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The Civic Education and Engagement of Latina/o Immigrant Youth: Challenging Boundaries and Creating Safe Spaces

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The Civic Education and Engagement of Latina/o Immigrant Youth: Challenging
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As demographics shift and immigration is a hotly contested area of US civic life, the civic preparation and participation of Latin American immigrant youth is becoming increasingly important. I examine the growing literature on this topic, inquiring into the political and demographic changes that have stimulated this area of inquiry, the challenges of studying this population, and what we currently know and what we still need to know about immigrant youth civic engagement and activism. At a time when the struggle for immigrant rights in the US is caught in the crossfire of severe recession and racism, young immigrant activists offer a ray of hope through their modest yet noteworthy successes. Scholarship on their civic engagement sheds light on ways that young people who live on the fault line between nation-states are creatively forging civic identities, claiming political voices, and making an impact.

Despite assertions that Latin American immigration threatens the vitality of U.S. civic life (Huntington 2004) and research findings that immigrants are less likely to engage civically than US citizens,¹ in 2006, Latinos with varied relationships to the US nation-state led some of the largest political mobilizations in U.S. history.² In the 2008 presidential election, Latinos may have provided the margin of victory in swing states.³ Numerous scholars are revisiting the question of Latina/o immigrant civic engagement to make sense of the gap between academic findings that it is low and their recent, remarkable political activism and influence.⁴ Due to the geographic proximity of Latin America, the dependence of Latin Americans on remittances, and the increasing construction of Latin American immigrants as illegal,⁵ the transnational and human rights

¹ S. Karthick Ramakrishnan and Mark Baldassare, "The Ties That Bind: Changing Demographics and Civic Engagement in California," (San Francisco: Public Policy Institute of California, 2004) ; S. Karthick Ramakrishnan and Celia Viramontes, "Civic Inequalities: Immigrant Volunteerism and Community Organizations in California," (San Francisco: Public Policy Institute of California, 2006).

² Gustavo Cano, "Political Mobilization of Latino Immigrants in American Cities and the U.S. Immigration Debate," (New York: Institute of Latin American Studies, Columbia University, 2009) ; Sylvia R. Lazos, "The Immigrant Rights Marches (Las Marchas): Did the "Gigante" (Giant) Wake up or Does It Still Sleep Tonight?," *Nevada Law Journal* 7 (2007).

³ Laura Limonic, "Latinos and the 2008 Presidential Elections: A Visual Data Base," (New York: Latino Data Project, Center for Latin American, Caribbean & Latino Studies, City University of New York, 2008).

⁴ Irene Bloemraad and Christine Trost, "It's a Family Affair: Inter-Generational Mobilization in the Spring 2006 Protests.," *American Behavioral Scientist* 52, no. 4 (2008).

⁵ Nicholas De Genova, *Working the Boundaries: Race, Space, and Mexican "Illegality" In Mexican Chicago* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

dimensions of Latina/o politics challenge traditional paradigms of borders and citizenship.

Growth and Dispersal of Latina/o Immigrant Communities

As part of a long tradition of examining the acculturation process of the children of immigrants, scholars are looking at the recent political activity of 2nd generation Latina/o youth, for example in the 2006 protests.⁶ Although immigrant youth education⁷ and family relationships⁸ have long been studied, the civic education and engagement of Latina/o immigrant youth has only recently attracted scholarly attention. This new awareness is partly fueled by changing demographics. Latinas/os comprise 22% of all minors in the US; a majority (52%) of these youth belong to the 2nd generation (born in the US with at least one parents born in Latin America) and 11% were born abroad.⁹ By 2007, at least half of immigrants under age 18 were of Latin American origin, with 37% of foreign-born minors originating in Mexico (1.1 million), 7% from South America (207,000) and 6% from Central America (175,000).¹⁰ English Language Learners are the fastest growing student group in the US, and as Latin American immigrants disperse throughout the country, they increasingly impact suburban and rural schools in states like North Carolina, Georgia, and Kansas with little experience educating this population.¹¹ Unauthorized immigration is hotly debated, and children comprised 12.6% of the

⁶ Bloemraad and Trost, "It's a Family Affair: Inter-Generational Mobilization in the Spring 2006 Protests;" Christina M. Getrich, "Negotiating Boundaries of Social Belonging: Second-Generation Mexican Youth and the Immigrant Rights Protests of 2006," *American Behavioral Scientist* 52, no. 4 (2008).

⁷ John Ogbu, *Minority Education and Caste: The American System in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New York: Academic Press, 1978); Laurie Olsen, *Made in America: Immigrant Students in Our Public Schools* (New York: New Press, 1998); Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco, *Central American Refugees and Us High Schools: A Psychosocial Study of Motivation and Achievement* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1989); Carola Suárez-Orozco, Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco, and Irina Todorova, *Learning in a New Land: Immigrants, Students and American Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Angela Valenzuela, *Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

⁸ Nancy Foner, ed., *Across Generations: Immigrant Families in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

⁹ Richard Fry and Jeffrey S. Passel, "Latino Children: A Majority Are U.S.-Born Offspring of Immigrants," (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, 2009).

¹⁰ "Statistical Portrait of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States, 2007: Table 19: Living Arrangements of Children by Region of Birth," (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, 2009b).

¹¹ Haeyoun Park, "New to English," *New York Times*, March 13 2009.

undocumented in 2008.¹² Although the number of undocumented children has not been growing since 2003,¹³ they are becoming more visible through legislative battles and organizing to help or hinder their life chances in the US.

Yet changing demographics only partially explains why the civic engagement of Latina/o immigrant youth is significant. Youth are important change agents and have played key roles in Latina/o social movements. How does their civic participation differ from that of immigrant adults and US-born youth? Latina/o immigrant youth also live at the intersection of a number of key struggles against the criminalization of youth of color and immigrants.¹⁴ Political initiatives aimed at them include struggles over bilingual education, attempts to restrict the educational access of undocumented students, and federal initiatives to legalize their status. Yet the innocence of children has been highlighted in civil rights struggles, such as the integration of schools and other public facilities. There are strong arguments for incorporating all immigrant children into US society and not penalizing them for their parents' circumstances and "choices."

Inclusive Definitions of Immigrant Youth Civic Engagement

When scholars study immigrant youth civic engagement, they face special challenges that include the varied ways that these youth and their civic practices are defined and measured. We cannot use the experiences of adult or immigrant citizens to define and forecast immigrant youth civic engagement.¹⁵ Jensen and Flanagan¹⁶ argue that to paint a picture of immigrant youth's civic life, we must look at their general community involvement. For example, Stepick et al.¹⁷ identified and measured four types of activities in their study comparing U.S.-born and immigrant youth in South Florida: 1) political; 2) civic; 3) expressive group membership (participating in athletics and ethnic organizations); and 4) social (attending church, spending time with peers; helping one's family). This raises questions about when civic engagement is defined so broadly that it

¹² Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn, "A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States," (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, 2009).4.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Daniel HoSang, "Traditions and Innovations: Youth Organizing in the Southwest," in *Occasional Papers Series on Youth Organizing* (New York: Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing Occasional Paper Number 5, 2005).

¹⁵ Roberto G. Gonzales, "Left out but Not Shut Down: Political Activism and the Undocumented Latino Student Movement," *Northwestern Journal of Law and Social Policy* 3, no. 2 (2008).

¹⁶ Lene Arnett Jensen and Constance A. Flanagan, "Immigrant Civic Engagement: New Translations," *Applied Developmental Science* 12, no. 2 (2008).

¹⁷ Alex Stepick, Carol Dutton Stepick, and Carol Yves Labissiere, "South Florida's Immigrant Youth and Civic Engagement: Major Engagement: Minor Differences," *Applied Developmental Science* 12, no. 2 (2008).

becomes less informative.¹⁸ On the other hand, scholars may fail to measure immigrant youth's participation in key political activities such as volunteering for a candidate because they assume inactivity due to age and immigration status.¹⁹ Yet as immigrant youth and their parents become political targets, some volunteer in political campaigns and get-out-the-vote efforts.²⁰ The challenge is to define their civic engagement in a way that captures its scope yet is not too wide-ranging.

Diversity of Latina/o Immigrant Youth

Immigrant youth's civic engagement can also be hard to assess because of their great diversity and the differing ways that researchers have defined and categorized them. Historically, the second-generation children of immigrants have been called "immigrant youth" or have not been disaggregated from first-generation youth by researchers.²¹ For example, a special journal issue of *Applied Developmental Science* on the topic of immigrant youth civic engagement²² provides important studies on the topic, yet it also includes research on 2nd generation youth or studies that do not clearly disaggregate youth born abroad.²³ Although immigrant and 2nd generation youth share immigrant parentage, their immigration status and experiences may be distinct.²⁴ Many have lived through long separations from their parents, traumatic border crossings, the disorientation

¹⁸ Mary C. Waters, "The Challenges of Studying Political and Civic Incorporation," *Applied Developmental Science* 12, no. 2 (2008).

¹⁹ Stepick, Dutton Stepick, and Labissiere, "South Florida's Immigrant Youth and Civic Engagement: Major Engagement: Minor Differences."

²⁰ John Rogers et al., "Civic Lessons, Public Schools, and the Civic Development of Undocumented Students and Parents," *Northwestern Journal of Law and Social Policy* 3 (2008); Hinda Seif, "'Wise Up!' Undocumented Latino Youth, Mexican-American Legislators, and the Struggle for Higher Education," *Latino Studies* 2 (2004); ———, "Wearing Union T-Shirts. Undocumented Women Farm Workers and Gendered Circuits of Political Power," *Latin American Perspectives* 35, no. 1 (2008).

²¹ For example, in their book Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation* (Los Angeles, New York: University of California Press, Russell Sage Foundation, 2001). Portes and Rumbaut define the second generation as persons born to immigrant parents in the U.S. or who arrived in this country before adolescence.

²² Jensen and Flanagan, "Immigrant Civic Engagement: New Translations."

²³ Lene Arnett Jensen, "Immigrants' Identities as Sources of Civic Engagement," *Applied Developmental Science* 12, no. 2 (2008); Jane Junn and Natalie Masuoka, "Identities in Context: Politicized Racial Group Consciousness among Asian American and Latino Youth," *Applied Developmental Science* 12, no. 2 (2008); Stepick, Dutton Stepick, and Labissiere, "South Florida's Immigrant Youth and Civic Engagement: Major Engagement: Minor Differences."

²⁴ Seif, "'Wise Up!' Undocumented Latino Youth, Mexican-American Legislators, and the Struggle for Higher Education;" Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova, *Learning in a New Land: Immigrants, Students and American Society*.

of moving to a new land, and learning a new language.²⁵ There are indications that these distinct life events lead to significant differences in their civic participation.²⁶

Age of immigration also impacts Latina/o immigrant youth. Suárez-Orozco et al.²⁷ specifically studied newcomer youth, yet age of arrival is often unmarked by other scholars. The 1.5-generation, generally defined as those born abroad and mostly educated in the receiving country, often have divergent experiences and relationships to the US and their country of origin compared to both 2nd-generation and recently arrived youth. Furthermore, the 1.5-generation is variously defined, which makes it difficult to compare studies. Immigrant youth are also studied at different ages ranging from early adolescence to 30 years old. Although most studies that include immigrant youth do not look at immigration and citizenship status, scholars have begun to examine their great impacts that are especially relevant to questions of civic engagement and political activity.²⁸

Other forms of diversity can impact civic engagement patterns. Latina/o immigrant youth arrive from different countries. Within the dominant group of Mexican immigrants, youth may originate in Mexico City or indigenous communities in rural Oaxaca. Immigrant children and their families come to the US as refugees, for economic reasons, or both, and they have varied class backgrounds and educational levels. Latina/o immigrant youth have cultural, linguistic, racial, and religious differences. They settle in White neighborhoods isolated from other Latinos and ethnic support systems, and in immigrant enclaves apart from mainstream middle class culture and resources.²⁹ Political context matters in both regions of origin and destination, including local or national political events, presence of a social movement, and the changing relations between the US and

²⁵ Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova, *Learning in a New Land: Immigrants, Students and American Society*.

²⁶ Mark Hugo Lopez and Karlo Barrios Marcelo, "The Civic Engagement of Immigrant Youth: New Evidence from the 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey," *Applied Developmental Science* 12, no. 2 (2008).

²⁷ Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova, *Learning in a New Land: Immigrants, Students and American Society*.

²⁸ Leisy Abrego, "'I Can't Go to College Because I Don't Have Papers': Incorporation Patterns of Latino Undocumented Youth" *Latino Studies* 4, no. 3 (2006); Gonzales, "Left out but Not Shut Down: Political Activism and the Undocumented Latino Student Movement;" Carmen Martínez-Calderón, "Out of the Shadows: Undocumented Latino College Students," in *ISSC Fellows Working Papers* (Berkeley: Institute for the Study of Social Change., 2009); Seif, "'Wise Up!' Undocumented Latino Youth, Mexican-American Legislators, and the Struggle for Higher Education."

²⁹ Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova, *Learning in a New Land: Immigrants, Students and American Society*.

sending countries.³⁰ Cuban immigrant youth who lived in Miami during the Elián González controversy,³¹ Mexican immigrant youth who walked out of California schools to protest Proposition 187,³² and Salvadoran youth from families that fled political violence³³ have been impacted by their context. Aside from structural issues, these youth also have individual preferences and exercise agency.³⁴

Research in fields such as health³⁵ and education³⁶ demonstrate that being foreign-born is not only associated with problems; it can also lead to resilience. Studies that disaggregate the civic engagement of first-generation Latina/o youth can also present a clearer picture of their disadvantages and strengths compared to their peers with deeper roots in the U.S. and its system of racialization.

Methods, Themes, and Voices

The nexus of age, race, and immigration status makes it challenging to identify and study immigrant youth, especially when they are undocumented. Because most work on immigrant youth has been conducted on their education and schools are a key site of their civic education and engagement, some larger educational studies shed light on their civic life.³⁷ Similarly, although the experience of immigrant youth was not the focus of

³⁰ Karen Brodtkin, *Making Democracy Matter: Identity and Activism in Los Angeles* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007); Jensen and Flanagan, "Immigrant Civic Engagement: New Translations;" Stepick, Dutton Stepick, and Labissiere, "South Florida's Immigrant Youth and Civic Engagement: Major Engagement: Minor Differences."

³¹ Stepick, Dutton Stepick, and Labissiere, "South Florida's Immigrant Youth and Civic Engagement: Major Engagement: Minor Differences."

³² Seif, "'Wise Up!' Undocumented Latino Youth, Mexican-American Legislators, and the Struggle for Higher Education."

³³ Suárez-Orozco, *Central American Refugees and Us High Schools: A Psychosocial Study of Motivation and Achievement*.

³⁴ Valenzuela, *Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring*.

³⁵ Elena Zúñiga et al., "Mexico-United States Migration: Health Issues," (México D. F.: Consejo Nacional de Población, 2005).

³⁶ Ogbu, *Minority Education and Caste: The American System in Cross-Cultural Perspective*; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova, *Learning in a New Land: Immigrants, Students and American Society*; Valenzuela, *Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring*.

³⁷ Olsen, *Made in America: Immigrant Students in Our Public Schools*. Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova, *Learning in a New Land: Immigrants, Students and American Society*; Valenzuela, *Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring*.

Brodkin's³⁸ rich anthropological study of the development of youth activists in Los Angeles, approximately half of the activists profiled were immigrants.

Recent research either specifically looks at the civic engagement of immigrant youth or disaggregates them within larger studies of civic engagement. The topic has been approached from a variety of perspectives including psychology and adolescent development, education, political science, sociology, and anthropology. Most research has been qualitative and small-scale, using ethnographies, focus groups, interviews, or case studies.³⁹ This provides a nuanced picture of the lives of immigrant youth and their process of civic engagement. Our picture has recently been enhanced by data analysis from national surveys⁴⁰ and longitudinal studies.⁴¹ Although quantitative data offers a more generalizable view, it is difficult to find a representative sample of immigrant or Latina/o immigrant youth because of their low frequency in the population and the limitations of locating them through traditional methods such as phone surveys.⁴²

Scholars are interested in the ways that immigrant youths' civic education and activity compares to that of co-ethnics and other U.S.-born peers. Regarding identity issues, researchers examine how their immigrant or ethnic identity is related to civic engagement, and whether these pursuits focus on cultural or immigrant issues or reflect transnational perspectives.⁴³ The special role that schools play in immigrant youth civic education,⁴⁴ engagement, and activism is a major theme in this field of inquiry.⁴⁵ Youth

³⁸ Brodtkin, *Making Democracy Matter: Identity and Activism in Los Angeles*.

³⁹ Gonzales, "Left out but Not Shut Down: Political Activism and the Undocumented Latino Student Movement;" Rogers et al., "Civic Lessons, Public Schools, and the Civic Development of Undocumented Students and Parents;" Seif, "'Wise Up!' Undocumented Latino Youth, Mexican-American Legislators, and the Struggle for Higher Education."

⁴⁰ Lopez and Marcelo, "The Civic Engagement of Immigrant Youth: New Evidence from the 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey;" Judith Torney-Purta, Carolyn Barber, and Britt Wilkenfeld, "Differences in the Civic Knowledge and Attitudes of Adolescents in the United States by Immigrant Status and Hispanic Background," *Prospects: Quarterly Review of Comparative Education* 36, no. 3 (2006).

⁴¹ Stepick, Dutton Stepick, and Labissiere, "South Florida's Immigrant Youth and Civic Engagement: Major Engagement: Minor Differences."

⁴² Lopez and Marcelo, "The Civic Engagement of Immigrant Youth: New Evidence from the 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey."

⁴³ Brodtkin, *Making Democracy Matter: Identity and Activism in Los Angeles* Jensen, "Immigrants' Identities as Sources of Civic Engagement;" Alex Stepick and Carol Dutton Stepick, "Becoming American, Constructing Ethnicity: Immigrant Youth and Civic Engagement," *Applied Developmental Science* 6, no. 4 (2002).

⁴⁴ Torney-Purta, Barber, and Wilkenfeld, "Differences in the Civic Knowledge and Attitudes of Adolescents in the United States by Immigrant Status and Hispanic Background."

involvement in various immigrant rights struggles is examined, including efforts to pass in-state tuition bills for undocumented students, the 2006 immigration reform protests, and organizing in support of the DREAM (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) Act.

The civic engagement and political activism of undocumented youth is a special case that overlaps with yet differs from that of other immigrant youth and undocumented adults. These distinctions are reflected in related scholarship. For example, because of the difficulty of identifying undocumented youth and gaining their trust, no studies of this population utilize random sampling procedures. The social movement for immigrant rights motivates much writing in this area, and a central theme is the ways that silencing, fear, and shame impede undocumented youth's civic engagement.⁴⁶ In fact, undocumented youth are writing and producing scholarship as part of their activism, blurring the boundaries between research and political action.⁴⁷ When undocumented youth organize for their own rights with documented immigrant and U.S.-born peer allies, they demonstrate the creative identifications and citizenship practices of those who grow up as "illegal aliens." Because the general studies of immigrant youth civic engagement and those that focus on the issues of the undocumented diverge, I examine each separately.

National Studies and Regional Studies

Recent analysis of national and regional surveys offers important insights into the civic knowledge and activity of immigrant youth. Torney-Purta et al.⁴⁸ measured the differences in preparation for citizenship between immigrant, non-immigrant, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic youth. Their analysis, conducted from a human development perspective, uses survey data from the IEA Civic Education Study, a nationally representative sample of 2,811 14-year old students that included 194 non-Hispanic and 92 Hispanic immigrants.⁴⁹ They find that although immigrants and Hispanic students

⁴⁵ Rogers et al., "Civic Lessons, Public Schools, and the Civic Development of Undocumented Students and Parents."

⁴⁶ S.I.N. Collective, S.I.N., "Students Informing Now (S.I.N.) Challenge the Racial State in California without Shame... 'Sin Verguenza!'" *Educational Foundations* 21, no. 1-2 (2007); Francisco Villegas, "Challenging Educational Barriers: Undocumented Immigrant Student Advocates" (San José State University, 2006).

⁴⁷ Gabriela Madera and et.al., eds., *Underground Undergrads: Ucla Undocumented Immigrant Students Speak Out* (Los Angeles: UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2008); S.I.N., "Students Informing Now (S.I.N.) Challenge the Racial State in California without Shame... 'Sin Verguenza!'"

⁴⁸ Torney-Purta, Barber, and Wilkenfeld, "Differences in the Civic Knowledge and Attitudes of Adolescents in the United States by Immigrant Status and Hispanic Background."

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 347.

have a comparable understanding of the behavioral norms of citizenship compared to non-Hispanic, native-born students, the latter had more positive results in regards to “knowledge of civic concepts, understanding democracy, possessing the skills necessary to understand political communication, expressing positive attitudes toward the nation, and expressing protectionist attitudes toward the nation.”⁵⁰ On the other hand, immigrant and Hispanic youth express strong immigrant identities and are more likely to support “rights and opportunities” for immigrants.⁵¹

Despite this lower civic knowledge, immigrant youth report levels of civic engagement that are comparable to their native-born counterparts. Based on data from the 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey, Lopez and Marcelo⁵² find that although young immigrants report less civic engagement than their peers, many of these gaps disappear when demographic variables such as socioeconomic status are controlled for. The researchers find that 2nd generation youth have the highest level of civic engagement, followed by other U.S.-born youth; immigrant youth report the lowest rates. The survey was conducted soon after the 2006 immigration policy protests, and the one area where immigrant youth showed significantly higher civic engagement levels was in protest activities.⁵³ Political scientists McRee and Setzler use the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health to “examine patterns of both acculturation and civic incorporation” of foreign-born, second-generation, and native-born youth.⁵⁴ Their sample included 487 first generation students in grades 7-12. They find that, “young immigrants are as likely as native youth to embrace core American political values, practice volunteerism, and become politically involved to the extent that their citizenship and socioeconomic circumstances permit.”⁵⁵

Stepick et al.⁵⁶ combine surveys and participant observation in their study of high school students and college freshmen in Miami, Florida. Their data differs from most studies that focus on Latino adolescents because they capture the civic engagement of Cuban immigrant youth. They are interested in whether immigrant youth adapt the civic engagement patterns of other US minority youth or exhibit distinct behaviors. Using a

⁵⁰ Ibid.. 352.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Lopez and Marcelo, "The Civic Engagement of Immigrant Youth: New Evidence from the 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey."

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Nick McRee and Mark Setzler, "Becoming Young Americans: The Acculturation and Civic Assimilation Patterns of Young Immigrants in the Us," (Unpublished manuscript, N.D.). 3.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Stepick, Dutton Stepick, and Labissiere, "South Florida's Immigrant Youth and Civic Engagement: Major Engagement: Minor Differences."

broad definition of civic engagement outlined previously, Stepick et al.⁵⁷ find that immigrant youth's commitments are comparable to those of US-born minorities. However, immigrant youth's volunteer activities are more likely to benefit their ethnic group; they are active in tutoring, use their bilingual skills to help other immigrants, and serve as linguistic and cultural bridges between elders and the broader host society. Like native minorities, they are politically active related to discrimination. The immigrants surveyed are also more involved in sports, an activity where one can build a sense of community and that demands few English language skills. They report high levels of involvement with churches and family activities.⁵⁸

Qualitative Perspectives

Qualitative studies, including larger studies of immigrant education, shed light on some reasons for the gap between immigrant youth civic knowledge and what appears to be their solid civic engagement. In her ethnography of students at a high school that serves a working class Latino and Mexican immigrant community in Houston, educational scholar Valenzuela⁵⁹ identifies the various factors that sparked school walkouts in 1989. The school had a record of low academic achievement and high drop out rates, and was underfunded compared to others in the district. It was poorly maintained, and the students used obsolete or broken computers and outdated textbooks. A shortage of qualified personnel led to use of noncertified teachers, insufficient classes, course scheduling problems, and few extracurricular activities.

Although the school had demographically transformed to a Latino majority, there was no corresponding change in school personnel and curriculum. Students demanded more Latino faculty, bilingual counselors and staff who could communicate with immigrant students and family members, culturally sensitive administration, and an overhauling of the curriculum that mostly ignored Mexican and Latino history and culture. The walkout reminds us that immigrant students and US- born co-ethnics can become civically active in their demand for quality, culturally competent education.

Valenzuela⁶⁰ found that immigrant students' educational progress, friendships, and activities varied depending on whether they were from rural or urban regions of Mexico, and their class differences, religious practices, and level of Americanization. For example, immigrant students with limited English language abilities preferred to spend time with other recent immigrants and had difficulty participating in extracurricular

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Stepick, Dutton Stepick, and Labissiere, "South Florida's Immigrant Youth and Civic Engagement: Major Engagement: Minor Differences;" Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova, *Learning in a New Land: Immigrants, Students and American Society*.

⁵⁹ Valenzuela, *Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring*.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

activities because of language barriers.⁶¹ Immigrant girls were more likely to help others, and spending time at school was a way to escape the constant supervision of strict parents. Mexico-oriented, 1.5-generation youth were culturally assimilated yet were bilingual and retained pride in their Mexican heritage. These immigrant students were the most likely to participate in mainstream extracurricular activities.

Valenzuela⁶² also discusses the cultural values of Mexican immigrant students. For example, the principle of *educación* “refers to the family’s role of inculcating in children a sense of moral, social, and personal responsibility and serves as the foundation for all other learning. ... The end state of being *bien educado* is accomplished through a process characterized by respectful relations.”⁶³ This cultural standard may contribute to the robust civic engagement of young Mexican immigrants documented in other studies.⁶⁴

Suárez-Orozco et al.’s⁶⁵ developmental study of immigrant youth and education also elucidates ways that the immigrant experience detracts from and promotes civic engagement. Over a period of five years, the researchers followed 309 recently arrived immigrant youth at 100 schools. Like Valenzuela,⁶⁶ they find that many immigrant students attend schools that are understaffed, with low academic expectations and hostile and violent peer cultures. Despite these obstacles, the researchers identify social aspects of the immigrant experience that give these students strong motivation to improve their lives.⁶⁷ A driving force of immigration is to provide better opportunities for children. Parents make sacrifices, and their children’s success is defined collectively by their ability to lift up their families and communities.⁶⁸ Although Suárez-Orozco et al.⁶⁹ focus

⁶¹ See also Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova, *Learning in a New Land: Immigrants, Students and American Society*.

⁶² Valenzuela, *Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring*.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Dolores Delgado Bernal, Enrique Aleman, Jr., and Judith Flores Carmona, "Transnational and Transgenerational Latina/O Cultural Citizenship among Kindergarteners, Their Parents, and University Students in Utah," *Social Justice* 32, no. 4 (2008). Brodtkin, *Making Democracy Matter: Identity and Activism in Los Angeles*; Seif, "'Wise Up!' Undocumented Latino Youth, Mexican-American Legislators, and the Struggle for Higher Education."

⁶⁵ Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova, *Learning in a New Land: Immigrants, Students and American Society*.

⁶⁶ Valenzuela, *Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring*.

⁶⁷ Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova, *Learning in a New Land: Immigrants, Students and American Society*.

⁶⁸ Brodtkin, *Making Democracy Matter: Identity and Activism in Los Angeles*; Seif, "'Wise Up!' Undocumented Latino Youth, Mexican-American Legislators, and the Struggle for Higher Education."

on the ways that this immigration story influences students' educational motivation, it can also lead to civic and political engagement.⁷⁰

Yet these strong incentives do not necessarily translate into achievement. Suárez-Orozco et al.⁷¹ find that recently arrived immigrant youth are socially segregated, and spend most of their time with other newcomers and their families.⁷² The authors emphasize the special role that non-family mentors have in helping immigrant youth adjust to their new lives.⁷³ Although girls were most likely to find mentors through churches, sports teams, and community centers, few immigrant students had access to supportive after-school programs or had adults outside their families who played significant roles in their lives.

Summary: Immigrant Youth Civic Engagement

In sum, immigrant youth are highly diverse, and their civic engagement varies based on features such as sex, age of immigration, English language ability, and the political contexts of receiving and sending regions. They are also defined in various ways; in order to produce comparable studies, researchers must establish common definitions, for example of the 1.5 generation. Because civic engagement patterns for immigrant youth and the 2nd generation differ, it is especially important to disaggregate these groups for analytical purposes.

When socioeconomic variables are controlled for, immigrant youth exhibit rates of civic engagement that are comparable to non-immigrants. The schools that serve working class and poor immigrant youth must be improved so the civic education they provide may reach the standards of more affluent educational institutions. Because they often engage in different civic practices than U.S. natives, it is important to define their civic engagement broadly. For example, immigrant youth tend to participate in religious activities, pursuits where English language ability is less important such as sports, and they assist other immigrants as translators and tutors. Although few have nonfamily mentors, these adults play crucial roles in their educational achievement and civic development.

⁶⁹ Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova, *Learning in a New Land: Immigrants, Students and American Society*.

⁷⁰ Brodtkin, *Making Democracy Matter: Identity and Activism in Los Angeles*; Seif, "'Wise Up!' Undocumented Latino Youth, Mexican-American Legislators, and the Struggle for Higher Education."

⁷¹ Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova, *Learning in a New Land: Immigrants, Students and American Society*.

⁷² See also Olsen, *Made in America: Immigrant Students in Our Public Schools*.

⁷³ See also Seif, "'Wise Up!' Undocumented Latino Youth, Mexican-American Legislators, and the Struggle for Higher Education."

Immigrant youth draw upon cultural and social resources and motivations that can increase their capacity for civic engagement. Their parents have sacrificed to provide better opportunities for their offspring who are motivated to fulfill their end of the immigrant “bargain” by contributing to their families, neighborhoods, and ethnic communities.⁷⁴ Cultural values such as *educación* also emphasize communal responsibility.⁷⁵ Therefore, ethnic and immigrant identities are strong sources of resilience and civic engagement that should be fostered rather than suppressed.

Undocumented Immigrant Youth: Methodologies and Themes

Undocumented youth’s civic engagement has much in common with that of other young immigrants. It may be impacted by their English language ability and social segregation. Compared to non-immigrant youth, they are also more likely to demonstrate a commitment to social justice for immigrant and co-ethnic communities.⁷⁶ Yet their precarious status in the US makes daily life, let alone civic engagement, difficult.⁷⁷ Adolescents without lawful resident status face daily struggles that include the need to work illegally and reliance on public transportation. Their lives in the US are full of fear--of speaking out, revealing their identities and concerns in public, arrest, and deportation.⁷⁸ Recent studies reveal that despite overwhelming obstacles, undocumented youth may be as likely to participate in their schools and communities as other young people and exhibit distinctive civic engagement patterns. Rejected by the nation-state, their life chances and those of their loved ones depend on social change. When gifted and motivated undocumented youth are given opportunities to get involved in immigrant rights and other social justice causes, some become creative and dedicated leaders.

⁷⁴ Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova, *Learning in a New Land: Immigrants, Students and American Society*.

⁷⁵ See also Brodtkin, *Making Democracy Matter: Identity and Activism in Los Angeles*

⁷⁶ William Perez et al., "Civic Engagement Patterns of Undocumented Immigrant Youth in the United States," (N.D. a).

⁷⁷ Jocelyn Solis, "Transborder Violence and Undocumented Youth: Extending Cultural-Historical Analysis in Transnational Immigration Studies," in *International Perspectives on Youth Conflict and Development*, ed. Z. C. Daiute, et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁷⁸ Heidi M. Coronado, "Voices of Courage and Strength: Undocumented Immigrant Students in the United States," in *Activist Scholarship: 2006 Chicana/o Graduate Student Colectiva Conference* (University of California, Santa Barbara: Chicano Studies Institute, 2008); Daysi Diaz-Strong and Erica Meiners, "Residents, Alien Policies, and Resistances: Experiences of Undocumented Latina/O Students in Chicago’s Colleges and Universities," *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 3, no. 2 (2007); Madera et.al., eds., *Underground Undergrads: UCLA Undocumented Immigrant Students Speak Out*. Martínez-Calderón, "Out of the Shadows: Undocumented Latino College Students;" Seif, "'Wise Up!' Undocumented Latino Youth, Mexican-American Legislators, and the Struggle for Higher Education."

Perez et al.⁷⁹ conducted one of the first quantitative surveys to measure the civic engagement of undocumented students. However, due to the special challenges of researching this population, the few existing studies are generally qualitative and focus on their controversial political struggles for rights and recognition. These include an ethnography of the legislative effort to pass a bill that would allow California's undocumented students to pay in-state tuition to attend the state's public higher education institutions,⁸⁰ an educational policy history of the national movement for in-state tuition that focuses on Texas,⁸¹ and an ethnography of undocumented youth activism in Orange County centered around the 2006 immigration policy protests.⁸² Most studies are of California, and, more specifically, the Los Angeles metropolitan area, the epicenter of immigrant activism.⁸³ Because these studies involve snowball sampling and volunteer recruitment, we know less about students who are not civically active.

School Membership and Graduation as Trauma

With the *Plyler v. Doe* decision,⁸⁴ the US Supreme Court declared that school districts could not exclude undocumented students from public K-12 institutions because denying this basic level of education would make it impossible for them to live within the structure of our civic institutions as adults. This landmark decision granted unauthorized youth standing in our schools, and their recognition was based on their future contributions to U.S. society and civic life rather than rights.⁸⁵ Schools have become a key locus for the civic development of undocumented youth and their parents.⁸⁶

⁷⁹ Perez et al., "Civic Engagement Patterns of Undocumented Immigrant Youth in the United States."

⁸⁰ Seif, "'Wise Up!' Undocumented Latino Youth, Mexican-American Legislators, and the Struggle for Higher Education."

⁸¹ Alejandra Rincón, *Undocumented Immigrants and Higher Education: Si Se Puede!* (LFB Scholarly Publishing, 2008).

⁸² Gonzales, "Left out but Not Shut Down: Political Activism and the Undocumented Latino Student Movement."

⁸³ Brodtkin, *Making Democracy Matter: Identity and Activism in Los Angeles*; Madera et al., eds., *Underground Undergrads: UCLA Undocumented Immigrant Students Speak Out*. For related research conducted in other geographic areas, see J. López's (2007) study of undocumented high school students in North Carolina and Solis's (2005) research on undocumented Mexican youth and families in New York (2005). For a history and analysis of the 2006 immigration protests and related organizing focused in Nevada, see Lazos (2007).

⁸⁴ *Plyler v. Doe*, US Supreme Court 457 US 202 Docket: 80-1538, 1982.

⁸⁵ Rogers et al., "Civic Lessons, Public Schools, and the Civic Development of Undocumented Students and Parents."

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Studies of undocumented immigrant's education also provide insight into their civic engagement.⁸⁷ Through schools, students are linked to teachers, peers, and counselors, and networks of citizens.⁸⁸ They join student clubs and organizations, contribute to community service, develop leadership skills,⁸⁹ and form robust attachments to the United States.⁹⁰ Like their documented immigrant peers, they tend to serve other Latina/os and immigrants and assist with translation.⁹¹

For undocumented students, there is a contradiction between their educational membership and their exclusion from other social arenas.⁹² As minors, they have an identity as students and are less reliant on driver's licenses, working papers, and other trappings of adult normalcy. Until they reach high school, many undocumented students have limited awareness of their legal status or the future difficulties they face. Rather than a joyful rite of passage, the transition out of high school becomes a traumatic change in identity and status from student to illegal alien or illegal worker,⁹³ and its approach can thrust students into despair or action.⁹⁴

The Paradox of Social Rejection and Civic Engagement

⁸⁷ Coronado, "Voices of Courage and Strength: Undocumented Immigrant Students in the United States." Diaz-Strong and Meiners, "Residents, Alien Policies, and Resistances: Experiences of Undocumented Latina/O Students in Chicago's Colleges and Universities.", Martínez-Calderón, "Out of the Shadows: Undocumented Latino College Students.", Rogers et al., "Civic Lessons, Public Schools, and the Civic Development of Undocumented Students and Parents."

⁸⁸ Gonzales, "Left out but Not Shut Down: Political Activism and the Undocumented Latino Student Movement."

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ William Perez et al., "Motives for Service: Civic Engagement Patterns of Undocumented Immigrant Latino/a Youth," (N.D.).

⁹¹ Rogers et al., "Civic Lessons, Public Schools, and the Civic Development of Undocumented Students and Parents."

⁹² Gonzales, "Left out but Not Shut Down: Political Activism and the Undocumented Latino Student Movement." Perez et al., "Motives for Service: Civic Engagement Patterns of Undocumented Immigrant Latino/a Youth." Rogers et al., "Civic Lessons, Public Schools, and the Civic Development of Undocumented Students and Parents;" Seif, "'Wise Up!' Undocumented Latino Youth, Mexican-American Legislators, and the Struggle for Higher Education."

⁹³ Seif, "'Wise Up!' Undocumented Latino Youth, Mexican-American Legislators, and the Struggle for Higher Education."

⁹⁴ Gonzales, "Left out but Not Shut Down: Political Activism and the Undocumented Latino Student Movement." Perez et al., "Motives for Service: Civic Engagement Patterns of Undocumented Immigrant Latino/a Youth."

As part of their larger Loss of Talent research study mostly carried out at California's higher education institutions, Perez et al.⁹⁵ ask how illegal status impacts civic engagement patterns. The authors hypothesize that undocumented students will have lower levels of civic engagement because they feel more marginalized and face more discrimination than others. To address this question, 100 undocumented Latino students were recruited for an online survey through messages posted to student listservs. In a follow-up study, 54 students were located for in-depth interviews through email notices sent to undocumented students clubs and flyers distributed in high school and college classrooms.⁹⁶ Students reported feeling socially rejected and substantial time commitments such as academically rigorous coursework. They worked an average of 12 hours a week in high school and 25 hours per week in college.⁹⁷ Despite these barriers, 90% of students interviewed recounted civic engagement activities, a level that is even higher than in the general student population.⁹⁸ Female students reported more social service work and tutoring and were more likely to win awards for their civic engagement. The more hours a student was employed, the less they contributed civically.⁹⁹ On the other hand, students with higher GPAs, more extracurricular activities, and greater family responsibilities reported more civic engagement than average.

How do we explain this impressive level of civic engagement? Students shared that rather than give into hopelessness, they invest time in community service, volunteerism and political mobilization.¹⁰⁰ School clubs and churches are important in facilitating these activities. Service stems from a commitment to social and political ideals. However, it also is a way for students to resist marginalization and demonstrate to themselves and others that they are good people and model citizens.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Perez et al., "Civic Engagement Patterns of Undocumented Immigrant Youth in the United States."

⁹⁶ ———, "Motives for Service: Civic Engagement Patterns of Undocumented Immigrant Latino/a Youth."

⁹⁷ ———, "Civic Engagement Patterns of Undocumented Immigrant Youth in the United States."

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ ———, "Motives for Service: Civic Engagement Patterns of Undocumented Immigrant Latino/a Youth."

¹⁰¹ ———, "Civic Engagement Patterns of Undocumented Immigrant Youth in the United States."

Despite high levels of civic engagement reported by some researchers,¹⁰² other qualitative research indicates that undocumented students feel marginalized in organizations that do not focus on their issues.¹⁰³ This includes Latina/o student groups that overlook immigrant issues¹⁰⁴ and immigrant groups that neglect youth and student issues.¹⁰⁵ Undocumented students may be afraid to reveal their immigration status, or their special issues may be ignored or swept aside when raised.¹⁰⁶

This neglect has generated student clubs, organizations, and subcommittees of existing organizations that focus on the problems facing undocumented students and advocate for policy changes in schools and at local, state, and federal levels. Their activism has had an impact despite the harsh political and economic climate. Undocumented students have achieved greater college access in ten states and blocked numerous policy proposals across the country that would have thrust them further into the shadows of nation-state.¹⁰⁷ In California, they have forged an alternative identity through their successful political struggle.¹⁰⁸

Undocumented Students and the In-State Tuition Movement

Although undocumented students cannot legally be excluded from public K-12 schools, their access to higher education is more tenuous. They are generally kept out by cost, and efforts to help undocumented students attend college have focused on their ability to

¹⁰² Coronado, "Voices of Courage and Strength: Undocumented Immigrant Students in the United States." Perez et al., "Civic Engagement Patterns of Undocumented Immigrant Youth in the United States.", ———, "Motives for Service: Civic Engagement Patterns of Undocumented Immigrant Latino/a Youth."

¹⁰³ Olsen, *Made in America: Immigrant Students in Our Public Schools*. S.I.N., "Students Informing Now (S.I.N.) Challenge the Racial State in California without Shame...Sin Verguenza!."

¹⁰⁴ S.I.N., "Students Informing Now (S.I.N.) Challenge the Racial State in California without Shame...Sin Verguenza!."

¹⁰⁵ Gonzales, "Left out but Not Shut Down: Political Activism and the Undocumented Latino Student Movement."

¹⁰⁶ S.I.N., "Students Informing Now (S.I.N.) Challenge the Racial State in California without Shame...Sin Verguenza!."

¹⁰⁷ Rincón, *Undocumented Immigrants and Higher Education: Si Se Puede!*; Hinda Seif, "States Open up College to Undocumented Students," *UC Mexus News*, no. 44 (2008 a).

¹⁰⁸ Abrego, "'I Can't Go to College Because I Don't Have Papers': Incorporation Patterns of Latino Undocumented Youth."
Leisy Abrego, "Legitimacy, Social Identity, and the Mobilization of Law: The Effects of Assembly Bill 540 on Undocumented Students in California," *Law & Social Inquiry* 33, no. 3 (2008).

pay in-state tuition and receive financial aid. Seif documented the successful struggle for California's in-state tuition bill, AB (Assembly Bill) 540, as part of a larger ethnography of the transformation of state legislative politics in Latina/o districts with large undocumented populations.¹⁰⁹ The author traces the connections between legislators of Mexican ancestry who were former student activists and today's undocumented students from Mexico and Central America. Undocumented 1.5- generation high school students have become leaders in Southeast Los Angeles because of their high educational achievement compared to their immigrant parents, their English-language abilities, their recognized identity as students, and the mentorship that some receive from local Latina/o activists. Beyond being very painful for the students, their "illegal" status is a dilemma for Latino immigrant neighborhoods because it demoralizes teachers and fellow students and robs communities of the full potential of its leaders.¹¹⁰

Rincón provides an educational policy history of the national movement for in-state tuition of undocumented students, with a focus on the story of the first in-state tuition bill passed in 2001, HB 1403 in Texas.¹¹¹ She discusses strategies, organizational forms, and the role of undocumented students in these struggles. Rincón objects to the reliance on economic arguments or ones that depict uneducated youth as potential criminals. Rather, she urges students to remain at the center of their movement and assert their human right to education.¹¹²

Across the US, dozens of campus-based networks formed that focused on the needs of students without lawful immigration status. These groups educate others about the plight of undocumented immigrant students, advocate for relevant policies and laws, and disseminate information about new in-state tuition laws through outreach. Because well-educated and skilled immigrant students face a future of low-paid, illegal employment unless laws change, some college campuses have emerged as dynamic sites of undocumented activism. They have few choices but to advocate on their own behalf.¹¹³

Undocumented students have played a central role in the partial success of the national in-state tuition movement. High-achieving and even valedictorian undocumented students have come out of the shadows and gained public sympathy by telling their personal

¹⁰⁹ Seif, "'Wise Up!' Undocumented Latino Youth, Mexican-American Legislators, and the Struggle for Higher Education."

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Rincón, *Undocumented Immigrants and Higher Education: Si Se Puede!*

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Gonzales, "Left out but Not Shut Down: Political Activism and the Undocumented Latino Student Movement."

stories.¹¹⁴ Many students also stress their civic contributions in verbal and written accounts. Offering testimony also empowers youth who have hidden and felt ashamed of their legal status by converting their private troubles into a political issue.¹¹⁵ They organize and speak at campus rallies, tell their stories to journalists, and lobby and testify at government hearings. They advocate for their rights on campus, hold educational forums, gather petitions, organize mock graduations, and even participate in hunger strikes to raise awareness of their plight.¹¹⁶ Students travel across the country to lobby, network, and conduct outreach. They use information technologies, including Facebook websites, to publicize their groups and network with other students and groups across the nation.¹¹⁷

Young activists engage in these political and civic activities despite the risks associated with their legal status. They must overcome their fears and assess the danger of arrest and deportation. Students participate in mixed status groups, use pseudonyms, and gauge how far they can safely travel to minimize the risk. Yet they are committed to speaking for themselves.¹¹⁸ Their successes confirm that progress can be made on immigrant-friendly regional legislation when it is associated with the faces and stories of high-achieving, civic-minded youth.¹¹⁹

Enforcement of Higher Education Access and Other Policy Struggles

¹¹⁴ Rincón, *Undocumented Immigrants and Higher Education: Si Se Puede!*; Seif, ""Wise Up! Undocumented Latino Youth, Mexican-American Legislators, and the Struggle for Higher Education."

¹¹⁵ S.I.N., "Students Informing Now (S.I.N.) Challenge the Racial State in California without Shame...'Sin Verguenza!'"

¹¹⁶ Gonzales, "Left out but Not Shut Down: Political Activism and the Undocumented Latino Student Movement." Madera and et.al., eds., *Underground Undergrads: Ucla Undocumented Immigrant Students Speak Out*. Rincón, *Undocumented Immigrants and Higher Education: Si Se Puede!*; Seif, ""Wise Up! Undocumented Latino Youth, Mexican-American Legislators, and the Struggle for Higher Education." S.I.N., "Students Informing Now (S.I.N.) Challenge the Racial State in California without Shame...'Sin Verguenza!'"

¹¹⁷ Gonzales, "Left out but Not Shut Down: Political Activism and the Undocumented Latino Student Movement." Rincón, *Undocumented Immigrants and Higher Education: Si Se Puede!*; S.I.N., "Students Informing Now (S.I.N.) Challenge the Racial State in California without Shame...'Sin Verguenza!'"

¹¹⁸ Gonzales, "Left out but Not Shut Down: Political Activism and the Undocumented Latino Student Movement."

¹¹⁹ Rincón, *Undocumented Immigrants and Higher Education: Si Se Puede!*; Seif, ""Wise Up! Undocumented Latino Youth, Mexican-American Legislators, and the Struggle for Higher Education."

New in-state tuition laws have enabled thousands of undocumented students to attend college, empowered undocumented students, and generated more activism.¹²⁰ They are forging new identities, enforcing these laws and working to expand their scope, pushing for federal legalization, and engaging in other political and policy efforts to help marginalized groups. Abrego reports that since the California bill's passage, many undocumented student activists in the state call themselves "AB 540 students."¹²¹ This new identity reflects their social membership as students and activists.¹²² In California, the in-state tuition law has been poorly enforced by schools and the state.¹²³ To address this institutional neglect, the first wave of students to benefit from the law formed AB 540 groups on their campuses to enforce the law, organize younger students, and conduct outreach to parents, high schools, and community-based organizations.¹²⁴ These California organizations formed the AB 540 College Access Network.¹²⁵

A remarkable account of the impact of the law on the identity and political development of undocumented students was written by the Students Informing Now (S.I.N.) Collective (2007) at UC Santa Cruz, a Latina/o student group formed to support higher education access for immigrants.¹²⁶ The collective offers a "safe space" where undocumented students can share their identities and their concerns are central. Because their group includes Latina/os with various legal relationships to the nation-state, members can speak publically about the plight of undocumented students without placing themselves in jeopardy by revealing their own legal status. It also provides family-like support for students who struggle to stay in college and face an uncertain future after graduation. This includes emotional, financial, and transportation assistance. Such groups are crucial

¹²⁰ Rincón, *Undocumented Immigrants and Higher Education: Si Se Puede!*; S.I.N., "Students Informing Now (S.I.N.) Challenge the Racial State in California without Shame...Sin Verguena!"

¹²¹ Abrego, "I Can't Go to College Because I Don't Have Papers": Incorporation Patterns of Latino Undocumented Youth
." ———, "Legitimacy, Social Identity, and the Mobilization of Law: The Effects of Assembly Bill 540 on Undocumented Students in California."

¹²² Gonzales, "Left out but Not Shut Down: Political Activism and the Undocumented Latino Student Movement." Rincón, *Undocumented Immigrants and Higher Education: Si Se Puede!*

¹²³ Madera and et.al., eds., *Underground Undergrads: Ucla Undocumented Immigrant Students Speak Out*. Rincón, *Undocumented Immigrants and Higher Education: Si Se Puede!*; Seif, "States Open up College to Undocumented Students." S.I.N., "Students Informing Now (S.I.N.) Challenge the Racial State in California without Shame...Sin Verguena!"

¹²⁴ Gonzales, "Left out but Not Shut Down: Political Activism and the Undocumented Latino Student Movement." Madera and et.al., eds., *Underground Undergrads: Ucla Undocumented Immigrant Students Speak Out*. S.I.N., "Students Informing Now (S.I.N.) Challenge the Racial State in California without Shame...Sin Verguena!"

¹²⁵ Rincón, *Undocumented Immigrants and Higher Education: Si Se Puede!*

¹²⁶ Students Informing Now (S.I.N.) Collective website: <http://www.myspace.com/sinistas>

incubators for undocumented students as active participants in civic life. Although student groups such as the S.I.N. Collective and Improving Dreams, Equality, Access, and Success (IDEAS) at UCLA¹²⁷ have accomplished miracles given their limited resources and power, their efforts are no substitute for institutional enforcement of the educational rights of undocumented students.

In addition, student groups in California and across the nation have continued state-level efforts by defending existing state laws, fending off restrictive legislative proposals and lawsuits, and trying to further expand higher education access for immigrants.¹²⁸

Underground Undergraduates, a book published from a class project at UCLA's Labor Center, was part of an unsuccessful effort to pass the California Dream Act (Cedillo), a bill to extend state and university financial aid to AB 540 students.¹²⁹

Undocumented youth are also central to federal immigration reform efforts including the DREAM Act, a bill to legalize qualified young immigrants who came to the US as children. Many students are involved in DREAM Act organizing because it offers hope that they may someday use their education by working legally.¹³⁰ Between 2004-6, immigrant students and their supporters in California organized DREAM Act rallies and engaged in a hunger strike in Los Angeles.¹³¹

Students and student issues were often marginalized in the 2006 immigration reform protests or negatively depicted in English language news media.¹³² However, documented and undocumented immigrant youth and their campus support groups played key roles in the activities.¹³³ In a special issue of the journal *American Behavioral Scientist* dedicated to these events, Bloemraad and Trost found that although youth often learned of the protests in more tech-savvy ways than their parents, many participated in solidarity with and often accompanied by their parents, who they

¹²⁷ Madera and et.al., eds., *Underground Undergrads: Ucla Undocumented Immigrant Students Speak Out*.

¹²⁸ S.I.N., "Students Informing Now (S.I.N.) Challenge the Racial State in California without Shame... 'Sin Verguenza!'"

¹²⁹ Madera and et.al., eds., *Underground Undergrads: Ucla Undocumented Immigrant Students Speak Out*.

¹³⁰ Martínez-Calderón, "Out of the Shadows: Undocumented Latino College Students."

¹³¹ Gonzales, "Left out but Not Shut Down: Political Activism and the Undocumented Latino Student Movement." Rincón, *Undocumented Immigrants and Higher Education: Si Se Puede!*

¹³² Veronica Vélez et al., "Battling for Human Rights and Social Justice: A Latina/O Critical Race Media Analysis of Latina/O Student Youth Activism in the Wake of 2006 Anti-Immigrant Sentiment," *Social Justice* 35, no. 1 (2008).

¹³³ Gonzales, "Left out but Not Shut Down: Political Activism and the Undocumented Latino Student Movement."

view as heroes rather than the criminals proposed by the Sensenbrenner bill (HR 4437, The Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005).¹³⁴

We know less about the participation of undocumented youth in the 2006 immigration reform activities. Their civic education, participation in school activism, and organizing efforts for in-state tuition and the DREAM Act prepared undocumented college students to assume leadership.¹³⁵ For example, 22-year old Andrea, an undocumented college student, was a leader of the immigrant rights coalition that coordinated the Orange County May Day march. Approximately 40 student leaders in the county helped organize a student contingent of the protests. High school and college students drew attention to the intersecting issues of immigrant college access, criminalization, and silencing by donning caps and gowns and appearing with their mouths taped and hands tied.¹³⁶ The S.I.N. Collective worked with the Brown Berets to direct the Santa Cruz County May Day protests.¹³⁷ For participating undocumented youth, the 2006 protests and other activities have led to more empowerment, organizing, and coalition building, including national networking of undocumented students and their groups.¹³⁸ Since May Day, immigrant student groups have helped mobilize voters in electoral campaigns, advocated for drivers license legislation, and organized against individual deportations.¹³⁹ In Santa Cruz, S.I.N. Collective members created a coalition of campus organizations to address anti-immigrant legislation, prepared a resolution to make the university a safe haven for immigrants, lobbied in support of the California DREAM Act, and walked precincts to inform immigrant residents of their legal rights and a new immigrant hotline number.

Summary: Undocumented Youth Civic Engagement

Undocumented students face the contradiction of being included in public schools and excluded from the nation-state, and the painful transition from child and student to illegal adult worker. They may be motivated to become civically involved to change immigration policy or to improve their communities while they still have a legitimate

¹³⁴ Bloemraad and Trost, "It's a Family Affair: Inter-Generational Mobilization in the Spring 2006 Protests.."

¹³⁵ Gonzales, "Left out but Not Shut Down: Political Activism and the Undocumented Latino Student Movement." S.I.N., "Students Informing Now (S.I.N.) Challenge the Racial State in California without Shame...'Sin Verguenza!'."

¹³⁶ Gonzales, "Left out but Not Shut Down: Political Activism and the Undocumented Latino Student Movement."

¹³⁷ S.I.N., "Students Informing Now (S.I.N.) Challenge the Racial State in California without Shame...'Sin Verguenza!'."

¹³⁸ Gonzales, "Left out but Not Shut Down: Political Activism and the Undocumented Latino Student Movement."

¹³⁹ Ibid. Rincón, *Undocumented Immigrants and Higher Education: Si Se Puede!*

place in US society. They become active to feel good about themselves despite the stigma of being “illegal immigrants.” By emulating active, model citizens, they try to prove that they deserve a place in US society and to position themselves for future legalization programs.¹⁴⁰ Despite the risks, these students become visible and offer testimony of their life struggles; research and writing that sheds light on the civic contributions of undocumented youth can be part of this activist project.¹⁴¹

Undocumented youth are engaged in political organizing on campuses and at local, state, and federal levels to defeat anti-immigrant proposals and enact pro-immigrant policies. Because of the immediacy of these struggles, we have seen a cluster of research and writing on undocumented youth activism despite the difficulties of identifying this population. In-state tuition efforts offer rare cases of successful legislative efforts over the last decade to improve the lives of persons without lawful immigration status. The activism of undocumented youth has significance beyond their numbers because they demonstrate innovative visions and practices of citizenship in a globalized world where children may not fit into legal categories of national membership.

Future Directions

Our knowledge of immigrant youth civic engagement is much greater today than it was a decade ago, yet there is much to learn. **Methods.** Because of the challenges of identifying and studying immigrant youth, most studies have been qualitative and small-scale. The recent use of national data sets is a positive development in the field. Researchers should continue to pursue a range of methods to shed light on this topic, and studies that join quantitative and qualitative analysis should be encouraged. Immigrant education is a rich arena of study that should explicitly incorporate civic education and engagement in schools.

Studying subpopulations. In addition to defining the generations in a consistent manner so we can compare studies, Latina/o immigrant youth can be disaggregated in various ways to offer a more nuanced picture. For example, more attention should be paid to the ways that that gender and country of origin makes a difference in the motivations and processes of immigrant youth’s civic and political engagement. Researchers should also be attentive to the impact of immigration status, including the specific patterns of quasilegal youth (e.g., Central Americans with temporary legal status). Given that migrations from Latin America are increasingly indigenous, it is essential to track the civic engagements of youth from these communities, especially whether they are able to maintain indigenous forms of civic life. **Geography.** Most regional studies on this topic look at youth in California. We need to learn more about their civic and political engagement in other traditional and new immigration states. Beyond the urban US, we

¹⁴⁰ Martínez-Calderón, "Out of the Shadows: Undocumented Latino College Students."

¹⁴¹ Madera and et.al., eds., *Underground Undergrads: Ucla Undocumented Immigrant Students Speak Out*. S.I.N., "Students Informing Now (S.I.N.) Challenge the Racial State in California without Shame...!Sin Verguenza!."

know little about the opportunities for civic and political engagement of young immigrants in rural and suburban regions.

Addressing weaknesses and building on strengths. Now that we know more about arenas where immigrant youth's civic engagement is strong, such as religious activity, researchers can pursue these areas in more depth and identify ways to address weaknesses and promote strengths. The civic education that many immigrant youth receive in school and their opportunities to participate in clubs and extracurricular activities are often inferior to those of their more affluent peers. Researchers should find ways that these educational deficiencies may be improved. Given that local community centers, community based organizations, and nonfamily mentors are crucial for the civic development of young immigrants, ways to promote these resources in Latino communities should be identified. Immigrant youth are most likely to civically engage in relation to their ethnic and immigrant communities, so scholars can find ways to promote their "selective acculturation" rather than "subtractive assimilation"¹⁴² to foster their contributions to civic life. The prolific research on the transnational experience of immigrants should also examine the civic and political lives of immigrant youth.

Organizing. Despite evidence that information technologies are more widely used to organize by the children of immigrants than their parents,¹⁴³ we know little about the ways that immigrant youth employ email, web pages, and texting in their activism and networking. This area of research should be further explored. Given that young immigrants and their concerns may be marginalized in mainstream Latina/o youth organizations, the ways that Latina/o youth of varied immigration statuses civically engage and organize together should be examined. To promote interracial harmony in schools and communities and broad support for immigrant rights, we also need to know more about Latina/o immigrant youth who organize with youth from other backgrounds. Young immigrants are using hip-hop, art, poetry, and film to creatively tell their stories; the use of the creative arts in their civic and political life is underexplored.¹⁴⁴

Undocumented Students and Policy. We are learning more about the enormous barriers to the civic engagement of undocumented youth, and the courageous and creative ways that some have become highly active against the odds. There is substantial evidence that the passage of in-state tuition laws has promoted their civic and political activities. Such laws should be extended to other states and should be better implemented by schools and state government so the burden of enforcement does not fall on undocumented students.

¹⁴² Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). Portes and Rumbaut, *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation*.

¹⁴³ Bloemraad and Trost, "It's a Family Affair: Inter-Generational Mobilization in the Spring 2006 Protests."

¹⁴⁴ For example, Graham Street Productions and Film Action Oregon are collaborating with undocumented youth and the community organizations that serve them to produce a documentary, "Papers:" <http://www.papersthemovie.com/>

Immigrant student groups that have emerged on campuses across the country are dynamic examples of youth of activism and engagement that should be further examined. Schools and government should heed their demands, and they should be supported through technical assistance and funding.

We know less about mobilizations for in-state tuition laws in states beyond California and Texas or their advocacy for local and federal policies. For example, we know surprisingly little about the relationship of first- and 1.5-generation youth to the 2006 immigration reform protests. These areas of inquiry should be pursued. Because these students are creatively challenging the boundaries of citizenship in a global era, the civic and political engagement of undocumented youth has important implications. Ultimately, if youth raised in a nation that rejects them are to contribute to society to their full capacity, their struggle for a pathway toward U.S. citizenship must be supported.

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