>48</sup> Upland City Council Meeting, November 26, 2018. <https://uplandca.swagit.com/play/11262018-1176>

Irmalinda Osuna campaigned on an environmental justice platform not only because she was dedicated to protecting Upland's parks and natural resources, but also because she was committed to making sure that all Upland residents had a seat at the decision-making table. Irmalinda was devoted to making the City Council processes more democratic, and her campaign revolved around conversations and civic engagement. We shared information with many Upland residents about the elections, the new districts, and about the local issues of representation. We registered people to vote, we helped people fill out their mail-in ballots, and we gave people rides to the polls on election day. We brought residents together at Cabrillo Park to celebrate the diversity of the community at a "We Are Upland" taco party. We promoted local businesses across the city.

We knocked on over 2,600 doors and received 1,350 votes. This means that there are 1,350 Upland District 3 residents who identified with Irmalinda's campaign to protect parks and resources, make Upland a more inclusive community, increase civic participation, improve communication through technology, and support small businesses. The "Irmalinda Osuna for Upland City Council District 3" Facebook page remains intact with a new name; "Irmalinda Osuna for Upland Inclusive," and will continue to serve as a platform for Upland residents to spread information about current events and organize around action items.

Most importantly, we created relationships with one another. People of all ages and backgrounds gave their energy to Irmalinda's campaign, each bringing their own skills to the group. Volunteers worked on promotional videos, social media presence, event planning, graphic design, accounting, policy research, fundraising and endorsements. We canvassed, distributed lawn signs, and passed out flyers. On a people-powered campaign, everyone has something to

contribute. One volunteer summed it up, “How beautiful is it that her cause has brought together so many people from all walks of life? Each person there works to make Upland more inclusive for everyone, and the importance of that cannot be overstated.”

The group of women who worked with Irmalinda to defend the Sanctuary State Law SB 54, to Save Cabrillo Park, and to run for City Council are using the momentum from the campaign to continue to advocate for social and environmental justice in their community. Irmalinda has already begun communicating with her Council member, Ricky Felix, about the latest issues. In her “Thank you” concession post, Irmalinda stated, “We have a great opportunity ahead of us to work closely with our local representatives to help address the issues in our respective districts and across Upland. I very much look forward to being part of that collaboration.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> “Irmalinda for Upland | THANK YOU.” *Irmalinda | Irmalinda Osuna for Upland City Council District 3*, [www.irmalinda2018.com/thank-you.1](http://www.irmalinda2018.com/thank-you.1)

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