

## 9 *Conclusion*

### American Civic Institutions and Immigrant Mobilization at the Dawn of the Twenty-first Century

*I*mmigrants arriving in America today encounter an institutional landscape that differs dramatically from that encountered by European immigrants of the past. Political parties no longer have a strong presence at the neighborhood level, nor do they work hand in hand with community institutions to mobilize immigrants. In the absence of intense, consistent, and committed local efforts by parties to mobilize Asian American and Latino immigrants, community organizations—labor organizations, workers’ centers, social service organizations, advocacy organizations, ethnic voluntary associations, and religious institutions—may represent the brightest prospect for fostering immigrant involvement in the U.S. political system.

The fact that American civic institutions matter for the political mobilization of immigrants should not come as a surprise. The importance of institutions for participatory democracy and mobilization is well established. In their extensive study of civic voluntarism in the United States, Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady argue that community institutions are the “backbone of civil society,” serving as sites of recruitment to political activities and places where civic skills are fostered (1995, 369). Robert Putnam (2000, 339) has praised civic institutions for their role in creating social capital. Community institutions bring people together, build trust between individuals, allow people to share information, and instill citizens with democratic habits. Building on these studies, this book focuses on the extent to which American civic institutions are fulfilling the promise of democratic inclusion for contemporary immigrants, offering concrete examples of institutions that have effectively

mobilized immigrants politically. The volume examines the incentives influencing civic institutions in their behavior toward immigrants as a means of understanding why mainstream political parties are largely absent in minority communities and why community organizations have succeeded in mobilizing immigrants.

Most U.S. immigrants today come from Asia and Latin America. Largely because of that immigration, the Asian American and Latino populations are growing at a phenomenal rate. Yet the political strength of these groups does not match their demographic strength. The immigrant members of these communities, in particular, turn out to vote at very low rates. Observers too often mistakenly attribute this phenomenon to immigrants' political apathy arising from cultural norms or an orientation toward the homeland. This book shows that it is necessary to look beyond the immigrants themselves to American civic institutions to understand the impediments to immigrant political mobilization that exist today.

In contrast to the past, when parties were central to political mobilization, community organizations—labor organizations, workers' centers, advocacy and social service organizations, ethnic voluntary associations, and religious institutions—are now helping to bring immigrants into the political system to a greater extent than ever before. These organizations provide immigrants with opportunities to participate in an array of political activities that includes but is not limited to registration and voting. Immigrants are marching for amnesty, organizing against anti-immigrant voter propositions, demonstrating for workers' rights, taking part in political theater groups, and petitioning local governments to reform workers' compensation programs. Surprisingly, many immigrants who participate in such activities are those who lack citizenship or legal residency, who have limited English skills, and who live on poverty wages. According to traditional socioeconomic theories of political participation, these individuals should be among the least likely to be politically active.

For the most part, political participation does not take place overnight. Many immigrants' first experiences with the political system come through what has been described here as limited mobilization. Yet there may be ways for American civic institutions—both community organizations and political parties—to speed up that process by expanding their involvement in limited mobilization and by supporting programs for civic education. These institutions can induce immigrants to become involved in politics through positive encouragement and incentives and by providing oppor-

tunities for immigrants to learn about and take part in the political system. Furthermore, political parties, which were integral to immigrants' political mobilization in the past, may be able to better position themselves to expand their constituency in immigrant communities and their relevance in the immigrants' everyday lives.

### *Political Parties e3 Immigrant Communities*

By 1965, when Asians and Latin Americans began arriving in the United States in unprecedented numbers, the political landscape was already undergoing major transformations. Coupled with a generalized weakening of the party system (Wattenberg 1996), the appearance in the past twenty-five years of media-driven, candidate-centered campaigns has led to a major diminishment of neighborhood-level party activity (Conway 2001). The current failure of American political parties to bring a broad range of immigrant ethnic-minority communities into the political system can be attributed to: (1) a weakened local party structure and changing campaign tactics, (2) selective mobilization strategies and maintenance of existing party coalitions, and (3) assumptions about immigrants' and median voters' political attitudes. These factors explain why parties no longer have a strong presence in the mobilization of immigrant communities. Nevertheless, parties are the key institution responsible for linking a nation's people to its government; thus, they play a critical role in the democratic process (Schattschneider 1942; Dahl 1967; Eldersveld and Walton 2000). In a healthy democracy, the parties bear responsibility for providing representation in government for all people, including immigrants, rather than for only society's most advantaged groups.

Are the country's immigrants likely to be the targets of greater party interest in the coming years? Will parties again work with community organizations to build the kind of mutually reinforcing relationships that helped bring earlier waves of Irish, Jewish, and Italian immigrants into the American political system (Sterne 2001)? Some scholars and popular press accounts suggest that parties have gradually begun to turn their attention to immigrants (see, for example, Uhlaner and García 1998; Riley 2004). However, recent history does not suggest that we will see a dramatic end to immigrant exclusion by the two major parties. During the 2004 election, the Democratic and Republican Parties reached out to Latinos more than ever before, yet their efforts were mainly symbolic and selective and

did not include mass mobilization, the normative strategy for political incorporation in the first half of the twentieth century. In addition, parties continue to target a specific subset of the Latino community—that is, registered voters in battleground states. Many immigrant Latinos are never targeted for mobilization because they do not live in those areas. Others are not targeted because party leaders assume that Latinos are unlikely voters based on a demographic profile marked by a lack of financial resources, education, and citizenship. The parties have also overlooked those non-Latino ethnic groups that include a large proportion of immigrants, particularly Asian Americans, the fastest-growing racial group in the United States and one that has a higher proportion of immigrants than Latinos.

Despite the three disincentives that parties face, they could again become a force for the political socialization of immigrants. To do so, the parties will need to take a more active role in immigrant communities by participating in community events, offering naturalization and voter-education workshops, regularly registering immigrants to vote (rather than only during political campaign season), and maintaining a high profile in places frequented by immigrant populations. These mobilization strategies would help to engage immigrants in the political system over the long term rather than merely aiming to turn them out to vote on Election Day. Parties need to overcome the phobia about disrupting existing coalitions by recognizing that courting other constituencies could have a high payoff in terms of votes. They also need to overcome misperceptions about immigrant and minority-group apathy by recognizing that lack of education and poverty, as blocks to voter turnout, could be offset by party mobilization efforts. Taking these steps would not only increase the parties' relevance in immigrant communities but also bring them long-term gains by expanding their constituencies and solidifying future partisan loyalties.

### *Community Organizations e<sup>3</sup> Immigrant Communities*

In contrast to parties, community organizations have already shown great potential for mobilizing immigrants. Several characteristics position community organizations for success in politically mobilizing minority immigrant groups. First, as they did with European immigrants, community organizations are providing valuable social services and representation, which can attract and hold an immigrant constituency. Motivated by a desire for organizational maintenance, these organizations willingly reach

out to immigrants. Second, the organizations are led and staffed by people with strong connections to the immigrant and existing expertise vis-à-vis the immigrant group. The presence of first- or second-generation immigrants in positions of leadership provides important human capital. These individuals are fluent in the ethnic language and sensitive to the community's cultural traditions and policy priorities. These characteristics, often coupled with many years of service to the community, endow organizations with significant legitimacy in eyes of their constituencies. Third, an organization with transnational connections has opportunities to build coalitions and to politically engage the constituency. Through its community outreach efforts, the seemingly narrow hometown association opens pathways for its immigrant members to interact and become familiar with their U.S. community. In so doing, their regional (and ethnic or racial) identity broadens to include an identity as members of a new community in the United States. Hometown associations actively maintain ties with the country of origin, yet rather than diverting the attention of immigrants away from an involvement in U.S. politics, transnational activities can heighten interest in politics generally, thereby helping to draw newcomers into the American political system. Although they do not always engage in active or direct political participation, community organizations provide an institutional setting in which immigrants learn communication and organizational skills that can be easily transferred to the political sphere (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Community organizations also act as advocates for immigrants, helping to offset racial and ethnic discrimination. As such, such groups can empower immigrants to challenge stereotypes and become more involved in the political system.

The grassroots nature of many community organizations places them in a web of relations with the members of the communities they serve. That web is the source of information and cultural understanding that directs the efforts of these organizations, strengthening their bases and enabling them to engage in activities and endeavors that forward the political representation, mobilization, and participation of immigrants in the United States. The limited but vital role that community organizations play in immigrants' political mobilization, socialization, and participation is likely to continue as parties continue their shift toward more national-level, media-driven tactics. In the absence of a strong party presence at the local level, community organizations are among the only civic institutions mobilizing immigrants in their local communities.

When it comes to political mobilization of their constituencies, community organizations engage in a range of activities. Some are aimed directly at electoral participation—voter registration drives, get-out-the-vote campaigns, lobbying, and citizenship classes. Others are nonelectoral in nature, such as petition drives, demonstrations, marches, and protests. Because these activities are not mass forms of mobilization, their political effectiveness may be limited in terms of direct electoral effects. However, from the perspective of the immigrant, these activities provide an institutional bridge to the larger community, civic education required for naturalization and hence for voting, and a sense of empowerment and political socialization.

Although many community organizations' efforts are not aimed at turning out the vote, they do foster action and involvement that has visible consequences for the political system and policy making. New York City's Chinese Staff and Workers' Association has sent immigrant women working in garment factories to testify before Congress for antisweatshop laws. The Asociación de Tepeyac has organized Mexican immigrants to protest outside of Manhattan restaurants to challenge exploitative employers. The Brooklyn Chinese American Association provides social services to immigrants but also helps Chinese immigrants register to vote. One-Stop Immigration, a social service provider mainly for Latino immigrants in Los Angeles, has sent immigrants to Washington, D.C., to march for amnesty legislation. The Center for Asian Americans United for Self-Empowerment registers Asian American immigrant voters in Los Angeles. A New York City runners' club for Mexican immigrants is a focal point for intraethnic socializing but has also created opportunities for members to learn how to negotiate the city bureaucracy. Local unions nationwide organized the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride, which toured the country and culminated with demonstrations in Washington, D.C.

This array of actions on the part of a range of community organizations merits support and encouragement because it provides mechanisms so that ethnic minorities can become familiar and comfortable with participation in the U.S. political system. Political parties, nongovernment organizations, and government agencies, among others, should consider how to reinforce such efforts to better serve immigrant communities as they move toward fuller political incorporation into U.S. society.

However, because of the constraints on these organizations, they engage primarily in limited mobilization. For most of these groups, the

primary mission is not political mobilization but instead providing much-needed social services, networking, labor advocacy, or even spiritual ministering. Consequently, most organizations cannot engage full time or consistently in political activities. In addition, most confront serious limitations in financial resources that place mass mobilization efforts out of reach. Nevertheless, as noted earlier, labor organizations, workers' centers, advocacy and social service organizations, ethnic voluntary associations, and religious institutions are often rich in human capital and legitimacy, unique resources that help them to mobilize immigrants. Although most of these groups do not mobilize immigrants at a mass level, they are clearly laying the groundwork for political participation. New technologies, such as electronic communication, may help some organizations, even those that are underfunded, reach larger numbers of people. However, it will take more financial resources to increase the face-to-face contact with community members, which is at the heart of immigrant mobilization.

Despite their limitations, some community organizations have even mobilized some of the least advantaged segments of the immigrant community, such as day laborers, garment workers, and undocumented immigrants. These are often individuals with few resources who do not speak English and who are not citizens—those whom parties tend to shun under the assumption that they are unlikely to participate politically. Understanding the characteristics that have enabled community organizations to mobilize this segment of the population can provide important lessons about how civic institutions might mobilize immigrants more generally. The strengths that community organizations bring to immigrant mobilization provide a model for other civic organizations to follow.

#### *Do Group Differences Matter for Mobilization?*

This book focused on two panethnic groups, Asian Americans and Latinos. They can be compared along several dimensions. Both have had a long U.S. presence marked by racial discrimination. Consequently, unlike earlier waves of European immigrants, the white majority has never fully accepted Asians and Latinos. Today, the ongoing arrival of new immigrants from Asia and Latin America continues to shape both communities, creating fractures along a multitude of ethnic, national, generational, class, religious, and linguistic lines. Another similarity is that majorities of both groups are concentrated in large metropolitan areas in the coastal states.

The two groups also exhibit differences. Latinos are a much larger population than Asian Americans, but Asian Americans are better educated, earn more, and have higher citizenship rates. Latinos tend to live much closer to their homelands than do Asian Americans and consequently exhibit a propensity for circular- or return-migration patterns. In addition, Latinos, unlike Asian Americans, are also a growing presence in some key battleground states, including New Mexico, Colorado, and Arizona.

These characteristics affect the extent to which the groups are mobilized, especially by the political parties. Until recently, the major parties ignored both populations because they were characterized as “low-propensity voters,” owing to their high proportion of noncitizens and low rates of turnout. Racial stereotypes also reinforced party leaders’ view that both groups were politically apathetic and therefore not worth mobilizing. Internal diversity in terms of class, length of residence, and ethnicity presents challenges for mobilization as well. Parties have been slow to recognize the specific needs and interests of the diverse elements within each group, thereby hampering their ability to mobilize Asian Americans and Latinos. Yet in the last two presidential elections, the two parties devoted more attention than ever before to Latinos, especially those registered to vote in the battleground states. Asian Americans have received less attention than their Latino counterparts have received from the two parties. One reason is that Asian Americans constitute a smaller proportion of the population and have been underrepresented in battleground states in recent elections.

When it comes to mobilization and the role of community organizations in that process, ethnic group similarities and differences are less critical than might be expected. What matters for community organizations are several features shared by both communities, and the most successful organizations recognize these features in their attempts to mobilize immigrants. First, as two of the fastest-growing groups in the United States, Asian Americans and Latinos will in the future certainly become a significant group of voters. As such, they should not be treated as politically marginal. Second, each group comprises multiple and cross-cutting identities. Ethnicity and racial background are key components of those identities, but not to the exclusion of other identities based on occupation, class status, region of origin, gender, and even length of residence, among other things. Community organizations mobilize immigrants more effec-

tively if they take these multiple and intersecting identities into account. Third, coalitions are being built across communities based on shared identities and interests. Community organizations unite diverse groups of immigrants around common concerns, such as immigrant rights, worker rights, language issues, women's issues, and environmental concerns. Fourth, organizing around multiple identities and the potential for coalition building does not have to come at the expense of ethnic-group recognition. Race and ethnicity may be socially constructed, but they remain politically relevant categories in the United States. Community organizations have been successful in large part because they foster a positive ethnic identity for immigrants that helps them to combat negative stereotypes. A strong ethnic identity can also empower disadvantaged individuals to take part in political life.

Community organizations' strategies for mobilizing immigrants depend to some degree on the specific features of each ethnic group. Latino community organizations utilize different cultural symbols when reaching out to Latinos than Asian American organizations employ when reaching out to their constituencies. In some cases, Latino and Asian American organizations mobilize around different policy priorities. Latino organizations have been more active regarding calls for amnesty for undocumented workers, while Asian American organizations have been more involved in fighting for harsher penalties for people who commit hate crimes. But common ground exists as well. Both types of organizations have been strong advocates for antisweatshop legislation and streamlining the naturalization process.

This book has found striking similarities between groups in terms of the roles, strategies, and limitations of both parties and community organizations in mobilizing Latino and Asian American immigrants. The political participation of both groups is negatively impacted by the nationalization of the two parties and their heavy reliance on selective recruitment strategies and media outreach. For both groups, community organizations play a vital role in political mobilization, and the activities of labor organizations, workers' centers, social service organizations, advocacy organizations, ethnic voluntary associations, and religious institutions provide key examples of that mobilization. This common institutional context is relevant for understanding the participation of both Asian American and Latino immigrants, despite the important differences between the two groups.

*Racial Balkanization: Myth or Reality?*

Because social service, advocacy, and ethnic voluntary associations tend to work with specific ethnic communities, some academics and pundits have charged that a strong orientation based on race and ethnicity might serve to encourage an unhealthy degree of ethnic identity that would divide and balkanize American society. Are we likely to see such a development? The answer is no. Ethnic organizations have existed throughout American history, and they tend to reflect rather than define society's already existing broader racial hierarchies and divisions. In the vast majority of cases, ethnic organizations emerge in reaction to racial and ethnic discrimination to make claims for inclusion in the larger society. Two ethnic organizations discussed in this volume, Los Angeles's Asian Pacific American Legal Center and the Latino Workers' Center on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, arose in reaction to social, economic, and political exclusion based on race. Their goal is to promote democratic inclusion, not racial exclusion. Although most of the organizations discussed in this volume work with particular ethnic communities, they often mobilize constituents around multiple and intersecting identities, and when necessary, they work to build coalitions with other organizations that have similar goals. For example, when the Chinese Staff and Workers Association undertakes a campaign against a local sweatshop, it activates Asian American women's identities as immigrant Asian women and as garment workers. A Mexican hometown association representing indigenous migrants mobilizes members based on their intersecting ethnic, immigrant, and regional identities. The intersection of these identities based on ethnicity, gender, religious affiliation, occupation, and regional origin plays an important role in shaping immigrant political mobilization, even within ethnic organizations. Moreover, the existence of the New York Immigration Coalition and other such groups that bring together immigrants of multiple ethnic backgrounds and identities undermines claims that ethnic organizations threaten Anglo-Protestant American culture by promoting a separatist identity (Huntington 2004).

*Revitalizing Political Parties in Local Communities*

Contemporary immigration has transformed the U.S. population, cities, and culture. How can political parties remain relevant in an increasingly

diverse nation? How can they become a positive force in the political lives of people in the United States, both members of the country's growing immigrant population and the population more generally?

For Asian American and Latino immigrants, participation in electoral and nonelectoral politics increases steadily with length of residence in the United States. As was the case with earlier groups of immigrants, high rates of political participation do not occur immediately but usually increase gradually over a long period. Given that U.S. civic institutions are either unwilling or unable to engage in mobilization efforts, it is clear that political socialization over time represents the only consistent mechanism for bringing a large number of immigrants into the political system. Even though community organizations engage primarily in limited mobilization, they have been more effective than parties in mobilizing immigrants because these groups constitute a consistent and trusted presence in immigrant communities. Mobilization efforts that are not connected to a community institution are not likely to succeed. Immigrants, like the rest of the population, are much more likely to take part in a political activity when the request comes from someone they trust who is part of everyday life, such as a social service provider, a church leader, or a union organizer. In contrast, immigrants are less likely to respond to requests from strangers knocking on their doors or calling them before an election, even if that call is in their native language. The usual political-party tactic of mobilizing a select group of citizens who are most likely to vote and getting out the vote in the short period immediately before an election does not seem likely to elicit the intended results or to build an engaged constituency among immigrants.

Most importantly, parties should focus on strategies that will help immigrants to become more knowledgeable, familiar, and engaged with the U.S. political system. Why reach out to noncitizens when they cannot vote? Because today's noncitizens are tomorrow's citizens. By reaching out to immigrants when they first arrive in the United States, parties can broaden their future political base. Consistently and year-round, not just during key moments in the election cycle, parties should sponsor voter-education programs and workshops for both citizens and noncitizens and mass voter registration drives at citizenship ceremonies. Parties should also host town hall meetings where immigrants can ask questions and get information about party platforms and policy priorities. Parties should also make a point of having a presence at community events, such as ethnic cel-

celebrations, and in such places as ethnic grocery stores. If parties interact with immigrant communities on a regular, sustained basis, that continuity will create trust and familiarity and build long-term relationships. Parties too often constitute only a fleeting presence in immigrant communities, seeking votes with the least amount of effort and offering little in return.

Parties and other actors in the civic sphere need to reconceive of how they view immigrants' involvement in homeland politics as well as their transnational connections. Rather than discouraging transnational contacts, they quite possibly should be encouraged. Observers often assume that immigrants pursue homeland interests at the expense of U.S. political participation; however, this perspective ignores the complex relationship between transnational attachments and political involvement. In this book, the analysis of surveys and qualitative interviews suggest that although Latino and Asian American immigrants maintain strong connections to their countries of origin, their transnational orientations do not lead to a preoccupation with homeland affairs at the expense of U.S. political participation. For some groups, such as Asian American immigrants, transnationalism is associated with more U.S. political participation in activities other than voting. This finding should lead U.S. civic institutions to regard transnational activists as a potential source of mobilization and participatory political leadership rather than to dismiss them as disloyal to or uninterested in the American political system.

For their part, community organizations must continue to build on their established strengths. They should mobilize around ethnicity while continuing to recognize the multiplicity of identities that individual immigrants exhibit. These groups should focus their efforts on a range of political activities outside of voting but also devote additional resources to immigrant naturalization and voter registration as well as to voter education. This approach would lay the foundation for political action and increased influence across the democratic arena. Finally, community organizations should acknowledge the individual limits of their particular group, with the understanding that if each organization does a small part, their collective efforts can have an enormous impact on immigrant communities.

Political parties' future role in mobilizing immigrants remains unclear. During the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, the Republican and Democratic Parties strove to portray themselves as inclusive of ethnic and racial minorities and explicitly attempted to reach out to Latinos. Perhaps

these recent campaigns signaled a new willingness to court minorities, including ethnic immigrant communities. Yet the parties' commitment to bringing Asian American and Latino immigrants into the political system is far from assured. Partisan attempts at greater inclusion of immigrants have been limited primarily to symbolic gestures. Mass mobilization strategies directed at immigrants remain largely absent from the parties' agendas. Even when they do reach out to Asian Americans and Latinos, Republicans and Democrats focus on those individuals with a strong propensity to vote (registered citizens) and on those whose votes count most from a partisan perspective (voters living in battleground states). The focus on the battleground states has led to racial disparities in mobilization, since non-Latino white voters are twice as likely as Latinos and Asian Americans to live in those places. Selective mobilization remains the norm.

The scope of contemporary party outreach efforts toward immigrants remains limited. This means that most Asian Americans and Latinos—but especially immigrants—are relegated to the margins of the political system. The parties may view Latinos as potential future partners but have yet to turn their attention toward other immigrant groups. Asian Americans, a population dominated by the foreign-born, remain largely unrecognized by the major parties. Community organizations' successes should not lead parties to shirk the responsibility for mobilizing immigrants and other people of color. Community organizations alone should not have to take on the task of immigrant political mobilization.

Political parties are among the most powerful institutions in the nation and have the resources and mandate to expand their circle of inclusion. Ironically, as their resources have increased, political parties seem less and less able directly to touch people's lives. This is true not just for immigrants but for the American population more generally. The parties' national-level strategies, their reliance on media outreach and direct mail at the expense of face-to-face contact, and the reduction in the number of truly competitive seats in federal and state races have led to a failure to mobilize people locally around the specific issues that touch their lives most deeply. Parties appear to be unmotivated not just to mobilize immigrants but also to mobilize other segments of the U.S. population, including people who live outside battleground states.

In the 2004 presidential election, the number of voters reached record heights. With nearly 60 percent of eligible voters going to the polls, turnout in that year was the highest, as a proportion of the overall eligible

population, since 1968. A study by the Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University (Patterson 2004) showed that election-year issues provided most first-time voters with their motivation to go to the polls. In addition, a large proportion voted because they disliked one of the candidates, George W. Bush or John Kerry. Mobilization also contributed to the high turnout. Strikingly, many more first-time voters (61 percent) compared to repeat voters (21 percent) claimed that they voted because a family member or friend encouraged them to vote. Similarly, more first-time voters (14 percent) than repeat voters (4 percent) said that they voted because a group or organization helped them to register. Indeed, election observers attributed the high turnout rates to “massive get-out-the-vote efforts” (Rainey 2004, A-31).

The huge voter turnout in 2004 shows that people can be mobilized to participate in politics, but it remains unclear whether the parties were responsible for this mobilization. The Republicans relied primarily on unpaid volunteers for their get-out-the-vote programs. For the most part, Republicans turned out their base—who were already mobilized, high-propensity voters—including many right-leaning Christian conservatives. Turnout in Florida and five other southern states with large populations who identify as members of the Christian Right was the highest since Reconstruction (Rainey 2004, 31). In contrast, the Democrats relied on tax-exempt political advocacy organizations (known as 527 committees after the section of the tax code that created them), such as America Coming Together, MoveOn.org, and America Votes. Many of these committees are tied to community organizations. For example, America Votes is an alliance of nonprofit advocacy groups and labor organizations, including the AFL-CIO, the NAACP National Voter Fund, and the Sierra Club. Thus, the Republicans relied on their base of high-propensity voters, including many community organizations, while the Democrats relied on other groups to reach out to new voters. The problem of lack of party mobilization is particularly acute for immigrants but is a feature of the American political system that affects other members of the population as well. Thus, the 2004 election both illustrates the power of political mobilization to expand political participation and calls into question how involved political parties were in that process.

This is not to suggest that a return to the political machines of old, which were often associated with corruption and cronyism, is the appro-

priate remedy for lack of immigrant mobilization by major political parties. However, although Progressive Era municipal reforms contributed to the decline of machine power by attacking corruption and political favoritism, those reforms did not include mechanisms for mobilizing minority communities (Fraga 1988). Harold A. Stone, Don K. Price, and Kathryn H. Stone (1939, 79) described how municipal reformers in Dallas drew support from “the middle- and upper-class areas” while neglecting the “Negro sections.” Luis Fraga (1988) notes that municipal reforms, including the institutionalization of city-manager-type governments, at-large nonpartisan elections, and slating groups (lists of candidates endorsed or put forward by reformers), solidified the power of the reform movement’s white, probusiness base and thereby ensured that the most privileged members of the community would dominate politically in cities such as Los Angeles where minorities, including minority immigrants, were becoming a major demographic presence.

There are several ways to increase mobilization in the United States more generally. Parties could foster a greater presence at the local level and become more involved in the local issues and concerns that bring people together across American neighborhoods. Parties could also shift some resources from national-level media outreach to face-to-face contact as a means of building the networks of trust that could lead to more participation. The U.S. government could also set aside resources for community organizations to develop programs dedicated to helping people become more involved in the political system. Linking mobilization efforts to trusted community institutions is critical for increasing U.S. political participation. Finally, it is important to recognize that American civic institutions exist within a larger political context that may require reform if immigrants are going to be mobilized en masse. For example, reforms that encourage political competition would also increase institutional incentives to mobilize people. Current redistricting practices encourage partisan gerrymandering, which favors incumbents at the expense of creating competitive seats and thus depresses political mobilization.<sup>1</sup> Taking redistricting out of the hands of incumbents and parties and placing it in the hands of independent nonpartisan commissions would likely increase electoral competition and mobilization. Reforms to the electoral college and campaign finance systems that would create competitive conditions across the country, not just in a handful of battleground states, would also increase

electoral competition and encourage candidates and parties to mobilize more people.

In the absence of large-scale political reforms, parties and community organizations should do their part to maintain a healthy democracy by helping more people to have a voice in the political system. True political equality in this country will be achieved only when American civic institutions reach out to all who contribute to American life.