The Context and Dynamics of Civic and Political Participation Among Latino Immigrants in Fresno County

By

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Introduction

The Woodrow Wilson Center's study, "Latin American Migrants: Civic and Political Participation in Binational Context" represents an important step forward in building on a solid foundation of research providing a general framework for understanding the dynamics of immigrant civic and political participation. In the past several decades, there has been growing appreciation of the general dynamics of civic and political participation (Verba and Nie 1972; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995; Putnam 2000). As immigration leads to increasing linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity, it is becoming clearer how community context, group, and individual factors affecting patterns of civic engagement (De la Garza et al 1992; Ramarkrishnan 2005). As civic life moves toward a new era of 21st century diversity, it is necessary to develop a more fine-grained analysis of civic participation in the emerging pluralistic society of the United States.

The study strategy of examining Latino immigrants' civic and political participation in Fresno County and in other areas of the country is very useful—because community activists' own perspectives and the research literature are in agreement that civic and political participation emerge from the distinctive context of social life in which individuals, families, neighborhoods, and "communities" (however defined, based on ethnicity, social network affiliation, race, or income) function.[1] Therefore, the Pan Valley Institute's convening of an August, 2007 community forum offered a valuable opportunity to explore the genesis of local Latino immigrants' civic participation. Most importantly, the inquiry was designed to rely on immigrant activists themselves to "tell their story", to come together collectively to share recollections and reflect on both unique individual and community-wide experiences.

The framework for describing and understanding civic and political participation must inevitably be multi-dimensional because it is so clear that that understanding patterns of participation requires attention to at least the following issues:

Demographic and societal context—what groups there are in a local geographically defined community or area, the size and age structure of these diverse groups, the day-to-day economic and social relations between diverse groups in the community, the legal and political context, patterns of residence

[1] This paper has benefited greatly from the contributions of a Fresno-area community advisory committee consisting of long-time knowledgeable observers of Fresno civic life and immigrant activist themselves convened by the Pan-Valley Institute as well as staff members at the Institute. These advisors included: Myrna Martinez-Nateras, Rufino Dominguez-Santos, Eduardo Stanley, and Estela Galvan. I am grateful also to Jonathan Fox for sharing his analytic insights, suggestions, and a broad range of resources from the rapidly-increasing research literature.

Community and individual history—evolution of the community and the contemporary sociopolitical system. In Fresno, as in the case of other communities with concentrations of immigrants, this "vertical" dimension includes in addition to community civic history, the individual migration histories of arriving immigrants and migration networks, their home country experiences and perspectives as well as trends and evolving agendas—locally, regionally, and statewide.

Modes of civic and political participation—the textures of civic and political life in a community. This aspect of an analysis is crucial since individuals' and groups' experience with one mode of civic engagement inevitably is a factor in determining which other types of activities will ultimately involve them. In particular, engagement in electoral politics and voting grow up out of experience in a range of non-political civic contexts (particularly for immigrants since so many are disenfranchised due to immigration status).

Fresno also provides a valuable opportunity to reflect on ways in which Latino immigrant civic participation changes over the course of several generations—since there has now been ongoing immigration to Fresno and, in fact, all of California's San Joaquin Valley for at least three generations (Griffith and Kissam 1995; Kissam 2006c).

A deeper understanding of the ways in which immigrant civic and political participation is affected by community context will be a valuable resource for multiple generations of individuals in immigrant families, to neighborhoods and to the local communities in which they live, to entire regions, and to the United States as a nation. This issue is important just because of its' magnitude. About one in eight persons living in the United States is a 1st generation immigrant, i.e. foreign-born and at least one in every six persons in the U.S. live in an immigrant households , i.e. 1st generation immigrants and their 2nd generation U.S. born children (Camarota 2007).

Given that the United States' national identity is shaped, at least rhetorically, by a commitment to "exporting democracy", understanding the factors which affect immigrant civic participation—particularly in the often-neglected precursors to political participation, discussion, self-expression, and debate about controversial issues—is necessary. Quite practically, such understanding can show how to facilitate the greatest possible degree of civic engagement in diverse communities and a pluralistic society. If it is believed that public participation in decision-making is more than a ritual obligation and theoretical duty, engaging immigrants is a critical component of federal, state, county, and municipal civic life if the nation is to make good on the promise of democracy. Particularly in communities with scarce economic resources, understanding how social and cultural capital can be converted into "civic capital", that is, a collective resource for coming together to work effectively to improve quality of community well-being is increasingly recognized as an important policy consideration (Flora and Flora 2008).

The urgency is even more evident in 2008 than in past years, because a rushed effort to forge a compromise on "comprehensive immigration reform" in 2007 not only fell apart

but catalyzed myriad local laws, ordinances and initiatives—some well-intentioned, some even promising as first steps in working toward civic integration of diverse groups, but mostly ill-informed and polarizing.[2] Immigration policy, that is federal policy regarding migration, has always been the framework for de facto immigrant social policy—but the issue of developing a proactive policy framework to promote successful social and civic integration has usually been neglected or consigned to rhetorical exhortations by nativists about what immigrants should do and don't do.[3]

However, there have also been some well-reasoned calls for serious, focused, attention to the central challenge of immigrant civic integration.[4] There has also been growing recognition that this process is actually one of mutual adaptation---that immigrants and native-born populations must both change for communities to evolve in a healthy direction.[5] However, ironically, it was only in 2007 that a consensus emerged that the "architecture" of federal policy vis-à-vis immigrants must have as a main pillar, a strategy to address the challenges of immigrant social and civic integration.[6]

Within the national political context, the discussion of immigrant civic integration is particularly important because federal decisions on immigrant issues are so heavily influenced by local community political perspectives and representation.[7] If immigrants cannot make their voices heard in the communities where they live, the policy outcomes are likely to be serious problems. Because of the demographics of immigration—given robust ongoing migration from Mexico, increased immigrant settlement, and relatively high Latino fertility rates—California will increasingly become a minority-majority state and Latinos' representation as part of an increasingly diverse U.S. multi-ethnic society will continue to grow. California and, indeed, U.S. society as a whole clearly cannot afford to a civic landscape in which Latinos are disengaged.

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[2] Julia Preston, "Surge in Immigration Laws Around the U.S.", New York Times, August 6, 2007.

[3] The legislative and policy framework about who is "admitted" to the United States so clearly affects immigrants' family life, their relationships with their employers, their rights as community residents and access to public services, in addition to the obvious issue of civic participation as a result of naturalization provisions that it actually underscores widespread appreciation by policymakers that the "borders" in question are actually borders in the social universe of day to day life, not the physical "line" symbolically held by the Border Patrol. See Peter Andreas, **Border Games** (Cornell University Press, 2001), for an excellent analysis of one aspect of this and Jennifer Gordon, "Transnational Labor Citizenship", Southern California Law Review, March 2007 for another.

[4] In fact, California quite recently gave serious attention to such strategies in a well-reasoned analysis which, however, has had little practical impact to date. See the Little Hoover Commission 2002 report, "We The People: Helping Newcomers Become Californian"

[5] Robert Bach, Changing Relations: Newcomers and Established Residents in U.S. Communities, Ford Foundation, 1993.

[6] Although many provisions of the 2007 Senate immigration reform bill were fiercely anti-immigrant, there were, for the first time, provisions designed to support state and local municipalities in initiatives to facilitate immigrant civic integration.

[7] N.C. Aizenman, "Small Town Resistance Helped Seal Defeat", Washington Post, June 29, 2007.

Fresno County Latino Immigrants in a National Context

The Woodrow Wilson Center study's focus on Latino immigrants and, in the Pan-Valley Institute's inquiry in Fresno, on a predominantly Mexican immigrant population, is central to the national public policy discussion vis-à-vis immigrants because almost half (49%) of the nation's immigrants are Latino and about two-thirds of the nation's Latino immigrants are born in Mexico.[8] Understanding the history, dynamics, challenges, and prospects of Latino immigrants in Fresno is a key part of the California story and the nation's story—not simply because of numbers, but because of the long history of migration to the San Joaquin Valley and Fresno for more than 80 years, but, also, because Fresno has been a significant part of the national picture.[9]

Profile of Fresno County Latino Immigrants by National Origin and Generation

In 2005, the latest year for which comprehensive county-level population estimates are available, Fresno County's population was estimated as being 858, 948 persons.[10] Very close to half the county's population (47%) was reported to be Latino.[11] The overwhelming majority (93%) of Fresno County's Latino population were reported to be of Mexican origin, although there are estimated to be at least 7,000 Central Americans and 13,000 persons classified in the census as belong to an "other" Latino sub-group.[12]

Close to 195,000 persons in Fresno County—23% of the County's entire population-- are foreign-born. By this measure, Fresno is "more immigrant" than Chicago, for example,

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[8] Jeffrey Passel, "Statistical Portraits of the Hispanic and Foreign-Born Populations at Mid-Decade" (2006), Pew Hispanic Center, Tables 2 (Foreign-born by Region of Birth 2000 and 2005) and 3 (Foreign-born by Country of Birth 2000 and 2005). See also "Statistical Picture of the Foreign-born Population in 2006" Pew Hispanic Center 2008.

[9] See Carey McWilliams, **Factories in the Fields** (1939). See also Kevin Starr, **Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California**, Oxford University Press, 1996.

[10] Data from American Fact Finder, 2005 American Community Survey dataset. I use the term "estimated" because it is likely the 2000 decennial census and subsequent Census Bureau surveys have resulted in a 15% or greater undercount of Fresno County farmworkers and other limited-English Mexican immigrants living in low visibility housing. For details see Ed Kissam and Ilene Jacobs 2004. "Practical Research Strategies for Mexican Indigenous Communities in California Seeking to Assert Their Own Identity", in Fox, J. and Gaspar Rivera-Salgado (eds.), **Indigenous Mexican Migrants in the United States**, , Center for Mexican-US Studies.

[11] It is likely that the actual number of Latinos in Fresno County is closer to 450,000 persons, making the county actually a Latino majority one—because there has been a chronic undercount of migrant and seasonal farmworkers in decennial censuses (Gabbard, Kissam, and Martin 1993) and this undercount is more pronounced in the American Community Survey (ACS) than the decennial estimates.

[12] Many of these "other" Latinos may actually be Mexican immigrants of indigenous origin because the census questions on race, Hispanic/Latino status, and origin/ethnicity are framed in way which make it difficult for Mexicans of indigenous origin to understand (Kissam and Jacobs 2006).

but "less immigrant" than Los Angeles.[13] About 135,000 persons are 1st generation (i.e. foreign-born) Latino immigrants. Thus, as a group they make up more than two-thirds (70%) of Fresno's immigrants, and one-third of all 405,000 native-born and foreign-born Latinos in Fresno County, and about 15% of the county's total population. The overwhelming majority of these Latino immigrants (94%) are of Mexican origin. Thus, in a practical sense, the story of Latin American migrants' experience and patterns of civic and political participation in Fresno is a Mexican one.

Reflecting a long history of migration from Mexico as well as its status as one of the leading areas where Mexican-origin Texas migrant farmworkers settled in the 1960's, there are relatively more 2nd and 3rd generation Mexican-American immigrants in Fresno than in most other rural areas of the country. This, also, is an important facet of community diversity because the predominantly Texas born cohort of middle-aged Mexican-Americans who grew up in farmworker families in the 1960's and 1970's have a pivotal role to play in local community civic and political life in rural communities.[14]

Fresno County Agribusiness and Mexican Immigrant Farm Labor Force

Fresno County also occupies an important place in the socioeconomic context of the United States because it is the top agricultural production county in the United States—with 1.9 million acres of farmland with more than $4.8 billion in farm income in 2006.[15] Because Fresno County agribusiness production is highly labor-intensive, it is also has the largest population of immigrant migrant and seasonal farmworkers in the United States. About 14% of the nation's farmworkers live principally in Fresno County (Kissam and Mehta 1999). In Fresno County, as in the rest the U.S. farm labor force, at least one in six farmworkers is of indigenous-origin, most often Mixtec.

Not all of Fresno county's Latino immigrants are farmworkers; however, agricultural work remains the main magnet drawing migrants from rural areas of Mexico to the San Joaquin Valley and to Fresno County specifically. With peak-season employment of about 100,000 jobs, most of them filled by Mexican immigrant workers, farmwork accounts for a very substantial slice, perhaps the majority of all Mexican immigrants'

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[13] Urban proportions of immigrants are based on 1997 data reported in Portes and Rumbaut 2001. They report Chicago's population to be 13.9% 1st generation (foreign-born) immigrants while the Los Angeles population is 36.9% foreign-born (Table 2.1). Fresno's proportion of 1st generation immigrants is close to the California statewide level (reported by Ramakrishnan to be 26% based on November, CPS data).

[14] In this regard, the history of civic and political engagement of Mexican-origin residents of Fresno County and resulting patterns of civic life are quite similar to those of other rural communities with a similar history which Kissam and his colleagues have studied—Woodburn, Oregon, Arvin, California, and Parlier, California.

[15] California Farm Bureau Federation web page.

employment in the county.[16] Thus, the overwhelming majority are likely to have first come to the area to do farmwork and consequently their educational profile is very much like that of the farmworker population.

A tabulation of National Agricultural Worker Survey (NAWS) data on California farmworkers (Rosenberg, Steirman, Gabbard, and Mines 1998) provides a detailed profile of the predominantly immigrant California farm labor force. This snapshot is likely to fairly reasonably capture the typical socioeconomic characteristics of Fresno County's Latino immigrants.[17] Almost three-quarters (72%) of the foreign-born farmworkers had 7 years or less schooling (*primaria* or *secundaria*). Only 7% had been able to take ESL or GED classes. Three-quarters earned less than $10,000 per year and 60% of the families lived in poverty.

One-third (35%) of these farmworkers had lived in the U.S. for less than 5 years and were, therefore, likely sojourners or not yet very well oriented to local life, while another one-third or so (31%) had lived in the U.S. for 15 or more years and were, therefore, likely to be settled immigrants. During the period of the surveys, 42% of the farmworkers interviewed were unauthorized immigrants with no legal status, while almost half (48%) were legal permanent residents (LPR's). Contrary to popular lore, many of the IRCA-legalized farmworkers have remained in agriculture throughout their working lives and settled in the Fresno area, although as this immigrant cohort ages, there is an ongoing influx of new Mexican farmworkers taking their place. Almost half (47%) of farmworker LPR's, most of them now in middle-age, are technically "migrants" but most travel to work is in the San Joaquin Valley region. The interstate migrants who travel north to Oregon for summer berry harvest work or Washington for apple harvesting in the fall are predominantly younger unaccompanied men. Consequently most Fresno-area farmworkers' lives are firmly rooted in the local communities where they reside.

Profile of Fresno County Naturalized Latino Immigrants

The 2005 American Community Survey tabulations estimate that there are 29,819 Latino immigrants in Fresno County who successfully achieved citizenship. This is consistent with Department of Homeland Security tabulations which do not break naturalizations out by national origin but which do provide insights about recent trends. Over the past decade (1997-2006) only 25,169 Fresno County immigrants were naturalized. This is

[16] Author's estimate based on data presented by Professors Bert Mason and Philip Martin (Slide 7, "California Farm Labor Force"), at 2006 Conference on Immigration Reform and Agriculture, University of California DC Center.

[17] The tabulation draws on pooled data from 1,885 California farmworker interviews conducted in the period from 1995-1997, two-thirds of which were conducted in the San Joaquin Valley counties of Kern, Tulare, and Fresno and 492 of which (26%) were conducted in Fresno County. In this pooled NAWS sample 91% of the farmworkers are Mexican-born and 2% are U.S.-born.

actually a very low yield of naturalized citizens given the fact that nationally more than 6.2 million immigrants were naturalized during this period.[18]

An analysis by the Public Policy Institute of California (Johnson and Reyes 1999) reported similar findings estimating that, at that in 1990, there were 28,586 naturalized immigrants in Fresno County—24% of the immigrants legally able to naturalize and 18% of the overall immigrant population.

Mexican immigrants' very low success rate in achieving citizenship results in large measure from the fact that most have low levels of educational attainment, are "working poor", and live in "linguistically isolated" neighborhoods where relatively few households speak English well. Thus, opportunities for learning English informally are few and the challenges of demonstrating English proficiency formidable (Kissam and Jeter 2000; Kissam 2007). Reyes and Johnson used a logistic regression model to identify contextual factors associated with low county-level rates of naturalization and reported that San Joaquin Valley agribusiness counties with high proportions of immigrants like Fresno County had particularly low rates of naturalization while counties with lower concentrations of immigrants and urban counties had higher rates.

Overall Profile of Fresno County Latino Immigrants by Legal Status

The American Community Survey (ACS) 2005 data suggest that more than half (51%) of Fresno County's Latino immigrants are ineligible for legal status.[19] Since only about 18% of the entire immigrant population are naturalized and the Latino immigrants have lower naturalization rates than European, African, and Asian Immigrants, this suggests that about 31% are legal permanent residents. Although the exact breakdown of Latino immigrants in Fresno County who are unauthorized, temporary residents (under TPR status or family unity provisions), legal permanent residents, and naturalized citizens is unknown, the Census Bureau and NAWS data provide reasonable indicators of this distribution.

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[18] "Persons Naturalized by Core-Based Statistical Area", Table 23, Department of Homeland Security website.

[19] Author's estimate. The ACS data, of course, do not directly report immigrants' legal status (although there is a breakout of naturalized immigrants—a subset of the total). However, relatively few post-1986 Mexican immigrants have been eligible for LPR status due to the numerical caps on family petitions and the low rate of naturalization of Mexican-origin immigrants (since only citizens can petition for family members outside the quotas). Moreover, the 1996 IIRIRA provisions created additional hurdles for family members who had been living with a head of household illegally to secure LPR status. During a brief period (1999-2000) the temporary opening of the "window" of opportunity to petition and pay a fine allowed some to legalize but even then the process was difficult. The categories used by ACS in tabulating length of time in the U.S. also require extrapolation of the proportion of 1980-1989 entrants who arrived in the period from May, 1986 through 1989 and were, therefore unable to legalize under the SAW provisions of IRCA which were the primary gateway for most Mexican immigrants in Fresno County to achieve legal status.

Three Generations of Latino Immigrant Civic Activism in Fresno County

World War II was a watershed for Mexican immigrant settlement in Fresno County as it was nationally. In 1942, the Bracero program formalized labor recruitment networks which had been established a decade or two earlier to meet burgeoning demand for low-wage workers in California agriculture.[20] But Texas-based farmworkers were already in Fresno and large numbers of Tejano migrant farmworkers (some of them U.S.-born, others Mexican-born in Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon, or San Potosi) began settling out of the long-haul migrant circuit in the San Joaquin Valley in the late 1950's and early 1960's as cotton picking was mechanized (Griffith and Kissam 1995). A second wave, "los migrantes del crisis", consisted of Mexican immigrants pushed northward by a faltering Mexican economy in the period from 1977-1982. A third wave consisted of farmworkers and other newly-legalized immigrants settling in the area after passage of IRCA in 1986; this wave included growing numbers of indigenous-origin migrants.[21] There was, in the 1980's and 1990's also increased migration of Salvadorans and Guatemalans as a result of violence and civil strife in their home countries; many came to the U.S. with an extensive history of social and political activism.

Although some observers believed that passage of IRCA might decrease Mexico-U.S. flows, migration continued—in part due to the fact that IRCA-legalized migrants could once again shuttle freely back and forth to their home villages, perhaps due in part to remote villages in indigenous areas of Mexico having better road linkages to the rest of the country. Paradoxically, settlement has strengthened former migrants' ties both to the local Fresno-area community and to sending villages in Mexico—since communication and travel by the older generation of settled migrants has become easier even as the costs of border-crossing for unauthorized migrants have increased steeply.

Civic engagement can and does take many different forms—evolving as a result of external forces and also following an "internal syntax" as to what kinds of involvement appeals to specific segments of the overall immigrant population. Because of Fresno's maturity as part of a transnational migration network, it presents unique opportunities to look at Latino immigrant civic engagement not simply cross-sectionally but, also, longitudinally over the course of several generations.

[20] It has sometimes been argued incorrectly that the Bracero program initiated migration from rural Mexico to the rural U.S. This is not actually true. Mexicans worked alongside Dust Bowl migrants in California agriculture in the 1930's (as did Yemenis, Filipinos, and others). It did, indeed, expand and extend the pre-existing binational networks, for example, bringing the first Oaxacan migrants to California (Kissam and Garcia field notes Santa Rosa Caxtlahuaca 2000).

[21] The California Institute of Rural Studies' field research conducted from 1989-1993 on Oaxacan village networks in California agriculture tabulates Oaxacan immigrant settlers in 15 Fresno County areas. The CIRS tabulations show Fresno County to have had about 12% of all the Oaxacan immigrants in the state. The CIRS data is consistent with interviews with Mixtec and Triqui immigrants by the author and his colleagues regarding growing Oaxacan migration from labor-intensive agriculture in Sinaloa and Baja California from the early 1980's on (although there were Mixtec migrants recruited to work in the Pacific Seaboard region in the Bracero program as early as the 1940's).

What becomes clear in examining the history of immigrant civic engagement in Fresno county is that there is no high-level invisible hand which moves "civic integration" forward—much as host country policymakers and institutions have wished to argue that their decisions and actions (e.g. formulation of naturalization requirements, the establishment of settlement houses) have shaped the course of immigrants' progress toward citizenship. The direction and texture of immigrant civic involvement is shaped by many factors—among them official policy, economic pressures threatening individuals and families, new opportunities presented by political openings, charismatic leaders emerging within the immigrant community, and hostile opponents attacking immigrants legally, physically, culturally, or physically.

Extending presentations at the Pan-Valley Institute's August, 2007 Fresno Forum on Latino Immigrant Civic Engagement, a group of knowledgeable community observers and civic activists met to review an over-arching chronology of immigrant activism over the past half century combined with a categorization of the sorts of civic issues which engaged the Latino immigrant community at large.[22]

A matrix presenting periods of activism, key events, and types of issues addressed in each period and key event is presented below. It provides a way to consider, in some detail, the dynamics of Latino immigrant civic engagement in and to consider ways in which this observed pattern reflects the distinctive population and community context of Fresno County. The "issue clusters" which emerge are not entirely mutually exclusive because most of these clusters of concerns are linked to one or several others. At the same time each of the issues tended to engage some sub-groups within the Fresno County immigrant more than others—although some, such as Proposition 187 and the Sensenbrenner Bill (to deport unauthorized immigrants among other provisions) were so clearly an attack on the entire population of Latino immigrants that virtually all groups were mobilized in response to the threat.

[22] This group included Myrna Martinez-Nateras, Rufino Dominguez, Estela Galvan, and Eduardo Stanley. They reviewed, suggested revisions, and corrected inaccuracies in a draft matrix developed by Ed Kissam.

Figure 1: Matrix of Timeline and Key Historical Periods and Events in History of Fresno Latino Immigrants' Civic Activism

Key Systems and Issue Areas Which Have Drawn Fresno-Area Immigrants into Civic Participation									
Key Historical Events and/or Periods	Civic Voice and Political Representation	Pay and Working Conditions in Farmwork	Personal Security, in Daily Life	Equitable Access to Key Services:	Cultural, Community, Individual Identity	Immigration Status: Security, Family Unity	Language Equity	Civil Rights: Access to Employment and Elected Office	Transnational Civic Participation
Post World War II-Establishing Palomar Ballroom			X		X				
1962 -1st convention of Natl. Farmworker Assn		X							
Chicano push for equal employment rights-- 1960's onward	X		X				X	X	
Delano Grape Strike 1965-1970, Marches		X			X				
1970-1973 Calmecacs, U. de Aztlan					X				
Cultural identity: RCAF (70's), Artes America (90's), Se'e'Savi from 2003 Tamejavi ongoing					X				
Creation and development of Radio Bilingue 1976-present		X			X		X		
1971-1975 Creation of system of rural health clinics		X		X					
Emergence of Latino presence among elected officials 1973-ongoing	X			X	X		X	X	

Key Systems and Issue Areas Which Draw Fresno-Area Immigrants into Civic Participation (continued)									
Key Historical Events and/or Periods	Civic Voice and Political Representation	Pay and Working Conditions in Farmwork	Personal Security, in Daily Life	Equitable Access to Key Services:	Cultural, Community, Individual Identity	Immigration Status: Security, Family Unity	Language Equity	Civil Rights: Access to Employment and Elected Office	Transnational Civic Participation
Grassroots indigenous organizing 1985-ongoing	X	X		X	X	X	X		X
Transnational political life, Mexican officials visits to Fresno 1988 onward Voto en el Exterior 1996 onward	X				X				X
IRCA Legalization 1987-1990	X		X	X		X			
Community-sponsored ESL classes post-IRCA 1988-1994	X					X	X		
1994 Proposition 187			X	X	X	X			
1998 245(i) campaign—primarily family unity			X						
Right to Higher Education: AB 540 and Dream Act 1995-ongoing				X		X		X	
Transportation Safety-Raitero Van Crash 1999 and response		X							
Drivers' License Bill 1995-2005			X			X			

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Bracero rights to promised benefits 1999-ongoing		X							
Response to winter '98-'99 and winter '06-07 Freezes	X	X	X	X					
May 1, 2006 Demonstrations against Sensenbrenner Bill	X		X		X				
Border Patrol and ICE raids 2005-ongoing			X			X			

* Latino presence elected officials: Arcadio Viveros, Parlier City Council 1972-1974, Mayor of Parlier, 1982-1994, 1995-1996; Victor Lopez, Orange Cove City Council 1973-onward Mayor of Orange Cove, 1977-onward, co-founder Latino Caucus, California League of Cities, 1997 Juan Arambula 1987-1996 Fresno School Board, 1997-2004 Fresno County Board of Supervisors, 2004-2008 State Assembly. Numerous others.

** Proposition 227 and 209 did not, to my knowledge, engage significant numbers of people in Fresno County

Recurring Themes—Clusters of Issues Important to Fresno County Immigrants

As can be seen in **Figure 1** above, various clusters of issues emerge time and again over the past half-century of immigrant civic involvement in Fresno. Each is briefly discussed below. This paper then concludes with a review of implications for an overall understanding of Latino immigrant civic integration into U.S. community life.

Pay and Working Conditions in Farmwork

Fresno County provides a valuable lesson by reminding theorists that civic engagement does not occur in a static vacuum and is not confined to the public realm. For most Mexican immigrants to Fresno County, particularly farmworkers, their first, often ongoing, and often most powerful experience of civic involvement is the workplace—where the boundary between "public" and "private" cannot be clearly defined, given that the distinctive conditions of the immigrant workplace are shaped as much by public policy (e.g. official border control, unofficial porosity; official regulations vis-à-vis wages and working conditions seldom enforced).

Mexican farmworkers' lives are distinctive in that agricultural work does not simply entail low earnings. Farmworker is housing is typically sub-standard, and working conditions dangerous and difficult—given pesticide exposure, labor contractors' strategies for controlling their workers, and the prevalence of piecework where economic survival requires constant competition. It is inevitable that the agricultural workplace would be the crucible for most Latino immigrants' civic engagement and that the UFW movement seeking economic justice and collective bargaining rights for farmworkers would be one of the most distinctive common strands of immigrant civic engagement in Fresno. The farmworker movement would, from the 1960's, on provide the United States with one of the clearest and most compelling of immigrant civic action—although, ironically, it was seldom publically acknowledged or recognized as an "immigrant issue".

What becomes clear in the Fresno County record, though, is that this issue was much broader than the UFW. For example, Radio Bilingue was founded in 1976 by farmworker activists whose engagement with immigrant farmworkers' lives was independent of the UFW—Hugo Morales, son of a Mixtec farmworker. Reflecting and responding to community concerns, the station devoted much attention to farmworker issues and other labor activist no longer involved with the UFW such as Pablo Espinoza and Filemon Lopez, a Mixtec labor activist whose history of civic and political activism had begun in Baja California, soon became involved with the station.

In 1999, after a tragic accident in which 13 farmworkers in an overloaded and crowded van were killed (they had been seated on wooden benches without seat belts), it was the FIOB, joined by Leonel Flores, Apolonio Chavez, and other Fresno immigrant activists with close ties to farmworkers, who led the push for safety legislation. But this issue was one which powerfully engaged a broad spectrum of Mexican immigrants from all sectors of the community—since virtually all had farmworker family members or had, themselves, worked at some point in farmwork. Community pressure, Sarah Reyes, then

State Assembly Member for District 30 introduced AB 555 and Dean Flores, Assembly Member District, introduced AB 1165 to improve farmworker safety. For Mexican immigrants in Fresno, this was immediately understood as being an accident which stemmed from the way the "system" worked, not as a random "mistake".

What is also particularly clear in the Fresno County experience is that the Latino immigrant community has always accurately understood California farmwork as being part of a binational agricultural production system. It is for this reason, for example, that a very long and difficult advocacy campaign for Braceros' rights was supported by a broad range of local groups and activists.[23] While, from some community organizers' perspective, it has never been clear whether opposition to a guest worker program is a "labor movement" or an "immigration policy issue", for Mexican immigrants in Fresno County it was both.

Asserting and Celebrating Individual, Cultural, Community Identity and Tradition

Latino immigrant civic engagement in Fresno County does not simply address issues of legal rights or political rights. It inevitably includes assertion of individual, cultural, and community identity and is a valuable reminder about the importance of recognizing Latino diversity—that a racial analysis is inadequate as a basis for understanding civic activism in the area. Civic action is not simply a campaign for racial equality—it seeks to assert ethnic and cultural identity also. The earliest efforts of Tejano migrants settling in Fresno, as described by Judge Armando Rodriguez at the Fresno Forum were to set up venues for their own entertainment and cultural celebration. Subsequently, despite the quasi-racial terminology of "raza" movements in the 1960's, Fresno County cultural activism was characterized by assertion of specifically Mexican cultural identity—efforts to set up *calmecacs* (a Nahuatl term referring to pre-Conquest education), Royal Chicano Airforce assertion of yet a new identity which surely went well beyond being Latino/Hispanic. Similarly, Artes Americas'Dia de los Muertos events where local artists created extraordinary altars made reference not to racial identity but to cultural heritage.

At the same time, a nationally-important and distinctive aspect of Mexican immigrant civic activism in Fresno County has been the development of a pan-indigenous movement led by the Frente Indigena Oaxaqueno Binacional (FIOB). While the core activists were, as they had been in Baja California, of Mixtec origin, the movement was, from the start, oriented toward recognizing and respecting the diversity of indigenous culture. Therefore, over the years what began as efforts of a Mixtec cultural/ethnic minority to assert their identity, as a result of its broad orientation, has now come to engage Triqui, Zapotec, and Purepecha activists as well and the FIOB has evolved into the Frente Indigena de Organizaciones Binacionales, a pan-indigenous and inclusive movement. The history of ethnic activism in Fresno also provides a valuable reminder that the most powerful role that can be played by "popular arts" groups is one where "art" is part of day-to-day life and part of efforts to bring diverse groups together. Thus Se'e'Saavi, a Mixtec dance group formed in 2002, continues to grow—because its roots

[23] *Ramirez Cruz, et al. v. United States, et al.*, filed in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California on March 1, 2001,

go deep into the community, helping bond 1st and 2nd generation Mixtec immigrants (and now even non-Mixtec participants) in respecting, appreciating, and asserting the presence of Mixtec cultural tradition.

One of Se'e'Savi's founders, Jorge San Juan, presents a particularly powerful explanation as to how an organizational entity of this sort can successfully facilitate civic engagement—and it points to an important aspect of the challenges which Latino immigrants face in transforming social capital into civic capital. San Juan describes what happens at the weekly rehearsals/gatherings of the group of parents and youth involved in the dance troupe and why it is important, as follows:

Many farmworkers get done in from fieldwork...there's no chance to even talk to their children....Even though they're here with their wives and children, not all their family is here...When we get together it's like a big family—yelling, smiling, joking, everything. So they get excited also about showing up—even if there's not been time to take a bath or eat, they go straight to the rehearsals. It's fun, there's an atmosphere of tranquility and I think their exhaustion evaporates...[24]

The process leading up to Se'e'savi's re-creation of the "Los Rubios" dance in California presents another example of how "small things can make a big difference". In order to perform "Los Rubios" Se'e'Savi needed to have four masks. These are fairly small, hand-carved masks, painted with lacquer paint. They are a crucial part of the stagecraft of transforming young men into the dance's image of mature men celebrating their return from the month-long trek driving cattle from the highlands of the Mixteca Alta to the Pacific Coast. San Juan recounts his interaction with the mask maker and its impact as follows:

He was distant—from his neighbors, even from his own family. When he got involved with the group everything changed...Now he's laughing all the time...We needed the masks for the dance, and he said, "I can make them, but the problem is I don't have any tools". So I told him, "That's not a problem" so he explained "I've been looking around her for the kind of trees you use to make the masks and finally I found them, but they're by the river. So I can't use an electric saw with a cord". So we bought him a little chain saw with a gas motor. So he cut some tree limbs and took them home. He's told us he now has finished 3 masks and that he's willing to make more".

The work of groups such as Se'e'Savi and FIOB go well beyond that of traditional art and culture programs by boldly seeking ways to concurrently preserve traditional funds of knowledge but keep culture alive by embracing innovation and change.[25] The

[24] This term "tranquility" (*tranquilidad*) in Spanish also conveys a sense of calmness, freedom from anxiety, worry. Thus exuberance and tranquility are not contradictory emotions.

[25] FIOB, generally thought of in the context of politically-oriented civic engagement, has been proactive and innovative in efforts oriented toward maintaining cultural capital. Activities have included support for a garden of traditional medicinal herbs, sponsoring of a workshop on Mixtec language, and a reading of a Mixtec novelist's new book about transnational life, Cartas de Cristina (2005) as well as annual sponsorship of the Oaxacan Guelaguetza celebration.

relevance and resonance of these efforts are evident in the fact that Se'e'Savi continued to grow well after its initial founders turned their attention elsewhere.

Transforming Institutions and Creating New Ones

Philanthropist Craig McGarvey, whose career has included more than a decade of efforts to nurture immigrant civic participation, was visionary in framing the goal of such efforts as relating not only to increased participation in existing institutions and civic processes but, also, and more importantly, in a community transforming those institutions, and creating its own processes and institutions.

Community activists at the August, 2007 Fresno Community Forum who had come of age in the 1960's pointed to their vision of civil rights as being one which was not simply about individual equality but, just as fundamentally, about "working for social justice" by transforming institutions. For example, Ernest Velazquez spoke eloquently about his dream (actually never fully-realized but, nonetheless significant) of changing the Fresno Social Services Department. Velasquez's dream was one shared by a wide range of Mexican and Mexican-American community activists—2nd generation immigrants, Tejanos, Tejanas, California-born Chicanas and Chicanos, as well as 1st generation Mexican immigrants, and their Mexican-born but U.S. raised children—the "Generation 1.5" immigrants.

All were brought together under the banner of Raza activism and the exuberant vision of the historical era where it seemed that, with adequate political will, cultural change, social change, economic change, and even fundamental change in societal institutions would be possible. In the broadest sense "revolution"—including a readiness to engage in conflict, but just as fundamentally, a willingness to re-create institutions-- was in the air around the country but quite distinctively in Fresno and surrounding small rural communities such as Parlier.[26] For example, Fresno-area community activist, Gloria Hernandez, a Tejana who grew up in Parlier, has talked at length about how her civic engagement grew from initial involvement in the UFW movement, to working on farmworkers' rights at California Rural Legal Assistance, and then on to efforts not just to protect poor people's rights but on to changing the institutions and systems which are not constituted to respond adequately to their needs—work to assist victims of domestic violence, work to improve the mental health services system, work to make the Fresno Police Department more responsive to the community at large, but particularly to Mexican immigrant community.

Another Parlier-based Mexican immigrant activist, Arcadio Viveros, who became famous as one of the first elected local government officials in Fresno County exemplifies this generation's understanding of conflict as an integral element in institutional change—not

[26] Larry Trujillo's dissertation, "The Quest for Chicano Community Controls", University of California, Berkeley, 1978 provides an excellent analysis of both the macro-level forces which led to the Parlier revolt and a detailed and authoritative ethnographic account of this important historical event in the Central Valley's progression toward majority rule.

to make existing institutions "do right" but to transform them.[27] It is clear that Viveros' initial involvement in the "Chicano takeover" of the Parlier City Council began at least in part as civic engagement in search of social justice. However, this led him rapidly, as Mayor of Parlier, to fundamentally changing local government's way of "doing business" (e.g. disbanding the police department and re-channeling money into housing re-development in response to local residents' own sense of priorities.[28] Ultimately, looking back over three decades, his career has seems best understood as more on building institutions than as an opponent of "the system". His efforts as a very young adult to establish of the Universidad de Aztlan in Del Rey, one of the extraordinary efforts of the Chicano movement toward creating educational institutions which reflected Mexican cultural heritage, on into civic life as Mayor of Parlier, and then, as part of a statewide movement in the 1970's to establish a rural health system which would be responsive to the needs of farmworkers and other low-income rural Mexican immigrants, provides powerful evidence of the value of immigrant human and "civic capital" as a resource for systemic change, evolution .[29]

Although twenty years later, the actual network of community health clinics which emerged from the vision of Fresno-area immigrant activists and others does not actually live up to the original vision, as with Velasquez's efforts in the Social Service Department, the impact of Mexican immigrant civic action is of historical importance

The founding of Radio Bilingue in 1976 must also be seen as part of this strand of Fresno-area Mexican immigrants seeking not simply to "participate" or "get access" to existing institutions but, rather, to transform the concept of public radio, moving it in the direction of community radio, implying responsiveness to community concerns and offering an electronic forum for community discussion, instead of toward programming for the cultural elite.[30] Although Radio Bilingue has struggled throughout its two decades

[27] The history of Parlier has attracted historical attention because the issues were so clear-cut; quite simply local government responded to special interests more than to community residents; what opponents saw as ethnic politics (railing about Viveros' role as a "half-breed") was actually impelled by the same principles found in textbooks on "good government". See Adaljiza Sosa Riddell and Robert Aguallo, Jr. "A Case of Chicano Politics: Parlier, California" in Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies, Vol 9, 1979 for a structuralist analysis of the sociopolitical dynamics 1971 Parlier rebellion and transition to Raza-led city council in 1972.

[28] For a discussion of the changes in Parlier local government see a community case study by Ed Kissam and Anna Garcia, in David Griffith and Ed Kissam, **Working Poor: Farmworkers in the United States**, Temple University Press, 1995.

[29] Viveros' career presents yet another example as to how conflict and institutional change were, for that particular generation, not incompatible, but actually complementary. Viveros became well-known statewide as a result of having reported and documented one of the most shocking pesticide poisonings of farmworkers in California—the Lemon Grove Parathion poisoning which led to major changes in EPA pesticide regulations regarding field re-entry intervals.

[30] In addition to his role as Executive Director of Radio Bilingue, Hugo Morales went on to serve for some years on the board and as an officer of National Federation of Community Broadcasters, a public radio association devoted toward community-oriented radio (as distinct from a quasi-network system of public radio stations as outlets for National Public Radio programming)

of existence to secure adequate financial support to fully implement its vision—it has been successful in going well beyond the "envelope" of the institutional mainstream. The station's consistent insistence on using the power of the media, for example, to reject music which undermines cultural progress (narco-corridos), its insistence on diverse programming to different audience segments (both middle-aged settled Mexican immigrant families and 2nd generation Mexican-American youth and adults), and commitment to serving transnational migrant audiences—with La Hora Mixteca, now broadcast in Baja California and Oaxaca, as well as in California—are all successes of national importance.

Personal Security as A Driver of Civic Engagement

Policies generally lumped together under the general category of "immigration issues", in the light of Fresno County Latino immigrants' experience and civic involvement, fall into at least four related, but distinct sets of concerns—one focused on personal security in day to day life, others focused on several different but distinct issues including family unity, access to services conditioned on legal status, and political voice.
The history of Latino immigrants' civic engagement in Fresno County provides a powerful reminder that civic involvement often does not emerge from a sense of duty or from a hope to make community life better but, rather, from the need for individuals and groups to defend themselves from attack.

State passage of Proposition 187 in 1994, while presented by its proponents as being a fiscal measure focused only on state government expenditures was correctly recognized by Latino immigrants in Fresno County as an attack which imperiled their future. Similarly, the 2006 Sensenbrenner Bill, viewed by many legislators as simply part of ongoing Congressional negotiations regarding immigration reform was seen by Mexican immigrants as a direct threat (in part because Mexican immigrants remember better than the general public that in the 1930's Mexicans—including US-born citizens—were deported to Mexico). Similarly, ICE raids in immigrant neighborhoods—presented technically by Homeland Security as being part of narrowly-targeted law enforcement efforts—were recognized as threats to the entire community.

In a certain sense, it appears they were seen as evidence of new resolve to rewrite the social contract governing Mexico-US migration where the tacit "rules of the game" were that Mexican immigrants could live and work in areas such as Fresno without interference (e.g. there have not been field sweeps by the Border Patrol for several decades) as long as they were willing to settle for working in a sociopolitical environment where they would not have equal legal rights or equitable access to services available to other community residents.

In many regards, the massive involvement in efforts to pass Drivers' License legislation falls into this category also—in part, because opposition to a rational legal solution to technical problems, i.e. immigrants' inability to purchase car insurance without a drivers' license, their vulnerability to penalties for driving without a license they were prohibited

from applying for, was seen as outright attack, in part because the legislative back-and-forth were so clearly political.

Immigration Reform-Family Unity, Freedom to Travel

For Mexican immigrants in Fresno County, as for immigrants throughout the country, immigration reform is a very high priority. What most deserves note, perhaps, is that for this population of primarily rural-to-rural area migrants with low levels of educational attainment, family unity and the freedom to return home, more than political voice per se, is the driving rationale for involvement. This is a reminder that immigration issues cannot be understood as relating only to individual legal status; they relate to the basic human right of living with one's family. The human dimensions of the issues are: children separated from parents who went north alone so as to spare them the dangers of desert-crossing, teenage farmworkers who are lonely for their parents and girl friends, middle-aged adults torn by pressures to return home to care for an ailing relative or bury a deceased mother or father conflicting with concerns about the costs and possible consequences of dying or being apprehended while re-entering the U.S. after a family trip home.

Equitable Access to Crucial Services

The third aspect of an immigration policy where almost an entire generation of post-IRCA Mexican immigrants has been in the legal limbo of unauthorized status due to the harsh provisions of IIRIRA relating to status adjustment of family members who had settled in the U.S., the low annual quota on family petitions for Mexican-born family members, and the lack of any avenue of employment-related status adjustment for farmworkers and other "low skill" workers (even in demand occupations).

In Fresno, as in the rest of California, the hot-button issue has been access to higher education—making the Dream Act, an extremely high priority for local immigrants and making the not entirely adequate AB 540 provisions for in-state tuition for immigrant students graduating from high school in California a widely-recognized triumph.

At the same time, it deserves note that Proposition 227, which many policy analysts saw as a major barrier to the success of immigrant students in the school system never became a priority for the Latino immigrants of Fresno County. It also deserves note that, although community organizers typically consider access to affordable housing to be an almost certain concern, community organizing around housing issues has never been the top priority on Fresno County Latino immigrants' list of civic concerns.

Equitable Political Representation—Mexican Immigrants' Participation in Civic Decisions and Latino Elected Officials

Because of the barriers to naturalization and the citizenship requirements for holding public office, the struggle for equitable political representation has, in some respects, been one carried out by the Mexican-American children of immigrants. However, at the

same time, many of the settled Mexican immigrants who cannot vote or hold office because they are not citizens but who have lived for decades in small rural communities such as Parlier, Orange Cove, Huron, and others with Latino political leadership consider themselves to have a stake in community life. Whether or not these community residents can themselves vote or hold office, their perspectives do carry weight in local civic dialogue, in consideration of priorities, and in a very real sense the earliest, as well as more recent transitions to Latino political leadership, are as much related to these settled Mexican immigrants as to the citizen-voters who actually went to the voting booths.

Fresno County's long history of Mexico-California migration makes it an area where it is possible, in a sense, to look one or two decades into the future to understand how a newly-pluralistic social and political environment will change community civic life. Latinos are seriously under-represented in the electorate---making up only 26% of all registered voters despite being 40% of the county's population.[31] However, despite under-representation in Fresno political life, Mexican immigrants and their families have been well represented by those Mexican-Americans who have been elected to office. The perspectives of immigrants have been represented on City Councils, County Boards of Supervisors, local school boards, and in other venues. Even good representation and responsive leadership do not always prevail and surely local government institutions are not optimally responsive to Latino immigrants' concerns, needs, and priorities—but progress has been made and continues to be made.

While the Fresno County political landscape continues to be one where Latinos are under-represented, there has been Mexican-American leadership of a number of smaller cities in Fresno County for more than three decades. As in other areas of California, the political career ladder is one where local Latino leadership slowly percolates upwards into state-level leadership. Juan Arambula, now representing Fresno in the State Assembly began with a long period of school board service, moved on to county government, and now the State Assembly. State-level elected officials from Fresno County such as Cruz Bustamante, Sarah Reyes, and Juan Arambula have, by and large, been responsive not only to their citizen-constituents' concerns but to the concerns of their non-citizen constituents, the very large population of legal permanent resident and unauthorized Latino immigrants who have settled in Fresno County. Local government in Fresno County communities like Orange Cove and Parlier have benefited from the leadership of City Councils which have worked in innovative and responsive ways to meet local community members' needs.

An inevitable challenge for Latino immigrants is to assure that their children and grandchildren, the 2nd and 3rd generation Mexican-Americans who are eligible to vote, do so and that those who are eligible to hold office and do move into careers in politics become politicians who retain a sense of their cultural heritage and a positive stance toward newer immigrants and their particular needs and concerns (which may, of course, diverge from the majority of community residents). The dynamics of generation-to-generation relationships among Mexican-origin families settled in the U.S. is complex and well beyond the scope of this paper to examine adequately. However, the bottom

[31] The data on Latino voter registration is from NALEO Education Fund's Fresno Latino Political Profile.

line is that Fresno County's Mexican-American elected officials have, indeed, been responsive to their interests—where in some other areas, co-ethnics ended up with little or no sense of "solidarity" with "the immigrant community".

At the same time, in the formal political realm, Fresno County is in transition. The political landscape continues to be shaped in large measure by the wealth of agribusiness and Latinos continue to be under-represented. The Fresno story, as in the rest of the San Joaquin Valley is that immigration and settlement have resulted in such dense concentrations of Mexican-origin residents that, even the formidable legal barriers to political participation which keep many 1st generation immigrants out in the cold, will soon be breached. The key issue is not whether or not there will be Latino, predominantly Mexican-American, political representation but whether that representation is cognizant of, responsive to immigrants' concerns, and successful in finding good solutions to address them.

Transnational Civic Participation

Many analyses of the transnational dimensions of Mexican immigrants' civic participation appear to suggest that this involvement only emerges when mediated by hometown associations. Mexican immigrant transnational civic and political life in Fresno appears to have not relied heavily on hometown associations (although some do exist).

Perhaps because of the maturity of FIOB as a transnational organization but also in part due to the extent of political inequity in the state of Oaxaca, there has been ongoing engagement of Mexican immigrants in the political life of their home communities. Successive Oaxacan governors have made it a point to visit Fresno and at least listen to presentations and complaints by Oaxacans living in Fresno. Simiarly, Cuautehmoc Cardenas made Fresno part of his itinerary when he pioneered what was then the new strategy of seeking support from Mexican migrants living in the U.S. President Vicente Fox's visit to Fresno in 2001, soon after his election, made statewide and national headlines and drew one of the largest crowds of Mexican immigrants in Fresno. At that event, for example, the transnational dimensions of immigrants' civic participation and self-expression was clear-cut inasmuch as hundreds gathered inside the auditorium where he was speaking to listen attentively while hundreds outside protested his inadequate efforts to promote immigration reform and his rural economic program.

Lessons Learned from Fresno County

Reviewing the history of Latino, predominantly Mexican, immigrants' involvement in Fresno County civic life in the years since World War II provides a sound foundation for reflecting on the diverse ways in which community sociopolitical and economic context, population characteristics, and migration history interact to shape civic involvement.

One fundamental lesson learned is that immigrant civic participation evolves over time—through multiple generations of a family settled in an area. Another is that, even within a

population which is largely politically disenfranchised due to immigration status, civic participation takes diverse form; citizen and non-citizen voters discuss, express themselves, and act on a broad range of issues of concern to them. That being said, a disproportionate amount of the county's Mexican immigrants' civic involvement has coalesced around different aspects of the basic theme of "defending one's rights". Forward progress toward a new vision of civic engagement has been hampered by the need to fight for basic human rights, basic legal rights, and basic social and economic equity. Fresno County's Mexican immigrants have persisted but not yet prevailed.

To date, no explicit community-level, state-level, or national strategy has been articulated for working collectively and proactively to integrate immigrants into local civic life. Despite substantial investments by the public sector and by the James Irvine Foundation in ESL/citizenship classes, the naturalization requirements remain difficult for many Mexican immigrants in legal permanent status who are long-term settled families, concerned about community issues and, in all practical aspects, good citizens. While economically-strapped communities across the rural U.S. might be expected, in principle, to benefit from proactive, inclusive approaches designed to integrate immigrants into civic life—by drawing on immigrant families' rich stores of social capital to generate "civic capital"—structural barriers to citizenship still stand in the way.

This suggests several over-arching issues will be important in ongoing efforts to fully understand and to find new opportunities and creative approaches to advance immigrant civic integration. This paper closes by summarizing several of the most important topical areas deserving ongoing attention.

Community Context and Opportunities for Civic and Political Participation

One major set of barriers to civic participation related to Mexican immigrants' stem from their socioeconomic status as working poor families since long working hours and family responsibilities make it difficult, particularly for families who have young children, to find available time for civic activities. The seasonality and unstable nature of farmwork, rather than freeing time for civic involvement, probably further decreases available time for civic involvement since farmworkers, when not employed, are necessarily engaged in looking for scarce work or finding ways to survive in the face of poverty. Other non-farm occupations where many Fresno County Latino immigrants work—e.g. construction, restaurant work, services---pose many of the same barriers to civic engagement as farmwork.

The fact that large numbers of Latino immigrants to Fresno County lack legal status and that many who have legal residency cannot successfully satisfy naturalization requirements very seriously constrains Latino immigrants' participation in the political process. Limited English is also a barrier since even in Latino-majority communities much official business and political activity takes place in English. A related issue is that the "civic skills" Latino immigrants to Fresno County have were developed in the context of Mexican civic life and may not easily be deployed to engage in political processes which are shaped within the distinctive legal framework of U.S. governance (e.g. the

convoluted processes of local school board governance, planning commission proceedings).

Given these considerations it is important to recognize that the richest set of opportunities for Latino immigrant civic engagement are those which involve informal activities or alternative modes of participating in community political discourse (e.g. demonstrations). because many avenues of political participation are totally blocked or, at best, seriously constrained. Taking into account the many disincentives to civic and political participation and barriers faced by even motivated community activists it is remarkable, therefore, to consider the extent to which Fresno County Latino immigrants have been engaged in civic life.

Analyses are not available regarding the specific levels of civic involvement of Fresno County Latino immigrants but there are recent assessments of the extent of civic involvement of a very similar population of predominantly Mexican immigrants in Kern County (Kissam 2006c). Long hours of work and lack of volunteer opportunities notably constrained Mexican immigrants' level of volunteerism; only one in five had volunteered for a civic cause (compared to 36% of all Americans and 27% of all Latinos in the U.S.). However, more than half of the Mexican immigrant households surveyed in 2005 had provided some form of support to a civic cause—41% in the form of cash donations, 10% via donation of in-kind goods, and 7% with both cash and in-kind support. One in five households had also made a contribution to send a compatriot's body home for burial.

Identity and Civic Participation

Purely political or static sociological analyses of civic and political behavior are inadequate—in general but particularly in seeking to understand immigrants' civic participation. To be sure broad societal force fields, culture, political context, economic framework, technological change, exert powerful forces in shaping civic life. Our past shapes our civic identity in part, but so do the current circumstances of our lives, and our unique individual visions of our futures—hopes, fears, dreams, ambitions all interact as and dynamic forces driving civic participation.

Fresno teaches us a lesson often forgotten when "theories" of migration are built upon tacit assumptions that immigrants bring little or nothing with them to the communities where they now settle.

Apolonio Chavez, now a civic activist in Fresno for two decades providing immigration advice and political perspectives to scores of families out of a small one room office, brought to his new life in Fresno, experiences from his participation as a teenager in the extraordinary popular education movement experimenting with student-governed schools in urban Mexico City. These experiences shaped in part his work in the 1980's as a English/civics teacher in community-based classes run by One Stop Immigration after passage of IRCA when immigrants needed to participate in citizenship classes to secure a certificate of "satisfactory completion" as part of paperwork requirements.

Yet, at the same time, it deserves note that institutional/structural developments play a major role in assuring that individuals' human and civic capital can actually be mobilized effectively to address community issues. Under the provisions of IRCA, which had included major funding for services provided to newly-legalized immigrants, scores of community-based non-profits moved, in the period from 1988-1991 to provide ESL/citizenship classes for thousands of Fresno-area immigrants. The federal SLIAG funding from IRCA, thus, served as one important input, to community activists' and civic networks' efforts to strengthen immigrant civic skills and engagement. Larger community-based organizational networks such as Catholic Charities of California and La Cooperativa Campesina de California, were joined by smaller local organizations such as Centro Esperanza and Colegio Popular

The ways in which personal circumstances and broader social context interact to engage individual Mexican immigrants in civic life and shape their mode of engagement and particular concerns must also be understood within a transnational framework. The personal trajectory of Rufino Dominguez, a founder of FIOB and, now, a leading binational pan-indigenous community activist, was shaped, as are most individuals', by experiences as an adolescent and young adult. In Rufino's case, as in the case of other civic activists who went on to become extremely influential community leaders, institutional context and social networks make a difference. Rufino's development as a civic leader included, his personal experiences as a local community activist in San Miguel Cuevas, a student activist working for educational reform in the Coalición Obrera Campesina Estudiantil del Istmo, as a labor activist in Sinaloa (where the tomato labor force consisted primarily of workers transported north from the Sierra Mixteca), and pioneering programming by Radio Universidad Autonoma de Sinaloa.[32] Dominguez brought with him to Fresno and the San Joaquin Valley knowledge, experience and skills not only from experience as a community activist and labor organizer in Mexico, but also a fund of "cultural capital" including traditional knowledge from a father who pursued an extraordinary career combining traditional healing with knowledge of "modern" health science. The inevitable drawback of overly sociological generalizations about a homogeneous group of Latino (or Mexican) immigrants can obscure the very diversity, the distinctive mix of tradition, personal knowledge and experience, collective experiences, and institutional affiliations, that contribute to the development of rich stores of cultural, social, and civic capital.

In a similar way, visualization of civic interests and behavior as one-dimensional—reducing civic engagement to being engage in one cluster of issues, for example, "immigration reform" or another "cultural expression" –because individuals, and particularly, individual Mexican or other Latino immigrants in Fresno are multi-faceted. Apolonio Chavez and Rufino Dominguez do not have to choose between one or the other issue; both are engaged in both—and in issues related to farmworker migrants' labor rights also.

[32] Myrna Martinez-Nateras' notes from the Pan Valley Institute Oral History Project (which included interviews with Dominguez) and Dominguez e-mail to Ed Kissam.

The interplay between culture, economic systems, the legal framework, and individual experiences affect everyone in our society but are, inevitably, more powerful and complex in the lives of migrants—because migration involves intertwined strands of loss and hope, past memories of growing up, family, extended family, and village social networks and future prospects of "getting ahead"—not just economically but, also, of remaking oneself so as to fulfill one's potential, creating a new future. Thus, inevitably, migration entails loss of old relationships and one's former personal and social identity, exploration of new relationships, and re-creating oneself and one's social environment.

Migrants' experiences are can be, in some respects more exuberant, more liberating than those of stay-at-homes (both in Mexico and in the U.S.) but, at the same time, they expose migrants to more sorts of risks and more serious risks.

Understanding how migration affects individual, family, and community resiliency would seem to be a crucial element in understanding the barriers to immigrant civic participation, how to overcome them, and some of the distinctive features of Latino immigrants' civic participation.[33] Concurrently, understanding how to best convert pre-existing stores of cultural, social, and civic capital into a form that they can be drawn upon in bringing a community together to act to bring about a shared objective is urgently needed. Civic capital will not be created out of thin air. It will be created out of the "raw materials" of Latino migrants individual knowledge, skills, and perspectives, shared values, norms, and understanding of processes of reciprocity and collaboration.

Actors on the Stage of Civic Life—Diverse Roles and Transnational Communities

How one participates in civic life stems, in part, from how one visualizes civic action and the roles played by actors on this public stage. Historical role models—Emiliano Zapata, for example, provide a highly visible sort of image of what civic participation might be, Benito Juarez, another, sub-comandante Marcos yet another, Dolores Huerta, yet another. But perhaps, more importantly, one's parent and relatives, their friends, the countless unrecognized everyday civic activists—say, Felix, a neighbor who serves for a time as presidente municipal in the village where one grew up, or Dona Elvira who year in and year out organized the church kermess to help needy families, another. However the "funds of knowledge" and the traditional civic skills immigrants acquired growing up, are not guaranteed to have practical utility in the new sociopolitical context of communities in which they settle.

Because the "rules of the game" in a new sociopolitical context are different, the roles one can play as a "civic actor" are unfamiliar, the types of activities that count and that

[33] See Cecilia Jaes Falicov, "Ambiguous Loss; Risk and Resilience in Latino Immigrant Families" in Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco and Mariela M. Paez, **Latinos: Remaking America**, University of California Press, 2002 for a brilliant discussion of the psychosocial dimensions of continuity and change in migrants' lives. I discuss the specific linkages between individual experiences and civic engagement, based in part on talks with San Joaquin Valley civic activists in "The Fulcrum for Immigrant Civic Engagement" in Latinos in Rural America, Special Issue, the Journal of Latino-Latin American Studies, University of Omaha, 2006.

are effective as part of expressing one's individual civic opinion or perspective and the types of reprisal that might occur cannot be fully known. Can a march and occupation of a government office lead to officials reversing an unpopular or unjust decision? Would a vote (if one were allowed to vote) on a long, involved proposition in a political system seemingly dominated by special interests make a difference? Can an "ordinary person" become a "community leader"? (Or can only the elite lead?) How can ordinary people negotiate with powerful officials and politicians? These are all reasonable questions and the answers to them play an essential part in determining how, and how much an immigrant becomes civically engaged.[34] Building immigrants "civic skills" cannot, therefore, be visualized as a simple task of communicating 15 basic "teaching points" about how a bill becomes a law and about the three branches of government.

Contemporary community organizing efforts, including the more populist-oriented ones focused on building immigrant civic engagement, all wisely understand that there is no sharp demarcation between "ordinary" civically-engaged individuals and "community leaders". As Craig McGarvey puts it, "Communities are places of learning" and a central challenge for community organizers is to develop a practical "curriculum" for civic activists' development which can, ideally, be individualized for a broad range of potential civic actors.[35] In considering how to catalyze or, at least, facilitate immigrant civic engagement, this issue of "capital accumulation"—how human capital can be developed and transformed into civic capital, how cultural capital can be translated into being a practical resource for improving community well-being, how human, social, cultural, and civic capital can be leveraged into political capital to assure wise and equitable community governance is a central challenge.

One of the extraordinary opportunities Mexican immigrants confront is how to best support transnational civic participation—given the ever-present reality of binational families, binational lives. And the Fresno forum presents a particularly exciting occasion to examine this issue because of the ongoing work of transnational organizations and activists—e.g. the FIOB's work in the San Joaquin Valley, San Diego, Baja California, and Oaxaca, Radio Bilingue's work in creating a "virtual agora" linking radio listeners in Oaxaca, Baja California, and the San Joaquin Valley, and the work of local civic activist and former CSU-Fresno Professor, Jesus Martinez-Saldana as a diputado representing Michoacanos throughout the U.S., strengthening their binational organizations, and advocating for systemic change to give them a political voice in both countries.

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[34] In the mid-1990's in the course of research for the Census Bureau my CRLA colleagues (most of them indigenous community workers—Antonio Flores, Santiago Ventura, Irma Luna-- and I found that even the very passive "civic role" of being counted in the decennial census was one which some immigrants felt was closed to them (since they recognized that they were not "supposed" to be living in the community where they lived). Subsequently, in the 2000 Census, as a result of efforts by FIOB and CRLA, many migrants of indigenous origin came to recognize this was a safe and useful civic role as part of asserting their individual and collective identity.

[35] Craig McGarvey, Civic Participation and the Promise of Democracy, Center for Religion and Civic Culture, University of Southern California, 2004.

The Need to Address a Broad Range of Concerns and Build Flexible Civic Skills Sets

Personal and social identity can be presumed to strongly affect the sorts of issues which resonate with potential immigrant activists. There is no single issue which is "best" to focus on as a vehicle for building immigrant civic engagement.

The broad range of issues and civic possibilities which have attracted the attention and led to action on the part of Latino immigrants in Fresno County makes it clear that a central challenge in promoting civic engagement is to understand the breadth of the spectrum of issues which resonate as a framework for immigrant civic participation.

The next requirement is to use that understanding to intervene wherever there are particularly promising opportunities in order to broaden and strengthen immigrant civic participation. Can immigrant parents' personal identity and experiences as a parent lead them onward to focus on and get involved in the functioning of the school system or not?

Strategic intervention needs also to engage in tough-minded analysis of what the barriers to participation might be and what action-oriented options may help immigrants who are interested, conceptually engaged, but uncertain about moving forward into action. Does an individual immigrant have the self-confidence to express their opinion in public, for example, if one is a parent in a school board meeting? Or do Mexican immigrants' identity as part of farmworker family networks lead make issues related to workers' rights the ones which can overcome internal divisions and bring large numbers of potential activists together? Or immigration reform as an avenue to family unity? Or should the first steps toward civic engagement be non-ideological and oriented more toward the "safe" but important impulse to help others? What are local immigrants' perspectives about helping others and balancing time spent in volunteering or money spent on a charitable cause or civic initiative against one's family responsibilities?[36]

A very specific challenge in Fresno and throughout the country is that community organizing movements which are, in principle, based on populist notions of democratic participation and, therefore, in theory, responsive to distinctive community problems and concerns, have in actuality been more likely to offer immigrants a limited menu of opportunities for civic participation which, arguably, have more to do with the organization's mission and grand strategy than with actual community priorities.

Fresno County (as well as other communities throughout the San Joaquin Valley region with concentrations of Mexican immigrants) present an opportunity to consider rich panorama of possibilities and the challenges of making available to civic activists

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[36] The most thorough and analytically well-grounded research on U.S. civic voluntarism to date is based on the Citizen Participation Study. See Sidney Verba, Kayh Lehman Schlozman, and Henry Brady, **Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics**, Harvard University Press, 1995. While it is not known to what extent specific cultural factors may affect the relevance of their findings for specific sub-groups such as Latino immigrants, some overall findings probably hold for all groups. One is that gender and free time are significantly related to level of civic participation.

opportunities to engage in very different modes of civic participation (e.g. as dancers in Se'e'Savi working to sustain traditional cultural capital, as community activists monitoring local police treatment of immigrants, as local demonstrators in a network of national demonstrations against the Sensenbrenner bill, as volunteers in community radio, or as mainstream community leaders serving on the school board, city council, board of supervisors, or in the state legislator). Ultimately, sustainable immigrant civic participation will require a strategy to achieve "critical mass" but the particular mix of efforts to bring immigrants together to address a common cause and to nurture diverse modes of civic participation is still unclear. The "best mix" and promising practices to balance unity and diversity are likely to vary from community to community across the U.S. Fresno's contribution to collective thinking on this issue will be an important one.

Social, Linguistic, and Ethnic Identity as Determinants of Civic Engagement

Social or ethnic identity, one's sense of who "people like me" are can be presumed to strongly affect the sorts of persons with whom one talks about issues, whose opinion one is likely to respect, and whose interests one is impelled to champion (or defend) and, whose leadership one follows in deciding among competing options for civic participation. Here, as Fresno shows, the Latino immigrant story becomes complex—in part because U.S. dialogue is so confused in talking about "race", ethnicity, and national origin and, in part, because racial identity is in so many respects a complex construct of social identity.[37]

A key issue to be addressed here is to more fully understand how ethnic identity may affect Latinos' and particularly Mexicanos' social alliances and modes of civic participation has to do with domains of social networks. What is the span, the reach of "strong ties" of social networks, that is, mutual reciprocity based on shared social identity? To be sure, family members are more likely to turn to other family members for help than to strangers, to trust each other. But to what extent are village or regional networks of *paisanos* more willing to join together in civic action than with strangers? To what extent does one's cultural/ethnic identity as a Mixteco or Triqui or Purepecha facilitate joining together and working together effectively in the civic sphere? Can an emerging pan-indigenous movement which sustainably works to bridge individual cultural/language barriers bring all indigenous immigrants together?[38] And to what extent may occupationally-defined identity contribute to collective social identity (as in

[37] Technically, Hispanic/Latino identity is not considered, in U.S. policy as a racial descriptor, only what some refer to as a quasi-racial category. There has been much concern in census research about how to properly elicit from respondents, a valid response about their racial and/or ethnic identity but actually the underlying problem stems from untenable public policy constructs about "racial identity" (which have no biological basis). For example, in the 2006 Pew National Latino Survey, 34% of Latinos identified their "race" as "White", 41% as "Hispanic/Latino", 16% as "Other" , 4% as "Black" and 4% refused to answer.

[38] The U.S. surely does seem to have some characteristics as a "melting pot" but while this has generally been seen as a process of bringing native-born Americans and immigrants together, and immigrants of different national origin together, the extent to which identity based on Mexican national origin overcomes historical racial and cultural divisions among Mexicanos is not yet clear.

successive waves of farmworker movements and civic activism) or undercut it (as when farm labor contractors abandon traditional norms of reciprocity and move toward exploiting co-ethnics)?

This issue of ethnic identity and the ways in which interacts with alternative reference frameworks for defining one's social identity becomes most crucial in thinking about the multi-generational dimension of Latino immigration and the long-term process of immigrant civic integration. In principle, the ideal model of Mexican (or other immigrants') civic integration would probably be a truly transnational/bicultural one in which 2nd and 3rd generation children and grandchildren of immigrants would have a measure of "solidarity" with their parents, their extended families, their villages of origin, and their *paisanos*.[39] In practice, social (and civic) integration into U.S. society can weaken these ties and, thereby, lessen prospects for successfully integrating new immigrants as divisions among successive generations of Mexican-origin community members emerge and weaken willingness of Mexican-Americans to accept, help integrate, and collaborate with newcomers to address common concerns.

Despite what seems to be, in general, an inexorable drift toward English-language monolingualism (an imperfect but powerful indicator of assimilation) among successive generations of immigrants, there is some evidence in areas such as the San Joaquin Valley, Fresno, and other similar areas with ongoing Mexico-US migration, that even if Generation 1.5 and 2nd generation children of Mexican immigrants rapidly acquire English, bilingualism is nonetheless increasing.[40] This is very good news. While bilingualism does not lead to maintaining solidarity, it <u>is</u> a necessary condition for additional efforts toward maintaining biculturalism and for 2nd and 3rd generation children of immigrants to construct a social and political identity which includes strong social linkages and with Mexico and Mexicanos as well as facility in bridging diverse social boundaries. From a political perspective, this is a crucial challenge for pro-immigrant Latinos—because relatively small but significant anti-immigrant minorities of native-born Latinos are appearing.[41]

[39] This is more or less what Alejandro Portes and Ruben Rumbaut refer to as "selective acculturation". While their perspective on outcomes for the 2nd and 3rd generation children of Mexican immigrants is perhaps overly pessimistic, the patterns they refer to are real and their observations that more enlightened social policy is needed are indubitably correct.

[40] My New Pluralism community case study research in Arvin (Kern County) and Woodburn, Oregon show increasing robust bilingualism, i.e. Mexican immigrant children 18 and under who are fluent in both Spanish and English. In Arvin, for example, only 25% of heads of household are bilingual (60% speak little or no English) but 66% of children and teenagers are bilingual (16% speak little or no English) However, some of the children growing up in the U.S. do "lose" Spanish.

[41] For example, Pew's June, 2006 survey of Latinos showed that 8% of native-born Latinos thought that no undocumented immigrants should get to remain in the U.S. and become citizens and 15% thought that less immigrants should be allowed to come to work legally in the U.S.

The Role of Civic Recruitment Networks and Strategies for Configuring Them

One of the curious aspects of "official" thinking about promoting civic participation is that civic activities in "the U.S. democratic system" are often talked about as being primarily individual ones and civic participation is framed as individual duty, more than as a dimension of social life. Individuals are presented as demonstrating their civic worth by volunteering, forming their own individual opinions after duly reflecting on issues being debated in public, expressing their opinions in community meetings or in the voting booth, and making isolated individual decisions to become actively involved in civic life as candidates for office.

In reality, most civic activities are structured by and around social groups and group activities—shaped significantly by individual outlook and commitment but also by family, peer group, and community (or communities in a contemporary world where social affiliation is often based on other linkages than physical proximity). The organizational frameworks for these "civic recruitment networks", that is, the organizations that reach out to individuals to engage them in a particular type of civic activity, are diverse These include an extraordinarily broad span of organizations—churches, civic groups such as the League of Women Voters, business-based groups such as the Lions and the Rotary, political party organizations, unions, community organizing groups such as PICO and IAF affiliates, and immigrant organizations such as the FIOB. Some analyses of civic participation (such as Putnam's) err in focusing primarily on formal organizational affiliation, the reality, especially in the lives of Mexican immigrants, is that the force fields of semi-formal and non-formal social linkages are important in understanding social and economic behavior in general (Lomnitz 1977; Wilson 1998; Hagan 1998; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993) and civic involvement in particular. Extended family and village migration networks play an important role in nurturing and sustaining civic engagement as well as formal organizations.

Non-profit organizations in the Fresno area have, like groups throughout the country, struggled seriously, but with only moderate success, to incorporate two divergent conceptualizations of immigrant civic integration into their strategies and activities.[42] One of these is the more or less "mainstream" view that immigrants need to be taught civic skills and about U.S. society's expectations of its citizens. The other is that community organizing groups can and should promote immigrant civic integration by helping them join together in affiliational networks to express themselves ("to make their voices heard") or to defend or promote their collective interests as a civically disadvantaged group ("to fight for social justice").

[42] A very promising endeavor that emerged from the James Irvine Foundation's Central Valley Partnership for Citizenship Initiative was a small grants program advised by Central Valley organizations which had joined together to promote immigrant civic engagement. An attractive feature was a provision for established organizations to mentor smaller, informal or semi-formal groups of immigrants seeking to foster immigrant civic engagement. This strand of the initiative only emerged near the end of the initiative and never managed to fulfill its full promise.

The role played by civic organizations (civic recruitment networks) in facilitating civic participation must be conceptualized as integrating both strands of efforts—both providing an infrastructure, an organizational framework for collective action, but, also, an educational role in working to develop immigrants' civic skills, that is, the skills need to function effectively in the civic realm. Some generic civic skills (e.g. listening actively to others' concerns, expressing one's own point of view, negotiating differences) are present in every society, cultural, and political context—but others (e.g. understanding polling data, understanding how complex legal frameworks shape and constrain local officials' decision-making) vary from place to place. Thus civic recruitment networks' role must not simply be to provide a locus for civic action but also to develop their constituents' civic skills. Obviously, this educational role is particularly important in preparing immigrants for effective and, thus, sustained civic involvement.

In the context of discussion about ways to promote and facilitate immigrant civic participation, the quite modest role played by formal civic recruitment networks in fostering Mexican immigrant civic participation in Fresno must be an occasion for considering strategies to do better in the future. Priority must surely be given to strengthening immigrants' own organizations to make them vehicles for "getting things done" in civic life but the longer-term capacity-building challenge must be faced squarely also.[43] Most probably, the best strategy will be a blended one combining both approaches but there remain many questions to be answered based on experience to date as to what works best for which groups of immigrants. The ultimate criteria for identifying the best strategy (or strategies) will need to include empirical analyses as to what different organizations' successes have been in engaging immigrants—both in terms of numbers of "ordinary immigrants" involved, and evidence that the strategy leads to sustained and effective civic involvement.

The two competing lines of strategic thinking regarding civic integration strategy — community organizing focused on immediate successes to build individual and collective self-confidence or "citizenship education" focusing more on learning and reaching out to others – each emphasize a relevant consideration. What research to date shows is that while immigrant social networks may be strong in principle, in practice they are eroded and frayed by the pressures of immigrants' lives in the U.S.[44] Preserving and increasing immigrants' resources of <u>bonding</u> social capital based on efforts which affirm social identity are important. But so are efforts to develop <u>bridging</u> social capital, bringing diverse groups together to address a common set of concerns, e.g. in cross-ethnic neighborhood action groups addressing local problems, issue-centered organizations focusing on issues such as environmental justice, economic justice, affordable housing, or other major social policy concerns.

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[43] For example, the Federacion de Clubes Michoacanos de Illinois, originally a federation of semi-formal immigrant hometown associations, is now working very energetically and effectively to transform what were initially social organizations into civic recruitment networks and political alliances.

[44] See Cecilia Menjivar **Fragmented Ties: Salvadoran Immigrant Networks in America**, University of California Press, 2000.

Fresno-area non-profits striving to support the process of Mexican immigrant civic integration have struggled to find the best balance—but more work is needed in this area. Since both approaches have merit the Fresno forum's most valuable contribution may well have been to move beyond the notion of "best" approach toward consideration of ways to draw from a wide range of promising approaches. But, at the same time, developing bridging social and civic capital are crucial to assure that civic action yields meaningful and lasting change.

From Workplace Activism to the Polling Booth—The Need for Ongoing Innovation

The history of farm labor organizing in the San Joaquin Valley and, specifically, in Fresno County is a complex and broad history which many of those convened in the Fresno forum know best of all—because of their own involvement and two generations of UFW-led farm labor organizing. However, what deserves note here, as part of reflecting on and learning from local experience, is that labor organizing can successfully engage undocumented Mexican immigrants and, against formidable odds, make significant progress by refining and improving earlier strategies. The national successes of groups such Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN) in Oregon and the local efforts of the Coalicion de Trabajadores de Immokalee (CIW) in southwest Florida have sought and found new and highly effective organizing strategies while Fresno-area labor organizing has stagnated—in part due to the dogma that UFW organizing is the best, or perhaps, the only model for catalyzing Mexican immigrant farmworkers' journey from labor camp to main street.[45]

CIW has been particularly analytic, drawing on Freirian principles, Latin American experiences in the broad liberation theology movement to develop workable practical approaches to engaging migrant workers in what activist-researcher Brian Payne refers to as "taking back the reins of individual and collective identity-construction".[46] In the long-run, this sort of approach, based on understanding the progression of Mexican and other Latino immigrants' involvement from efforts to defend and promote their human rights as workers in a transnational labor system, to community civic involvement, to local and national political participation will be crucial.

The challenge facing the Fresno forum in discussing and reflecting about the lessons to be drawn from local history is to consider how best their experiences and those of immigrant neighbors, family members, friends, and collaborators can be analyzed to

[45] See Lynn Stephen (in collaboration with PCUN staff members), "The Story of PCUN and the Farmworker Movement in Oregon", Department of Anthropology, University of Oregon, 2001 for the history of this organization which began as an immigrant rights and legalization project and subsequently evolved into a farmworker labor organization.

[46] See Brian Payne, "Taking Back the Reins of Identity Formation: The Evolution of a Grassroots Organization in a South Florida Migrant Farmworking Community", Unpublished Masters thesis, University of Florida, 2000. Payne's analysis includes a brilliant synthesis of the ways in which contemporary theoretical frameworks regarding new social movements (e.g. those of Habermas, Foucault, Freire, Scott) are practically relevant to immigrant labor organizing.

generate insights for both underlying "theories of change" and practical insights regarding ways to foster immigrant civic participation despite the many legal, political, institutional, and economic barriers which stand in the way. Theory for theory's sake is not useful—but action without reflection and a commitment to ongoing learning and innovation seems to be important. Fresno has not to date been very successful in this arena; therefore the Fresno Forum is an opportunity for a recommitment to principles of popular learning via inquiry and discussion.

Electoral Participation as a Mode of Civic Involvement

All too often, discussion of civic participation is reduced to consideration of the narrower mode of participation by voting. Given that only 14% of Mexican-born immigrants to the U.S. have managed to become U.S. citizens, it is obvious that political disenfranchisement is a crucial barrier to political engagement and that engagement in electoral politics, despite its importance as an ultimate goal, cannot in and of itself provide a sound footing for building experience in civic life.[47] Virtually all researchers paying attention to Mexican immigrants contemporary social and civic behavior, join with immigrant civic activists in affirming the proposition that political participation in U.S. society does and should include a broad range of civic activities which do not necessarily require citizenship status. Yet voting and electoral power do matter—not only to determine political outcomes but even to assure officials' and elected representatives' attention to one's concerns.

Given an ongoing national debate about "re-engineering" the naturalization process to make it more "meaningful" (but, quite probably, more exclusionary), an important priority will be to consider: how to most effectively advocate at the local level for broader inclusion of immigrants in local decision-making even if citizenship is a prerequisite for "mainstream" voting, how to advocate for a genuine "pathway to citizenship" (not the sham proposed as part of the Senate's version of comprehensive immigration reform), and how to prepare immigrants for eventual involvement voting in elections during the 20 years or so from when they first settle in the U.S. to when they secure citizenship.

There is extensive evidence that "just in time" voter registration campaigns, political and issue-oriented campaigns are ineffective unless immigrants are given meaningful opportunities to become civically engaged and develop civic skills progressively. The challenge for Fresno and communities like it around the country with concentrations of immigrants will be to devise innovative and practical ways to promote informed voting once immigrants have traveled the difficult legal path from unauthorized legal status to legal permanent resident status to citizenship.

[47] Xochitl Bada, Jonathan Fox, and Andrew Selee, "Invisible No More: Mexican Migrant Civic Participation in the United States, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2006.

An immediate and crucial need will be to promote conceptualizations of "citizenship" which go well beyond the envelope of rights, duties, and obligations currently reserved for U.S.-born and naturalized citizens[48]

The Role of Media in Facilitating and Sustaining Immigrant Civic Participation

Broadly speaking, civic participation seldom emerges solely from personal experiences, knowledge, and face-to-face discussion and interaction. For a variety of reasons, in contemporary U.S. society, the role of media continues to grow. Media not only inform the public but serve also to define the agenda of public policy discussion and political framing of social policy issues—as well as promoting a variety of defined political/policy agendas despite the convenient fiction that the media are simply vehicles, the information infrastructure for informing the public.

The obvious fact that language is a barrier to Mexican immigrants' participation in some sorts of civic activities and civic organizations is a major consideration in efforts to promote civic participation. What is perhaps less obvious is that language can be a barrier to even knowing what the "menu" of civic activities might be, what "issues" are of concern to community members. Consequently, Spanish-language media must be considered major civic institutions and crucial resources in fostering and sustaining immigrant civic involvement—because personal engagement in the issue agenda of a community indubitably precedes both civic activism and subsequent political participation after naturalization.

In this regard, Radio Bilingue's Spanish-language broadcasting has put Fresno on the national map—due to the station's providing ongoing in-depth coverage of immigration policy issues and the practical consequences (daily news as part of "Noticiero Latino", a weekly public affairs show on practical immigration questions, and, most recently an on-the-road series of broadcasts "Elecciones 2008". From a very practical perspective, the role of pro-social media outlets such as Radio Bilingue are particularly important for Mexican immigrants—because many are actually part of geographically extended transnational communities and others, such as recently-arrived solo farmworkers, are often live in social isolation in labor camps or remote housing. The "virtual agora" pioneered by Radio Bilingue is a unique contribution to efforts to promote Mexican immigrant civic participation.

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[48] Jose Jacques-Medina's strategy of promoting local ordinances to allow undocumented immigrants and legal permanent residents alike to join with local citizens in institutional decision-making, the Proposition 1 campaign in Los Angeles which gave rise to the Comite Pro-Uno was a brilliant example of proactive thinking in this regard. Engaged researchers such as Lynn Stephen and Paul Johnston have written eloquently about the concept of "cultural citizenship", essentially the principle that everyone who is a de facto member of a community should be entitled to engage in collective community decision-making. Jennifer Gordon extends this reasoning even further in articulating her vision of "transnational labor citizenship".

Summary Conclusions

The challenges of fully understanding the dynamics of Latino immigrants' civic and political participation in a binational context are substantial. But Fresno is, indeed, a community which has a great store of experience to draw on and profound insights to contribute because of its long history of immigrant activism, and indeed, because this history of immigrant involvement has been a painful and difficult one, stemming from the need to confront a broad spectrum of injustices relying only on available resources of human, social, and cultural capital.

The opportunities presented by the current Woodrow Wilson Center initiative to link a series of local community forums around the country into a national study of what forms of civic participation emerge in different social and political environments where Latino immigrants have settled, aggregating "lessons learned" in each environment, and based on these insights, articulating national strategies for promoting and sustaining immigrant civic integration into U.S. society, are tremendous. The bottom line is that the road forward will be a difficult one. But—*Si se puede*!

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