

## *4 The Role of Community Organizations in Immigrant Political Mobilization*

Organizations that do community-based work—labor organizations, workers’ centers, social service organizations, advocacy organizations, ethnic voluntary associations, and religious institutions—appear to have great potential for politically mobilizing Asian American and Latino immigrant communities. When asked which civic institutions had been important for involving the Chinese community in the U.S. political process, a Chinese American leader, active in a campaign for a Chinese American candidate in Los Angeles, revealed the role that these organizations have in immigrant politics. Rather than mentioning a traditional political party or even the elected official for whom he had campaigned, he named a nonprofit legal-advocacy organization serving Asian Americans: “I think the Asian Pacific American Legal Center has done a great job of getting people to register to vote and helping people in the community.”

Community organizations have long been active in politically mobilizing immigrant groups (Skerry 1993; Skocpol 1999a; Hall 1999; Sterne 2001; A. Lin forthcoming), but their centrality to the process is something new. During the first half of the twentieth century, political machines and party organizations courted immigrant groups, running consistent, committed mobilization efforts at the neighborhood level. In those efforts, the political institutions worked closely with churches, fraternal organizations, and other community organizations. Since the 1960s, however, the collaboration between parties and community organizations has weakened notably. Community organizations are more likely to focus on promoting immigrants’ and minorities’ civil and economic rights than on getting out the vote. The proliferation of nonprofit organizations (Berry 1997) incorporated under the 501c(3) section of the Internal Revenue Code, which precludes participation in any political campaign on behalf of a candidate

running for public office, has also undermined collaboration between parties and organizations. A third factor is that the political parties have shifted their focus to the national level and no longer have a presence in neighborhoods (Conway 2001). The relative absence of political parties has created a vacuum in terms of immigrant political organizing at the local level. Community organizations are stepping into the breach.

*Community Organizations: Incentives & Strengths for  
Mobilizing Minority Immigrant Communities*

Local community organizations have certain strengths and incentives for politically mobilizing minority immigrant groups. Three stand out: (1) the desire for organizational maintenance, (2) connections between the leadership and immigrant constituencies and leaders' resulting expertise regarding the immigrant group, and (3) transnational connections.

The first incentive is shared with organized groups everywhere: community organizations seek to expand their membership and constituencies to build a base and increase effectiveness (Hrebenar and Scott 1990; C. Thomas and Hrebenar 1999). In contrast to political parties, community groups are often interested in the power of numbers of individuals rather than in absolute voting power alone. Thus, community organizations have an incentive to reach out to noncitizens and others who may not be obvious potential voters as a means of increasing the organizations' influence, clout, and ability to achieve policy goals. Immigrants represent a sizable bloc of potential constituents. By claiming to represent a large number of people, a community organization can increase its influence and policy-making power. As one community activist explains, having more immigrant participants at events, such as demonstrations, contributes to the success of those activities by generating more attention from the media, elected officials, and the public.

My personal feeling is that there is still a lot to be said about mobilizing large numbers of people to take action and to show support for a specific issue or policy or whatever concern they have. I think about the time of Proposition 187 [the mid-1990s], when immigrant rights, including legal immigrants, were being attacked. In [California, there] was the largest march and rally I had seen in the whole time I've lived in L.A. I think upwards of twenty-five thousand people or maybe more—

it might have been many, many more—marched through the streets of L.A. for immigrant rights, primarily led by the Latino community. And that really changed the tone in the city of L.A. . . . The tone was set that attacks on immigrants—immigrant bashing—was not going to be accepted, and this was because tens of thousands of people were in the streets.

Further, to expand its membership base, the organization must create activities and provide services that will attract and solidify its potential constituency. An obvious approach is to provide a group with what it lacks. In the case of immigrants, this can include education (English as a second language and citizenship training), services (health care, legal advice), information (logistical, work-related, political), and a reinforcement of positive self-identity (through ethnohistorical commemorations, religious rites, and social events such as soccer games), among other things. Organizations provide immigrants with the tools explicitly needed for naturalization (such as English proficiency and a knowledge of U.S. history and civics). Furthermore, by providing services, sharing information, and reinforcing group identity, organizations help to give their constituents some of the traits that are generally characteristic of civically active segments of the population—social and economic stability and positive self-identity. Finally, the provision of these things builds a connection between the organization and its constituency so that the organization is positioned to mobilize people around relevant issues.

A second strength of community organizations for working with immigrants is that the organization leaders often have close ties to immigrant communities and are committed ideologically to immigrant and minority rights. It is not uncommon for leaders to be first- or second-generation immigrants who have grown up in—or have parents who grew up in—immigrant communities. All of the forty community leaders interviewed in the fieldwork for this book were immigrants or the children of immigrants. Because of these close personal affiliations and common concerns, leaders may be impelled to involve immigrants in the organization's work and activities. For example, when asked why he decided to organize Asian Americans, one leader mentioned his commitments to the community: "I think once you have a better understanding of your cultural heritage and the stark conditions your community is facing in this country, it makes you want to do something about it, to be part of a legacy that was started by

farmworkers and laborers who struggled at the turn of the century. Being exposed to that developed that consciousness in me and has got into my work.” The transmission of historical knowledge and cultural identity bolsters positive group identity and helps to create a community within the United States that is vital and anchored rather than bleak and temporary. These are significant steps along the slow path that over time leads to full political incorporation. In the past, political parties provided some of the resources needed to move along that path, but today community organizations appear to have replaced parties as the source of tools that immigrants must acquire to participate in politics.

Because leaders have or develop strong social and cultural connections to immigrant communities, they may be more effective in terms of mobilization. They can engage in culturally sensitive strategies and reach out to immigrants in their native language. One community organizer emphasized the importance of linguistic skills and ethnic awareness for achieving successful mobilization.

Unless you have that language capacity, it is going to be impossible to make inroads in these communities. It's not even so much [that] you need to understand culturally the community, because you can learn that once you have the language access and once you can talk to actual members in the community and go into their neighborhoods and meet with them, and that's where these organizations have an advantage. They tend to be staffed by second-generation and even later Asian Americans, but people who have consciously tried to maintain their language heritage or who have just learned on their own or who have hired other folks—first-generation immigrants who do have a language capacity—they've made that a priority. And so I think that's the single-most important factor in being able to mobilize these communities.

In contrast, for the most part, mainstream political leaders have at best tenuous connections to the local community. This does not bode well for political parties' ability to mobilize locally because leadership is key to group mobilization (Cigler 1985; Nownes and Neeley 1996). Even if the mainstream parties made an effort to balance their national-level, mass-media-driven strategies with some efforts at more local and personal appeals, they would be hard-pressed at present to find people who are not already community organization leaders but would be positioned to move immigrants along the road toward naturalization and voting. In his study of Latino politics, Louis DeSipio observes that “electoral and institutional

politics appear only after a foundation of mutualist, civic, and community-focused politics is laid" (2002, 1).

In addition, organizations are run by individuals who have or develop extensive expertise in and familiarity with immigration policy and law, labor laws, naturalization procedures, minority-health-care issues, civic and language education, economic and development problems, and other social-service concerns. Involvement in these areas is a strength because these issues frequently become points of political contention and mobilization in communities. The leadership and staff of community organizations are well positioned to organize and mobilize politically around these concerns. They can do that because they have firsthand experience with these issues and because they have the cultural sensitivity and direct, personal contacts needed to reach the people who will respond to challenges in these areas. That experience, coupled with years of providing immigrants with services and information, can endow an organization with strong legitimacy that helps it to mobilize immigrants. In contrast, political party organizations, especially local chapters, are much less likely to have teams of experts in place to work on a day-to-day basis on mobilization around issues of concern to immigrant communities.

Anecdotal evidence gathered during interviews with Chinese and Mexican immigrants demonstrates that many immigrants continue to have a deep interest in the politics and events relating to their homelands. Thus, in terms of fostering a strong base of immigrant support, it is not surprising that a third strength for community organizations lies in their transnational connections and work.

Immigrants have been the agents in creating new transnational philanthropic organizations and in instituting transnational practices within existing organizations. Migrants just from the Mexican state of Zacatecas have created more than 250 clubs located throughout the United States. In terms of new organizations created by immigrants, hometown clubs are a prime example of groups that use transnational practices to mobilize immigrants to participate in politics not just in their homelands but also in the United States. Associations in the Federation of Zacatecan Clubs of Southern California are active regarding hometown issues, and their members lobby Mexican political authorities on these topics, but they have also sponsored scholarships for students in Southern California and protested Proposition 187, the 1994 California ballot measure that aimed to restrict services to illegal immigrants (Levitt 2002).

The Support Committee for Maquiladora Workers in San Diego, which

organizes Asian immigrant women to document unsafe working conditions in maquiladoras near the U.S.-Mexican border and to provide social services to the predominantly female Mexican maquiladora workforce, provides another example of an organization that uses transnational organizing to engage immigrants. For immigrant and native women working in subsistence-wage jobs, these partnerships have helped to build cross-border solidarity and communication that transcends ethnicity. Lisa Lowe, who has studied the support committee, notes, "Labor organizing projects are changing both in response to the modes of global restructuring and to the changes in immigration and immigrant communities over the last two decades; new strategies aim to take on the difficult work of forging understanding and political solidarity between women and men across racial and national boundaries" (1998, 41).

#### *Implications of Mobilization by Community Organizations*

With the decline of a strong political party presence at the local level, contemporary community organizations are poised to take an even more prominent role in the political lives of immigrants than has been the case in the past. If community organizations continue to take on this role, they are likely to (1) provide multiple channels of political socialization; (2) increase the opportunities for noncitizens to participate in the U.S. political process; (3) develop single-issue-based political agendas; and (4) foster the retention of ethnic identity as a component of organizational strategy.

First, community organizations are likely to mobilize immigrants around a wide range of political activities, both electoral and nonelectoral. Involvement of noncitizens in nonelectoral activities raises questions about the relative effectiveness of electoral versus nonelectoral participation. Many political scientists consider electoral participation to be the cornerstone of political participation (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Parties and elected officials also tend to focus on electoral participation because votes and electoral victories are the source of their power. Although the value of nonelectoral activities remains an open question, the research for this book indicates that participation in activities other than voting and campaigns, especially if that participation occurs through an array of different types of community organizations, may represent an easily overlooked element of immigrants' involvement in politics, as acknowledged by others who have studied nonelectoral participation

(Piven and Cloward 1978; Echols 1989; Wei 1993; Kelley 1994; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995; Wrinkle et al. 1996). Robin Kelley writes eloquently about the “need to break away from traditional notions of politics” preoccupied with voting and participation in formal social movements (1994, 4). He claims that to understand the full scope of political participation, we must look beyond traditional political institutions and focus on oppressed groups’ efforts to organize through institutions outside of the mainstream as well as their ability to transform both mainstream and more marginalized institutions (10). Further, he encourages greater attention to unique forms of political participation beyond voting or such traditional grassroots activities as protesting.

Second, because community organizations seek to expand the size of their bases (unlike political parties, which single-mindedly pursue the vote among a narrow group of likely voters), community organizations are more likely than are parties to focus their energy on noncitizens. As they mobilize immigrants generally, community organizations will also mobilize noncitizens, giving that group—which mainstream parties have traditionally ignored because they cannot vote—an opportunity to participate in certain aspects of American politics, such as protesting, picketing, and testifying at public hearings.<sup>1</sup>

Third, while mobilization by political parties is likely to lead to organization around a party platform or comprehensive agenda, mobilization led by community organizations is likely to be driven by issue-specific and issue-oriented strategies. Parties are the vehicles of America’s two competing ideological agendas, republicanism and liberalism (Reichley 1992). The two parties mobilize around broad sets of policies reflecting these ideological agendas, which are framed in more universal terms to appeal to people at the state or national level. In contrast, the policy concerns around which community organizations mobilize their constituencies tend to be much narrower and more specific in scope. They are likely to mobilize around a single issue or set of related issues affecting an immigrant community—for example, legalization, worker rights, or language policy. It may be easier to mobilize around a local issue or specific issue that is related to concerns that directly affect people. A personal concern may prompt individuals to become politically involved. The degree to which community organizations mobilize around a specific set of community concerns may vary considerably, but most do so to a greater extent than the two major parties.

Finally, a distinguishing feature of contemporary community organiza-

tions is that they allow for a strong retention of ethnic identity and a role for it in organizing. Political parties may periodically engage in symbolic outreach to immigrants based on perceived aspects of immigrant culture such as language and ethnic foods, but because they must also appeal to white swing voters, they are not deeply committed to supporting or recognizing diverse cultural practices or traditions. Community organizations, in contrast, often simultaneously offer political activities (such as citizenship classes) and cultural activities (such as ethnic-language instruction for children, training in traditional dances, or traditional ethnic festivals). Community organizations also seek to protect immigrants from cultural or ethnic discrimination. For example, the Asian Pacific American Legal Center in Los Angeles has fought several legal battles to ensure language rights for immigrants and to change language policies at the Los Angeles Police Department. Some organizations have launched public education campaigns to teach the wider community about the specific traditions of the represented group. The dual nature of the activities that today's community organizations promote not only distinguishes them from political parties but also sets them apart from the community organizations of the first half of the twentieth century, such as settlement houses, which were assimilationist in orientation.

The extent to which these four implications are associated with any specific type of organization varies. Nonetheless, understanding those implications helps us to distinguish the ways in which community organizations' role in immigrant mobilization is likely to affect the future direction of immigrant participation.

#### *Community Organizations in the Absence of Parties*

Contemporary community organizations are taking responsibility for many types of immigrant activities that used to be associated with political machines, including applying for citizenship and naturalization, voter registration, voter education, and getting out the vote. They have not entirely replaced political parties, however, because the community groups have an array of responsibilities. Only rarely can an organization be involved consistently or full time in political activities. They also face serious limitations in terms of financial resources, as comments by a leader of a nonprofit that focuses on voting rights in the Latino community illustrate.

How we try to situate ourselves with that kind of mission is by organizing the community around elections. We do that by doing voter education, voter registration, and get-out-the-vote [work]. We work within a very specific moment of the political process. That defines a lot of our organizing, but it's also required because our community is so large, and money-wise, there's no way to sustain ourselves. There's a whole question of continuity, because we don't have the money to work continuously. We practically work within different windows of opportunities, within certain conjunctures, political conjunctures.

Some community organizations have had surprising success in politically mobilizing their constituencies. In certain instances, community organizations have mobilized the least advantaged segments of the immigrant community, those individuals who have few resources, do not speak English, and are not citizens—day laborers, garment workers, and undocumented immigrants among others. According to traditional theories of political participation (especially socioeconomic theories), this segment of the U.S. population is the least likely to participate politically. Understanding how organizations have mobilized those people may provide important insights about how civic institutions could mobilize immigrants more generally and potentially even other segments of the U.S. population.

Immigrants acknowledge community organizations' importance in motivating newcomers' political participation. Mexican and Chinese immigrants interviewed in New York frequently connected their level of participation in U.S. politics to their level of involvement in community-based advocacy organizations. For example, a thirty-nine-year-old Mexican immigrant who had lived in New York City for sixteen years claimed that since he had never belonged to an organized community group in the United States, he didn't "have the experience" needed to participate in politics. In contrast, a twenty-nine-year-old Mexican who had been living in New York for only three years had joined a Mexican workers' organization there and had recently attended two protests, one outside the Immigration and Naturalization Service offices to call for amnesty for undocumented immigrants and another outside a New York City restaurant calling for workers' rights. He claimed that he had joined because of the group's goal of protecting immigrants from labor exploitation and abuse.

Chinese immigrants who were interviewed in Los Angeles also tended to view involvement with an organization or group as key to their political involvement in the United States. One forty-nine-year-old Chinese immigrant who had lived in the United States for thirteen years claimed that he was not very involved in U.S. politics because he did not know people willing to work with him to address the issues about which he cared. In contrast, a Chinese immigrant woman who had lived in the United States for only a year said that she was interested in getting involved in politics and seemed to believe that participation in a group would be an important step in that direction: "I'm still new. I'm working on forming a group and getting involved."

The community organizations that I studied covered an array of forms and missions. The work and strategies of (1) labor organizations and workers' centers, (2) advocacy, social service, and ethnic voluntary organizations, and (3) religious institutions highlight community organizations' contributions to immigrant mobilization. These three groupings do not suggest rigid analytical categories. Instead, they help to describe the variety of community organizations that mobilize immigrants into politics. The specific organizations described loosely fit under each grouping.

Data collected in part through fieldwork consisting of participant observation, gathering materials from community organizations, and in-depth interviews conducted in New York City and Los Angeles with Chinese and Mexican immigrants and individuals affiliated with organizations that provide social, legal, political, or issue-oriented services for these immigrants inform the descriptions. I conducted interviews with forty individuals affiliated with organizations that provide social, legal, political, or issue-oriented services for Chinese or Mexican immigrants in New York or Los Angeles, including the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project, One-Stop Immigration, the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, the Chinatown Service Center, the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights, and the Asian Pacific American Legal Center in Los Angeles and the Chinese Voter Education Alliance, the Chinese Staff and Workers' Association, the Catholic archdiocese, the Latino Commission on AIDS, and the Asociación de Tepeyac in New York. These research methods provided a rich source of qualitative information about the ways that community organizations mobilize Chinese and Mexican immigrants as well as the challenges they face. Interviews with organization leaders revealed some of the motivations and political commitments driving institutional activities and

the strategies that are bringing immigrants into the political system. (The methods used in the study are described in greater detail in the appendix.)<sup>2</sup> My observations are intended to provide a personal, descriptive, and process-oriented view of how certain leaders have come to understand their organizations' roles vis-à-vis immigrant communities. The observations also allow for an assessment of how community institutions, local mobilization efforts, and neighborhood settings structure opportunities for immigrant political mobilization in the United States.

#### *Labor Organizations and Workers' Centers*

It is surprising that national labor unions<sup>3</sup> and their local affiliates are mobilizing immigrants because labor organizations have often taken an ambivalent—if not overtly anti-immigrant—stance toward racial minorities (Takaki 1989, 199; K. Wong 1994). At the beginning of the twentieth century, the American Federation of Labor did some selective immigrant organizing, “appealing to the early arriving Irish and Germans and to skilled labor, but openly and vituperatively opposing newer, unskilled immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe and from Asia” (A. Lin forthcoming, 17). Labor organizations' contemporary efforts to include immigrants partly reflect changing demographic and economic realities. At the end of the twentieth century, the increase in immigrant workers within the U.S. manufacturing and service sectors coincided with an overall decline in union membership. In response, labor leaders began actively to recruit Latino and Asian immigrants (Greenhouse 2000a, b). A high-ranking member of the California Federation of Labor even claimed that “immigrant workers from Mexico and Central America . . . are the strongest part of the workforce for us” (Cleeland 2000, A-1).

Nevertheless, not all unions or sectors of the labor movement have embraced immigrants. Even though the American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) has recently made efforts to include Asian and Latino immigrant workers, Alicia Schmidt-Camacho notes that “the institutionalized labor movement still privileges the skilled, male, white labor force in both its structures of representation and in its vision for combating the erosion of labor rights under the globalization of capital. The crisis of international trade unionism is a direct result of the hyper-differentiation of workers along lines of race, gender, nationality, and immigration status” (1999, 92). An example is the slowness with which traditional unions have responded to the needs

of restaurant and garment workers in New York's Chinatown (Kwong 1996). National trade unions and their local affiliates undeniably continue to struggle with their commitment to fully incorporate and represent immigrants, women, people of color, and other marginalized groups. Thus, building a strong relationship between unions and immigrant workers remains a challenge (K. Wong 1994).

There are, however, significant signs of progress. Racial minorities and women are slowly gaining leadership positions within the "new labor movement" (M. Chen and Wong 1998; Mantsios 1998; Milkman and Wong 2000). This new generation of leaders demonstrates a greater commitment to inclusion of nonwhite immigrants than did their mostly white, mostly male predecessors. This new vision has translated into some encouraging, tangible activities.

The AFL-CIO created the California Immigrant Workers Association in 1989 to help Latino immigrants with citizenship and English acquisition. In addition, in February 2000, the AFL-CIO called for amnesty for undocumented immigrants. In October 1999, at a major labor event at the Staples Center in Los Angeles attended by many Latin Americans, immigrants were symbolically welcomed with the availability of simultaneous English-into-Spanish translation. The September 2003 Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride (IWFR) was spearheaded by labor. Modeled on the 1960s freedom rides, immigrants from all over the United States embarked on bus journeys to Washington, D.C., and New York City, stopping at places throughout the country where local communities were facing labor, immigrant, or civil rights struggles. After reaching Washington, participants lobbied Congress for immigration reforms, including an amnesty program and more liberal family-reunification policies (see Greenhouse 2000c; Goldman 2003, A-25).

Today, unions are essential to immigrant political mobilization (Milkman 2000). A Chinese American labor leader who works with a New York union local 90 percent of whose members are Chinese immigrant garment workers noted that the city's proposal to build a jail in Chinatown catalyzed union members' political organizing:

In 1983, the city decided to build a jail in Chinatown. And the reason they decided to build it was because they said that "Nobody votes in Chinatown. We can get away with it." And the union joined with a lot of the groups to actually get all of the shops to stop working. We had a

rally of ten to twenty thousand people out there. . . . Stories of the '80s, of the union after the strike, was really heavily building alliances around political action. And encouraging voter registration. So in '84, we did really massive voter registration; the first Chinese judges were elected. The union has been involved in a lot of the voter registration drives and the first efforts to elect Chinese into office, also in spearheading a lot of the lobbying efforts, like how do you lobby political officials. On the immigration issues, we'll send buses to Washington and stuff like that. . . . Since we are working now with an Asian population, I think we're able to do quite a lot of strong education to the community as to how to do some of this stuff . . . the nuts and bolts of politics. And I think we're able to impart that back to the community in a way that's got people much more involved. And not just the workers, and not just our members, but also the community at large.

That particular union has organized more than twenty thousand Chinese immigrant garment workers in New York's Chinatown and mobilized more than a thousand workers to rally in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, in 1995, in that neighborhood's first large political rally.

As one union leader in Los Angeles noted, "For unions to be successful, they have to embrace a much broader vision of who they are and what they do. . . . They see the necessity of addressing all aspects of workers' lives, from the political arena to the social arena to [the] economic. And it's the same type of organizing skills whether you are bargaining for a contract or leading an organizing campaign, or fighting Proposition 187 or 209. . . . So I think that most successful unions have been able to skillfully combine both political mobilization and organizing."<sup>4</sup> This statement represents an approach to labor organizing that takes seriously immigrant involvement in the U.S. political system.

Some unions provide immigrant members with a space to receive and share information about how the U.S. political system works and about the basics of politics in this country. The few Chinese and Mexican union members interviewed for this book all stated that their unions had provided them with information about U.S. politics.

Political organizing by unions is also noteworthy because some unions build bridges across "city trenches," to use Ira Katnelson's (1981) term.<sup>5</sup> Whereas Katnelson and others contend that workers often view labor issues and community issues as separate and unrelated areas of struggle,

today there are signs that the union's presence in immigrant workers' lives is not limited strictly to the workplace. The AFL-CIO held the Convocation for Working Families in Los Angeles in October 1999. The theme was "community alliance building," and it was followed by an AFL-CIO-organized a forum on hate crimes against immigrants, gays and lesbians, and religious minorities. Commenting on the forum, one organizer said, "Our message, in terms of why we organized that forum and why we set it up the way we did, was, once again, [that] we wanted unions, as critical institutions, to understand that they have a much broader role in society that extends beyond the workplace. And that it is imperative for unions to speak out against hate crimes, to mobilize community response, and to be at the forefront of fights against racism and for equality." In addition, the AFL-CIO sponsored town hall forums on immigration and immigration rights in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and Atlanta in which not only union members but also community organizations and immigrant-rights advocates participated.

Recent organizing campaigns by janitors in Los Angeles and New York indicate that immigrants see a strong link between workplace and political struggles (Waldinger et al. 1997; Greenhouse 2000b). That is, workers often see their fight for higher wages and benefits as political. One organizer for the Service Employees International Union's Justice for Janitors campaign in Los Angeles framed it as a fight for "rights, not just wages": "We said, 'There've been five demonstrations. It's probably very difficult for you, but we ask for your support as we fight for our rights.' And it turned out to have a positive impact" (quoted in Waldinger et al. 1997, 40).

Immigrant workers' centers also help to mobilize immigrants.<sup>6</sup> A few workers' centers are affiliated with unions, but most are independent, community-based organizations made up of low-wage workers. These organizations form to help protect workers' rights and wages and to give workers, many of them immigrants, a stronger voice in their communities. "Workers' centers pursue their mission through a combination of strategies: service delivery: such as legal representation to recover lost wages, English as a Second Language classes, and job placement, advocacy: speaking on behalf of low-wage workers to local media and government, and organizing: building an association of workers who act together for economic and political change" (Fine 2003, 1). Examples of workers' centers include the Chinese Staff and Workers' Association (CSWA) in New

York City, Korean Immigrant Worker Advocates in Los Angeles, and the Workplace Project in Long Island, New York. Workers' centers also exist in Chicago; Minneapolis; and Alexandria, Virginia.

The CSWA, with offices in Chinatown and Sunset Park, organized a petition drive and several demonstrations outside the New York State Workers' Compensation Board to call for an overhaul of the workers' compensation system. Despite their long and hard hours and the risk of apprehension, about one hundred immigrant workers made the effort to attend one demonstration. CSWA played a key role in organizing workers to testify at hearings for state legislation aimed at protecting garment-industry workers from employer exploitation. One worker recalled that after she joined the center's Women's Project, she became active in challenging the gender discrimination and substandard conditions for female garment-industry workers.

Labor unions and workers centers represent a unique and potentially potent space for political coalition building because although many community organizations are segregated, it is possible in some cases for "African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Pacific Americans, and European Americans to work side-by-side" (K. Wong 1994, 340). The involvement and cooperation of a range of ethnic groups may fortify the unions' and workers' centers' efforts to mobilize immigrants politically. It is too early to know if these organizations will remain a source of political mobilization for immigrants, but their efforts to construct community alliances and develop a relationship with immigrant communities may allow them to build a sustained mobilization in some areas (for further examples, see Bonacich 1999; Saito and Park 2000). In addition, if unions in particular remain committed to recruiting more women, immigrants, and people of color into leadership positions, they are likely to become even more effective at political mobilization.

The implications of labor organizations' and worker centers' involvement in immigrant political mobilization are clear. Unlike the two major parties, these organizations are not primarily interested in getting candidates elected to office and so they are more likely than parties to involve non-citizens in a wide range of political activities. For example, the 2003 IWFR organized by labor unions drew attention to the struggles of immigrant workers. Along the bus route, workers and their supporters took part in rallies, and IWFR members wrote letters and columns advocating immigrant worker rights, which were printed in major newspapers across

the country. IWFR organizers invited noncitizen workers to take part in the activities, and a number of them traveled on the buses. Significantly, better working and living conditions for noncitizens was an important demand made by the riders. The IWFR is an example of labor organizing workers beyond narrowly defined worker rights to address immigrant rights as well. However, compared to most political party platforms, worker and immigrant rights represent a specific and narrow set of concerns.

Given the declining role of mainstream party machines and organizations in mobilizing immigrants, it is important to consider the relationship between political parties and the labor movement in particular. Some argue that labor is an “ancillary organization” of the Democratic Party because the labor movement has long shown strong financial and logistical support for Democratic candidates (Schattschneider 1957; see also Greenstone 1969). Nevertheless, the strength and viability of the relationship between the Democratic Party and labor remains controversial. Organized labor has put tremendous resources and energy into supporting Democratic candidates, but “historically, the Democratic Party has given labour more symbols than substance” (Chang 2001, 384). For example, in its fight to reform labor-relations laws, the labor movement has failed to win strong Democratic support.<sup>7</sup> Not surprisingly, on occasion, the labor movement has supported Republicans who take a moderate stand on labor issues (Dark 2000). In 1998, the AFL-CIO endorsed twenty-seven Republican candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives (Greenhouse 1998a). The president of the AFL-CIO commented on the endorsements by saying, “If we’re going to maintain credibility with our rank and file as well as with elected officials, we have to show that we’re supporting candidates, regardless of party, who have supported us” (Greenhouse 1998b, A-20).<sup>8</sup>

Despite working closely together at times, the mainstream parties and labor unions do not share identical interests, and their mobilization activities reflect different concerns. Whereas parties are in the business of winning elections by gaining votes, the goals of unions include organizational maintenance and the adoption of policies that benefit labor. These distinct albeit sometimes intersecting interests affect the types of political activities around which the organizations try to mobilize. Parties aim to get out the vote on Election Day. To influence the policy responses of elected officials and the parties, labor organizations might mobilize individuals to partici-

pate by voting, but they also attempt to influence legislation by getting people to participate in nonvoting activities, including grassroots lobbying, rallies, and demonstrations. While mainstream parties have been turning much of their attention to raising funds and garnering support among business groups and large corporate contributors (Aronowitz 1998), unions have been directing their resources toward worker mobilization (Dark 2000).<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the labor movement is distinct from mainstream parties primarily because it engages workers, including immigrants, in a wide range of political activities.

#### *Social Service, Advocacy, and Ethnic Voluntary Organizations*

Nonprofit social service agencies, legal and voter-education advocacy organizations, and ethnic voluntary associations are among the most active institutions mobilizing immigrants politically today.<sup>10</sup> Because these organizations serve many immigrants and are often involved in community affairs, both immigrants themselves and community elites such as elected officials and government agency leaders have widely recognized the important role played by these institutions in the political mobilization of immigrants.

In the first half of the twentieth century, local community organizations such as settlement houses were assimilationist in orientation. Ethnic customs and practices were considered part of an Old World mentality that had little place in America (Kraut 1982). Organizations such as the Chicago-based League for the Protection of Immigrants sponsored programs to introduce and educate southern and eastern European immigrants to “American ways” (Fuchs 1990, 62). Reacting to assimilationist pressures, some groups established their own ethnic community institutions. For example, in Chicago, southern and eastern European immigrants created social clubs and developed cultural programs rather than attend the activities to which they were invited at Jane Addams’s Hull House (A. Lin forthcoming, 15).

Social service and advocacy organizations currently incorporate community traditions and language into their mobilization strategies as a means of targeting particular communities. Most social service organizations that serve Asian American or Latino immigrants employ a multilingual staff and make educational materials available in multilingual or bilingual formats. Advocacy organizations commonly integrate community traditions into organizing strategies. For example, in December 2003, the

Mexican American Political Association, a Los Angeles-based advocacy organization, called for a labor and school strike, marches, and an economic boycott to protest the repeal of a law that would have allowed immigrants without legal documents to apply for drivers' licenses beginning on January 1, 2004. The actions were scheduled for December 12, to coincide with the traditional Mexican holiday honoring the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Some social service agencies not only provide information and resources to help immigrants find jobs, housing, and health care but also help them become politically active. Because these organizations provide direct services, often to thousands of immigrants, they are well positioned to mobilize large numbers of people. Three successful examples come from Los Angeles: the Chinatown Service Center, which assists more than twelve thousand Chinese immigrants a year; the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles, which organizes domestic workers and day laborers in the Mexican community; and One-Stop Immigration, which provides citizenship-application preparation and legal education to more than forty thousand Mexican immigrants annually (*Directory 1999–2000*). All three have organized notable political demonstrations, marches, and petition drives.

Another New York organization, the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, provides legal services for Chinese and other Asian immigrants. It organized approximately two hundred people to attend a teach-in for the National Day of Action for Dr. Wen Ho Lee, the Chinese American Los Alamos scientist incarcerated by the U.S. government for allegedly mishandling government secrets.

Although few community-based advocacy or social service organizations adhere to an explicitly political agenda, many leaders see their organizations as having a political role in immigrant communities. As one leader of a nonprofit Los Angeles social service center that targets Mexican immigrants said,

The reason why I work at [the organization] is because I saw it as a space, as an opportunity where I could do a lot of work on behalf of the immigrant community. Because I understood that we have gone through cycles of very, very difficult political times. . . . We have touched the [people's] lives directly in actual services provided to them . . . both through our legal-services branch as well as our education

branch. . . . And we're very proud to have been—of the fact that we have been part of what rightfully can be called a social movement to empower formerly totally marginalized communities.

This statement indicates that some social service agencies see themselves as providing not just social services but also a space for political organizing.

One of the most interesting examples of political organizing by community-based advocacy groups involves the mobilization of immigrant day laborers. Because they are not concentrated in a traditional workplace, like a factory, but are dispersed at different street corners and work sites, it is often difficult for these laborers to organize collectively and share information. Traditional models that focus on socioeconomic status and assimilation would predict that day laborers would be one of the hardest groups to organize politically because they have few resources and little formal political power. However, certain advocacy organizations have begun to meet these challenges through innovative organizing tactics that create unique spaces in which immigrants can meet and talk. An organizer who works with Mexican immigrant day laborers in Los Angeles described how collective endeavors are promoted that create opportunities for workers:

I think we've really done a lot of nontraditional things, like soccer. In every corner where we are organized, we try to make a soccer team. And we actually have a league. . . . They play soccer, and they love it. Getting people for soccer is never a problem. And after the game, when people are drinking water or refreshments and mingling and things come up, like, "At our corner, we have a minimum wage." "At our corner, the police came, but you know what, we filed a complaint." And things get shared like that. So that successes that have been happening on corners get shared in places where we're barely organized. That was the total intent of the soccer, and plus everyone loves soccer.

The executive director of a community-based voting rights organization that targets Los Angeles's Chinese American community also commented on his organization's desire to create space and opportunities for political awareness and education, noting how Chinese immigrants

don't understand American politics, so you need to educate them. You need to empower them by giving them material, by providing opportunities for them, get them involved and get them interested. . . . But it takes a long time. . . . I mean, I will be talking to a Taiwanese group in

Mandarin—I have no problem giving a speech in Mandarin about U.S. politics. I will use some of my knowledge about their interests in Taiwan and play off that. Now, if I didn't have that understanding, I think it would be difficult.

Thus, ethnic appeals may be quite consistent with motivating interests in participation in American politics.

Regarding ethnic voluntary associations, Ann Chih Lin's forthcoming study of the political incorporation of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century immigrants shows that immigrant-organized homeland associations made political demands, especially at the local level. Their successes included the creation of classes in native languages within some public-school systems. Even when homeland associations did not work to improve conditions for immigrant communities in the United States, the preservation of ethnic traditions and culture existed simultaneously with retention of homeland cultures and an interest in homeland politics could go hand in hand with the increase of interest and participation in American politics.

Today, homeland associations continue to aid their members' sending communities (Jacobson 1995). In 1999 in Los Angeles, Mexican immigrants from Oaxaca organized a fund-raising benefit to aid flood victims in their home state. A Mexican immigrant leader in New York who has organized several events for the Mexican community there explained how he had become an activist: although he had migrated to the United States nearly thirty years earlier, the boundaries of his community encompassed both New York City and his hometown in the state of Puebla (see Robert Smith 1998). Consequently, he organizes long-distance running races in both places. At first he had difficulty even knowing where to begin in organizing U.S. events: he would start by looking in a phone book and calling different government offices. Over time, however, he became familiar with the local government structure, and now he has friends in various city agencies and departments: "I started working with the organizers of the police department. They like me! You know, like the police department, now every time that I go up to the department [to do paperwork related to a community event], they know me like friends. The guy told me, 'Any time you just come, no problem. We just help you.'"

The interaction between homeland associations and government agencies is critical to political mobilization and empowerment. In the process

of organizing events to benefit those in the sending community, members of homeland associations become more familiar with local government institutions in the United States and more comfortable with the people who work in them. This also works in reverse: contact with a homeland association gives individuals working in local government offices in the United States an opportunity to connect with the members of an immigrant community. One leader of another Oaxacan group in Los Angeles predicted, "Organizations like this are going to be more important in the next ten years because some of them are in the early stages and will mature in time. . . . Slowly some politicians, at least Latinos, are becoming aware of such organizations and are trying to tap into them to get political support." That prediction began to assume concrete form in 2003 when representatives from eighteen Mexican and Central American migrant organizations attended a series of leadership-building workshops under the auspices of the University of Southern California. One aspect of the series was an attempt to connect participants with officials and representatives from government agencies and philanthropic organizations (Rivera-Salgado, Rodriguez, and Escala-Rabadan 2004).

Most homeland associations engage in an array of activities to benefit or celebrate the region or hometown from which the immigrants came. At times, these activities have a political component. A festival in Los Angeles's Highland Park, attended by five hundred people, celebrated Oaxacan heritage by featuring music and dance from different regions. Vendors sold T-shirts, food, and juices, but there was also a table where those attending could register to vote in the United States. All of the literature and signs at the voter registration table were in both Spanish and English.

In the Asian American community, some ethnic voluntary associations sponsor explicitly political activities. For example, New York City's Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) includes sixty associations, mostly based on home-country regional and district groups. The CCBA has been very active in Chinese politics. Historically, strong ties existed between the CCBA and the anticommunist (Nationalist) Guomindang party, and the CCBA has received financial backing from the party.<sup>11</sup> However, the CCBA has not focused its activities solely on homeland issues. It has assisted immigrants with housing, jobs, naturalization, and financial support (J. Lin 1998). The CCBA has also been involved in community politics in Chinatown. In 1974, for example, the CCBA and other Asian American community organizations helped to negotiate a settle-

ment with the city over the hiring of Asian American construction workers at the site of Confucius Plaza, a Chinatown housing development. A year later, the CCBA mobilized a crowd estimated at twenty thousand for a demonstration at City Hall Park to protest police brutality against Asian Americans (J. Lin 1998, 136).

The CCBA's political power in the Chinese community has waned in recent years (Kwong 1987). However, immigrants I interviewed still mentioned the CCBA as an important institution for fostering political involvement. When asked about whether it was difficult for immigrants to get information about the U.S. political system, a Chinese man who had lived in New York City for thirty years responded that it is "difficult, unless under some guidance—for instance, the CCBA. . . . Because when you are in someone else's country, you don't know how the system works or how to get information."

According to Jan Lin, the importance of ethnic voluntary associations in the Chinese community should not be underestimated: "It would be misleading to assume that traditional associations are backward or obsolescent social institutions. . . . Traditional associations had a historical salience in assisting Chinese immigrants in their adjustment to life during the exclusion years and continue to play a significant role in their cultural lives and familial interactions. . . . There has been a continuing growth of new family, clan, and regional associations since the mid-1980s, particularly of the Fujianese variety, as emigration has accelerated out of Fujian province" (1998, 122). Lin also suggests that contemporary Fujianese clan associations are "institutionally comparable" to the older Chinese associations such as the CCBA. Like the members of many other ethnic voluntary associations, the members of Fujianese associations are concerned about homeland politics, but they are also likely to mobilize Chinese immigrants from Fujian in the United States, as when several Fujianese associations organized to resolve ethnic tensions in a Brooklyn neighborhood in 1996 (Lii 1996).

Because of their informal nature and organization, it is difficult to quantify the exact number and membership of ethnic voluntary associations. Although some hometown associations may have fewer than one hundred members, others are quite large. In Los Angeles, an organization representing immigrants from Jalisco has ten thousand members, and one representing immigrants from Oaxaca has two thousand (*Directory* 1999–2000). A nationwide federation includes more than 250 clubs representing Zacatecan migrants.

Ethnic voluntary associations offer immigrants a sense of belonging and self-worth that can lead to political empowerment in the United States. Immigrants are likely to experience a loss of status when they enter economic and social life in the United States, but this loss can be offset by their involvement in immigrant organizations. Within the immigrant organization, immigrants can “reconstruct the social networks and perpetuate socialization patterns of the home country. Ethnic organizations offer immigrants an alternative to adaptation to the receiving country by providing an environment which, like the ethnic enclave, recognizes their social standing in spite of whatever downward economic mobility they may have suffered in the United States” (Jones-Correa 1998, 333).<sup>12</sup>

Ethnic voluntary associations also represent the kind of institution that Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry Brady (1995) argue is important for the development of civic skills. Through their participation in homeland associations, immigrants improve their communication abilities and practice other civic skills such as organizing events. “Once honed,” claim Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, “they are part of the arsenal of resources that can be devoted, if the individual wishes, to politics” (331). The formation of these associations requires tremendous organization-building skills. Organizational leaders develop skills in personnel management, time management, public relations, accounting, and grant writing, among many other areas. Many of these associations offer rank-and-file members educational and social services such as lessons in English, civics, health care, and maintaining cultural traditions. In addition, these organizations achieve some measure of a presence within the mainstream community through public events and the contacts they forge with social service providers and government personnel.

Despite their successes, ethnic voluntary associations also face significant challenges in influencing mainstream politics through mobilizing efforts. In her insightful study of the role of ethnic advocacy groups in the political incorporation of Arab immigrants, Ann Chih Lin (forthcoming) notes that because they operate outside the upper echelons of U.S. political circles and contribute only insignificant amounts to political campaigns, these groups find it difficult to influence elites. Still, given that political parties pay little attention to immigrant communities, especially those with the least resources, homeland and ethnic voluntary associations represent a significant source of mobilization for immigrants. Even when these associations fail to turn out massive numbers of voters, they have provided and will continue to provide a conduit for political expression by

those who cannot vote. As the examples in this section show, their activities lay the groundwork for integrating future voters into the polity through activities that either directly involve political participation, understood broadly, or help immigrants to acquire the skills and experience needed for their political mobilization over the long term.

Social service, advocacy, and ethnic voluntary associations involve immigrants in a range of political activities beyond voting, and some of these organizations are very active in terms of working with and promoting participation by noncitizens. Unlike parties, which are more likely to mobilize generally by putting forth platforms describing their stands on a broad range of issues such as national security, education reform, and tax policies, advocacy, social service, and ethnic voluntary organizations are likely to organize around specific issues that directly affect immigrants, such as health benefits, hate crimes, amnesty for undocumented migrants, and naturalization. This more limited approach to issue advocacy further distinguishes the type of politics generated by ethnic voluntary associations from that of political parties. Social service, advocacy, and ethnic voluntary associations are also more likely than parties to reinforce ethnic identity among the immigrants they serve by providing information and services in the native language. While parties have made a major effort to reach out to Spanish-speaking voters, they have not been as attentive toward immigrants who speak an Asian language or other non-English-speaking immigrants. Social service, advocacy, and ethnic voluntary organizations working with immigrant communities also often participate in cultural events or celebrations that help to reinforce ethnic identity among immigrants. For example, to celebrate the traditional Mexican festival of the Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead, or All Souls' Day), organizers with the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles included an altar decorated with flowers, food, and candles at the tenth anniversary celebration of a coalition day-laborer site.

#### *Religious Institutions*

Religious institutions have always constituted a critical source of political mobilization for certain groups such as African Americans and Irish Catholics. In the past, however, some churches have been actively hostile to immigrants, especially those who were Roman Catholic or Jewish. Protestant social reformers demonstrated an unyielding assimilationist approach to non-Protestant immigrants and at times supported strong

exclusionist measures against immigrants (Higham 1952; Kraut 1982; Katerberg 1995).

Similar tensions exist today. An increasing number of Protestant churches offer services in Chinese, Korean, and Spanish,<sup>13</sup> but several conservative Christian leaders have taken anti-immigrant stands (Abcarian 1996; Dart 1996). The Catholic Church, a significant institution in the lives of many previous immigrants, has seen its ranks swell with Mexican, other Latin American, and Asian immigrants. In heavily Latino regions, church leaders have even begun adopting Mexican indigenous ceremonies (Gold 1998; M. Ramirez 1999; Niebuhr 2000). Many Catholic Church officials and community members credit immigrants who arrived from Latin America during the 1990s with “revitalizing” the church (Christian 2000). The executive director of a major social service agency serving Mexican immigrants notes that “in the case of Los Angeles, for example, it didn’t used to be, but now it is, the largest Catholic archdiocese in the entire United States. And the only reason it became that is because of the influx of immigrants. . . . And what did they cluster around? The one institution they knew—the church.”

The Asociación de Tepeyac provides an important example of religion-based political organizing of immigrants. Mexican leaders suggest that the association is by far the most important organization for involving New York’s Mexican immigrants in U.S. politics. The group was founded by a Jesuit brother from Mexico who was recruited by the New York archdiocese to provide outreach to the Mexican community. With more than half of its members having arrived after 1995, the Mexican community is among the newest immigrant groups in New York City (Robert Smith 1996; Gonzalez and McCoy 1998). The Asociación de Tepeyac is housed within the Catholic Church but is a citywide, neighborhood-based political network. Leadership, communication, and meetings are structured and formal. Most members are undocumented service workers with minimal economic resources, yet they have participated in more than fifty demonstrations for worker and immigrant rights. In the fall of 1999, they brought together busloads of people to participate in a march in Washington to call for amnesty for undocumented immigrants.

The members’ socioeconomic profile is one of the most surprising features of the Asociación de Tepeyac. Traditional political-participation models tends to emphasize socioeconomic incorporation or citizenship as

key to political involvement (Skerry 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 1996).<sup>14</sup> Association members are the type of individuals that those models would predict to be the least likely to participate in U.S. politics, yet Tepeyac leaders claim that 10,000 out of an estimated 250,000 Mexican immigrants living in New York attended one of the group's demonstrations. The group is developing workshops on workers' rights, which will be offered within the New York parishes. In addition, it emphasizes training young people to be future U.S. political leaders.

New York's Catholic Church clearly illustrates a religious organization that successfully mobilizes immigrants. There are other examples. The Immigration and Refugee Division of Catholic Charities of Los Angeles annually has contact with more than fifty-two thousand immigrants, primarily Latinos. The organization provides legal assistance as well as citizenship, literacy, and job-training classes (*Directory* 1999–2000). Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE) is an interfaith organization that helps to organize low-wage workers in Los Angeles County. In May 2002, religious leaders and workers affiliated with CLUE participated in a downtown march for immigrant workers' rights.

Asian American evangelical churches appear to be very much a part of the American Christian conservative movement. The reach of the church into some Chinese immigrant communities is significant. Although only 2 percent of Taiwan's population is Christian, nearly 25 percent of Taiwanese immigrants in the United States are Christians (most convert after migration) (C. Chen 2001). Two predominantly Asian American evangelical Christian churches in Los Angeles have shown signs of incipient political mobilization. A few months before the 2000 presidential election, the pastor at one of these churches encouraged the congregation to register and to vote for George W. Bush, emphasizing that the country needed a "Christian" president. At another service, the same pastor urged congregation members to spread the antiabortion message to their friends, family members, and congressional representatives.

For Chinese immigrants, an evident link exists between political involvement in the United States and membership in a religious organization. In separate interviews, two middle-aged immigrant Chinese women living in Los Angeles mentioned the church as having played a role in getting them involved in politics. One described opportunities for political participation in the United States as being "easy because America is very free. I can do whatever I want. There's no limit. If I want to

join, I can. Easy to form groups to change problems in societies. Like in my church group, we discuss politics. If they wanted to change things, I think they can.” She was one of the few immigrants interviewed who expressed a fairly positive feeling about opportunities for participating in U.S. politics.

In regard to politically mobilizing immigrants, religious organizations face two notable constraints. First, many are explicitly apolitical or even antipolitical in orientation. When political mobilization occurs, it may be the unexpected by-product of the pursuit of nonpolitical goals. Under such circumstances mobilization efforts will at best be sporadic. Second, ideological commitments, a fundamental aspect of religious life, may mean that a given religious organization is hostile to certain segments of immigrant communities, such as gays and lesbians; in other cases, the organization may be anti-immigrant altogether. Conversely, membership in a congregation can give immigrants an opportunity to meet and interact with nonimmigrants in their community, or membership in a congregation that consists primarily of immigrants can create a sense of belonging to a community of shared interest. In their report on *Immigrant Religion in the City of Angels*, Donald Miller, Jon Miller, and Grace Dyrness write that “for many immigrants religion continues to exercise a strong attraction simply because it provides a setting and a reason to be in contact with their fellow immigrants. Religion, in other words, is a source of community, a place to speak one’s native tongue, eat one’s native food” (2001, 35). In both cases, with or without the blessing of church officials, participation in a congregation provides opportunities and a setting for sharing information and ideas about U.S. life and politics.

Political mobilization by religious institutions is likely to affect how and which immigrants participate in politics. It leads to patterns of participation that are distinct from those that would result if parties were more involved. Like other types of community organizations, religious institutions are more likely than parties to involve immigrants in a range of political activities while encouraging their members to naturalize and to vote. For example, church leaders affiliated with CLUE organize Latino immigrant parishioners to take part in the immigrant rights march held in downtown Los Angeles each May. In contrast with parties, some religious institutions with large numbers of immigrant congregants have worked closely to provide support and services to undocumented immigrants and have advocated on their behalf. Finally, some religious institutions have

proven to be much more attentive than are parties to immigrant members' cultural traditions. This is likely to reinforce the retention of ethnic identity while encouraging participation in political activities organized by their church or other religious institution.

### *Conclusion*

Community organizations have long had an important role in helping to integrate immigrants into the political system. From the 1890s to the 1920s, when major migrations to the United States occurred and nativism flourished, community organizations such as ethnic voluntary associations proliferated at both the national and local levels. These organizations gave immigrants a voice and some measure of group representation in American political and social life (Skocpol 1999b; A. Lin forthcoming). They often worked directly with political parties, which had strong presences at the local or neighborhood level, to mobilize immigrants. By the end of the twentieth century, however, mainstream political parties, now focusing on national-level strategies and mass media and direct-mail campaigns, had become relatively absent at the local level. Community organizations have stepped into the breach.

Today, the labor organizations, workers' centers, social service organizations, advocacy organizations, ethnic voluntary associations, and religious institutions play a strong role in politically mobilizing immigrants even though some of these institutions have demonstrated ambivalence toward immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities. Community organizations bring certain strengths to immigrant mobilization, including a focus on outreach motivated by the desire for organizational maintenance; strong ties to immigrant communities and existing expertise related to the cultural traditions, language needs, and policy priorities of those communities; and in many cases a transnational orientation. In a fashion parallel to that of the political machines and the ethnic voluntary associations of old, today's community organizations often provide much-needed social services and sometimes material goods to Asian American and Latino immigrants (Skocpol 1999b). Community organizations often engage in mobilization around a single issue or set of issues while taking responsibility for a wide range of immigrant political activities, including applying for citizenship and naturalization, voter registration, voter education, and getting out the vote, all of which used to be associated with political

machines. As did machines and voluntary associations in the past, contemporary organizations reach out to immigrants by making ethnic-specific appeals (Dahl 1961; Erie 1988; A. Lin forthcoming).

However, because their end goal is not necessarily influencing electoral outcomes, contemporary organizations also mobilize immigrants in ways that differ sharply from those that prevailed in the past. Mobilization manifests in nonelectoral activities, such as petition drives, demonstrations, and protests. In fact, because many of these organizations emerged during or after the civil rights movement, they are often more concerned with ensuring and promoting the civil rights of immigrants and racial minorities than in producing electoral outcomes. Community organizations' ability to engage immigrants in a wide range of political activities, especially those that take place outside of the electoral system, indicates a need to employ a broad definition of political participation when evaluating immigrant populations. Although immigrants participate in politics at lower rates than their U.S.-born counterparts, some newcomers participate in innovative ways (such as organizing through political theater groups or by becoming involved in transnational political campaigns) that should not be discounted. Finally, many community organizations have emerged in an era of multiculturalism, which shapes their notions of group representation and eases the assimilationist pressures present in the ethnic voluntary associations of the early twentieth century.

In the absence of strong political-party presence at the local level, contemporary community organizations have the space to take on an even more prominent role in immigrants' political lives than has previously been the case. If this opportunity is pursued, we are likely to see these organizations (1) providing multiple channels of political socialization; (2) increasing the opportunities for noncitizens to participate in the U.S. political process; (3) developing single-issue-based political agendas; and (4) fostering the retention of ethnic identity as a component of organizational strategy. Furthermore, if adopted on an even wider scale, these efforts would likely result in increased political participation for members of immigrant communities. Mobilization by community organizations has been shown to be effective in increasing Asian Americans' and Latinos' political participation. Janelle S. Wong, Pei-te Lien, and M. Margaret Conway's (2005) study of survey data regarding Asian Americans' political participation shows that mobilization by community organizations boosts participation, especially in terms of nonvoting political activities. In

their analysis based on an experimental research design, Ricardo Ramirez, Alan Gerber, and Donald Green (2004) report that the National Association of Latino Elected Officials increased vote turnout among Latinos by using live phone calls.

Although the community organizations described here are bringing some immigrants into the U.S. political system, often through unique and creative strategies, this should not be misinterpreted to mean that all immigrants are suddenly participating at high rates. Further, only rarely can community organizations focus on political mobilization consistently or on a full-time basis. Immigrants frequently acknowledge that it is difficult to participate in the U.S. political system, citing as the main barriers language, lack of time, and the perception that major political institutions are simply not interested in them. Despite these barriers, some community organizations are politically mobilizing immigrants. Although most community organizations lack the financial resources required to engage in mass mobilization efforts, many are helping to lay the foundations of participation in immigrant communities through limited mobilization. They foster communication and organizational skills on a day-to-day basis that can be transferred to the larger political sphere. Surprisingly, this mobilization includes those immigrants who are usually thought to be the least likely to participate politically—non-English-speaking people who are racial and ethnic minorities, disadvantaged socioeconomically, and noncitizens. Their ability to mobilize new and often disadvantaged individuals could be built on to expand participation more generally.

Community organizations have not displaced political parties or achieved mobilization at the mass level. However, their activities and the role they play in immigrant communities illuminate potential strategies that, if adopted on a larger scale by parties or by community organizations, could lead to more political participation by Asian American and Latino immigrants.