

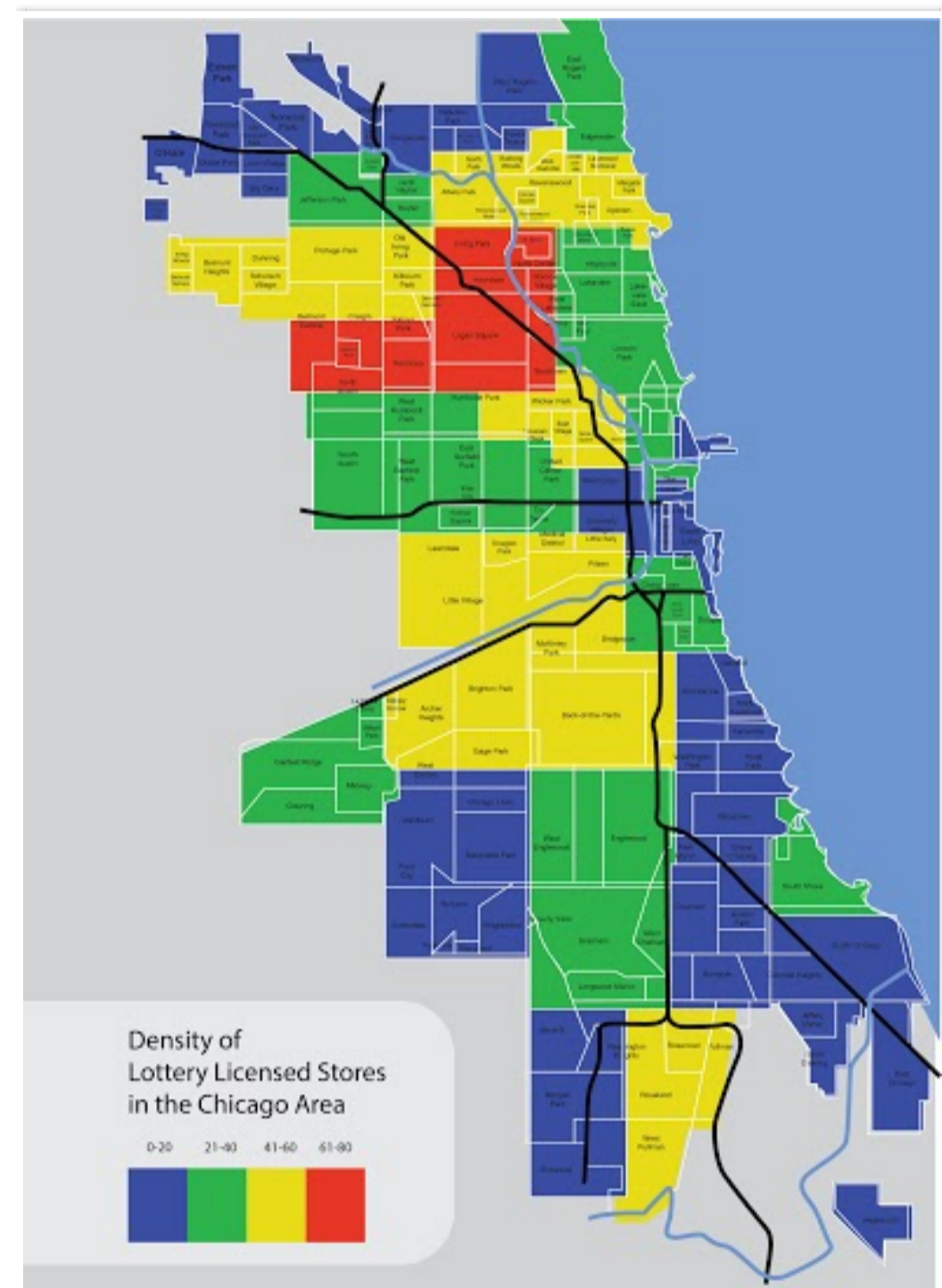
Easy Targets

by **ELEXIS RUIZ** • DECEMBER 23, 2014

The Illinois Lottery tempts Latinos with advertisements and ample opportunities to gamble

By Alex Harrell, Brenda Mak and Salina Jewell

When Yanira Roman thinks about how much money her family spends on Illinois Lottery tickets, she is frustrated. “They think that by winning the Lottery you get out of debt, but you don’t,” she says.



Roman, 21, is Puerto Rican and lives in Chicago’s Hermosa neighborhood on the city’s Northwest Side. She has watched her father spend \$20 to \$30 a week on Lottery tickets. When she tells him he’s wasting money, he laughs.

“They want us to save, but they don’t know how to save,” she says.

The situation isn’t helped by the pervasiveness of Illinois Lottery retailers and advertisements in her neighborhood. Hermosa includes part of zip code 60639, which has 60 Lottery retailers, the third-highest number in Illinois, according to an analysis of Lottery and census data by the Investigative Reporting Project (IRP). “Latin people are known for going to the corner store and playing,” she says.

A 2010 study in the *Journal of Community Psychology*, “A geospatial statistical analysis of the density of lottery outlets within ethnically concentrated neighborhoods,” supports this assertion. Researchers examined the concentration of vendors in ethnic New Jersey neighborhoods and found that they correlated most closely to the percentage of Latino residents.

In zip code 60639, there are 12 lottery retailers per square mile. Walking through her zip code is like running a gauntlet of gambling opportunities.

Opportunities abound

Latinos are the largest ethnic group in the three Chicago zip codes with the most Lottery retailers: 60639, where Roman lives, and neighboring zip codes 60618 and 60647, which include parts of the nearby Logan Square, Avondale, Irving Park and North Center neighborhoods.

The 60618 zip code has 76 retailers, the highest of any zip code in the state; the 60647 zip code had 67 retailers, Illinois’ second-highest total. The density of Lottery retailers in relation to the number of adults over the age of 18 in these neighborhoods is three times the density of zip code 60631, which includes majority-white Norwood Park and Edison Park, the IRP found.

This high concentration in poor, predominantly Latino neighborhoods stands in contrast to the statement Illinois Lottery Director Michael Jones made to the Investigative Reporting Project, when he said the Lottery does not have a target audience, other than “people over the age of 18.”

“No lottery ad, since I’ve been here, has ever been targeted to anybody,” said Jones.

Low income, high spending

Between 2011 to 2013, more money was spent on the Lottery in low-income Chicago zip codes than in higher-income zip codes. In Roman’s zip code, more than \$68 million was spent during those years—the sixth-highest expenditure of any zip code in the city. That averages out to more than \$1,000 per resident age 18 years or older in a neighborhood where the average income, according to the 2009-2013 American Community Survey, was just under \$39,000.

In all, six of the seven zip codes where Latinos were the majority group had below-average incomes, the IRP found. Lottery spending in the seven majority-Latino zip codes from 2011 to 2013 totaled more than \$400 million. This was more than the 22 Chicago zip codes with the least Lottery spending

combined, even though the latter group had more than 100,000 more adults than the majority-Latino zip codes.

“Many state lotteries have been trained to reach Hispanics for a very long time,” says Nataly Kelly, Vice President of Marketing at Smartling, a translation technology company. “Games and competitions are a prominent part of the Latino culture.”

Laritza Lopez, founder of Purple Group, a marketing communication agency that specializes in multicultural markets, says the Lottery’s “The Good Life” advertising campaign is especially effective with Latinos. These ads, which portray Lottery play as a way to ensure financial security for families, hit on a cultural reference point, she says.

“We know for a fact that close to 80 percent of Latinos, when surveyed in the country, say the most important thing they want to do is make sure to leave money for their family,” Lopez says. “That’s higher than any other group from the country, so that’s a different motivator. It’s protecting what you’ve built for your family.”

The website of one of the Illinois Lottery’s advertising agencies, Commonground, states that it focuses on “those factors that are in the DNA of a specific culture.” Neither Commonground nor the Lottery’s other agency, Downtown Partners, returned calls requesting their comments on advertising strategies in Latino neighborhoods.

Meanwhile, there’s only one tab for another language on the Illinois Lottery’s own website: ¿Habla Español?

Supply and demand

Alderman Rey Colón (35th), whose ward includes zip codes 60647 and 60618, doesn’t think that having a high density of Lottery retailers in one neighborhood is a bad thing. “When you dream numbers, you gotta play the numbers,” Colón says, recalling that he once told his mother about his dream of getting his first paycheck for a specific amount. She played those numbers and won.

Colón, who is Puerto Rican, says marketing to Latinos simply makes sense. Latinos are a fast-growing minority group, comprising 28.9 percent of the city’s population, according to the 2010 census. Without heavy Latino participation in the Lottery, Colón says, the state would lose out.

Moreover, Colón notes, the Lottery is good for Latino-owned businesses. He cites a convenience store owned by a friend, which struggled until it obtained a Lottery license. “The benchmark for a convenience store is having a Lotto machine,” he says.

Demand justifies the large number of places to play, Colón says. “I think they wouldn’t be there if people weren’t using it.”

Colón does, however, feel that Lottery money should be distributed to better reflect the places it comes from. “They should prioritize the areas with high number of dispensaries,” he says. “Those areas that are making money from dispensaries, the money should go to the schools in those areas.”

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