

6 *Mobilization of Latinos & Asian Americans*

Evidence from Survey Data

The qualitative evidence gathered in Mexican and Chinese communities in the United States suggests that community organizations play a significant role in the political mobilization of immigrant minorities. This is in surprising contrast to historic patterns, in which mainstream political parties were key to getting noncitizens to naturalize and vote. This qualitative evidence leads to two quantitatively testable hypotheses. The first is that Asian American and Latino immigrants do not view political parties as strong intermediaries representing their interests in the political arena. Instead, these immigrants are more likely to view community organizations as intermediaries representing their interests in the U.S. political system. The second is that when party organizations do choose to target minority immigrants, they are more likely to focus on voter mobilization than on other types of political activities, in contrast to community organizations, which are more likely to engage immigrants in a range of political activities other than voting, such as participation in demonstrations and petition drives.

The quantitative data used to test these two hypotheses come from the 2000–2001 Pilot National Asian American Political Survey (PNAAPS) (see Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004) and the 1989–90 Latino National Political Survey (LNPS) (see de la Garza et al. 1992). (For more information on these surveys, see the appendix, tables A1, A3.) The samples used include a large number of immigrants, many naturalized, who self-identify as either Asian American or Latino. Unless otherwise indicated, the label *immigrant* includes both nonnaturalized immigrants and naturalized citizens. For the analyses of voting, the sample includes only those who are eligible to vote—that is naturalized citizens who are registered to vote.

Party Activism in Latino Communities

Only the LNPS, which targeted members of Mexican, Puerto Rican,¹ and Cuban subgroups, included an adequate range of questions to address the first hypothesis, that political parties are less likely to be seen as intermediaries representing immigrant interests in the political system than are community organizations. Although the LNPS data have been available for sixteen years, other publicly available data on Latino political attitudes, such as the more recent 1999 *Washington Post*/Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University National Survey on Latinos in America, do not contain questions that allow for testing this hypothesis.

The LNPS asked respondents, "Is there any group or organization that you think looks out for your concerns, even if you are not a member?" Twenty-four percent of Latino immigrants answered affirmatively, 57 percent answered negatively, and 19 percent responded, "Don't know" (n = 1808).² If respondents answered yes, they were then asked, "What group or organization is that?" The respondent could select from more than six hundred organizations, which later were categorized and coded into groups as (1) unions and professional organizations; (2) charity organizations; (3) religious groups; (4) traditional interest groups; (5) neighborhood, recreational, or school organizations; (6) Latino organizations or clubs; (7) government agencies; and (8) political parties and candidates.³

Consistent with the first hypothesis, Latino immigrant respondents who identified one of the six hundred organizations were more likely to name a community organization such as a religious group or Latino organization than a political party (table 1). Across all three Latino national-origin groups, the pattern is striking. Compared to their compatriots who named a political party or candidate, Mexican respondents were nine times more likely to name a religious group, Puerto Ricans were three times more likely to name a neighborhood organization, and Cuban respondents were fourteen times more likely to name a Latino organization.

Fifty-two percent of Latino immigrants answered "yes" when asked whether any organization looked after the concerns of their specific national-origin group. ("Thinking about Mexicans/Puerto Ricans/Cubans, even if you are not a member [of the organization], is there any group or organization that you think looks out for Mexican/Puerto Rican/Cuban concerns?") Twenty percent answered "no," and 20 percent answered, "don't know." Those who answered "yes" were then asked

a second question: “What group or organization was that?” They could identify up to three organizations. Among only those respondents to that second question who named a political party, labor or professional organization, religious group, neighborhood group, or Latino organization, very few responded by naming a party (table 2). Across the three ethnic groups, most of these respondents named a Latino organization. Notably, national origin affected the frequency to which a respondent named a particular type of organization as looking out for the concerns of his or her national-origin group. Mexican immigrants were much more likely than their Puerto Rican and especially Cuban counterparts to name a religious institution.

Thus, Latino immigrants in the LNPS show remarkable consistency in their perception that community organizations—especially ethnic voluntary associations and advocacy organizations and to some degree religious institutions—represent their interests. This is not to say that political parties never advocate on behalf of their Latino constituents. Indeed, in the Puerto Rican sample, the respondents who believed an organization advo-

TABLE 1. Latino Immigrants’ Perceptions of Individual Representation by Various Organizations (in percentages)

	Mexican (<i>n</i> = 113)	Puerto Rican (<i>n</i> = 68)	Cuban (<i>n</i> = 93)
Union, labor, or professional organization	11	7	8
Neighborhood, recreational, or school organization	6	21	2
Religious group	28	27	10
Latino organization or group	28	25	43
Political party or candidate	3	7	3
Charity	14	6	24
Traditional interest group	4	0	7
Government agency	6	7	4

Source: LNPS.

Question: (1) “Is there any group or organization that you think looks out for your concerns, even if you are not a member?” (2) “What group or organization is that?” Cell entries reflect the percentage that mentioned each type of organization in the second part of the question. Those who answered “Don’t know” or who declined to state a specific organization are not included. Note that the percentages do not total 100 percent due to rounding.

cated for their group's concerns were more likely to name a political party (6 percent) than they were to name a union (none). However, the data support the argument that Latino immigrants perceive that nonparty community organizations look out for their concerns and do not view political parties as doing so.

Some important caveats exist regarding these findings. First, the survey data represent a snapshot of Latino public opinion in 1989–90; attitudes may have shifted since that time (see chap. 3). Second, the survey question asks about advocacy, not mobilization, so although parties are not seen as advocates, they might still be mobilizing members of the Latino community. Third, most respondents in the LNPS answered “no” to the question of whether some sort of organization represented their individual concerns, and 28 percent answered “no” to the question of whether some type of organization represented their national-origin group. This is consistent with the argument that few organizations—parties or otherwise—engage in mass mobilization in immigrant communities. Yet it remains significant that those respondents who perceive that an organization represents their interests name community organizations but fail to name

TABLE 2. Latino Immigrants' Perceptions of Group Representation by Various Organizations (in percentages)

Percentage indicating:	Political party	Union, labor, or professional organization	Religious group	Neighborhood, recreational, or school organization	Latino organization
Mexican (<i>n</i> = 151)	6	11	23	5	63
Puerto Rican (<i>n</i> = 136)	6	0	13	7	80
Cuban (<i>n</i> = 237)	2	1	3	4	93

Source: LNPS.

Question: (1) “Thinking about Mexicans/Puerto Ricans/Cubans, even if you are not a member, is there any group or organization that you think looks out for Mexican/Puerto Rican/Cuban concerns?” (2) “What group or organization is that?” This data sample consists of *only* those respondents to the second question who named a party, labor organization or union, religious institution, Latino or Hispanic group, or community or neighborhood organization. Cell entries reflect the percentage of those respondents who named each type of organization. Note that the percentages do not total 100 percent because respondents could name up to three organizations.

political parties. This analysis certainly suggests that a range of community organizations constitute important vehicles for mobilizing Latino immigrants and the Latino community as a whole.

Another aspect of civic institutions' involvement in immigrant political mobilization—voter registration—was also analyzed (see table 3). Who encourages Latinos, especially Latino immigrants, to register to vote? For naturalized immigrants interviewed in the LNPS, 24 percent had been contacted about registering to vote, but fewer than 5 percent of that group had been contacted by a political party. Indeed, more respondents claimed that they had been contacted about registering to vote by an individual—for example, a family member, friend, or community member—than by a party. The survey did not ask about whether specific types of community organizations (such as labor organizations, workers' centers, social service organizations, advocacy organizations, ethnic voluntary associations, or religious institutions) had contacted respondents.

The LNPS reveals that regardless of ethnic origin, parties were not targeting large numbers of naturalized Latino immigrants to register to vote (table 3). Naturalized Mexicans clearly are much more likely to report contact by a family member, friend, or community member than by a political party. For those of Cuban origin, the difference is less dramatic. Strikingly, however, as U.S. citizens, all Puerto Ricans living in the United

TABLE 3. Mobilization through Voter Registration among Latino Immigrants (in percentages)

Contacted to register by	Political party, candidate, or politician	Family member, friend, or individual in community
Mexican naturalized immigrant (<i>n</i> = 105)	8	20
Cuban naturalized immigrant (<i>n</i> = 234)	4	8
Puerto Rican immigrant (<i>n</i> = 429)	3	27

Source: LNPS.

Question: "Next, we would like to ask you about elections in the U.S. During 1988, did anyone talk to you about registering to vote? . . . Who spoke to you about registering to vote in the U.S.? (How do you know this person?)"

Note: Percentages in the first column were calculated by dividing the number of people reporting contact by a party, candidate, or politician by the total number of naturalized immigrants. Percentages in the second column were calculated similarly.

States are eligible to register to vote, but only 3 percent had been contacted by a political party, whereas 27 percent had been contacted by an individual. Overall, naturalized Latino immigrants interviewed in the LNPS were most likely to have been contacted by an individual, such as a family member, friend, or community member, than by a political party. The analysis supports the contention that parties are not perceived as an active force mobilizing minority immigrants to register to vote. Similar data are not available for Asian Americans because the questions asked about parties and mobilization in available surveys were too different to compare directly with the LNPS data.

Determinants of Asian American e³ Latino Political Participation

Does involvement with a community organization lead to participation in a wide array of political activities that may or may not include voting? To answer that hypothesis, we must examine the effects of affiliation with a community organization on political participation, manifested as (1) voting and as (2) taking part in a range of political activities other than voting, such as demonstrations and petition drives. The analyses used data from both the LNPS and the PNAAPS. In addition to questions about political contact, the LNPS includes questions about membership in or affiliation with Latino or Hispanic organizations and attendance at religious services (a measure of affiliation with a religious institution).⁴ The PNAAPS included a comparable set of key variables, including whether respondents were members of an Asian American organization, attended religious services, or had been contacted by a political party or individual (via e-mail or letter or telephone call about a political campaign) in the past four years.

The association between a respondent having voted or having participated in political activities other than voting and his or her membership in an organization, attendance at religious services, or contact with a political party or individual concerning voter registration was analyzed (tables 4 and 5). The coefficients indicate whether any of three key independent variables (membership in an organization, contact by a party or individual, or attending religious services frequently) is associated with political participation, manifested as voting or as political activities other than voting. Other factors, including age, sex, education, family income, political engagement, English fluency, experience with discrimination, ethnic group, and length of residence, were controlled in the analyses.⁵

For the Latino sample, political participation other than voting was measured by a question asking respondents about participation in the past twelve months in a range of political activities, such as signing a petition, writing a letter to an editor or public official, attending a public meeting, or supporting a candidate for public office. Similarly, for the Asian American sample, participation other than voting was measured by a question asking, "During the past four years, have you participated in any of the following types of political activity in your community?" Respondents picked activities from a list that included, among other things, writing or phoning a government official, donating money to a campaign, signing a petition for a political cause, or taking part in a protest or demonstration. The Asian American and Latino data sets were analyzed separately. Again, for the analyses of voting, the sample includes only those who are eligible to vote—that is, naturalized citizens who had registered to vote.

For the first analysis, the dependent variable, voting in 1988 for Latino immigrants in the LNPS, was regressed on the key independent variables as well as on the set of control variables. (The full models appear in the appendix, tables A4, A5.) For Latino immigrants, being contacted by an individual and frequent attendance at religious services are associated strongly with voting in the 1988 election. Contrary to expectations, hav-

TABLE 4. Effect of Mobilization on Political Participation among Latino Immigrants by Source of Mobilization

	Member of a Latino or Hispanic organization	Contacted by political party, candidate, or politician	Contacted by family member, friend, or individual in community	Attends religious services frequently
Voted in 1988 ^a	.63 (.59)	-.14 (.54)	.74*** (.30)	1.37*** (.35)
Participation other than voting ^b	.66** (.13)	-.12 (.21)	.30*** (.10)	.05** (.02)

Source: LNPS.

Note: Entries in parentheses are standard errors. Full equations are listed in appendix.

^aCell entries are coefficients from logistic equations. For voting analysis, the samples included only those who were eligible to vote—that is, citizens who were registered to vote.

^bCell entries are coefficients and standard errors from OLS equations. For the analysis of participation other than voting, the sample was not restricted by citizenship or registration.

* $p \leq .10$ ** $p \leq .05$ *** $p \leq .01$

ing been contacted by a political party does not appear to be strongly associated with voter turnout in 1988. Thus, for Latino immigrants, nonpartisan contact and being active in a religious institution are closely associated with voting, but contact by a political party, candidate, or politician is not a major factor. The degree to which party contact affects voter turnout may have changed as the mainstream political parties more actively courted Latino registered voters, but even as late as 1988, that contact appeared to have had little effect on Latino mobilization.

The results for the analysis of immigrant political participation in activities other than voting show that being a member of a Hispanic organization, having been contacted by an individual, and attending religious services frequently are positive and statistically significant predictors for political participation in activities other than voting. In terms of magnitude, membership in a Latino or Hispanic organization is especially important. In sharp contrast, contact by a political party appears unrelated to participation in activities other than voting. Thus, analysis of the LNPS

TABLE 5. Effect of Mobilization on Political Participation among Asian American Immigrants by Source of Mobilization

	Member of Asian American organization	Contacted by political party	Contacted by individual in community	Attends religious services frequently
Voted in 2000 ^a	.75 (.58)	.75** (.36)	-.21 (.44)	1.32** (.55)
Voted consistently in 1998 and 2000 ^a	-.12 (.36)	.87*** (.30)	.07 (.33)	1.03*** (.39)
Participation other than voting ^b	.44*** (.11)	.08 (.09)	.57*** (.11)	.03 (.03)

Source: PNAAPS.

Note: Voted consistently in 1998 and 2000 is coded as follows: 0 = did not vote in both 1998 and 2000, 1 = voted in both 1998 and 2000. Entries in parentheses are standard errors. Full equations are listed in appendix.

^aCell entries are coefficients from logistic equations. For voting analysis, the samples included only citizens who were registered to vote (that is, only those individuals who were eligible to vote).

^bCell entries are coefficients and standard errors from OLS equations. For the analysis of participation other than voting, the sample was not restricted by citizenship or registration.

* $p \leq .10$ ** $p \leq .05$ *** $p \leq .01$

data supports the hypothesis that involvement with a community organization—in this case measured by membership in a Hispanic organization or frequent attendance at church—is likely to lead to involvement in a range of political activities. Being contacted by an individual or frequently attending religious services increases the likelihood that immigrant Latinos will vote as well as take part in other types of political activities. This is consistent with past research showing a strong association between church attendance and political participation for the general population and minority groups as well (Harris 1994; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Jones-Correa and Leal 2001). Membership in a Hispanic organization is associated with participation other than voting. This suggests that because community-based organizations are not in the business of winning elections, they are less likely to focus their mobilization efforts on voting alone, as political parties do. However, contact with a political party did not seem to increase likelihood of voting or participation in activities other than voting, after other variables were taken into account.

Uncertainty exists about the causal direction of the relationship between political contact and participation. Although contact may lead to more political participation, it is also probable that those who are most participatory are also the most likely to be targeted for contact by parties and other political groups (see Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Leighley 2001). Thus, although a strong association between contact and participation exists, caution in interpreting the causal direction of that association is appropriate. Some evidence from field experiments indicates that contact precedes participation.⁶

To gain some understanding of the relative influence on voting of such factors as contact by a political party, membership in an organization, or attendance at religious services, voter turnout for Asian American immigrants was analyzed (see table 5). Of the different sources of mobilization, contact by a political party and frequent attendance at religious services was associated with voting in 2000. Consistency in voting (as measured by voter turnout in both 1998 and 2000) appears to be associated with either contact by a political party or attendance at religious service. In contrast, membership in an Asian American organization and having been contacted by an individual from the respondent's community did not appear to be associated with voter turnout. (For full model, see appendix, table A6.)

Similar to the findings for the LNPS analysis, for Asian American immigrants surveyed in the PNAAPS, membership in an Asian American orga-

nization emerges as one of the variables most closely associated with political activities other than voting (see table 5; for full model, see appendix, table A7). Those who belong to an Asian American organization are more likely to take part in a broad range of political activities, even when controlling for other factors such as socioeconomic status. For Asian American immigrants, contact by an individual in the community is also a very strong predictor of political participation other than voting. However, contact by a political party is not associated with participation in any activities beyond voting. These results seem to support the hypothesis that for immigrants, involvement with a community organization is likely to be related to greater participation in a range of political activities that may or may not include voting. The results reveal that for Asian American immigrants, there is no association between contact by a political party and participation in political activities other than voting. Although attendance at religious institutions was associated with both voting and participation other than voting for the Latino sample, for Asian Americans, frequent attendance at religious services appears to have no relationship to political participation other than voting, after other variables are taken into account.

Conclusions about Parties, Community Organizations, and Mobilization

The analysis of large-scale quantitative data using samples of Latino and Asian American immigrants has allowed us to test two hypotheses that emerged from qualitative research on Chinese and Mexican populations in New York and Los Angeles. The first is that immigrants do not view political parties as robust sources of political representation or mobilization and that community organizations play a role in fostering immigrants' political participation. The second is that when targeting immigrant communities, party organizations focus on voter mobilization, whereas community organizations are more likely to engage immigrants in a range of political activities other than voting. Thus, contact by a party may lead some immigrants to the polls, whereas membership in an Asian American or Latino organization or church is more likely to be associated with an immigrant taking part in an array of activities, such as signing a petition, writing a letter to the editor, attending a public meeting, or going to a rally.

Although the available surveys did not directly address the question of whether political parties and other nonparty organizations are mobilizing

immigrants, the analysis corroborates the contention that parties do not have a strong presence in immigrant communities and that in contrast, community organizations are more involved in the representation and mobilization of immigrants. Among the Latino respondents who indicated that an organization watched out for their interests, many identified community organizations. These immigrants consistently asserted that community organizations were the groups most likely to represent their concerns. They did not make similar assertions about political parties.

The examination of mobilization as measured by voter registration showed that Latino immigrants report very low levels of contact by political parties. This is not to say that political parties never target immigrant communities: some respondents in both surveys reported being contacted by a political party. However, concerning registering to vote, Latino immigrants were more likely to be contacted by an individual than by a political party. This finding suggests that at least until very recently, parties have not been a robust force in the mobilization of Latino communities. Although political parties may now be making more of an effort to target Latinos, the analysis showed that in their minds, political parties must overcome a weak historical presence, even specifically in regard to voting-related activities.

As the second hypothesis predicted, the analysis showed that the effects of party outreach are generally distinct from the effects of mobilization involving community organizations. Efforts by a political party will affect primarily voter turnout, whereas community organizations are more likely to engage immigrants in a range of political activities other than voting. This finding is to be expected because community organizations have direct contact with many noncitizens (that is, people ineligible to vote) and because their organizational missions are rarely focused on election outcomes (especially in the case of nonprofit organizations, which are barred by law from electioneering). Thus, it is not surprising that these organizations would mobilize Asian Americans and Latinos, including immigrant members of these communities, to participate in a range of political activities.

Contact by a political party has an inconsistent effect on Latino and Asian American political participation. For Latino immigrants who took part in the LNPS, no association exists between party contact and any type of political activity, voting or otherwise, after other factors, such as socio-economic status, political engagement, and other types of institutional

connections are taken into account. For Asian American immigrants, being contacted by a political party is associated most strongly with consistent voting—that is, voting in both 1998 and 2000. Party contact was also associated with voter turnout for Asian American immigrants in 2000, but was not a consistent predictor of participation in political activities other than voting.

The analysis solidly supports the prediction that involvement with a community organization constitutes one of the strongest determinants of Latino and Asian American immigrant participation in political activities other than voting. For Latinos and Asian American immigrants in the samples, being a member of a community organization is always associated with participation in political activities other than voting, even when other possible determinants of participation are taken into account.

The findings presented here suggest that contemporary community organizations can play a vital role in mobilizing immigrants to engage in politics. Yet it is also true that neither parties nor community organizations have been engaging in mass mobilization of Asian American and Latino immigrants. One important question, then, is how both parties and other types of American civic institutions can become a stronger force in the political mobilization and incorporation of contemporary immigrants. The following chapters explore long-term mobilization strategies and building on immigrants' transnational attachments as two possible modes of attaining a more vital role for American civic institutions in immigrant political mobilization.