



Member Spotlight: Noreen Sugrue Publishes via Forbes to Bring Latino Economics into the Spotlight

FEBRUARY 6, 2025

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For years, [Noreen Sugrue](#) of the Latino Policy Forum has worked to sharpen her media engagement skills. Through SSN's OpEd writing workshops and editorial support, she honed her ability to translate data into compelling narratives, contributing regularly to local, state, and national media and even writing regular pieces for The Edge before expanding her reach. Now, [as a Forbes contributor](#), she brings national attention to the Latino wealth gap and the socioeconomic contributions of Latinos in the U.S. via her twice monthly columns. SSN spoke with Sugrue about how her column allows her to elevate stories that often go untold while pushing back against misinformation. The following conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Q&A

Why did you want to become a Forbes contributor?

Noreen: So much of the work around Latino issues, particularly on the wealth gap, is invisible. We saw this with coverage of work during COVID, for example. Latino issues are often not given the spotlight that they should be given and that they need to be given in this changing demographic world. *Forbes* presented an incredible opportunity to elevate the Latino narrative around the wealth gap and the socioeconomic contributions of the population whose numeric growth is greater than any other demographic group.

What is the focus of your Forbes column?

Noreen: *Forbes* is very clear in they give you a definition and it's part of the contract of what you cover. It is a column, not op-eds, so it is not anything about opinion. It is really writing a narrative that is data-driven and it has to have suggested actions that are derived from the data.

My particular focus is the Latino wealth gap and the socioeconomic contributions and challenges facing Latinos in the United States. For example, one of the pieces I wrote was published the Friday before the inauguration. There is all this talk about mass deportations, the threat of undocumented immigrants, et cetera. This was [a column](#) that focused on the economic contributions, both in the workforce as well as in

terms of the public dollars and consumer spending that undocumented immigrants, and then zeroing down to Latino undocumented immigrants, contribute versus what they cost.

How did your prior experiences help set you up for this opportunity?

Noreen: I've previously written [monthly pieces for *The Edge*](#), and I've also done a number of op-eds for both local or regional as well as national venues. Each writing opportunity gets you to step out of the role of researcher and ask how this is being heard and what the words mean, not to a researcher, but to a consumer of information who's looking for information that they can trust. Each of those pieces was practice. Honestly, each *Forbes* column now is practice in that turns of a phrase that I wouldn't have thought were controversial or had a double meaning are picked up by editors or by readers. You are forced to look not only at the data for how good it is, how much you can trust it, and what the narrative is, but you also have to ask yourself, how do you translate that for people who don't live in the world of the data you live in? Leave room for discussion, but always be faithful to the truth.

What resources have been helpful to you in establishing this column?

Noreen: SSN's workshops are amazing. They're very focused, they're very structured. The questions you are asked in the workshop, like what is the main argument of your piece, on the face of it sort of seemed like, well, how much can you learn from this? But as soon as you go to answer the question, you realize that it's a question that forces you to dive very deeply to understand how to translate your research and what you think about a topic into something that is reflective and respectful of the data and the research, but also doesn't require that you be a subject expert in the area.

SSN's editing of my previous writing and coaching have also been tremendously helpful. Before I talked with *Forbes*, a conversation I had with SSN staff really structured things and was a fantastic reminder that the goal here is not to tell people that this is the data, but it's to tell the story with the data.

What are your goals for your Forbes column?

Noreen: My column really elevates the work we're doing at the [Latino Policy Forum](#) and the work that we do in collaboration with others. It is elevating the Latino story. I actually think there should be a column that has the same parameters that I do for rural Whites, first-generation college students, Asians, Black Americans, Native Americans, and so on. We have to understand that the world is changing, society is changing, demographics are changing, and I think *Forbes* allows me and people I work with to elevate the Latino story, but we also have to be cognizant that that's only one story. All these other stories have to be elevated if we're truly going to have this mosaic of demographic, racial, and ethnic groups, and a successful socioeconomic world in which we live. We'll see if I continue the column at the end of the year, if there's anything more to say, but I suspect there's going to be a lot more to say.

In what ways does your column speak to the current moment when immigration is such a politicized topic?

Noreen: I think that there is so much vitriolic language and misinformation around immigration. There is this belief that Latinos are an immigrant group and in fact they're not. The majority of Latinos were born in this country. There's this belief that all undocumented immigrants are Latino, that is not true. There's little knowledge of the importance of the work that Latinos do. Undocumented Latinos have the highest labor force participation rate of any group, 77%. There's also the fact that these undocumented immigrants are not costing money. They don't collect Social Security, they pay Social Security. They're not eligible for social welfare programs, they're not eligible for housing subsidies.

And then I'm trying to offset some of the disinformation. The White House press secretary the other day said, well, everybody's worried about agriculture, but only two or three percent of farm workers are undocumented, or something like that. That's the wrong statistic. Yes, two or three percent of undocumented immigrants are farmworkers. The question is what percent of farm workers are undocumented and it's 42% nationwide. Go to places like the Salinas Valley and it's even higher. And so one of my goals is countering misinformation with data to say, these policies will have economic ramifications for Latinos, but for the rest of us as well. A lot of what the column does is situate the Latino socioeconomic contributions in the larger context of how we all benefit.

What lessons have you learned in the three months of writing this column?

Noreen: I mean the columns are a lot of fun to do. But the thing about academics is we can easily write a 15 page paper, not a problem, but putting it in less than 1200 words and sort of finding that sweet spot between 600 and 1200 words for the reader is really difficult. *Forbes* is an online platform, a lot of people are reading it on their phone, so it needs to be a four to six minute read. And you have to hit them with the information early, you've got maybe four sentences to motivate them to keep reading. That's a real challenge. There's not this big lead up into the analysis. Instead, it's: here's what this column is doing and why, and now I'm going to tell you the story.

It's fun to think about information in that way, but they are a lot of work, more work than people think. You need to make sure you've got the right data, site sources, and you need to triple check that data. You write two or three drafts, the editor and the copy editor go over it, and then you have to go over it again. I also spend a lot of time thinking what is the elevator pitch. In ten seconds, what is this column about? That helps, but that also takes time.

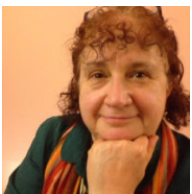
And I would encourage SSN members to take advantage of the resources they have access to through the network. SSN members should take the op-ed writing workshop that you facilitate three or four times. Doing it just once isn't going to do it, you learn a lot by going through that process multiple times. And honestly, the

conversation I had with SSN staff before I talked with the *Forbes* editor made all the difference. You all were clear, you were honest about the work, you were honest about what they wanted, and you pointed out the rigor that you have to approach this with. Our daughter says, researchers don't have deadlines, they have suggestions. That is not the case here. And SSN was very clear about all that, you were very nice about it, but also clear that I should really think this through.

So, thank you to SSN. I would not be doing this column were it not for SSN, and that really needs to be communicated. People need to take seriously the opportunities and the intellectual power that SSN brings to translating academic work and research work into public engagement.

NOREEN SUGRUE

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Sugrue's domestic research focus is COVID, inequality, immigration, housing, inequity, and Latinos. Her international research focuses on nursing and in particular neonatal nursing workforce, policy, and education issues. Overarching themes in Sugrue's writings include answering the questions of: who gets what and why? what policies and incentives need to be implemented to ensure greater equity?