# The Demography and Future of Indigenous (Oaxacans) Populations in Los Angeles County

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## Abstract

- Oaxacans are indigenous peoples from the state of Oaxaca, Mexico.
- Migration patterns of Oaxacans and other Mexican indigenous groups into the United States has been traced back as early as the 1940's, and again, in the 1970's - post the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).[1,2]
- Los Angeles, CA holds the largest Oaxacan population outside of Mexico.
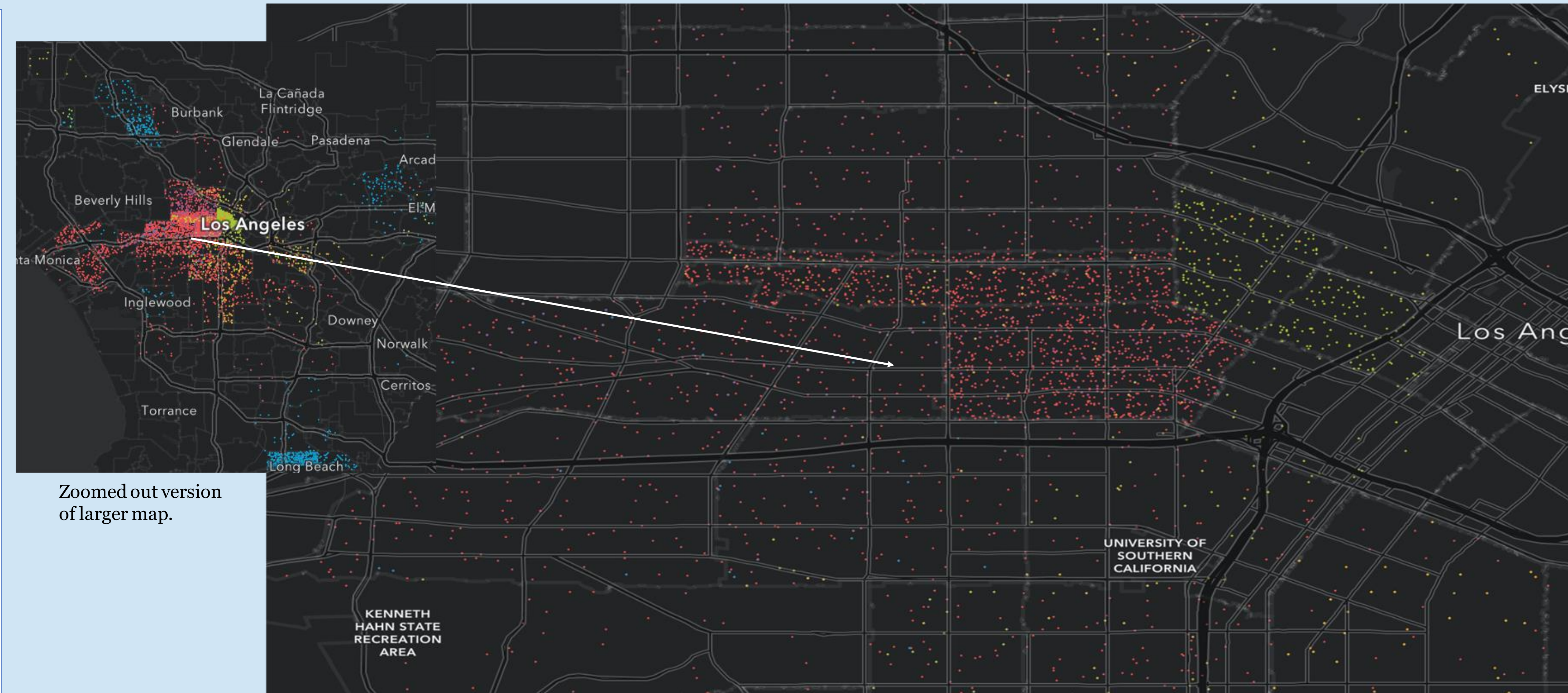- **Approximately 150,000 to 200,000 Oaxacans reside in Los Angeles County (LAC).**[3,5,9,11]

## Issues

- Notable absence of official sources or a comprehensive database that's specifically dedicated to documenting the population of Oaxacan's in LAC.
- Oaxacans and indigenous groups face racism, colorism (from White and lighter skinned Mexican and Latinx individuals), and discrimination based on physical appearance, skin color, and indigenous background. [4]
- Language:
- In LAC, many Oaxacans speak and understand little or no Spanish, making traditional outreach challenging. [5]
- Many of these indigenous groups have low levels of literacy and education and are often poorer than their non-indigenous counterparts.[5]



Zoomed out version of larger map.

Figure 1. Map of the diversity of indigenous languages in Los Angeles. Glowing dots, representing nearly **11,000** indigenous peoples with 20 different indigenous languages spoken throughout Mexican and Central American indigenous groups. (via CBO: Comunidades Indigenas en Liderazgo CIELO).[8]

## Demographics

- Geographic locations: Oaxacans and other indigenous groups are heavily populated in the Pico-Union area, near Koreatown (Figures 1).
- High rates of poverty and low-income status, lack of access to health insurance, and substandard housing conditions are faced across these Oaxacans.[5,6,12]
- In LAC, Oaxacans predominantly work in service industry, as janitors, housekeepers and restaurant employees.[5]
- In LAC, a majority of Oaxacans identify from Zapotecs and Mixtec groups.[7]
- There are about 20 different languages/dialects spoken among indigenous groups in the Los Angeles County area.[8]

## Recommendations

**Policy:**

- Recognize Oaxacan/other indigenous populations and their dialects to be officially included at city, state, and national levels and census data — to improve "mega-undercounting" [5] of indigenous groups.
- At the LAC level, create and provide accessible and affordable language interpreter services for Oaxacan and indigenous groups.

**Research:**

- LAC to strengthen collaboration with current indigenous CBOs to increase population visibility, opportunities, and voice community needs and further implement RDS methods into research practice.
- Effectively design and implement cultural and linguistic outreach strategies (i.e., radio)[10] to better survey population demographics.

## Conclusions

Upon extensive research, there was limited official and quantitative data sources, thereby limiting the quantitative analysis of the Oaxacan population.

- Access of some current data sources were obtained through publishment of indigenous Community Based Organizations (CBO's, i.e CIELO).
- Analysis of residential & geographic trends shows that Oaxacans have maintained a longstanding presence in these areas.
- Observed trends indicate a continuous Oaxacan population increase in surrounding areas (Mid-City) as well as increase of Oaxacan social movements.
- Historically, there has been difficulties in enumerating indigenous populations.[5]

## Future Implications

- To enhance the efficacy of population data collection for Oaxacans/indigenous groups, creating a Response Driven Sampling (RDS) is recommended through partnerships of indigenous CBO's.
- RDS could facilitate a comprehensive, community, and culturally sensitive approach, which could improve strategic methods for obtaining population demographics through a social network and snowball sampling effect.

**References:**