

# Over 100 Latino Christians reprove Trump adviser's reach

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More than 100 Latino Christian leaders signed a statement saying the Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, an evangelical adviser to President Donald Trump and a go-to voice for Hispanic evangelical perspectives, and news media have exaggerated the size of Rodriguez's reach as president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference.

In the [statement](#) released Tuesday, March 10, the signers said they were prompted to speak out because of the damage the Trump administration's immigration policies have done to Latino communities.

Rodriguez and the Rev. Tony Suarez, vice president of the NHCLC, are among a handful of Hispanic evangelical pastors advising the president.

In recent months, they have lamented that the Trump administration's immigration enforcement has not focused on deporting criminals, and they have continued to advocate for immigration reform through the [Dignity Act](#), a bipartisan immigration bill.

Several signers of the letter, titled "We are not a monolith, we are a multitude," said while Rodriguez represents some Latino evangelicals, he should not be the sole public representative.

"It's not just a misrepresentation but how that misrepresentation is impacting the communities we serve," said the Rev. Gabriel Salguero, president of the National Latino Evangelical Coalition and a letter signer. "Our people are hurting, and our people are not going to stand for apologists for this kind of immigration action."

## Op-ed increased tension

Building on years of simmering frustration with Rodriguez among some Latino evangelicals, letter signers interviewed by Religion News Service said the catalyst for the letter was an op-ed by Rodriguez published in Christianity Today late last month.

In it, he wrote the Latino church “is hemorrhaging” due to immigration enforcement. A week later, Rodriguez posted [photos of himself](#) and other pastors praying over Trump.

“Reverend Rodriguez hasn’t had a change of heart,” said the Rev. Carlos Malavé, president of the Latino Christian National Network, of his interpretation of the op-ed. “I believe that the reason he is doing that is because he’s starting to feel a strong pushback.”

Rodriguez’s biography at the bottom of the piece claims that, through the NHCLC, he “represents millions of Christians worldwide.”

Republican Rep. María Elvira Salazar’s office [cited](#) the NHCLC as representing more than 42,000 churches as recently as last fall. However, the Tuesday letter alleges both estimates are inaccurate and implausible given the numbers of Hispanic churches in key denominations.

“This demonstrates the need for media outlets to verify claims and accurately reflect the diversity and complexity of Latino Christian institutions in the United States,” the letter reads.

Reached by phone shortly after the letter was released Tuesday afternoon, Rodriguez said his group doesn’t “claim at all” regarding public membership figures and accused the letter writers of “bearing false witness.”

Though he acknowledged some spokespeople might reference certain

numbers, Rodriguez said, “After COVID, there has never been an articulation on our end in order to protect our constituents” from harassment related to policy positions the NHCLC takes.

“We’re not about the number of churches, and we’re not about the number of millions of people. We are about serving our community,” he said.

## **NHCLC website shows error message**

The Internet Archive shows the NHCLC’s website claimed a membership of more than 40,000 churches as late as October 2020, and a press release from last fall said the NHCLC represents “tens of thousands” of Hispanic evangelical churches worldwide.

On Tuesday evening and on Wednesday, the NHCLC’s website showed error messages and was inaccessible. An NHCLC spokesperson did not immediately respond to an RNS question about what caused the website outage.

Asked about letter writers’ claims Christianity Today published an unverified figure, president and CEO Nicole Martin told RNS Rodriguez provided the biography to the publication. She said it had been edited in an identical process used for all opinion writers.

Martin said she checked with Rodriguez about the statement’s accuracy after receiving RNS’ request for comment, and she forwarded two statements from the NHCLC to RNS.

One statement said the biography was accurate. “While it is impossible to know exactly how many Hispanic Evangelicals share our Biblical perspectives, we are confident that we represent the views of most of the 7 to 9 million Hispanic Evangelicals in the United States,” the NHCLC wrote, according to Martin.

Assessing the precise views of Hispanic evangelicals can be difficult, but surveys indicate their political alignment has shifted over time.

## Surveys affirm disagreement over immigration policies

A [2024 polling analysis from PRRI](#) found the share of Hispanic Protestants who identified as Republicans nearly doubled from 2013 to 2024, rising from 17 percent to 31 percent. Meanwhile, the percentage who identify as Democrats declined from 31 percent to 23 percent.

Even so, Hispanic Protestants have voiced strong disagreement with Trump's immigration policies. A [PRRI survey conducted last August and September](#) found that 64 percent of Hispanic Protestants said they have little or no confidence in Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and 57 percent agreed increases to the agency's funding have gone too far.

Similarly, a [Pew Research survey](#) conducted around the same time found that 55 percent of adult Latino evangelical Protestants said they strongly or somewhat disagreed with the president's overall approach to immigration.

The NHCLC sent RNS a statement that read: "The integrity of our representation is thoroughly verified. The number of churches affiliated through our denominational partners, networks, and chapters is formally certified through a rigorous internal process overseen by Mat Staver, Chief Legal Counsel, former Dean of Liberty University School of Law, and President and CEO of Liberty Counsel."

A spokesperson did not provide an approximate membership number when asked by RNS on multiple occasions.

The coalition letter criticizing media representation of Rodriguez was signed by Latino leaders across the U.S. and denominational backgrounds,

including some from the Assemblies of God, the denomination in which Rodriguez first became a pastor.

Other leaders who signed on come from the Reformed Church in America, Evangelical Covenant Church, Church of God of Prophecy, American Baptist Churches USA, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the United Methodist Church, nondenominational Pentecostal churches, and several seminaries, including Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

The group of letter signers also includes some who have longer histories with Rodriguez, like the Rev. Elizabeth Rios, founder of the Passion2Plant Network for church planting. Reviewing her book in 2013, Rodriguez [called her](#) “one of the most anointed and gifted leaders in the kingdom today.”

Rios said she’s asked journalists why they overrepresent his voice, and they say their editors required them to speak with him. “It’s not about him per se,” Rios said. “We’re just tired of people always pivoting to him as the unverified person that’s representing millions of people.”

“We just don’t think that he’s a credible witness,” she added—a feeling that’s been growing over the last decade. “Nobody in the Latino community wanted to call him out because we never want to throw our own under the bus.”

But, she said, “We have to say that journalists are helping to hurt our community by not verifying the sources that they use.”

## **Rodriguez responds**

Rodriguez said he had not read the letter yet on Tuesday afternoon but that criticisms of him were motivated by personal animus and jealousy. “I’ve never claimed to represent the woke evangelical left,” Rodriguez said. “It’s just a family conversation taking place which shouldn’t take place publicly.”

Despite the disagreement, he said he would follow the biblical command to “love and forgive and bless your enemies,” explaining, “If they believe the Nicene Creed, these are my brothers and sisters who I will see in heaven.”

Multiple Latino leaders who signed the letter told RNS they attempted to address their concerns in private with Rodriguez in recent years and that they had asked journalists to broaden their coverage of Hispanic Christians.

Rodriguez also said he supported diverse voices being represented in the media and that meeting with Trump while criticizing his administration’s policies is “a challenge.”

“I walk into these corridors of office with humility, and I ask God to just give me the right words that will help change hearts and minds—for the political leaders to appreciate this blessed community, the Latino community overall, the Hispanic community, the immigrant community, as a blessing and not a burden,” Rodriguez said.

He said Trump has doubled down on deporting criminals and finding “a solution for the good people,” referring to immigrants. “Even in the past 48, 72 hours, he’s talked about the fact that these people are good people, [and] we need to find a solution,” Rodriguez said of Trump.

Daniel Montañez, executive director for the Center for Public Theology and Migration and a post-doctoral associate at Boston University, said he’s witnessing “seismic shifts” within U.S. Latinos.

“I hope we’re able to assume our agency and autonomy within larger public narratives about our community,” said Montañez, who signed the letter. “That we’re able to come together in this moment and make a statement like this is something that is very significant.”

*RNS National Reporter Jack Jenkins contributed to this report. This story*

*has been updated to remove an incorrect explanation of Pew Research Center data.*

*Additional reporting by Faith Pratt of Baptist Standard.*