

### *3 Institutional Mobilization in an Era of Local Party Decline*

*H*ow do U.S. civic institutions shape contemporary immigrants' political mobilization and participation, especially in the case of the majority of immigrants who are arriving from Asia and Latin America? Said a Mexican American community leader in East Los Angeles, "Stop anybody walking down the block, ask them, 'Can you please tell me where is the local chapter or the local office of the Democratic Party in your neighborhood?' Everybody will look at you with bewilderment: 'What is this crazy guy talking about?'" This comment illustrates party organizations' low profiles in immigrant neighborhoods. Immigrants are well aware that contemporary mainstream political parties are uninterested in mobilizing newly arrived minorities. When asked whether she felt like a part of the political system, a Chinese immigrant in Los Angeles responded, "No. We won't be elected officials, and they don't want our votes. How can we feel a part of the system? Besides, I don't even vote or participate in their functions. Of course I don't feel part of it." Mexican immigrants also feel that they have no say in and are not taken seriously by machines or local party organizations. In New York City, where neither the two major political parties nor local party clubs has conducted any substantial outreach to the Mexican population, a Mexican immigrant man said that it was difficult to get involved in the U.S. political system because it "doesn't care about us."

It is not merely the newly arrived who perceive the absence of political parties. According to a Latino leader, the political advocacy organization he heads in Los Angeles was established because the two major political parties were not supporting Latino political participation. His organization, which exists outside of the mainstream political machine or party structure, assisted nearly ninety thousand legal permanent residents in the 1990s with obtaining U.S. citizenship. The organization was started, he

explained, “because a number of Latino elected officials saw the need for a networking organization of Latino elected officials, especially in light of the fact that the political party structures would not support Latinos.” In sharp contrast to the experiences of past waves of European immigrants, political machines and party organizations today are no longer the driving force behind minority immigrant political mobilization.

Such perceptions might seem at odds with recent political campaigns that appear to have targeted the growing Latino population through Spanish-language campaign advertisements in Latino media markets and the inclusion of high-profile Latino elected officials and entertainers at campaign and party events. However, the outreach efforts in the 1990s—undertaken by the Democratic and Republican Parties in an attempt to attract Latino and Asian American immigrant populations—were largely symbolic and limited in their scope and for the most part fell short. In the 2000 presidential race, expectations that the two major political parties would court the Latino vote were dashed when, in the waning days of the campaign, the parties turned their attention to midwestern and southern battleground states, where, with the exception of Florida, the immigrant population is relatively small. In 2004, both parties claimed to be paying attention to Latinos, but members of the Latino community continued to express disappointment in party outreach efforts. The number of Latino delegates at the 2004 Democratic Convention actually declined from 2000, as did the time allotted to Latino speakers during prime time, leading Loretta Sanchez, a Democratic member of the House of Representatives, to complain that Latinos did not receive enough time at the podium (Ratcliffe 2004, A-3).

Mainstream political parties today generally have been slower to respond to contemporary immigrants than had been the case with earlier groups. The nature of political party campaigning at the beginning of the twenty-first century is different than it was one hundred, fifty, or even twenty-five years ago. The party structure is weak at the local level, and outreach strategies have shifted dramatically. Today, parties primarily use direct-mail and media campaigns that target only those registered voters who are the most likely to vote, a group that includes few immigrants. The potential for mass-mobilization efforts—including the type of face-to-face mobilization at the neighborhood level that in the past was standard practice for reaching European immigrants—has been overlooked in favor of party activity confined primarily to the airwaves.

Parties also have incentives to distance themselves from minority immigrants, including the desire to maintain existing party coalitions and to appeal to median voters and assumptions about apathy among immigrants. Because whites are overrepresented among voters, parties and candidates may be reluctant to fully embrace newcomers who trigger hostile attitudes among that mainstream electorate. This disincentive is reinforced by popular and even academic perceptions that immigrants are apathetic about taking a role in politics or that even if they did take an interest, there are no guarantees about how they might vote. Facing such uncertainties, parties are unwilling to expend scarce resources to cultivate relatively unpredictable groups. As Asian American and Latino immigrants gradually become more powerful demographically and more involved in the political system, the two parties may turn their attention to these groups. Current evidence, however, raises the possibility that their efforts to appeal to immigrants will be limited in terms of mass mobilization.

#### *The Historical Role of Parties and Immigrant Mobilization*

The widespread perception among immigrants and immigrant-community leaders that the Republican and Democratic Parties are not doing much to mobilize immigrants is surprising given what we know about the past political mobilization of European immigrants. The role of machines in mobilizing turn-of-the-century European immigrants is well documented in historical accounts and is firmly entrenched in the popular imagination (Cornwell 1960; Dahl 1961).<sup>1</sup> The late 1860s to the early 1890s is considered the golden age of political parties (Reichley 1992).<sup>2</sup> For the 1868 New York gubernatorial campaign, the Tammany machine recruited more than forty thousand immigrant voters (Erie 1988, 10). By the first decades of the 1900s, the political recruitment of immigrants had become the center of American party politics. Parties and politicians offered immigrants patronage jobs and social services in exchange for their participation and loyalty in the voting booth (Dahl 1961). “In a nonbureaucratic manner that placed a premium on personal loyalty and left much room for corruption, the party served its constituents by facilitating naturalization, finding jobs, offering relief in times of distress, and acting as an intermediary with higher authorities” (Archdeacon 1983, 100).

In a competitive two-party system, parties usually compete for the loyalty of potential voters in an attempt to expand their electoral bases. What-

ever else European immigrants lacked in the late 1800s and early 1900s, they possessed numerical power (Dahl 1961). Kristi Andersen notes that “a half million to a million potential voters . . . disembarked in this country every year between 1890 and 1910,” and the Democrats actively recruited these new potential supporters (1979, 22, 25). These numbers may have helped European immigrants overcome the racial biases of the turn of the last century. The mobilization of immigrants was so great that Andersen attributes the New Deal partisan realignment to the Democratic Party’s political incorporation of the foreign-born. Politicians made it easy for immigrants to become citizens, encouraged them to register to vote, put them on the party rolls, and aided them in meeting the challenges of poverty, distance from their homelands, and low social position (Dahl 1961; Andersen 1979). To obtain and hold the votes, political leaders rewarded newcomers with city jobs (Dahl 1961, 34). As goods and services were exchanged for votes, political machines became the mediating institution between immigrants and the U.S. political system (Skerry 1993).

That role, while a historic fact, is somewhat exaggerated (Erie 1988; C. Stone 1996). In reality, parties often worked in concert with local organizations, such as unions and churches (Sterne 2001). The inclusive nature of political machines has also been romanticized. Parties mobilized some groups of European immigrants when it was to their advantage but failed to mobilize others when no obvious benefit existed. Political competition and the quest for votes, not commitments to inclusion, drove outreach to immigrants (C. Stone 1996). Moreover, immigrants have never been passive recipients of political mobilization. Ann Chih Lin (forthcoming) argues that European immigrants did not occupy the submissive role accorded them in the traditional story of urban machines that incorporated newcomers politically while simultaneously exploiting them for votes. She points out that immigrant groups developed their own community institutions, such as ethnic social clubs, which existed outside of the machine structure and furthered the group’s interests. Lin also reminds us that “machines acted strategically to suppress immigrant votes when it was in their interest to do so” (10). Political machines were quite capable of abandoning their potential immigrant constituencies when expediency demanded it. Despite these significant revisions to the classic political-machine narrative, machines and parties clearly played a critical role in politically incorporating European immigrants until the middle of the twentieth century.

Thus it is natural to assume that political mobilization and immigrant political mobilization in particular are the purview of the mainstream parties (Dahl 1961; Banfield and Wilson 1963; Glazer and Moynihan 1964). Parties are characterized as critical institutions for ensuring democracy and representation for diverse elements in American society (Rossiter 1960; Ladd and Hadley 1975). In their overview of American parties, Samuel J. Eldersveld and Hanes Walton Jr. (2000, 9) described a party as “a group that competes for political power by contesting elections, mobilizing social interests, and advocating ideological positions, thus linking citizens to the political system.” Similarly, Samuel Huntington (1968, 401) describes the party system as an important foundation of a stable polity, “capable of structuring the participation of new groups in politics.” This view suggests that powerful incentives exist for political machines and party organizations to bring potential voters or blocs of voters, such as immigrants, into the political system to build winning coalitions. It also suggests that a failure to do so would have serious consequences for the American polity.

*Contemporary Political Parties: Changing Contexts,  
Strategies, Incentives, & Constraints*

Despite parties' importance for the stability of the polity, their historical involvement in immigrant political mobilization, and their seeming incentives to mobilize immigrants, it is unlikely that even the limited pattern of mobilization experienced by European immigrants in the early twentieth century will repeat. Why are the Republican and Democratic Parties so absent today? There are at least three factors: (1) weakened local party structure and changing campaign tactics; (2) selective mobilization strategies and maintenance of existing party coalitions; (3) assumptions about political attitudes among immigrants and median voters.

*1. Weakened Local Party Structure and Changing Campaign Tactics*

The golden age of political parties coincided with the height of European immigration to the United States. From 1850 to 1930, the foreign-born population of the United States increased from 2 million to 14 million, and by 1890 immigrants accounted for nearly 15 percent of the entire U.S. population (Gibson and Lennon 1999, 3). From that year until 1910, party machines governed 75 percent of major U.S. cities (Reichley 1992, 174). Indeed, European immigrants and their children were the

lifeblood of many urban party machines (Andersen 1979). A general decline in local party strength was set in motion by Progressive Era reforms and continued through the 1960s and 1970s, just as immigrants from Asia and Latin America were entering the country at unprecedented levels (Ceaser 1978; R. Scott and Hrebenar 1984; Wattenberg 1994; Skocpol 1999a; J. Green and Farmer 2003). The absence of local political machines and parties in the lives of contemporary immigrants distinguishes their experiences from those of their European predecessors. How did this change in political context come about?

Although they did not undermine local party strength immediately, Progressive Era reforms had a cumulative weakening effect on parties, particularly in the western states. One of the most critical changes in election procedures introduced by Progressive Era reformers was the introduction of the Australian ballot in 1880. The Australian ballot, printed with all of the candidates' names and marked by voters in secret, encouraged more split-ticket voting. Coupled with the widespread implementation of non-partisan elections for local office, this electoral reform reduced parties' control over ballot procedures and election outcomes (Reichley 1992). The introduction of direct primaries in the early 1900s further diluted local party control over nominations, prompting political scientist David Truman to assert that "The direct primary has been most potent in a complex of forces pushing towards the disintegration of the party" (quoted in Reichley 1992, 170).

Many urban machines survived an earlier wave of assaults by Progressives, but a new wave of reformers seeking to eliminate inefficiency and corruption by attacking state and local machines emerged in the aftermath of World War II. They pressed for the professionalization of state and local workforces by implementing merit-based systems, undermining the machines' most powerful resource—local patronage (R. Scott and Hrebenar 1984; J. Green and Farmer 2003). Local party decline is attributed to several other factors, including the federal government's expanding role in social and economic redistribution programs and the growth of alternative political organizations, such as interest groups (R. Scott and Hrebenar 1984; Reichley 1992).

The rise of candidate-centered campaigns has also contributed to a weakening of local party organizations (Wattenberg 1994). In 1913, the adoption of the Seventeenth Amendment, allowing for the direct election

of senators, encouraged campaigns around specific candidates, rather than a party label. Building on support by the general public and political activists for reforms to encourage more participatory democracy, the parties, particularly the Democrats, adopted new rules of nomination in the 1970s that gave increased power to individual candidates and their campaign organizations, rather than to local party leaders. These rule changes coincided with larger social trends that weakened local political machines throughout the 1970s, including suburbanization that moved people outside of the cities and traditional machine territories. Technological changes increased the importance of mass media marketing and further focused the American public on the image and characteristics of individual candidates. Finally, lack of electoral competition exacerbated this decline. In 2004, only 10 percent of elections for the House of Representatives were considered competitive, a drop from previous recent elections (Page 2004). Redistricting that creates a bias in favor of incumbents has led parties, which are already oriented toward national politics, to devote their energies to a handful of competitive congressional races, while paying far less attention to the majority of Americans who live in noncompetitive districts.<sup>3</sup> Lack of competition is also related to low rates of turnout in local elections (Hajnal, Lewis, and Louch 2002). Parties do not need to mobilize voters when the outcome is assured.

The end of the twentieth century witnessed a limited revitalization of political parties driven by the expansion and institutionalization of the national committees rather than by state and local party organizations (J. Green and Herrnson 2002). The Democratic and Republican National Committees acquired permanent headquarters and larger professional staffs, and they are now major fund-raisers and the purveyors of critical campaign services (Reichley 1992; J. Green and Herrnson 2002; Dulio and Thurber 2003). However, the parties' strategies for revitalization focused on technical and professional sophistication rather than grassroots organization (Reichley 1992). Both parties built sophisticated production facilities at their national headquarters, instituted large-scale direct-mail campaigns, and hired professional pollsters and consultants (Dulio and Thurber 2003). By the end of the twentieth century, personal contact by neighborhood party activists had become largely a thing of the past, replaced by "selective voter activation" that uses sophisticated phone and direct-mailing techniques and media advertisements to narrowly target

those individuals most likely to support a particular candidate or policy issue (Conway 2001, 84).

These new high-tech outreach strategies stand in unmistakable contrast to those of the past. Machines were effective because party activists spent the time and effort to become familiar with residents of a precinct and consequently were able to mobilize immigrants through personal contacts, make ethnic appeals based on knowledge of a particular neighborhood community, and work closely with community-based institutions (Skocpol 1999a; Conway 2001). However, direct-mail and mass-media campaigns are much less effective in mobilizing the electorate at the local level. With a few exceptions, such as the 1992 and 2000 elections, vote turnout and other types of political participation are characterized by a dramatic and ongoing pattern of decline (Shea 2003, 292–93).<sup>4</sup>

Local party organizations and machines were hit hard by these changes, and although the midcentury reforms addressed the corrupt practices associated with traditional machines, they also exacted a price in terms of citizens' personal contact with parties, one of people's primary connections with the larger political system. Writing in the 1980s, Ruth Scott and Ronald Hrebenar describe the consequences of these changes for the population as a whole and for immigrants in particular: "Contemporary parties have lost their historical role of socializing Americans into the political system. . . . The replacement of the patronage system with the merit system has further reduced the parties' opportunities to function as socializers. People no longer rely on parties for their initiation into politics, for ombudsman services, or for large numbers of patronage jobs. . . . Are any of today's immigrants introduced to American politics and political traditions through the medium of the Republican or Democratic parties?" (1984, 15–16).

Despite these broad changes in the party system, urban machines remain active in some regions, including New York City (Mollenkopf 1992, 77; Jones-Correa 1998; Sanjek 1998). James Q. Wilson notes that "the political machines, once a conspicuous feature of urban and country life, are now found in relatively few places . . . but party organizations do exist . . . and they perform a variety of functions, ranging from candidate endorsement through fund raising to systematic canvassing" (1995, 95). However, given the changing political environment, even in places where local party machines remain, they are on the defensive, fighting for their survival (Shea 2003).

## *2. Selective Mobilization Strategies and Maintenance of Existing Party Coalitions*

In their quest to exploit new technologies and implement national-level strategies, parties have failed to develop a mass base of active members (J. Green and Herrnson 2002). These developments weaken the connections to the political parties for all but the most elite citizens, a particularly serious and harmful development for contemporary immigrants, whose connection to the political system is even more tenuous than that of other Americans. When deciding whom to mobilize, political leaders focus their efforts strategically to expend the least effort and resources to achieve the greatest effect. According to Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, “The wealthy, the educated, and the partisan are more likely to be targeted for mobilization than the poor, the uneducated, and the uncommitted” (1993, 33). In the political system, having few economic and educational resources is clearly a detriment, and it weighs heavily on immigrants because they are among the least advantaged members of society.

Many immigrants also lack citizenship (and therefore voting power), English language skills, and an understanding of the U.S. political system, all of which makes them even less desirable targets for mobilization by parties and political leaders.<sup>5</sup> In general, parties focus on upcoming elections to the detriment of long-term planning that would have to consider changing demographics. When taking this short-term approach, cultivation of a group that contains a large number of people who are ineligible to vote is not likely to seem to be a viable tactic. Reuel Rogers (2000b) has witnessed this in central Brooklyn, where the Democratic organization selectively mobilizes traditional supporters under the assumption that they are the segment of the population most likely to vote and to vote as they have done in the past—for Democrats. The organization shuns the city’s many Afro-Caribbean residents, who are perceived as noncitizens (and hence ineligible to vote) or newcomers to the political system (and hence unorganized or uninterested or, worse yet, unaligned with a party and thus open to non-Democratic recruitment).

Especially where interparty competition is low, entrenched machines may be indifferent or even hostile to immigrant mobilization because they anticipate that newcomers will disrupt the existing power structure and coalition base (Mollenkopf 1992, 79; Jones-Correa 1998; Rogers 2000b). In his study of political participation of Afro-Caribbean immigrants in

New York, Rogers (2000b), observes that although the Democratic Party in Brooklyn dominates the borough, its growing Afro-Caribbean population has the potential to cause an insurgency within the party; as a result, few attempts to mobilize these newcomers occur. The executive director of a political empowerment organization in New York's Chinatown suggested that neither party in New York wants to mobilize Asian American immigrants because of a fear of disrupting existing coalitions: "The Republicans are afraid to register more people. It's a five-to-one Democratic city; there'll be more Democrats registered. But for the [Democratic] City Council, they'd rather keep it the same way that it is, because they got elected this way, so why should they change?"

3. *Assumptions about Political Attitudes among Immigrants and White Swing Voters*

The stereotype of minority immigrants as apolitical individuals may also dissuade parties from mobilizing immigrants. Perceptions that certain racial or ethnic minorities are apathetic or preoccupied with homeland politics have served to discourage parties from mobilizing those groups. An elected official's staffer has described Afro-Caribbean immigrants in Brooklyn as "docile" (Rogers 2000b, 95). Michael Jones-Correa, who studies Latinos in Queens, observes that the entrenched Democratic Party there long ignored Latinos because they were perceived to be apolitical. He spoke with politicians in Queens who made it clear that they would not mobilize Latinos until they became registered voters: "Claire Shulman, the Queens borough president, reportedly asked one Latino activist why Queens politicians should pay attention to Latinos when they don't vote. She said she would deal with Latinos when they voted, and they don't vote now." He also quoted a Democratic district leader who said, "For years I have heard talk about [Latinos] delivering votes. . . . In all my years as district leader, I haven't seen anyone deliver more than a pizza" (1998, 79). Such comments fail to acknowledge the possibility that Latinos were not voting because they were not being mobilized and place the blame for lack of participation on immigrant attitudes alone rather than on the political system and political leadership.

Furthermore, immigrants, especially those from Latin America and the Caribbean, are often assumed to be loyal to the Democrats; consequently, little is done to woo their votes. Jones-Correa observes that limited resources are not wasted on the already committed: "The Democratic

Party could register and mobilize Latino voters, but mobilization would only mean additional competition for scarce resources” because the Latinos who do participate tend to be Democrats anyway (1998, 80).

Scholars—perhaps inadvertently—also perpetuate the idea that immigrants are politically apathetic. Peter Skerry (1993, 222) describes the Mexican American community in Los Angeles as “relatively unorganized” and “passive.” These descriptions help to wrongly attribute minority immigrants’ lack of participation to cultural characteristics while avoiding the tough question of whether the lack of mobilization by political institutions might be at the root of the problem. In fact, the long history of political activism within Asian American and Latino immigrant communities counters assumptions about apathy. Although many are barred from voting because they fail to meet eligibility requirements, both groups have participated in politics through civil disobedience, civil rights litigation, and boycotting (see Muñoz 1989; Perea et al. 2000; Lien 2001). Latino and Asian American immigrants have historically worked for political change through their participation in the labor movement (K. Wong 1994). More recently, members of the two groups have worked together on issues related to political redistricting (Saito 2003).

Political parties may also make assumptions about white swing voters’ attitudes about racial minorities and tailor behavior toward those minorities accordingly. Although the political science literature on traditional party structure contends that minorities will be represented in a competitive party system, political parties historically have failed to incorporate racial minorities (Pinderhughes 1987; Jones-Correa 1998; Frymer 1999; Rogers 2000a, b). Paul Frymer notes that the mainstream U.S. parties developed in part to minimize divisive racial issues among white voters. Martin Van Buren created an electoral coalition that emphasized the distribution of power and was neutral on slavery as a means of uniting southern slave owners and northern voters indifferent or opposed to slavery. In reaction, Whigs also sought to minimize the issue of slavery (1999, 36). During the 1930s, black voters joined the Democratic Party, often providing critical votes in close state and local elections. Yet party leaders sought to preserve whites’ political dominance within the party and to defend their position vis-à-vis the black newcomers (Reichley 1992, 259). In the case of Latinos, before the late 1980s, the parties paid scant attention to the group and even worked to actively depress Latino political participation (de la Garza and DeSipio 1996).

Racial division and exclusion continue today, and white racial attitudes remain strong determinants of party behavior. To build their electoral bases, parties appeal to moderate whites because white voters make up the majority of the electorate. Party leaders believe that if they appeal to blacks, whites will defect as a consequence of hostility toward programs perceived as benefiting blacks. "The behavior of party leaders reflects their belief that the nation is divided along racial lines, and that the prominence of racial issues is bound to disadvantage one of the parties in a system of two-party competition. . . . The stakes of a winner-take-all electoral system only heighten this ambivalence, since it is crucial for party leaders to respond to the opinions of the median voter. These concerns lead party leaders to attempt to manipulate the two-party system in a manner that denies the primacy of race, all the while confirming that very primacy" (Frymer 1999, 34). To preserve their coalitions and appeal to (white) swing voters, the Democratic and Republican Parties marginalize black interests. Both give preference to white voters, who are perceived as being ambivalent or even hostile toward blacks. Thus, the parties make little effort to represent policy perspectives that would benefit blacks or to mobilize the black community toward political participation.

Because antiblack attitudes are closely associated with hostility toward other racial minority groups and immigration (Burns and Gimpel 2000, 218), we can extend Frymer's argument to minority immigrants. This is not to say that discrimination against Latinos and Asian Americans mirrors that against African Americans. Each group faces distinct stereotypes as well as different forms and levels of racism (C. Kim 1999; T. Lee 2000),<sup>6</sup> but white hostility toward Asian American and Latino immigrants is well documented (R. Lee 1999; Santa Ana 2002). As levels of immigration to the United States have increased, so have negative attitudes toward immigrants, and this hostility is not race-neutral. Public opinion surveys conducted from 1984 to 1995 suggest that Americans believed that immigration from Europe was "at about the right level" but that immigration from Asia and Latin America was "too high" (Lapinski et al. 1997). Further, racial stereotypes of Latinos are associated with negative attitudes toward immigration (Burns and Gimpel 2000). The racial minority status of many immigrants and the racial stereotypes that they face are likely to influence party organizations to distance themselves from the Asian American and in some cases Latino immigrant communities. The parties are especially likely to distance themselves from those immigrants who generate negative attitudes among voters—that is, those who are poor or without documents.

In the case of Latino immigrants, fears of alienating white swing voters might explain why the parties and candidates shied away from discussing legalization for undocumented immigrants during the 2004 campaigns. Instead, the candidates opted to reach out using symbols of inclusion and emphasized traditional family values and education. This rhetorical and symbolic strategy allowed them to appeal to Latinos generally without offending white swing voters by offering substantive policies that would benefit undocumented Latinos, an unpopular group. Although party leaders are not likely completely to reject the growing Latino community, beliefs about white swing voters' racial attitudes may cause officials to distance themselves from some unpopular segments of the community.

California illustrates the incentive for parties to distance themselves from racial minorities. The state has some significant gaps in public opinion between whites and other racial groups (Hajnal and Baldassare 2001). Whites (24 percent) are more likely than blacks (14 percent), Asians (13 percent), or Latinos (13 percent) to agree that ethnic and racial change is bad for their region. When asked whether immigrants today constitute a burden on California, 22 percent of Latinos, 29 percent of Asians, and 45 percent of blacks responded in the affirmative, whereas a majority of whites (53 percent) did so. Moreover, the public-opinion divide was exacerbated by the fact that although whites made up just 54 percent of all adults in California in 2000, they accounted for 70 percent of all voters.

Rogers makes the important point that "whatever the impetus for the party's practice of selective mobilization, then, it only reinforces racially stratifying trends and patterns of participation—New York's political insiders are preponderantly white, while the outsiders and marginal players are mostly nonwhite" (2000b, 98). Though parties may not discriminate against immigrants based on race, the fact that the majority of all immigrants are nonwhite (from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean) means that lack of mobilization in immigrant communities is likely to lead to political outcomes that are unequal across racial groups. In short, even when race issues do not directly determine party behavior, they can negatively affect mobilization in immigrant communities of color.

#### *Party Outreach: Symbolic Politics versus Mass Mobilization*

Influenced by the three factors that act as disincentives and constraints impeding mainstream parties from mobilizing immigrant communities, the national mainstream parties have largely ignored minorities and espe-

cially minority immigrants. Gradual changes have been apparent since the late 1980s, but efforts continue to be limited primarily to symbolic gestures rather than the type of mass mobilization of immigrants that was apparent in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 2000, researchers and pundits proclaimed that a genuine change in party behavior was taking place because, it was believed, the Democratic and Republican Parties were finally taking minority populations seriously. In retrospect, it appears that the efforts in that campaign represented merely more of the same, and 2004 also saw no significant changes. An analysis of national party strategies and activities clearly demonstrates how the nationalization of parties has contributed to lack of immigrant mobilization at the local level. Neither major party has paid attention to the specific characteristics of Asian American or Latino immigrant populations, nor have the parties expended resources on face-to-face mobilization. Although both the Democrats and the Republicans emphasized mobilization during the 2004 campaign, the vast majority of their resources went to media campaigns rather than mobilization (J. Green 2004). The failure is most apparent in the political parties' treatment of the Latino community.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Political Party Outreach to Latinos*

Despite Latinos' long presence in the United States, political parties have throughout most of the nation's history worked actively to demobilize Latinos from participating in the political system, using such measures as English-literacy requirements and blatant discrimination (de la Garza and DeSipio 1996, 14; DeSipio 1996). With the exception of the 1960 presidential race, notable for the Kennedy campaign's effort to reach Latino voters via local Viva Kennedy! clubs, mainstream party interest in Latinos was virtually nonexistent before 1988 (DeSipio and de la Garza 2005). That year, Latino leaders and organizations worked to develop a more positive relationship between Latino communities and the political parties by attempting to influence party policy priorities and asking the parties to heed Latino concerns (DeSipio and Rocha 1992).

The 1988 election proved to be a harbinger of future party response to the Latino community. Both parties claimed to be making an effort to recruit Latino voters. Although they granted Latinos greater visibility, neither party addressed Latino issues or invested resources in mobilizing or increasing Latino voter turnout. Most party appeals to Latinos consisted

of symbolic outreach requiring minimal time, resources, and policy commitments (DeSipio and Rocha 1992, 15). Democratic candidate Michael Dukakis spoke Spanish on occasion and emphasized his immigrant ancestry (DeSipio and Rocha 1992). The Dukakis campaign ran Spanish-language advertisements and established Viva Dukakis clubs, but these were underfunded and controlled primarily by Dukakis staffers in Boston (DeSipio and Rocha 1992, 16, 175). Republican presidential candidate George H. W. Bush emphasized his family's ties to the Latino community through his son, Jeb, who is bilingual, and Jeb's wife, Columba, who is Mexican American. The party recruited Latinos as state-level party organizers and tried to improve the party's image among non-Cuban Latino groups, which had traditionally shunned the Republicans (DeSipio and Rocha 1992).

In 1992, the Republican Party again used the Spanish-language media, and Bush, now the incumbent, continued to emphasize his familial ties to the Latino community. The Republicans again chose a prominent member of the Latino community, Gloria Gonzalez-Roemer, to second the presidential nomination. Latino participation at the national convention was greater than in years past, yet no Latino-specific issues were included in the convention messages (de la Garza and DeSipio 1996). Instead, the Republican Party platform included strong support for increased border control, and convention speakers voiced their concerns that immigrants were abusing the American social welfare system (Elder 1999).

The Democrats, for their part, condemned the Republican policies that Latinos viewed as hostile, but the party did not break from tradition in terms of advocating for Latino-specific issues such as more inclusive language policies and immigrant rights (Elder 1999). Instead, much of Bill Clinton's campaign revolved around the rhetoric of inclusion while deemphasizing the party's links with specific minority communities: "Clinton downplayed traditional Democratic party efforts to seek minority votes with specialized messages" (DeSipio, de la Garza, and Setzler 1999, 12). This would prove a new strategy (de la Garza and DeSipio 1996; DeSipio, de la Garza, and Setzler 1999).

Although proposals of specific interest to the Latino community were absent, symbols of Latino inclusion were quite apparent. For example, Clinton introduced his national education plan at the predominantly Latino East Los Angeles College. In terms of substantive efforts, a few high profile and prominent Latinos received key or leadership positions:

Gloria Molina was Rules Committee cochair, and Edward Roybal served as convention cochair. However, the Latinos who spoke at the Democratic National Convention did so only outside of prime time. *Adelante con Clinton y Gore* (Forward with Clinton and Gore) clubs received party support in the most competitive states but were not effective for mobilization elsewhere. Perhaps the most substantive Democratic efforts were the monitoring of polling places to ensure that Latinos were not unfairly disqualified from voting and the establishment of a national Hispanic voting rights hotline. The lack of consistent mobilization in Latino neighborhoods by either party was apparent throughout the campaign. Indeed, fewer eligible Latinos voted in 1992 than had voted in 1988 (de la Garza and DeSipio 1996).

By 1996, the Republican Party had given up efforts to win Latinos on the basis of substantive policy appeals (Elder 1999). Instead, following close on the heels of congressional Republicans' adoption of the Contract with America and the passage of the Republican-supported Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act, the Republican platform contained measures Latinos opposed. The offending proposals included termination of the automatic citizenship accorded U.S.-born children of undocumented immigrants and the right of those children to a public education (Elder 1999; DeSipio 2001). This hard-line stance made it difficult to employ symbolic outreach at their national convention, where, not surprisingly, Latino delegates were noticeably absent (DeSipio, de la Garza, and Setzler 1999, 21). By 1998, most of the anti-immigrant policies had been reversed, but in the eyes of many Latinos, the Republicans' image had suffered (Elder 1999; Neal 2003; R. Ramirez forthcoming).<sup>8</sup>

In 1996, the Democratic Party sought to persuade Latinos to join by arguing that Republican attacks could best be countered by a Democratic president. Laurel Elizabeth Elder's interviews with Democratic Party leaders reveal that the party's strategy throughout the 1990s was to "exploit the Republican Party's alienation of Hispanic voters, without [offering] any specific policies to further the interests of Hispanics themselves" (1999, 271). Even though Latinos already occupied key positions in the Clinton administration, on the Democratic National Committee, and as Democratic elected officials at various levels of government (DeSipio, de la Garza, and Setzler 1999), the Democrats implemented decidedly mixed policies. They opposed Republican attempts to completely dismantle

bilingual programs and services but avoided addressing immigrant-rights issues and even called for stronger border controls and helped to enact laws that denied legal immigrants government benefits (Elder 1999).

The 1996 Democratic campaign was, once again, heavily symbolic. A memo circulated among Latino Democratic National Committee members emphasized that “visually, Latinos needed to see the president standing in Latino neighborhoods; viscerally, they needed to see themselves or people who looked like them in party ads” (Subervi-Vélez and Connaughton 1999, 53). The Democratic Party established the Office of Latino Outreach, staffed by Latinos, which coordinated the party’s outreach strategy, as well as Adelante con Clinton clubs in twenty locales nationwide, and it committed \$2.5 million (out of a \$217 million war chest) to run a Spanish-language media campaign. However, these efforts targeted registered Latino voters. Federico A. Subervi-Vélez and Stacey L. Connaughton note that the strategy during the Clinton reelection campaign was “to have the president’s carefully constructed messages repeatedly disseminated only to those registered Latino voters most likely to influence the campaign by tipping the electoral college balance in their respective states” (1999, 62).

Despite the use of Spanish-language media by both parties, campaign strategies were largely devoid of mass mobilization efforts aimed at Latinos. A correspondent for Univisión, the largest Spanish-language television station in the United States, noted that during the 1990s, top officials from both parties contacted the station, a dramatic change from the 1980s, when “no one in Washington would return our calls” (Armando Guzmán quoted in Elder 1999, 285). However, the campaigns continued selectively to target constituencies, and in the case of Latinos, the focus was on Latinos who were already mobilized. The 1996 campaign failed to make voters out of Latino nonvoters (DeSipio, de la Garza, and Setzler 1999, 12–13).

In sum, despite the Republican Contract with America in the middle of the decade, the 1990s saw the Democratic and Republican Parties gradually paying greater attention to the Latino population, but this development manifested primarily in terms of symbolic visibility at the state and national levels. However, consistent with their tendency to selectively mobilize voters, both parties continued to shun mass mobilization and to target those Latinos most likely to vote. Despite the utilization of Spanish-language media, parties did not expend resources in an attempt to connect

with Latinos not yet mobilized, preferring instead to focus on partisan supporters through increasingly centralized and high-tech strategies. Further, perhaps because they feared alienating white swing voters, neither party offered substantive policy benefits aimed directly at the Latino community. Consequently, the Republican and Democratic Parties played a minimal role in facilitating the political involvement of most Latinos and particularly Latino immigrants.

In 2000, researchers and pundits proclaimed that the Latino population, long considered a sleeping giant in American politics, had awakened, and the Democratic and Republican Parties were going to heed the realities of demographic change. For the first time in history, Latinos outnumbered black Americans, becoming the country's largest minority at more than 12 percent of the population. Voter-registration rates for Latinos had been rising consistently for the previous twenty years, as had their share of the national electorate. In 1976, Latinos comprised 2.4 percent of the national electorate; by 2000, that figure was estimated at 7 percent, an increase of 300 percent over twenty-four years (Fraga and Ramirez 2000). Significantly, Latinos were concentrated in the states with the largest numbers of electoral votes.

Analysts of the 2000 election tend to agree that "more than in any previous national election, Latinos gained the direct attention of the major Democratic and Republican candidates for president" (Fraga and Ramirez 2000, 1). The campaigns utilized the Spanish-language media more than ever before, and both presidential candidates used Spanish in their speeches. George W. Bush addressed Latino crowds with, "Mi corazón es Hispano" (My heart is Hispanic), and Al Gore introduced himself by saying, "Llamáme Alberto" (Call me Alberto). A *Ganamos con Gore!* (Let's Win with Gore) subcampaign organization was set up. The Bush team hired Sonia Martinez, a Mexican American immigrant, as its bilingual public-relations spokesperson (DeSipio and de la Garza 2005). At the conventions, Latinos and Latino symbols were very visible. California's lieutenant governor, Cruz Bustamante, one of the country's most prominent Latino politicians, spoke during prime time the night that Gore accepted the Democratic nomination, and Abel Maldonado, a Republican member of the California Assembly, gave a speech in Spanish on the Republican Convention's final night. The Mexican American band Los Lobos played for the Democrats, and Mexican singer Vicente Fernandez entertained the Republican delegates. Although the Democrats had four hundred Latino

delegates on the floor compared to the GOP's seventy-three, Latino Republican delegates reported that they sensed a new openness their party (LeDuc and Melton 2000).

In marked contrast to the 1990s, anti-immigrant and anti-Latino rhetoric did not characterize the policy debates in the 2000 election, which was a step—albeit a weak one—toward greater inclusion. Both Gore and Bush underscored tolerance toward immigrants. The Bush campaign proposed new resources for processing naturalization claims, and although it did not put forth policies that aimed to benefit Latinos in particular, the campaign sought to appeal to the group by emphasizing compassionate conservatism and family values (DeSipio and de la Garza 2005, 44). The Gore campaign supported the Latino Immigrant Fairness Act, a legalization program, and proposed more liberal education and health-care policies that would likely appeal to Latino voters (DeSipio and de la Garza 2005). Luis Fraga and David Leal contend that the Bush campaign in particular engaged in a strategy of rhetorical and symbolic inclusion that was designed reach out to Latinos without alienating median white voters: “There are demonstrations of understanding and respect for Latinos and their communities. However, the material interests of many of these voters, such as for English language training, long-term immigration reform, increased access to adequate health insurance, and greater opportunities for home ownership, are rarely mentioned, if at all. When they are mentioned, such as with early descriptions of educational reform resulting in the No Child Left Behind Act and the need to rethink temporary guest worker programs, the details of funding and implementation are not specified” (2004, 309).

Latino leaders and community members welcomed the parties' long-awaited efforts to reach out to the group. However, disappointment in the parties' efforts set in quickly. As the campaign proceeded, outreach efforts by the candidates and parties dropped off dramatically: “The sense of disappointment among Latino activists [was] deep, especially given the promise of the primaries and the summer conventions, when both sides declared this would be the year in which the Latino vote was vital” (Tobar 2000, A-17). Commenting on the election, Cecilia Muñoz of the National Council for La Raza said, “We seem to have made one transition, which is that candidates get it, that they need to be campaigning in our community. And that's been reflected in their use of the Spanish language and in the overall tone and tenor of the campaign, and in the extraordinary

amount of marketing that is being aimed at our community.” But she also went on to say that “for the most part, the focus has been on marketing and not on policy. We would note that Latinos didn’t come up in any of the presidential debates” (Fountain 2000, A-26).

*Asian American Immigrants: Left Behind?*

Although the 2000 election represented a change in the parties’ relationship with Latinos, non-Latino immigrants remained on the perimeters of party outreach efforts. In particular, the Republican and Democratic Parties did not target Asian Americans during the 2000 elections. The Democratic Party’s lack of commitment to that community was apparent on its campaign Web site, where the page focused on outreach to the Asian American community was available in English only. This is surprising given that the 2000 Census shows that nearly 80 percent of Asian Americans speak a language other than English at home.<sup>9</sup> Although it may be unrealistic for the parties to make outreach efforts accessible in every Asian language, it would not require immense resources to translate their materials from English into three or four of the Asian languages most commonly spoken in the United States. Despite the best efforts of Asian American campaign staffers, the outreach efforts of both the Democratic and Republican National Committees remained nearly invisible.

Selective mobilization strategies were one of the reasons that the parties failed to target Asian Americans during the 2000 campaign. Although Asians are one of the fastest-growing major racial or ethnic groups in the country, the 2000 Census showed that fewer than 5 percent of the U.S. population identified itself as Asian; of Asian American adults, approximately 40 percent were noncitizens (Jamieson, Shin, and Day 2002). Like their Latino counterparts, Asian Americans are geographically concentrated in a few electoral-vote-rich states, such as California, New York, and Illinois, but these were not battleground states in the 2000 election.

Perceptions of Asian American voting and partisanship patterns may have been another factor. Furthermore, it is unlikely that Democrats or Republicans see Asian Americans, even eligible Asian Americans, as likely voters. Despite exhibiting higher education and income levels than the population as a whole, Asian Americans have some of the lowest voting rates of any racial or ethnic group. Only one out of every four adult Asian Americans voted in elections throughout the 1990s according to Current Population Survey data (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004). In terms of par-

tianship, those Asian Americans with a party preference tend to lean slightly toward the Democratic Party. In the 2000–2001 Pilot National Asian American Survey, 36 percent of Asian American respondents self-identified as Democrats, 14 percent as Republicans, and 13 percent as independents. Notably, however, about 20 percent did not think of themselves in partisan terms, and 18 percent claimed that they were uncertain about their party identification or refused to give a response.

Thus, half of Asian Americans in the survey did not identify with an American political party. If the Democratic or Republican leadership believes that Asian Americans are not likely to vote, it is reasonable that they would also believe that spending resources to mobilize that group would be unwise. Given the uncertain partisan attachments of Asian Americans, a campaign may also hesitate to mobilize Asian Americans because it is not clear what candidate those mobilized voters would ultimately support. Accentuating this point, Kathay Feng of the Asian Pacific Legal Center in Los Angeles says, “I think politicians are very savvy and very calculating about how they spend their education or marketing dollars. A politician’s greatest fear is . . . to wake up the voters who are going to come out and vote for someone else” (quoted in Somashekhar 2002, 1).

Yet small population size and weak partisan attachments do not explain fully the parties’ marginalization of the Asian American population. Historically, other small population groups, such as Jewish Americans and African Americans, have received more (if still limited) party attention. In some places, such as California, exit polls and surveys show consistently that Asian Americans make up the same proportion of registered voters as do African Americans. Further, rather than view Asian Americans’ lack of commitment to a particular party as a problem, parties might consider Asian Americans an important swing vote, open to party recruitment and influence (Nakanishi 1991). Asian Americans represent a ripe opportunity for parties to appeal to a constituency through issue mobilization. Garrett Yee, president of an organization that encourages Chinese Americans to get involved in local politics, argues that Asian Americans “make their decisions based on the person and the issue, not the party. Most people philosophically want to think that, but Asian Americans actually do that” (quoted in Somashekhar 2002, 1). Thus it seems that community organizations, which mobilize around issues rather than partisan platforms, may be well positioned to assist with Asian American political mobilization.

Race may be yet another reason parties do not court Asian Americans,

who are stereotyped as foreigners with no legitimate place in the political system. This hypothesis is consistent with American public opinion. A random telephone survey of 1,216 Americans, conducted in January and March 2001 by the Committee of 100 (an Asian American advocacy organization) and Yankelovich Partners (2001), found that more people would reject an Asian American presidential candidate (23 percent) than would reject a black candidate (15 percent), a woman candidate (14 percent), or a Jewish candidate (11 percent). According to community leaders, both parties distanced themselves from the Asian American community following allegations in 1996 that the Clinton administration improperly accepted donations from Asian nationals living in the United States. The racialization of the campaign scandal was epitomized by a *National Review* cover illustration featuring President Clinton, Hillary Rodham Clinton, and Vice President Al Gore as yellow-faced caricatures. Shortly after the allegations arose, the Democratic National Party began doing background checks and audits on all donors with "Asian-sounding" surnames. The perception that during the campaign finance investigations, the media, and the Democratic National Committee targeted Asian Americans because of their race has led some to speculate that "the fund-raising scandal will have a 'chilling effect' on Asian Pacific American participation" (Nakanishi 1999b, 35).

Although immigrants from Latin America and Asia began arriving in the United States in significant numbers in 1965, party mobilization over the past forty years has been the exception rather than the rule. Whether parties' behavior will shift toward a more sustained effort to mobilize contemporary Asian American and Latino immigrants depends on changes in the political environment and institutional incentives as well as demographic changes.

#### *Election 2004: More of the Same?*

The three factors discussed earlier (changing campaign tactics as a result of party nationalization, selective mobilization strategies, and assumptions about political attitudes among immigrants and median voters) help to explain the parties' limited effects in terms of mobilizing Latinos during the 2000 and 2004 presidential campaigns. First, a nationalized campaign strategy focused on winning the electoral vote in specific battleground states and reduced the incentive to woo Latino voters because the majority are not concentrated in most of those states (Florida, New Mexico, and

Arizona do contain significant Latino populations, but the vast majority of Latinos live outside of these states). In 2000, as it became clear that Gore would take California, the campaigns of both candidates focused their attention elsewhere. At the end of October, a reporter from the *Los Angeles Times* wrote, “The battle for Latino hearts and minds is a lesser sideshow to the all-out push to win centrist voters in states such as Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania” (Tobar 2000, A-17). Hector Orci, a Latino activist and founder of La Agencia, a New Mexico advertising agency targeting Latinos, commented, “The circumstances of this election have led both candidates to ignore the Latino vote almost completely, because tactically, they don’t see it as important” (quoted in Tobar 2000, A-17).

In 2004, the battleground states remained largely unchanged from 2000.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the two parties failed to target mobilization efforts at California (home to about one of every three Latinos in the nation), New York state (one of every eight), and Illinois (one of every fifteen). Only 20 percent of all U.S. Latinos but 40 percent of all non-Latino whites live in the battleground states. Consequently, Latinos are about half as likely as whites to live in the states that were the focus of the past two presidential campaigns. In 2004, as a result of these demographics, the vast majority of the parties’ resources were directed toward states that are disproportionately white. Adam J. Segal of the Hispanic Voter Project at Johns Hopkins University observed in late September 2004, “Most of the Hispanic voters across the nation will never see or hear a paid advertisement by the campaigns and will likely never see the candidates at events in their state. Limited resources force the campaigns to make trade-off decisions based on this year’s election. This short-term strategy unfortunately does little to contribute to broader, long-term national political gains for the Hispanic community” (Segal 2004, 3).

Second, the shift in mobilizing tactics to the use of sophisticated media, direct-mail, and market-research techniques at the expense of local outreach meant that in a handful of battleground states, both parties targeted only the most likely Latino voters. Louis DeSipio and Rodolfo de la Garza conclude that in 2000 both parties were “narrow in their focus, seeking only to reach Latinos who [were] likely to vote. Although this segment of the Latino electorate continues to increase, the number of eligible non-voters continues to grow as rapidly. As a result, campaign and party investment in outreach did not necessarily mean that presidential campaigns at

the end of the twentieth century had become more likely to increase Latino turnout” (DeSipio and de la Garza 2005, 21). The campaigns and parties spent record amounts of money courting the Latino vote via Spanish-language media outlets in 2004. By late September of that year, the Kerry campaign had spent more than the Gore-Lieberman campaign and the Democratic National Committee combined in 2000 (Segal 2004, 2). In an interview, Rosalind Gold, senior director of policy, research, and advocacy at the National Association of Latino Elected Officials (NALEO), acknowledged in late October 2004 that the parties were spending money on advertising and field operations in the battleground states, but she also observed that the “parties are very, very heavily media-oriented. . . . I don’t know how much of their fieldwork is being targeted specifically toward Latinos, except in the battleground states.”<sup>11</sup> The Bush-Cheney campaign also set records, devoting \$3 million to Spanish-language advertisements by August 2004 (Segal 2004, 3). However, for the majority of the campaign, patterns of party outreach appear to have remained similar to those of 2000. Despite the unprecedented amounts of money that both groups contributed toward Spanish-language advertising, Latino outreach efforts remained mostly limited to the airways and focused on the battleground states (where fewer Latinos live). Both parties failed to mobilize Latino participation at a mass level.

Third, in the face of statistics that showed that the voting rate for all Latino adults in the United States is less than 30 percent (compared to 55 percent of the general adult population), the parties may have believed that courting the Latino vote, especially outside of key battleground states, was not worth the effort and expenditure of resources. However, although almost 40 percent of adult Latinos were ineligible to vote because they were not citizens, 79 percent of registered adult Latinos voted in 2000, which compares favorably with the 86 percent rate for the registered population as a whole (Jamieson, Shin, and Day 2002). DeSipio and de la Garza observe that although “electoral institutions have increased their sophistication at reaching out to Latinos and the number of Latinos voting has increased, there is still no pattern of overall Latino electoral mobilization that reaches more than a small share of Latino adults” (2005, 16). Had the parties expended the effort, they might have belied the misperception about Latino political apathy.

The parties also made little effort to address Latinos’ substantive policy concerns and instead discussed those concerns superficially. This strategy

allowed the parties to try to appeal to Latinos without alienating white swing voters who might not support more direct measures that would benefit Latinos. During 2004, both candidates sought to reach out to Latinos by emphasizing substantive policy priorities in the areas of education, health care, and job creation generally, which a series of town hall voter forums organized by NALEO had revealed were the most salient issues for Latino voters. However, when asked in an interview whether the two candidates were doing a good job of addressing these issues, NALEO Director of Communications Erica Bernal answered,

No. And I'll give you a perfect example about why. We visited eight communities, talked to over six hundred Latinos ranging in age, socio-economic status. We didn't hear one person who thought that No Child Left Behind was working. . . . Latino voters are saying, "50 percent of our kids are not graduating, our schools are overcrowded, our teachers are underpaid, they're not credentialed properly, so who's going to give me something that's going to fix my child's education and make sure that they're successful?" So there's a particular perspective that the Latino communities are facing. Even though education is thrown around, Latinos are not hearing any substantive policy that's going to ensure their children's success.

Although the two candidates may have addressed issues important to Latinos, they did not offer specific policy recommendations that addressed core Latino concerns about the issues. Further, a *Los Angeles Times* reporter observed that although the GOP featured more minority delegates at its convention than had previously been the case, its "bid for minority votes is . . . hindered by the animosity that some of Bush's policies and decisions have stirred up in black and Latino communities. . . . Many Latinos question Bush's no-citizenship program for illegal immigrants, and stricter rules on travel to Cuba are dividing the Cuban American vote in Florida" (Neuman 2004, A-26).

As the size of the Latino population has grown and its voting potential has become more apparent, the Republican and Democratic Parties have shown greater interest. In the future, they may continue in this direction and recruit votes in Latino communities, but party efforts to this point have been primarily symbolic. The focus has been on recruiting Latinos into key party positions, adopting policy platforms that appeal to (or at least are not perceived as hostile to) Latino interests, and targeting only

those members of the Latino community already registered to vote. Noncitizen immigrants and other major ethnic groups, including Asian Americans, have been ignored.

Asian Americans received far less attention than Latinos in 2004. During the campaign, Karen Narasaki, president of the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, commented, "In this election season, I think we've been fairly invisible" (*USA Today* 2004, 1). Echoing these sentiments, David Lee, executive director of the Chinese American Voters Education Committee, said of the 2004 campaign, "Traditionally, neither party has spent much effort reaching out to Asian Americans. . . . As a result I think you have a very large untapped population" (Schwartz 2004, A-21). One reason for this is that parties and candidates do not understand the contours and internal diversity within the Asian American community well enough to conduct effective outreach efforts. "Asian votes should be courted, not taken for granted," Cao K. O, executive director of the Asian American Federation in New York, told an Associated Press reporter in July 2004. "At the same time, politicians and the political parties don't know how to court the Asian vote" (Armas 2004). That same month, a coalition of Asian American media representatives complained that the Kerry campaign and Democratic National Committee were overlooking Asian American media outlets (Hua 2004).

Although they broke records in their campaign fund-raising, the parties seemed reluctant to devote more than scant resources to the mobilization of Asian Americans in 2004. The Republican National Committee included more Asian American delegates at its convention than ever before and created a steering committee of 175 Asian Americans, encouraging them to host house parties and participate in phone banks. The committee also included Asian Americans in its Team Leader program, implemented to recruit Republican supporters. In October 2004, the Democratic National Committee initiated APIA Voice, a get-out-the-vote campaign that targeted Asian American voters and involved the hiring of Asian American field directors and organizers, the production of multilingual materials, and in-language phone banking and canvassing efforts. Nevertheless, most community members were disappointed in the two parties' outreach efforts (Armas 2004; Schwartz 2004).

In the last months of what was shaping up to be a close campaign, it was clear that undecided voters represented the holy grail for the parties and candidates. In theory, they should have targeted Asian American regis-

tered voters because, as late as August 2004, fully 20 percent of Asian Americans were undecided about their candidate choice (New California Media 2004). In fact, Asian American likely voters included a much larger proportion of undecided voters than did their Latino counterparts. By July 2004, only 3 percent of Latino likely voters remained undecided about the two presidential candidates (Greenberg et al. 2004). Further, the number of Asian Americans who actually cast a vote grew at a tremendous rate from 1996 to 2000—22 percent, compared to 19 percent for Latinos and just 4 percent for whites (Passell 2004). Yet the two major parties failed to mobilize most Asian Americans, in part because of selective mobilization strategies that focused on likely voters in battleground states. The Democratic National Committee's APIA Voice campaign focused almost exclusively on the battleground states and was not well funded compared to other aspects of the campaign. Like their Latino counterparts, only about one out of every five Asian Americans lives in a battleground state.

The parties' shift to mass-media and direct-mail tactics, use of selective mobilization strategies and need to maintain existing coalitions, desire to appeal to white swing voters with moderate views on race, and misperceptions about immigrant apathy have led the Democratic and Republican Parties to avoid mass mobilization strategies, which had been the normative strategy in the first half of the twentieth century (see Escobedo 2002; de la Garza and DeSipio 2004; see also DeSipio, de la Garza, and Setzler 1999). The behavior of the major parties in the presidential campaigns since 1988 shows that minorities and especially immigrants cannot yet count on parties as primary sources of political mobilization.

#### *Local Politics in New York and Los Angeles*

Many of the constraints and disincentives experienced by the Democratic and Republican Parties at the national level are also in evidence at the local level, although these forces manifest differently on the neighborhood stage than they do in presidential campaigns. An examination of local politics in New York and Los Angeles illustrates the problems arising from weakened local party structures and changing campaign tactics, selective mobilization strategies and the need to maintain existing party coalitions, and assumptions about political attitudes among immigrants and median voters.

Turning to an overview of politics in New York and Los Angeles, it is

apparent that mainstream political structures at the local level, such as community boards or local political organizations, have been slow to recognize or incorporate Asian American and Latino immigrants. Instead, labor organizations, workers' centers, advocacy and social service organizations, ethnic voluntary associations, and religious institutions have partially taken on the responsibility of mobilizing Asian Americans and Latinos to participate in the political system.

*The Political Context in New York City*

New York City is often described as a one-party town (Arian et al. 1991). Democratic Party organizations are part and parcel of the history of politics in New York. From the nineteenth century through the 1960s, Tammany Hall, a classic, big-city machine based in Manhattan, dominated the city's political life. Machines developed in the other counties as well, drawing on the city's resource pool of public-sector jobs and social services to maintain control of local elections. In the contemporary era of candidate-centered and media-driven campaigns, however, politics in New York has been described as more "fragmented" than in the years before reforms and changing urban demographics weakened the political machine (Wade 1990). The city is made up of five counties created by an 1898 charter; each county is characterized by a unique political context, with "its own party rules, identity, political dynamics, and county leader" (Mollenkopf 1992, 77). Despite this fragmentation, the Democratic Party retains control of most state and local elected positions despite the conservatism exhibited by recent New York City mayors such as Rudolph Giuliani and Michael Bloomberg.<sup>12</sup>

The most important municipal election is for mayor (Arian et al. 1991; Mollenkopf 1992, 69). The Democratic Party no longer determines who will win that office but still influences lower-level positions (Mollenkopf 1992, 78). The city's smallest units of political-party organization are assembly districts, which function as wards, although the assembly districts are not the most critical offices. In general, two leaders are elected in each district, and those district leaders elect a county leader, who is similar to a party boss. New York City district leaders seldom face reelection challenges, and many are legislators or the relatives of legislators. Although reformers and insurgents have challenged the party organization at the local level, the city's political organization remains based on Democratic clubs that nominate the local leadership and produce the candidates for

city council and state assembly seats (Arian et al. 1991). John Mollenkopf notes that the influence of the party clubs has declined since the mid-twentieth century: "Most observers would agree that the grass-roots organizational base of New York's political parties has decayed. Evidence to support this view may be found in the weakness of the regular Democratic political clubs compared to the 1920s or even the 1950s. They are fewer, have smaller and more elderly memberships, no longer provide the sole access to political careers, and play a smaller role in citywide political campaigns" (1992, 77).<sup>13</sup> Despite their declining influence, party clubs retain some power, especially in terms of controlling how the city grants government contracts and, in the assembly districts where clubs are most active, providing a healthy margin of victory to candidates (Mollenkopf 1992, 80, 122).

Despite the rapidly growing numbers of Latino and Afro-Caribbean immigrants, which make them a rich source of potential votes in several New York assembly districts, the weakened local party organizations have not reached out to these groups, preferring instead to protect existing coalitions. In his study of Latino immigrant political participation in Queens, Michael Jones-Correa asserts that "given that the political machine in Queens is long established, and has only token competition, machine politicians have little interest in disrupting the status quo" (1998, 82).<sup>14</sup> As a result, Latinos in Queens receive little attention from the local party organizations (see also Mollenkopf 1992, table 4.1). Reuel Rogers identifies a similar phenomenon, noting that the Brooklyn Democratic Party has made virtually no effort to mobilize Afro-Caribbean immigrants and has failed to sponsor voter-registration drives or to support Afro-Caribbean candidates. Rogers attributes this phenomenon to the party's desire to avoid "bringing new unpredictable voters into the electorate" (2000b, 93). In the past, however, Afro-Caribbeans had a stronger presence in the city's political life (Kasinitz 1992).<sup>15</sup>

The need to protect the status quo intersects with selective mobilization strategies and the need to appeal to moderate white swing voters in surprising ways. Both Jones-Correa and Rogers note that because the Democratic machine is firmly entrenched in Queens and Brooklyn, it has little incentive to expend resources to attract votes from immigrants, who tend to be unregistered and nonvoters. Rogers notes, "To be sure, party gate-keeping and selective mobilization can be explained as a purely rational, race-neutral strategy that allows Democrats to maintain their hegemony

and the political status quo. But the practice undeniably produces racially stratified patterns of participation. The party's core of traditional voters turns out to be more white and native-born than the overall population, while the nonvoters on the political margins are mostly nonwhite immigrants from the Caribbean, Latin America, and Asia" (2000b, 97).

In terms of shaping the political landscape in New York, civic associations represent another set of important local institutions. These associations frequently have connections to local party organizations—in some cases, they are in fact the same organization or have overlapping leadership. Most focus on quality-of-life issues having to do with street safety, zoning regulations, garbage removal, and local politics. Here again, the need to appeal to white swing voters proves a disincentive to immigrant political mobilization (Sanjek 1998). Like the party clubs, most associations until recently were composed primarily of established white residents, who often exhibited ambivalence toward new immigrants in their communities and consequently have done little to bring immigrants into the organizations.

The dynamics in Elmhurst-Corona provide a good illustration of the weaknesses of civic associations in mobilizing immigrant communities. According to Roger Sanjek (1998), during the 1970s and 1980s, residents of Elmhurst-Corona, which was fast becoming one of the most ethnically diverse parts of New York City, began establishing civic associations. Yet "only in small numbers, or in the outer layers, did any Latin American, Asian, or black newcomers appear" (263). When someone suggested adding Spanish and Chinese pages to the Newtown Civic Association's newsletter, several members reacted strongly against the proposal, and none were in favor.

Community Board 4, representing Elmhurst-Corona, had forty-five members in 1980. Despite the district's racial diversity, only two members were African American, three were Latino, and none were Asian (Sanjek 1998, 300). At times, the board's leadership has demonstrated outright racial hostility toward new immigrants, further diminishing the likelihood that immigrants will turn toward civic associations or local government institutions for help with getting involved in politics in New York City. For example, Sanjek recalls the comments of the board's chair during a discussion of applicants for a new low-income housing development for seniors: "Everybody's name is Wang. . . . I know how to solve their housing problem—call the INS. We want our own people. Chinese have some

nerve, saying we don't speak Chinese. We were here first. We want our neighbors in first" (1998, 303).

Since the 1990s, local civic associations and community boards have become more open to immigrants in terms of both membership and leaders. For example, Ron Casey, the chair of Community Board 2's veterans' affairs committee, expressed concern at an April 2001 board meeting about the fact that only three Latinos served on the board despite the fact that 35 percent of the area the board serves was Latino. "I'd like to see diversity," Casey said, noting that the board was made up mostly of third-generation whites (quoted in Becker 2001, 2). However, perhaps because of their initial reluctance to incorporate newcomers and the slow embrace that followed, other local institutions such as labor organizations, workers' centers, advocacy and social service organizations, ethnic voluntary associations, and religious institutions are taking the lead in the political mobilization of New York's immigrants.

#### *The Political Context in Los Angeles*

In contrast to New York, Los Angeles is the "prototypical western metropolis" (Sonenshein 2004, 19). In the early twentieth century, the city's leaders were committed to clean government, supporting reforms designed to increase citizen participation and discourage corruption. As Raphael Sonenshein points out, "Los Angeles is a model of the newer, western cities [that] developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, shaped by Midwestern Protestant migrants who hoped to devise an urban alternative to the 'old, corrupt' cities of the East and Midwest. The antiparty norms of the Progressive movement found their greatest expression in the West and were central to the development of the Los Angeles political community. Party organizations have been virtually non-existent in Los Angeles" (1993, 230).

This reform culture has received strong support from the city's voters, who hold strong antimachine attitudes. To select the mayor, the city holds a nonpartisan primary followed by a runoff between the two most successful candidates. The city's strong council model requires that the mayor share power with the fifteen city council members, each of whom is elected every four years from single-member districts. Power rests in part with the "permanent government" in Los Angeles, a coalition of progrowth business executives, developers, and members of the bureaucracy (Sonenshein 1993). The city council is small compared to other cities, such as New

York or Chicago, and is an important structural feature of Los Angeles politics that affects Asian American and Latino political mobilization. Because there are fewer seats on the city council, racial minorities have limited opportunities to achieve local political power (Mollenkopf, Olsen, and Ross 2001). A small city council means fewer electoral opportunities for coethnic candidates to mobilize Asian American and Latino immigrants (Sonenshein 2004, 255).

The historical weakness of the party structure is another notable feature of Los Angeles (Fogelson [1967] 1993). Although the New York example provides little evidence that minorities can rely on machines for political mobilization, the historical absence of a political-machine culture in Los Angeles has stringently limited the mobilization of Asians and Latinos. As Sonenshein notes, "There were no political party organizations to recruit precinct captains and mobilize minority voters. The doctrines of homogeneity and conservative reform left little incentive for elite groups to incorporate new groups through balanced tickets" (1993, 33).

Despite the absence of a traditional big-city machine culture, Los Angeles is home to the Waxman-Berman political organization, run by west-side politicians and fueled by money from Hollywood and developers rather than by city patronage jobs and strong grassroots mobilization strategies (M. Davis 1992; Fulton 2001). Indeed, rather than relying on grassroots strategies, the Waxman-Berman organization led the country in developing direct-mail and targeted-media campaigns and drew its strength from fund-raising and mailing lists. Until the 1990s, when term limits and Republican redistricting sharply limited its effectiveness, this machine had been somewhat powerful in city politics, though never absolutely dominant. The machine would slate candidates and promote them through direct-mail campaigns, eventually dominating Los Angeles's west side (Sonenshein 1993). The Waxman-Berman political organization and its strategies illustrate how both weak local party structures and a focus on large-scale direct mail campaigns rather than on grassroots mobilizing tactics discouraged immigrant mobilization in Los Angeles (Fulton 2001, 46). Minority immigrants are seldom the target of the superficial media campaigns that have come to dominate politics in Los Angeles and at the national level.

Peter Skerry associates organizations like the Waxman-Berman one with the "nationalization" of American politics, characterized by the decline of neighborhood-based, machine-style politics and the rise of "elite-network

politics” (1993, 375). Elite networks are exclusive groups of elected officials, staffers, and in some cases advocacy organizations relying primarily on direct mail and television advertisements that tend to have weak ties to Los Angeles communities: “The clique may not have roots reaching down into Los Angeles, but it has plenty of branches extending widely across the state” (228). This trend has created a gap between local ethnic communities and the larger political system. Historically, immigrants have participated only at low levels in Los Angeles politics. Skerry notes that the available political institutions (national parties, elite networks, political consulting and polling organizations, and the media) “offer little help in negotiating the gulf between the traditional values newcomers bring with them and those of contemporary American society” (375).

#### *New York and Los Angeles Compared*

New York and Los Angeles are the two most populous U.S. metropolitan areas (Halle 2003, 1). Both have been characterized as *global cities* because of their dominant role in “national and international interactions” and their critical position in global systems (Abu-Lughod 1999, 400). Despite their similarities, the two regions are the product of distinct historical forces (Abu-Lughod 1999) and represent different urban development outcomes. New York is organized around a traditional urban core, while Los Angeles is organized around a constellation of decentralized urban clusters (Halle 2003; Fogelson 1993; Fulton 2001).

Immigrants from all over the world have settled disproportionately in the Los Angeles and New York City regions (Waldinger and Lee 2001). Immigrants from Mexico dominate the stream of immigrants entering Los Angeles, while New York’s immigrant flow is more diverse (Cordero-Guzmán, Smith and Grosfoguel 2001; Waldinger and Lee 2001; Abu-Lughod 1999). New York has a longer history of immigration. The native white population in New York is composed of the descendants of earlier waves of Jewish, Italian, Greek, and Irish immigrants from Europe. In contrast, many native white Angelenos are the descendants of Western Europeans who settled first in small towns in the Midwest and then migrated west. Sabagh and Bozorgmehr (2003) assert that the latter group tends to be more nativist and that their presence in Los Angeles partly explains greater anti-immigrant sentiment in Los Angeles compared to New York. In addition, Mollenkopf (1999) argues that Los Angeles has been more hostile to immigration than New York because New York’s

demographic and political dynamics encourage greater collaboration among ethnic groups. For example, whites in New York need to form coalitions with other groups to govern, but that is not the case in Los Angeles.

One of the most striking differences in political organization between the two cities is that New York is a traditional machine-culture city whereas Los Angeles has developed in the reformist mode. However, in his study of urban reform, Sonenshein reminds us that both cities defy simple characterizations. New York City has not only been home to famous political machines and bosses but “has also been the cradle of the urban reform movement.” And although it is held up as the quintessential reform metropolis, Los Angeles shares many of the attributes of “unreformed big city government” (2004, 17). Further, New York and Los Angeles have some important commonalities. In the 1990s, white Republican candidates succeeded African American mayors in both cities, and both were challenged by secession movements, driven in part by white residents’ negative attitudes toward an increasingly diverse metropolis. Yet there are differences between the two cities in terms of their general features (Mollenkopf, Olsen, and Ross 2001).

Political mobilization in New York is still based on local party organizations and neighborhood networks, whereas in Los Angeles, mainstream political parties rely heavily on direct mail and media campaigns for electoral and issue mobilization (Sonenshein 2003; Mollenkopf, Olson, and Ross 2001). As a result, in New York, a salient factor vis-à-vis immigrant political mobilization is the entrenchment of parties and coalitions that selectively mobilize traditional supporters but not new voters as a means of maintaining the status quo. In Los Angeles, the salient factor is selective voter mobilization using sophisticated phone and direct-mail techniques and media advertising aimed at narrowly targeted groups that are most likely to support a particular candidate or policy issue.

John Mollenkopf, David Olson, and Timothy Ross (2001) and others (Halle 2003; Sonenshein 2003) note additional differences: First, New York City’s government is more organized and much larger than that of Los Angeles. New York’s political system provides many more opportunities for people to get involved in politics, through election to local offices and low-level appointments, than does the system in Los Angeles (Mollenkopf 1999). Local political offices in New York City include representatives on the school board, city council, or assembly. An assembly mem-

ber's constituency can include as few as 140,000 people. In contrast, the local office of county supervisor in Los Angeles represents more than a million constituents (Fulton 2001, 45; Mollenkopf, Olson, and Ross 2001, 37; Abu-Lughod 1999). Los Angeles has relatively few city council seats compared to New York City; consequently local races in Los Angeles County rely heavily on the ability to raise money and spend it on advertising and campaign professionals, whereas entry-level office seekers in New York City can still rely on networks based on friends, neighbors, and organizations. Minority immigrants have been running for the local school board in New York City with increasing success. However, representation is still limited. As mentioned earlier, despite Asian Americans' long history in New York City, it was not until 2001 that John Liu, representing northeast Queens on the city council, became the first Asian American elected to citywide office and not until 2004 that Jimmy Meng became the first New York City Asian American to serve in the New York State legislature.

Both New York City and Los Angeles have citizen advisory bodies. Community boards were introduced throughout New York City in 1969 to make recommendations on land use and budget decisions (Sanjek 1998). Their role is advisory, but at times they do wield power (Sonenshein 2003; Sanjek 1998). In 1999, Los Angeles voters approved charter revisions that provided for neighborhood councils that would monitor service delivery to local areas and make budget requests. Sonenshein (2003, 310) argues that neighborhood councils became "the main vehicle for enhanced citizen participation" in Los Angeles, while the community boards remained part of a collection of local organizations, including local party organizations, that could promote citizen participation in New York City. As noted earlier, community boards have a long history of racial exclusion but began to reflect New York City's diversity in the 1990s. The community boards have not served traditionally as a step toward elected office for residents of New York City (Sanjek 1998, 51). Los Angeles neighborhood councils were disproportionately white in June 2004, although Latino, black, and Asian American representation increased in areas of greater non-Latino-white population (Musso et al. 2004).

Finally, opportunities for political mobilization for minority immigrants may be affected by the presence and political calculations of minority political elites. Mollenkopf, Ross, and Olson (1999) note that many elected officials in New York City, including those who are Jewish, black, and

Latino, have a large number of immigrant residents in their districts. However, “like all local elected officials, these incumbents and their local county parties like the electorate which put them in office and are in no hurry to enlarge, and perhaps destabilize, that electorate or encourage new political competition from immigrant office-seekers” (8). In Los Angeles, second-generation immigrants often run for elected offices. For example, Xavier Becerra and Antonio Villaraigosa, both Mexican Americans, emerged as two of the top six contenders in the 2001 mayoral primary election. Becerra’s mother is from Guadalajara, Mexico, and his father was born in Sacramento, California, but grew up in Tijuana in Baja California. Villaraigosa’s father was born in Mexico, and his mother was born in the United States. Villaraigosa was elected mayor in 2005 (see chap. 2). However, given that most Latino elected officials in Los Angeles represent safe seats, mobilization of immigrants—which might disrupt existing coalitions—is often not a priority. In their comparison of immigrant political participation in the two cities, Mollenkopf, Ross, and Olson conclude that “neither New York nor Los Angeles County suggest that native minority politicians will help to promote active citizenship among and develop a political synergy with even closely related immigrant groups” (1999, 9).

### *Conclusion*

Mainstream political parties’ long-standing involvement in immigrant political mobilization has been undone during the past forty years, and the parties’ absence at the local level can be explained by at least three factors: (1) weakened local party structure and changing campaign tactics; (2) selective mobilization strategies and maintenance of existing party coalitions; (3) assumptions about the political attitudes of immigrants and white swing voters. Since the 1960s, political machines and party organizations have shown little interest in organizing immigrants to participate in the U.S. political system. The Democratic and Republican Parties have nationalized, to the detriment of local party structures. To get out the vote, today’s candidate-centered campaigns rely on direct mail, radio, and television—not face-to-face interactions or neighborhood grassroots activity. The parties tend to engage in selective mobilization of those who have the most resources in terms of income, education, and language skills because those are the people who are most likely to vote. Parties will not

expend their scarce resources on noncitizens, who cannot vote in federal, state, and most local elections. The two-party, winner-take-all structure of the American political system intensifies party reliance on an appeal to the median voter. Moderate views on race in that bloc of voters represent an incentive for parties to distance themselves from racial minorities or unpopular groups within those minorities and from policies that might be construed as benefiting those minorities. Because entrenched and reliable blocs of party support might vanish in response to appeals to minorities and especially to unpopular segments of minority groups such as undocumented immigrants, such appeals are discouraged. In the context of these many constraints and disincentives, immigrant enclaves—particularly the majority located outside of battleground states—are ignored. Thus, parties are not mass mobilizing immigrants, especially when they are poor, lack citizenship, do not speak English, and are from a racial minority. Nor are the parties likely to do so in the near-term future. However, this may be a mistake and may be less rational than party leaders seem to believe. By appealing to immigrants—even those who are not citizens—parties could build their future bases and political power.

Would immigrants participate more if parties appealed to them? A long history of research by political scientists has shown that mobilization is one of the most influential determinants of political participation for Americans generally (Gosnell 1927; Eldersveld 1956; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). In their classic study of mobilization and political participation, Rosenstone and Hansen (1993, 170) find that people mobilized by the two major parties over the course of presidential election campaign are more likely to vote, to try to persuade others to vote, to work for a party or candidate, and to contribute money to a campaign. Other studies show that mobilization can substantially affect voter turnout among those who are disadvantaged in terms of socioeconomic resources (Cain and McCue 1985; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, 173). Mobilization is positively associated with participation among Asian Americans and Latinos. Jan Leighley (2001) shows that mobilization has a positive effect on Latinos' political participation, and Lien, Conway, and Wong (2004) find that mobilization by parties increases political participation among Asian Americans. R. Ramirez (forthcoming) finds that mobilization increases turnout among Latino immigrants, although the effects of that mobilization depend on the type and quality of contact. Using an experimental field research design, J. Wong (2004) finds that mobilization increased

turnout among Chinese (immigrants and nonimmigrants) in Los Angeles County. Thus, a wealth of research suggests that increased efforts to mobilize immigrants would significantly affect political participation.

The relationship between American civic institutions—parties and community-based organizations in particular—and political mobilization is not relevant for immigrants alone. Parties are no longer bridging institutions between government and constituents; instead, the parties operate at the national level, and their reliance on the mass media and sophisticated direct-mail strategies means that most Americans, not only immigrants, are not targeted for direct mobilization. Face-to-face, personal contact—a factor that is strongly associated with political participation (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Gerber and Green 2000; Leighley 2001)—is no longer the primary feature of political organizing. Lack of mobilization by parties is exacerbated by features of the American political system, including redistricting practices that have led to a decline in competitive elections, that also undermine mobilization.

In the gap, community organizations are critical, especially because they can reach those who are resource- and skill-poor, the group that parties are the least likely to target because, according to traditional criteria, it is the least likely to participate. Labor organizations, workers' centers, advocacy and social service organizations, ethnic voluntary associations, and religious institutions are directly connected to immigrant and poor communities and can engage in ethnic-specific mobilization strategies and practices. Community organizations are reaching out to involve day laborers, noncitizens, and non-English speakers in the U.S. political system. That makes those organizations crucial in terms of helping the country move closer to fulfilling its ideals of political equality. Community-based organizations may represent a more promising source of mobilization than political parties, not just for immigrants but also for the population as a whole (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Leighley 2001).