

# UC Berkeley

## ISSI Project Reports and Working Papers

### Title

It's a Family Affair: Inter-generational Mobilization in the Spring 2006 Protests

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2352b2k2>

### Authors

Bloemraad, Irene  
Trost, Christine

### Publication Date

2007-05-07

**It's a Family Affair:**  
Inter-generational Mobilization in the Spring 2006 Protests

Irene Bloemraad  
Assistant Professor  
Sociology  
University of California, Berkeley

Christine Trost  
Assistant Director  
Institute for the Study of Social Change  
University of California, Berkeley

We would like to acknowledge the financial support of the Russell Sage Foundation and excellent research assistance by Edwin Ackermann, Abril Díaz, Monica Gudino, Sara Levine, Ricardo Huerta Niño, Heidi Sarabía and Robert Vargas.

Among those participating in immigration marches, demonstrations, boycotts and other events that occurred across the United States in the spring of 2006 were hundreds of thousands of children and teenagers. Data collected from newspaper reports throughout the country indicate that from March 10 to May 1, 2006 between 3.5 and 5 million individuals participated in immigrant rights rallies across the United States (Fox, Selee and Bada 2006). Newspaper reports at the time and early analyses of the marches repeatedly note that significant proportions of participants were under the age of 18 (e.g., Bada, Fox & Selee 2006; Flores-Gonzalez, et al. 2006; Wang & Winn 2006). One account of the May 1<sup>st</sup> march in Oakland, California, claims that a quarter of participants were school-age children and teenagers (Rauh 2006). If this estimate is accurate and representative of other rallies, one million youths might have participated in the 2006 spring immigration protests.<sup>1</sup>

Their mobilization demands study and explanation. However, methodological roadblocks and limited theoretical tools have hampered academics' ability to study young people's civic and political engagement. Institutional review boards and human subject protocols make it difficult to research those under the age of 18, since it is assumed that children and adolescents cannot give independent informed consent. For example, interviewers working on an important survey of participants at Chicago's May 1<sup>st</sup> immigrant rights march could only approach people who were "clearly" over the age of 16 (Flores-Gonzalez et al. 2006).

---

<sup>1</sup> In California, urban school districts reported absentee rates of about one in five in the public K-12 system: 20 percent in San Diego, 18 percent in San Francisco and 16 percent in San Jose (Sebastian, Knight and Asimov 2006). Among Los Angeles middle and high school students, the absent rate climbed to 27 percent. One heavily Latino West Contra Costa high school used in this research to recruit study participants reported an absentee rate of about 70 percent.

Theoretically, youths' civic and political engagement is an underdeveloped area. Models of adult participation map poorly onto the experience of children and teenagers. Literatures which explicitly consider youths tend to flow either from research on civic education and community service learning (Youniss, McLellan & Yates 1997; Yates & Youniss 1998; McNeal 1998; Youniss, et al. 2002), or from an older political science literature on political socialization (Jennings & Niemi 1968, 1974, 1981; Verba, et al. 1995). The former, while rich, tends to be centered predominantly on schools and programmatic issues and thus offers a relatively narrow view point, and the latter, while of impressive pedigree, had been marginalized and even abandoned until fairly recently by contemporary political scientists and sociologists.<sup>2</sup> Very little of this scholarship, old or new, examines immigrant families. We need to ask: Are processes of political socialization identified among the native-born, majority population the same for immigrant families?

This article aims to begin building an account of youth engagement from the perspective of immigrant families, using the Spring 2006 protests as a lens and case study. It draws on early findings from the Mexican American Political Socialization project, a study engaged in in-depth multi-generational interviewing of Mexican-origin families in Richmond and Oakland, California. Our data confirm that the protests mobilized large segments of the Mexican-origin population, both adults and youths. We also found that a significant proportion of people who had never engaged in any political action participated in the marches, rallies and boycotts.

---

<sup>2</sup> Niemi and Hepburn trace the rise and fall of political socialization as an area of research, which began in the 1950s and "died a premature death in the 1970s" (1995: 7). By the mid-1990s several prominent scholars, including Niemi, called for a "rebirth of political socialization," and in 1999, Niemi remarked that the field of political socialization "has been making a comeback as of late," although he conceded, "Still, we have a way to go" (1999: 471, 474).

We further make the case for a model of bi-directional political socialization. Youth engagement takes on particular salience within immigrant communities because it opens the possibility that political socialization—the process of acquiring or developing attitudes, values, beliefs, skills and behaviors related to public affairs and politics—occurs in two directions: from parent to child, as conceived by the traditional literature on this topic, *and* from child to parent, as children with greater access to the English language and mainstream institutions provide political information and encourage their parents to participate. Such dual socialization is likely evident in many families, but it is particularly relevant for immigrant families where adults face legal, linguistic and experiential barriers to political and civic participation. In developing this argument, we also consider how intergenerational communication and interaction can increase a family’s engagement by pooling different information sources and networks, based on schools and new technologies among teens, and workplaces, churches and ethnic media among parents.

### **<H1> Theorizing Youths’ Engagement and Political Socialization**

Models based on adults’ civic and political participation emphasize the influence of education, work force participation, occupation, income and marital status in explaining differences in individuals’ civic or political engagement (Putnam 2000; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). Given their age and stage in the life course, none of these measures work very well for children and teenagers. Most have not yet reach the end of their educational trajectory; few work full-

time; when they do work, it is likely not in the occupation they will have as adults; individual incomes are modest if not nonexistent; and few are married or have children.

At best, we can use parents' socio-economic characteristics as proxies for youth attributes, yet this is problematic, especially for immigrant populations. Among the native-born population there is a strong, but imperfect, relationship between parents' socio-economic status and children's eventual education and occupation (e.g., Solon 1992). Among immigrants, however, this relationship becomes weaker, especially for adults who arrive in the United States with limited schooling and poor English language ability. Current Population Survey statistics indicate that while just under 50 percent of Mexican-born immigrants have only eight years of schooling or less, in the second generation this percentage plummets to 15 percent for women and 11 percent for men, while conversely the proportion of four year college degrees triples from about 4 percent of all Mexican-born immigrants to about 12 percent of the second generation (Bean and Stevens 2003:134-35). Not surprisingly, wage differentials between those of Mexican origin and the native-born, non-Hispanic white population are cut in half or more as one moves from the first to the second generation (Bean and Stevens 2003:139). For the children of immigrants, relative to the native-born, parents' education and occupation are poor predictors of their future.

We consequently need theories for youth participation which are separate, wholly or in part, from the models used for adults. Barrie Thorne's observation twenty years ago that academic knowledge and thinking "remain deeply and unreflectively centered around the experiences of adults" (1987:86), largely remains accurate today. Put another way, we need to conceive of youth as actual or potential political actors with independent

agency that is exercised within the particular context of young people's lives. This context most obviously involves schools and families, but also incorporates the various social and civic activities of young people, from personal networking sites like MySpace.com to church youth groups or youth sports leagues.

Political scientists identify the family as a key site of political socialization.<sup>3</sup> Researchers argue that families transmit both general orientations about politics (e.g., political efficacy and trust) and more specific attitudes (e.g., political ideology and partisan identification), as well as the propensity to be politically active (Verba, et al., 1995; Beck & Jennings 1975, 1991; Jennings & Niemi 1981). Adolescents are viewed as especially ripe for political socialization. They are becoming increasingly aware of the political world around them as they develop their sense of self and identity, yet their attitudes are more unformed and open to change than at later stages in life (Chaffee, McLeod, Wackman 1973; Jennings & Niemi 1974; Tedin 1974, 1980).

Even though intergenerational transmission of attitudes and behaviors from parent to child is far from perfect, studies show that the influence of family and, especially, parents is a strong predictor of later political attitudes and behavior. Familial political socialization occurs both indirectly and directly. Indirectly, family members shape children's opportunities to acquire education, jobs and income, which in turn affect political engagement. Directly, family members provide political stimulation through family discussion of politics and they model political behaviors, such as when they go to

---

<sup>3</sup> Sociologists of childhood express reservations about the term "socialization" when talking about children and adolescents (e.g., Barrie 1986, 1993; Orellana 2001). While in many ways a useful term, they note socialization implies that children have little or no agency in the present; they are unformed and continuously preparing (or developing) for the future, when they can begin their productive lives as workers, parents, voters, etc. We retain the term political socialization since it is the dominant way of talking about these learning and development processes. However, we also argue that this socialization occurs at all stages of the life course, and can work in multiple directions across generations.

vote. Children with politically active parents are more likely to become politically engaged (Jennings & Niemi 1974; Verba, et al., 1995), whereas “those whose socialization in childhood is weak [...] exhibit a delayed pattern of political development” (Jennings, Stoker & Bowers 2001: 22). Transmission of political values, attitudes and behaviors is strongest when parents participate actively in politics, when both parents share the same political views, and when parents provide clear and consistent cues about these attributes (Jennings & Niemi 1974; Jennings, Stoker & Bowers 2001).

These findings are almost entirely based on research with native born America citizens. Parents are assumed to have much greater knowledge about and experience with the political system and public debate than children and adolescents. There is consequently little questioning in these studies over the assumption that parents hold relatively developed views of American politics, have access to political information and have the legal status to engage in acts such as voting.

These assumptions become much more tenuous in the case of immigrant families. US-born children often have much more direct access to the mainstream’s dominant language and culture than immigrant parents. Numerous studies document how the children of immigrants find themselves in the position of acting as a translator for their parents during medical exams, during interactions with government officials, including school employees and police, or during disputes with others, such as landlords (e.g., Bloemraad 2006; Kibria 1993; Orellana 2001; Portes & Rumbaut 2001). During these activities, children often must make decisions or become actively involved in managing or shaping the interaction, not just translating two (or more) adults’ conversation. Indeed,



we have some evidence that 1.5 generation immigrant children in particular—those children who come to the United States as immigrants, but quite early in their childhood—are particularly apt to become leaders of community-based organizations because of the early advocacy work they had to do for their families at a young age (Bloemraad 2006: 192-194). There are consequently solid grounds to hypothesize that processes of political socialization from parents to children might be attenuated in immigrant families, and that the reverse process—child to parent political socialization—might also occur.

Beyond families, the existing literature on political socialization also identifies other institutions affecting young people's political attitudes and behaviors. Most researchers agree that parents assert the greatest influence over children's political development, but many findings are modest, sparking considerable debate over the significance of other agents of socialization, such as peers, schools, churches and community-based organizations (Jennings & Niemi 1974; Serbert, Jennings & Niemi 1974; Tedin 1980; Verba, et al. 1995). Stoker and Jennings (2004) find that adolescent participation in church and community service develops civic skills, fosters political trust, and contributes to higher levels of civic engagement later in life, even when parents' influence, the youth's personality and socio-demographic characteristics are taken into account. Yates and Youniss (1998) suggest a more immediate socialization effect from certain school programs. They argue that youth participation in school-based community service activities increases awareness of the problems of society and provides a basis from which to develop a political identity.<sup>4</sup> Others have found that while classroom-

---

<sup>4</sup> Glanville notes, however, that “access to participation in various types of activities has been shown to differ by race and ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status and academic ability,” with the implication that

based civic education can lead to significant increases in political knowledge, especially for twelfth-graders, participation in curriculum-based service learning yields mixed results in shaping youth's political participation and attitudes (Galston 2001, see also Niemi & Junn 1998; Melchior, et al. 1999). These and other studies suggest the importance of not only a politicized family environment but also the broader social and political contexts in which a child grows up.

Building on these findings, it also suggests that if we consider the family as a dynamic unit of political socialization, different family members might draw on different institutions when sharing information, viewpoints and opportunities for participation. Clearly schools play an important part in the lives of children, and researchers find that activities within schools, as well as peer relationships, influence political interest, attitudes and behaviors. Both parents and children gain skills and information about politics from participation in community associations and religious institutions, but their patterns of membership might be different. Media might also have an effect on both, but the types of media older and young members of a family access likely differ in important ways. Parents have additional opportunities for political socialization and participation through workplaces, both from co-workers and organized groups such as unions. More generally, parents and children can learn from friends and acquaintances. In immigrant families, it is possible that adults' social ties are more firmly rooted in co-ethnic networks while children could have greater inter-ethnic friendship, thereby widening networks of information and mobilization. In cases where parents and children have strong, positive and frequent interactions, family members can "pool" sources of political socialization.

---

such programs produce political stratification with more socialization in some populations and than others (1999: 291, see also McNeal 1998).

## <H1> Data and Methods: Multi-generational Interviews

The arguments in this article draw on in-depth interview data from the Mexican American Political Socialization project. The origins of this project predate the spring 2006 protests. We initially set out to recruit 48 families of mixed status to participate in one to two hour interviews on civic and political engagement. As the momentum of protests built through March and April 2006, we modified the interview schedule to include a section on the rallies and boycotts, including specific questions about respondents' participation in and attitudes towards the spring 2006 events.

One of the project's goals is to examine the influence of parents' immigration and citizenship status on children's attitudes and participation. Within each family, interviewers consequently talked with, separately, a US-born youth between the ages of 14 and 18 and at least one Mexican-origin parent.<sup>5</sup> Recruitment efforts focused on getting roughly equal numbers of parents with one of four legal statuses: undocumented, non-citizen legal permanent resident, naturalized citizen or US-born citizen. In two cases, both parents (not always of the same status) were interviewed, either separately or together.

A second project goal is understanding how immigrants of modest economic backgrounds and limited schooling learn to participate in the associational and political life of their new homes. Research overwhelmingly demonstrates that socio-economic status, and especially education, correlates strongly with civic and political engagement (Miller and Shanks 1996; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman and Brady

---

<sup>5</sup> In two cases, we interviewed youth born in Mexico who migrated to the United States as small children (one was seven months old, the other was seven years old) and who acquired citizenship through a parent's naturalization. All the youth in the study had U.S. citizenship at the time of the interview.

1995). This project consequently asks how those with more limited personal resources might become involved and, when they do not, how they understand their non-participation. To this end, we restricted participation in the study to families where the interviewed parent, if born in Mexico, has less than a high school education or, if born in the United States, has less than a four-year college degree.<sup>6</sup> We purposely tried to sample families where we would be less likely to find extensively civic and political engagement.

Families were recruited through public high schools in Oakland and Richmond, California, cities on the east side of the San Francisco Bay. As Table 1 reports, both are ethnically and racially diverse “majority-minority” cities with large percentages of foreign-born migrants. Latinos—the bulk of whom are Mexican-origin—make up a quarter of the population in Oakland and a third of Richmond’s residents. Minorities and immigrants are even more heavily represented in the public school systems. Thirty-five percent of all students in the Oakland Unified school district are Latino, while that proportion increases to 40 percent in the West Contra Costa school district, of which Richmond is a part.<sup>7</sup>

#### TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

We focused recruitment efforts on four high schools with large Latino populations: Richmond High, Kennedy High, Castlemont Business and Information Technology and Castlemont Leadership. As Table 2 shows, Latino students comprised at least a third of the student body in each school, and in Richmond High they are the clear majority, making up almost three quarters of all students. All four schools cater to a large

---

<sup>6</sup> Parents also had to have lived in the United States for at least five years.

<sup>7</sup> Population statistics are from the 2005 American Community Survey, available at [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?\\_program=ACS&\\_submenuId=&\\_lang=en&\\_ts=](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?_program=ACS&_submenuId=&_lang=en&_ts=) (last accessed February 28, 2007). School data are from the California Department of Education, available at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/> (last accessed February 28, 2007).

population of low income students, as seen in the large number of students qualifying for free or reduced fee lunches, and all four schools are under-performing, with less than half of students passing the new California High School Exit Exam.

#### TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Respondent recruitment was based on a mix of purposive and convenience sampling, using a variety of techniques. In one school we sent bilingual Spanish-English fliers to almost all parents; in two others, we set up tables in the common areas of the schools to recruit participants or did class presentations. In some of the schools, we also called families based on a (non-exhaustive) list of Latino students. In a few cases we used snowball sampling to interview distant relatives or acquaintances who attended other public and private high schools in the area.

To date, we have completed 36 family interviews with a teen and at least one parent, for a total of 74 individual interviews. In a few cases one member of a family who initially agreed to participate later declined or failed to return calls, resulting in an additional 3 interviews with either a parent or teen, but not both. Table 3 summarizes the interviews completed. We had the most problem recruiting families with US-born parents, in part because the native-born Mexican American population is more heavily concentrated in the San Jose area, and because it appears that families with 2<sup>nd</sup> or later generation parents move out of Richmond and Oakland for better school districts or to purchase homes in other communities to the north and west of the Bay Area. We also had more trouble recruiting men than women. Of our 37 teen interviews, 13 were with boys (35%) and among the 40 parents interviewed, nine were men (23%). All interviews

were conducted between March 21, 2006 and August 10, 2006, with 95 percent occurring after the large May 1<sup>st</sup> rallies held throughout the San Francisco Bay Area.<sup>8</sup>

### TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

#### <H1> **Participation in the Immigrant Rights Protests in the East Bay**

Compared to other metropolitan areas in the United States, mobilization against H.R. 4437, the “Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005,” and in favor of legalization and immigrant rights was slower and less concentrated in the San Francisco Bay Area. As early as March 10, 2006, between 100,000 and 300,000 people marched in Chicago, while on March 25 anywhere from 200,000 to one million people rallied in Los Angeles.<sup>9</sup> In the Bay Area, the first sizeable mobilization around immigrant rights only occurred on April 10, the “National Day of Action,” bringing together an estimated 25,000 people in San Jose.

On May 1<sup>st</sup>, tens of thousands of Bay Area residents participated in marches and boycotts, but events were dispersed throughout the region. The largest rally occurred in San Jose, where an estimated 100,000-125,000 people participated. Numbers were lower in San Francisco, where the crowd was put at about 30,000. These figures, representing the two largest cities in the Bay Area, understate participation, however, since dozens of rallies occurred in smaller cities and towns throughout the region. In Oakland, police estimated that 15,000-17,000 people congregated in the downtown area, though

---

<sup>8</sup> Interviews were conducted with bilingual and bicultural interviewers, with all but one of Mexican-origin themselves. Almost all parents chose to be interviewed in Spanish, while almost all teens conducted the interview in English. Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to two hours, and subsequently were transcribed for analysis.

<sup>9</sup> Participation numbers cited here and below are drawn from newspaper reports collected by the author, as well as those collected and compiled by Fox, Selee and Bada (2006) and Wang and Winn (2006).

organizers put the figure much higher, at 50,000, noting that not all participants in the 100 block march were able to get to the final destination in front of City Hall and the Ronald V. Dellums Federal Building (Bender and MacDonald 2006). In Richmond, between 2,000 and 8,000 people marched from three Catholic churches to converge on the city's Civic Center (Simerman 2006). Throughout the region, schools reported dramatically reduce attendance and employers with significant numbers of Latino workers either closed their businesses or opened with greatly reduced staff.

## <H2> A Family Affair: Unprecedented Cross-Generation Mobilization

The first striking findings from our research are the unprecedented levels of participation in the spring 2006 events among our respondents and its cross-generational nature. At the outset, we sought to recruit families with modest economic and educational resources for civic and political engagement, and who might face particular barriers due to non-citizen or undocumented status. Of those we interviewed, fully 60 percent attended a march, participated in a boycott or engaged in some other direct action activity around immigration rights in spring 2006. Among parents, 60 percent participated in some way, and among teens, the proportion was 59 percent.<sup>10</sup>

This widespread participation stands in contrast to more modest engagement in other political activities. We asked our respondents a series of questions about their prior political participation, inquiring whether they had ever worked on a candidate campaign; worked on a ballot proposition or ballot initiative campaign; signed a petition; sent a

---

<sup>10</sup> Our interviews suggest that the number of teens participating might have been higher had some parents not insisted that their children attend school on the day of the May 1<sup>st</sup> protest, which was a Monday. Of those who went to school, some wore white t-shirts in solidarity with marchers. Wearing a white t-shirt is clearly a sign of engagement and sympathy with the movement, but we did not count this as active participation in the rallies.

letter or email to a public official; attended a political meeting; attended a neighborhood meeting; participated in any protest or march *other than* the spring 2006 immigration rallies and (only for parents) whether they had ever made a financial contribution to a political campaign. Among parents, the median number of political activities was only one out of eight possible activities; 16 of our parent respondents had never engaged in any of these activities prior to the spring 2006.<sup>11</sup> Among the teens, the mean number of political activities was also one, as was the median. Only 11 of our 37 teen respondents reported never having engaged in any sort of political activity.<sup>12</sup>

Of those parents and teens who had never engaged in any prior political activity, over half (56%) participated in an immigrant rights activity in the spring of 2006. Put another way, of all those who did participate, almost a third (30%) told us that this was the first political activity in which they had ever participated in the United States. In a number of cases, parents and teens were hesitant, even scared, of this first-time participation. Señora Sanchez<sup>13</sup>, a legal permanent resident who participated in an April 10 march, explained:

There were a lot of people and they invited me. I took my daughter, the older one, and she told me, “Mami, I do not like to be doing this.” I think because there were a lot of people. And I am not like that either [someone who participates], not at all. ...I did not think there would be so many

---

<sup>11</sup> We assigned a point for each time a respondent reporting having done one of these activities at least once, to create an eight point scale. Of our parent respondents, 16 reported no political activities, eight report one, eight reported two, two reported three activities, one reported four, two reported six activities and two parents reported having engaged in seven different types of political activities. Strikingly, three of the four parents who reported six or more activities were undocumented migrants; the fourth was born in the United States.

<sup>12</sup> Of the teens, 11 reported no political activity, 15 reported one, six reported two and four reported having engaged, at least once, in three of the seven? political activities we listed.

<sup>13</sup> All respondent names are pseudonyms.



people and my older daughter could not believe what she was doing. I told her that there is nothing bad and we are just supporting people. To tell you the truth, I am very scared of the kids that do bad things [attending the rally]. I feel like I will end up in prison for being there [giggling].

The personal encouragement of others helped overcome initial fears—in Señora Sacher's case, her child's babysitter urged her to go—as did the desire to be part of what quite a few described as a movement of solidarity.

Teens were equally mobilized into political participation for the first time due to the immigration marches, most often through friends at school. The teenage daughter of a legal permanent resident, who had never participated in any political activity prior to the spring 2006 events, attended two demonstrations, one on April 10 and another on May 1<sup>st</sup>. Abril explained:

At first I had no clue what was going on, but then all my friends were like, “Yeah, the immigrants... They're trying to kick everybody out. Like, if they find someone that is an immigrant, they're going to kick them out.” I was like, “Oh, that's not fair,” so they told us what days [the protests would be] through text messages on the phone and stuff.

Like Abril, various respondents reported becoming much more exposed to political information because of the marches and in some cases, participation changed their attitude and behaviors toward politics. One single mother, an undocumented migrant, had never previously engaged in political activities, but she now watches the news and follows current events regularly, activities that she never did before her participation in two Oakland marches. To the extent that mobilization is easier once people have

participated at least once in an event or activity, such broad participation holds out the possibility of greater future engagement among this population of Mexican-origin residents.

A second common theme from our interviews was the familial nature of participation in the marches and boycotts. Señora Sanchez went to the April 10 march with her daughter, and Abril attended the May 1<sup>st</sup> march with her family. Abril's participation with her parents is especially noteworthy since she told us that her interactions with her parents are quite limited. Abril does not know how to read or write in Spanish, and she does not speak the language fluently, creating communication problems. Both parents also work long hours. When we asked Abril whether she talks to her parents about politics or current events, she told us no, the same answer her mother gave when asked the same question. This lack of communication even extends to talking about school, as Abril explained, "I really don't talk to them. When I get home, I go to my room. Usually they're never around, they're always working." Abril's mother said that she was unsure whether her daughter and she share similar political views, but "The only thing we agree on is the protests that have taken place, because the people need papers and we agree on that, totally." Reinforcing the notion that the protests were strong expression of collective solidarity and identity, as well as important personal issues to participants, these events managed to bring parents and children together who in other cases seem to live lives quite apart from each other.

For families with closer parent-child communication and interaction, participation in the rallies also carried a strong emotional importance that spanned generations, uniting individuals in a generalized "Latino" community and reinforcing family bonds that often

involved members of different legal statuses. Señora Pacheco is an undocumented immigrant whose only previous political activity was signing a petition to extend her children's elementary school through to the eighth grade rather than stopping at the sixth. She participated in one of the local marches, after her 11 year old US-born son convinced her to attend. She found the experience a powerful one “because I felt a great emotion when the mass of people met. ...in that corner, there were three masses of people and when they all met, they clapped and I felt a great emotion, very nice, because as they were coming over, we were all united. And then we went together and left, all united.” She talked to her children about the marches and protests, including her older son, who participated in demonstrations with friends at school on May 1<sup>st</sup>.

The youth we interviewed, all who had US citizenship, overwhelmingly expressed solidarity with the plight of undocumented immigrants. In some cases the concern was personal, because of their parents' status or that of family members. A number commented that an uncle or cousin could be affected by the proposed legislation, or that family members now regularized had previously lived without papers. Yet not all teens actually knew their parents' legal status. These teens and others not directly motivated by personal benefits or family hardship felt solidarity with other Latinos and other immigrants.<sup>14</sup>

## <H1> Dual Political Socialization

---

<sup>14</sup> Feelings of solidarity or the desire to engage in direct political action was combined with other motivations. Many also were caught up in the idea that everyone was participating and they should not be left out—it was the thing to do—and a number liked the idea of skipping school to do something very different from their normal day-to-day routine.

A major strength of doing interviews with multiple members of the same family lies in a researcher's ability to compare accounts of events and examine whether family members share common attitudes or patterns of political engagement. To examine the degree of continuity or discontinuity between the political engagement of teens and parents, we split our interviews by generation and then assigned people to three categories: average participation for those in their generation, low participation (as compared to the median score on the political participation index discuss above), or high participation. The ranking of parents and teens were then compared. Families were labeled to show continuity if teen/parent scores were both low or low/medium, or if teen/parent scores were both high, or high/medium. Cases where a parent or teen had a low score and the other family member had a high score were labeled discontinuous. Using this system we found that 29 families had similar or continuous patterns of political engagement, while 7 (19%) showed discontinuity.

The high level of continuity is not surprising if we believe that parents socialize their children into behaviors of (dis)engagement similar to their own. In addition, the common living environment for members of the same family, in terms of neighborhood, economic resources, etc., also likely produces commonality across family members. However, we would like to suggest that such strong patterns of continuity across generations can also stem from the socializing work of children and adolescents. As we argue above, there are strong theoretical reasons to think that political socialization does not just occur from parent to child, but also from child to parent, especially in immigrant families.

## <H2> Parents Influencing Teens

The earlier example of Señora Sanchez, who encouraged her daughter to participate in the protests, shows a traditional example of political socialization where the parent directly influences her child to participate and tries to influence her views on the issue of immigrant rights and legalization. We see the same dynamics in the case of Isabel, the 18 year old daughter of a naturalized US citizen. Isabel attended the May 1<sup>st</sup> protest in Richmond with her father and sister. Asked whose idea it was to participate, Isabel responded:

Well, I guess my dad you can say. ...he went through that, he didn't have papers so he wanted me to go and be part of that. 'Cause he came from Mexico like that, and he wants a better life for the immigrants. He already had the chance. He came and he's already a citizen, and he wants that to be given to the immigrants. ...Sunday, we started talking about it. My dad was the one who said, "I want to go," and my sister and me, were like, "Oh well, we'll go with you."

In the language of the existing political socialization literature, Isabel's father modeled a particular political behavior and influenced his daughters' participation. He also shared his views and experiences, likely affecting those of his daughters. Yet Isabel did not merely go because her father attended the rally, she has developed her own understanding of the immigrant rights and policy. She explained that her participation was important because, "I wanted to help the Latinos try to get their green card so they can work, 'cause over there in Home Depot, there's a lot of immigrants there trying to get a job. I would think they have kids to support and I think they don't even have food, and

that's bad." Isabel's sentiments are simple and direct. They are also, in the context of American immigration debates, inherently political.

## <H2> Teens Influence Parents

We also heard repeated instances of teens influencing their parents or becoming active participants on their behalf. One single mother who is a naturalized US citizen, Señora Huerta, explained that her daughters often help her, including by providing translation and interpretation. Señora Huerta provided an example from the week before, when one of her daughters came to the doctor's office to help her, and then also helped another person facing language barriers. This sort of help naturally spills over into political "translation": Señora Huerta's daughters not only translate election ballots and state propositions from English to Spanish, they also provide substantive interpretation and their political viewpoints. As she explains, "My daughter helps me: 'Mom, check this, this proposal this, and this proposal that. Mom, this one is good for you!' [laughs] She helps me out, both of them help me..." In this role, her daughters provide her with a type of political socialization, a role that the teen confirmed in our interview with her.

Teen/parent socialization can occur because of teens' better English skills, but also because of their legal status. Legal status is a critical variable in thinking about political socialization because it not only determines who may participate in the formal electoral system through voting, but lack of status can make individuals hesitant to engage in any public activity that could draw the attention of local authorities or immigration officials. In these cases, children's US citizenship provides them with protection and more tools for political participation than their parents, and they might

even feel they should participate for their parents' sake. For example, Maria's mother is undocumented while her father only received his permanent residency papers three years earlier, after many years in the United States without documents. Both parents did not attend the marches, wary of mass protest and violence. Maria's mother explicitly told her daughter and son not to go—"I was afraid that they [marchers] could cause a riot instead of marching and there was going to be violence."—while Maria's father, who also worried about the dangers of massive crowds, was less categorical and more open to having his children attend.

From Maria's perspective, there was little question about the need to participate. She explained, "At my school, there are a lot of Hispanic students... I guess their parents are immigrants and some of them are immigrants, too. And so since my parents are immigrants, I was like, well, I needed to do something about it." She participated in the April march in Richmond, and noted that while it was fun and the thing to do, "I also believed that it was something that I needed to do."

Beyond just the immigrant rights marches, Maria feels that she is a bit more interested in politics and current events than her father, and quite a bit more than her mother. The family does not regularly talk about politics, though they will have conversations about issues like the proposed immigration legislation or the war in Iraq. Maria noted that her father and she each try to shape the other's views. When her father—with whom she frequently disagrees—gives his opinion, Maria says that she is "attentive," since he is her father, but "I do not always agree with them so it is okay to have a different point of view. Because sometimes I do not always agree, it is like they are feeding me information." At times she tries to change her parents' opinion on

political issues, though with mixed success, “If I tell them something, they are going to listen, but they are stubborn. What they believe is what they will keep believing.” In this case, we do not find clear evidence of effective teen to parent socialization, if we take a common policy stance among family members as our measure of socialization.

However, we do find a political dialogue, and one in which the child has an active part. Such conversations reinforce the legitimacy of talking about politics, and might increase information about current issues as the various parties to the discussion try to convince each other of their viewpoint.

### **<H1> Sites of Mobilization**

The mass mobilizations from March to May 2006 were made possible in part because many Latinos were receiving information and encouragement from numerous sources. Among those we interviewed, most mentioned the role of the ethnic media, including Spanish language television and two nationally-syndicated radio DJs, Renán Almendárez Coello (“el Cucuy”) and Eduardo Sotelo (“el Piolín”). Both parents and teens said that friends and acquaintances talked about the marches as people tried to figure out whether they should go and who else was going. The strong push to participate from the ethnic media combined with these interpersonal conversations helped to convince many that they need to join in because of the use, out of solidarity, or so as to not be left out. These dynamics were readily apparent among teens and parents.

Yet at the same time, teens and parents were also mobilized through different sorts of institutions and networks. A key advantage of taking a bi-directional approach to political socialization is that it allows us to conceptualize families as places where diverse



sources of information, social networks and opportunities for mobilization come together. To the extent that different family members have access to different social institutions and personal networks, parent/child interactions expand the opportunities for all members of the household to become more political knowledgeable and engaged. Here we very briefly consider some of the major ways and sites of mobilization during the spring 2006 protests.

## <H2> Teen Mobilization: Schools, Youth Groups and Peers

Not surprisingly, schools played a crucial role in the narratives teens gave of their participation in the marches. Schools provide sites where teens come together to talk with each other and a physical location at which to rally. Adults in positions of authority at school, especially teachers, but also administrators, counselors and others, either helped organize marches, facilitated the diffusion of information about the proposed immigration legislation and provided legitimacy to the protests, or in some cases, authorities worked to dissuade students from participating by demanding that students remain in school. Maria's account of the first march she attended in April, which started at her school, shows the uncertainty around the early protests and suggests that without the support of key individuals at school, adolescents such as she could have been demobilized rather than encouraged to participate:

In the morning, we went [to school] and there were people with posters and stuff, and they were like, "What are we going to do, what are we going to do?" I guess they just wanted to stand there and hold the signs and wait for people to pass or something... So we were standing outside

and the security guard came outside and he was like, “You guys have the right to protest but only at lunchtime. You can’t do it during school hours.” And he said that he would start suspending people, so then I did not want to get suspended... I guess the people organizing it said, “We are going to the walk to [downtown],” and we [Maria and her friend] are like, “Should we go? Or should we stay?” And then we decided to go, so we marched all the way [downtown]... a couple of hours. It was fun because you and your fellow classmates are part of something and so then we had signs and people would honk at us and people were taking pictures. Oh, and one of the principals went with us, so it was like all protected, and the police was with us, too. ..And when we got there, the superintendent [of the school district] was there, and some people spoke about what they believe and then afterwards there was a bus there that took us back to school.

Students at Maria’s school played a key role in mobilizing and organizing this early march, but the support of school authorities gave it added legitimacy and made it appear safe to students like Maria.<sup>15</sup> Participation itself was a positive experience, setting the stage for further participation at future rallies such as the May 1<sup>st</sup> protest.

The importance of schools in mobilizing teens can be seen in the case of a young woman who did not attend the marches, though she sympathized with the goals of the protests. When asked why she decided not to attend, she responded that friends had gone but, “they didn’t even tell me” about the marches or that they were planning to go. If

---

<sup>15</sup> Students at Maria’s school also built on a recent history of activism. Some have played an important role in protesting and encouraging a court challenge to California’s new mandatory High School Exit Exam, and exam that critics claim hits minorities and English language learners particularly hard.

they had asked, she said, she would have gone. Importantly, this young woman also told us “I kind of got sidetracked last year, I kind of dropped out, you can say.” She has been trying to turn things around, but it is not easy. Her story is important because the teen reported hearing about the issue on television, but the media alone was not enough to spur her to participate, absent the invitation from her friends. Since she skips classes frequently, she was less likely to be mobilized by school networks.

Having children at school also mobilizes parents, either because children bring home information acquired at school or because parents participate in their children’s school as parents, part-time helpers or teachers’ aids. A number of the parents we interviewed said that they participated because someone at their child’s school encouraged them to do so. Interestingly, elementary schools seemed particularly important in this regard, perhaps because parents came into more regular contact with teachers and school officials.

The influence of teens on parents is consequently direct, as discussed earlier, and indirect, by bring parents in contact with others through the activities of children. We see both of these dynamics in the case of Eduardo’s experience and that of his parents. Eduardo, a 17 year old soccer enthusiast, plays in an organized team. He and friends from school, a number with whom he also plays soccer, got together to organize a group of students to participate in a March 25 rally. His parents did not participate, and were initially unenthusiastic about his activities. Eduardo encouraged his parents to participate in later events, notably the May 1<sup>st</sup> march, “I told them, like, how me and my friends are going to go and, if they go, it would better ‘cause at least if one more person [goes], that can make a difference.” He initially met with resistance, “they weren’t that into it,” but

after a while, “they were agreeing with me, then they started to talk to me, like, about the other stories of how they worked.” Both of Eduardo’s parents are now legal residents, but the protests played an important role in spurring the parents to discuss more openly their history as undocumented migrants and the hardships they encountered.

From the perspective of Eduardo’s mother, her son’s encouragement and, importantly, the fact he plays soccer led her to participate in the marches. Eduardo’s mother reported that she heard about the marches through TV and at church, but the main push was through the soccer team, for which she volunteers. The marches were announced at practices and games, and then friends from soccer would talk about how important it was to support the protests, and they would ask each other whether they planned to attend, mutually reinforcing the importance of participation.

Finally, almost all the teens interviewed mentioned hearing about the marches or coordinating with friends around the marches through new technologies such as social networking internet sites like MySpace.com and cell phone text messaging. No parents reported using such technologies, and in a few cases parents mentioned that teens would do internet searches for them or talk about information gleaned from the web. In this area, teens clearly have more agency than their immigrant parents, and can potential serve as an important conduit for information.

## <H2> Parents’ Mobilization: Work, Church, and Peers

Insights from the existent literature on adults’ civic and political engagement find support in the experiences of those we interviewed. As Verba and colleagues (1995) argue, workplaces are important sites for skill acquisition, mobilization and political

information. For example, Señor Rivera works as a custodian at a large business in the East Bay. Two years prior to his conversation with us, he was involved in a series of demonstrations at work which ultimately led to a successful union organizing campaign. The union was able to address some longstanding grievances, and at the time of the interview, was pressing for better wages for the custodial staff. According to Señor Rivera, these successes in part shaped his attitude and participation in the immigrant rights marches since “you can see how the process is going, because sometimes it is by a process... it is by steps.” While Señor Rivera was one of the only to explicitly mention the role of unions among those we organized, he was not the only one to talk about how workplaces served as sites of information, political experience and mobilization. Another man who worked for a large company of over 400 people discussed the marches during work. These workers came together to request time off on the day of the May 1<sup>st</sup> march, and were accommodated by their employer.

Many of our adult respondents, few of whom could speak English fluently, relied on Spanish-language media for their information about the marches. While some teens also paid attention to Spanish media, this depended on their language ability, and in some cases their exposure was due to their parents. For example, a parent would be watching the evening news on television, and the teen would listen in. Parents consequently widened their children’s sources of information about immigration beyond the English language media.

Parents also relied on co-ethnic organization where the dominant language of discussion was Spanish. Such organizations included the Catholic Church, which played an important role, especially in Richmond. The May 1<sup>st</sup> rallies began at three Richmond

Catholic Churches, and a number of our respondents mentioned hearing about the protests through acquaintances at church or from the priest. Some children were also active in church, but the number mentioning the church as a source of information was lower than among parents. Again we see different sources of information and sites of mobilization between generations in the same family.

### **<H1> Toward a Two-Way Model of Political Socialization and Mobilization**

On one hand, the fact that teens and parents rely on different sources of information and sites of mobilization is not surprising, although these differences are most likely starker in immigrant families. Adults' access to "mainstream" media and institutions can be limited by language, legal status and other obstacles of foreign birth. US-born citizen children face fewer of these barriers, and they enjoy legally guaranteed political rights as well as the symbolic legitimacy of citizenship. At the same time, recognizing the diversity of political influences on children compared to adults is important—for immigrants or native-born families—because if we provide children and adolescents with agency in the political socialization of their parents, we can understand processes of learning and developing political attitudes and behaviors as a dynamic one based on interactions. These interactions can occur in multiple places, but central among such places are families. Prior research has overwhelmingly highlighted the uni-directional influence of parents on children. Here we argue that there are good reasons to believe that children can also influence adults.

At the same time, we also need to study when the potential for bi-directional learning and information sharing fails to materialize. In a number of families we spoke

with, interactions and conversations between parents and their children are limited by language (neither generation is fluent in the primary language of the other), by limited time (especially when parents work long hours) and by the inter-generational frictions that come from the immigrant experience as individual negotiate multiple cultural backgrounds and expectations. A number of our families were working poor or living in economically precarious positions, a situation that did not always facilitate positive inter-generational relations. Future research needs to take seriously the possibility of children's influence on the civic and political engagement of their parents, but also be sensitive to the conditions under which this fails to occur.

We are nonetheless struck by how widespread participation in the events of spring 2006 was among those with whom we spoke. The individuals we interviewed often did not have the personal resources normally associated with political participation, yet 60% of those we interviewed engaged in some direct action around immigrant rights. Further, in a significant number of cases, the protests were the first experience of teens or parents in the American political system. Many at the time saw their participation as positive. If this feeling persists, these individuals' experience might lay the groundwork for further activism, around immigration issues or around other public concerns. Given the widespread participation of minors, people often left out of standard accounts of political engagement, we also need to develop new models of youth participation, and the implications of young people's activism.

## References:

- Bean, Frank D., and Gillian Stevens. 2003. *America's Newcomers and the Dynamics of Diversity*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Beck, Paul Allen, and M. Kent Jennings. 1975. "Parents as 'Middlepersons' in Political Socialization." *Journal of Politics* 37: 81-107.
- , 1991. "Family Traditions, Political Periods, and the Development of Partisan Orientations." *Journal of Politics* 53: 742-63.
- Bender, Kristin, and Heather MacDonald. 2006. "Spirited Workers' Message Made Loud, Clear in Oakland." *Oakland Tribune* 2 May.
- Bloemraad, Irene. 2006. *Becoming a Citizen: Incorporating Immigrants and Refugees in the United States and Canada*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Chaffee, Steven H., Jack M. McLeod, and Daniel Wackman. 1973. "Family Communication Patterns and Adolescent Political Participation." In *Socialization to Politics: A Reader*. Ed. Jack Dennis. New York: Wiley.
- Flores-Gonzalez, Nilda, Amalia Pallares, Cedric Herring, and Maria Krysan. 2006. "UIC Immigrant Mobilization Project: General Survey Findings." Press Release. Chicago: University of Illinois at Chicago.
- Fox, Jonathan, Andrew Selee, and Xóchitl Bada. 2006. "Conclusion." Pages 35-40 in *Invisible No More: Mexican Migrant Civic Participation in the United States*. Ed. Xóchitl Bada, Jonathan Fox and Andrew Selee. Washington, DC: Mexico Institute, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.
- Galston, William A. 2001. "Political Knowledge, Political Engagement, and Civic Education." *Annual Review of Political Science* 4: 217-234.
- Glanville, Jennifer L. 1999. "Political Socialization or Selection? Adolescent Extracurricular Participation and Political Activity in Early Adulthood." *Social Science Quarterly* 80, 2: 279-291.
- Jennings, M. Kent and Richard G. Niemi. 1968. "The Transmission of Political Values from Parent to Child." *American Political Science Review* 65: 69-82.
- Jennings, M. Kent and Richard G. Niemi. 1974. *The Political Character of Adolescence: The Influence of Families and Schools*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Jennings, M. Kent and Richard G. Niemi. 1981. *Generations and Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Jennings, M. Kent, Laura Stoker and Jake Bowers. 2001. "Politics Across Generations: Family Transmission Reexamined." *Institute of Governmental Studies Working Paper* 2001-15.



- Kibria, N. 1993. *Family Tightrope: The Changing Lives of Vietnamese Americans*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- McNeal, Ralph. 1998. "High School Extracurricular Activities: Closed Structures and Stratifying Patterns of Participation." *Journal of Educational Research* 91: 183-191.
- Melchior, A., J. Frees, L. LaCava, C. Kinsley, J. Nahas, et al. 1999. *Summary Report: National Evaluation of Learn and Serve America*. Waltham, MA: Center for Human Resources, Brandeis University.
- Miller, Warren E., and J. Merrill Shanks. 1996. *The New American Voter*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Neimi, Richard G. and Mary A. Hepburn. 1995. "The Rebirth of Political Socialization." *Perspectives on Political Science* 24: 7-16.
- Niemi, R. G. and J. Junn. 1998. *Civic Education: What Makes Students Learn*. New Haven CT: Yale Univ. Press.
- Niemi, Richard G. 1999. "Editor's Introduction." *Political Psychology* 20, 3: 471-476.
- Portes, Alejandro and Rubén G. Rumbaut. 2001. *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation*. Berkeley/New York: University of California Press and Russell Sage Foundation.
- Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Rauh, Grace. 2006. "Oakland Schools Miss Thousands of Students." *Oakland Tribune* 2 May.
- Rosenstone, Steven J., and John Mark Hansen. 1993. *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*. New York: Macmillian.
- Saprio, Virginia. 2004. "Not Your Parents' Political Socialization: Introduction for a New Generation." *Annual Review of Political Science*. 7:1-23.
- Sebastian, Simone, Heather Knight, and Nanette Asimov. 2006. "Big Student Boycott All Across State." *San Francisco Chronicle*(A) 2 May: 9.
- Serbert, Suzanne Koprince, M. Kent Jennings and Richard G. Niemi. 1974. "The Political Texture of Peer Groups." In M. Kent Jennings and Richard G. Niemi, eds., *The Political Character of Adolescence*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Simerman, John. 2006. "Marchers Unite Efforts in Pursuit of "Better Life" - Thousands of Immigrants Protest." *Contra Costa Times*(A) 2 May: 1.
- Solon, Gary. 1992. "Intergenerational Income Mobility in the United States." *The American Economic Review* 82(3): 393-408.

- Tedin, Kent L. 1974. "The Influence of Parents on the Political Attitudes of Adolescents." *American Political Science Review* 68: 1579-92.
- Tedin, Kent L. 1980. "Assessing Peer and Parent Influence on Adolescent Political Attitudes." *American Journal of Political Science* 24: 136-54.
- Thorne, Barrie. 1987. "Re-Visioning Women and Social Change: Where Are the Children?" *Gender & Society* 1(1): 85-109.
- Verba, Sidney, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wang, Ted, and Robert C. Winn. 2006. *Groundswell Meets Groundwork: Recommendations for Building on Immigrant Mobilizations*. A Special Report from the Four Freedoms Fund and Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees. New York.
- Yates, Miranda and James Youniss. 1998. "Community service and political identity development in adolescence," *Journal of Social Issues*, 54, 3: 495-512.
- Youniss, James, J. A. McLellan and Miranda Yates. 1997. "What We Know About Engendering Civic Identity." *American Behavioral Scientist* 40: 620-631.
- Youniss, James, Susan Bales, Verona Christmas-Best, Marcelo Diversi, Milbrey McLaughlin, and Rainer Silbereisen. 2002. "Youth Civic Engagement in the Twenty-First Century." *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 12, 1: 121-148.

Table 1: Statistical Profile of Oakland and Richmond, California, 2005

	Oakland		Richmond	
	Number	%	Number	%
Total Population	373,900		97,600	
18 years and older	282,000	75.4%	71,100	72.8%
under 18	91,900	24.6%	26,500	27.2%
enrolled in grades 9-12	18,100	4.8%	6,700	6.9%
Race/Ethnicity				
Hispanic/ Latino	93,600	25.0%	32,700	33.5%
non-Hispanic black	113,800	30.4%	27,500	28.2%
non-Hispanic white	88,000	23.5%	19,700	20.2%
Asian	60,700	16.2%	15,400	15.8%
Foreign-born				
naturalized citizen	104,800	28.0%	32,100	32.9%
non-citizen	43,600	11.7%	14,400	14.8%
	61,200	16.4%	17,700	18.1%
Socio-economic Characteristics				
Median household income (dollars)	44,100		52,800	
Unemployed (%)		10.5%		9.7%
Families under poverty line (%)		16.9%		15.2%
Children under 18 in poverty (%)		25.3%		24.4%

Source: 2005 American Community Survey, Census Bureau

Table 2: Profiles of Primary Recruitment Sites, 2005-2006 school year

	Richmond High	Kennedy High	Castlemont BIT	Castlemont Leadership
Total Enrolled Students	1,774	861	486	450
Latino or Hispanic students	72%	44%	54%	37%
English learners	53%	32%	29%	18%
Spanish EL (% total enrolled)	48%	27%	26%	15%
Low Income*	70%	72%	67%	75%
CA High School Exit Exam				
% passing English	37%	44%	29%	42%
% passing math	40%	45%	40%	40%

\* Students eligible for free or reduced fee lunches.

Source: California Department of Education, Data & Statistics

Table 3: Interview Conducted, by Parent's Status

	U.S. Born Citizen	Naturalized Citizen	Legal Permanent Resident	Undocumented Resident	Total Interviews
Parents	4	14*#	13#	9##	40
Teens	4	12	13**	8	37
Total Interviews	8	26	26	17	77

\* Both parents interviewed in 1 family; status of both parents was the same.

\*\* Only teen interviewed in 1 family.

# Only parent interviewed in 1 family.

## Both parents interviewed in 1 family; mother's status was undocumented and father's status was legal permanent resident.