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Civic Spaces: Mexican Hometown Associations and Immigrant Participation

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The study of civic participation and social capital in the United States has, until recently, been silent on the role of immigrant-serving organizations. There is a new line of scholarship, which indicates that ethnic organizations are generally disadvantaged in relation to White mainstream organizations on factors such as resources and political visibility. Our fieldwork on Mexican hometown associations (HTAs) in Los Angeles shows that transnational associations are even more disadvantaged than ethnic organizations that primarily serve the native born. However, this marginality leaves some counterintuitive advantages, namely the creation of safe spaces where undocumented immigrants, recent immigrants, and those with limited English proficiency can get involved in civic and political activities. We explore the extent to which these dynamics vary by gender and immigrant generation, and over time as Mexican hometown associations increasingly turn their attention to political issues in the United States.

There is by now a well-developed body of literature in the United States on civic participation and its linkages to political involvement (Putnam, 2000; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Civic participation, also known as volunteerism, refers to membership and involvement in organizations such as neighborhood associations, faith-based groups, educational associations, and ethnic organizations. In recent years, scholars have sounded the alarm over declines in community involvement and their detrimental consequences for

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political engagement (Putnam, 2000; Skocpol, 2003). While the role of immigrants has largely been marginal to these studies of civic participation, several recent studies of immigrant civic participation in the United States and abroad have emerged (Bloemraad, 2006; Cordero-Guzmán, 2005; Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008; Wong, 2006). Many of these studies go beyond the traditional focus on individual behavior and draw attention to inequalities at the organizational level. According to this line of research, two different organizations may endow participants with similar levels of political skill and knowledge, but the organizations themselves may vary considerably in terms of their political visibility and access to government officials. Civic participation, even if it looks equal at the individual level, may be highly unequal at the organizational level, with important consequences for the relative empowerment of participants.

Some of these recent studies argue that civic inequalities are especially significant between mainstream civic organizations and those serving racial and ethnic minorities. These include disparities in resources (monetary resources, nonprofit status, number of paid staff), civic presence (visibility in the eyes of civil society), political presence (visibility in the eyes of government officials), or political influence over government decisions (Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008). These disparities between mainstream and ethnic organizations, in turn, can be explained by other factors such as organizational longevity, wealthier memberships, and leaders with higher levels of English proficiency and more social connections to elected officials.

Based on these findings, we would expect organizations that connect immigrants to their homelands (or "transnational organizations") to be even more disadvantaged than other ethnic organizations focused on the United States. As indicated by our fieldwork and by other studies of Mexican hometown associations (HTAs), these homeland groups are less likely than native-born ethnic associations to have full-time staff and nonprofit status (Rivera-Salgado, Bada, & Escala-Rabadan, 2005). Furthermore, our analysis of the 2006 Latino National Survey shows that participants in HTAs tend to have less education and lower English proficiency than those who participate in other civic associations.

At the same time, these disadvantages may not be detrimental to immigrant civic engagement. The psychological literature on stereotype threat (Steele, 1997) and the sociological literature on indigenous organizations and social movements (McAdam, 1982) suggest that HTAs may still serve as important sites of empowerment for immigrant residents. For instance, Steele and his colleagues (Steele, 1997; Markus, Steele, & Steele, 2000) have argued that creating an "identity safety" model of community helps individuals to overcome the alienation they may feel from common experiences with discrimination. By *identity safety*, they mean strategies that "[acknowledge] differences attached to group identity and [create] a setting that is accepting of differences as nonlimiting and as a basis of respect" (Markus et al., 2000, p. 235). While many examples of identity safety are

drawn from educational and occupational settings (Godwyn, 2008; Perry, Steele, & Hillard, 2003), HTAs may also play a similar role in creating institutionalized spaces that help counteract the pernicious effects of stereotypes and discrimination against Mexican immigrants (Dovidio, Gluszek, John, Ditlmann, & Lagunes, this issue). Similarly, McAdam (1982) shows that Black churches and professional organizations played an important role in building civic skills and mobilizing scarce resources for the Civil Rights Movement. Studies of the 2006 immigration rallies suggest that HTAs played an important role, alongside unions and the Catholic Church, in mobilizing immigrant residents (Voss & Bloemraad, in press). Thus, even if HTAs face significant resource constraints, they still can play an important role in empowering immigrant residents, especially those who are undocumented and with low levels of English proficiency.

Using the case of Mexican HTAs in the Los Angeles area, we find that transnational organizations are indeed disadvantaged in relation to ethnic organizations such as the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF). HTAs are disadvantaged in several ways, in terms of, nonprofit status, and political visibility among local officials. However, this civic marginality benefits immigrant residents by (1) creating relatively safe spaces for undocumented immigrants to participate and (2) by giving opportunities for the development of civic skills for immigrants with low educational attainment and limited English proficiency.

By operating “under the radar” for many years, Mexican HTAs have allowed immigrants—who either felt unwelcome or unable to participate in mainstream or ethnic organizations—to be involved in the civic lives of their communities. Still, there remain significant gender disparities in participation, with women playing circumscribed roles both as members and as leaders. We examine the extent to which the civic opportunities accorded to immigrant women and low-skilled immigrants are changing, as HTAs increasingly obtain nonprofit status, get involved in U.S. politics, and enter into collaborations with native-born ethnic organizations.

Data and Methods

This study of Mexican HTAs relies primarily on three sources of qualitative data gathered between April 2005 and August 2006: (1) semistructured interviews with leaders of HTA organizations and Latino civil rights organizations in the Los Angeles region, (2) reporting in mainstream and ethnic newspapers, and (3) participant observation at meetings, festivals, large events, and leadership training sessions. We also place our research in the larger context of Mexican immigrant participation in civic activities by referring to the 2006 Latino National Survey (Fraga et al., 2006), and directories of HTAs maintained by Mexico’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, 2008).

The Los Angeles metropolitan area is arguably the most important region in the United States to study Mexican HTAs. According to the database of associations registered with Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 100 of the 544 HTAs in the United States (nearly 20%) are in the Los Angeles metropolitan area, with Dallas (65 clubs), Chicago (51), and Houston (50), and San Jose, CA (22), rounding out the top five metropolitan areas. As Rivera-Salgado et al. (2005) have noted, however, the actual number of associations in each city is likely to be much higher, with figures closer to 400 in Los Angeles and 250 in Chicago.

Our fieldwork in the Los Angeles area included interviews with leaders of four Latino civil rights organizations, 17 HTAs, and 21 mainstream organizations focused on education and religion. Information on organizations was obtained through Internet-based searches of federation web sites and the use of an online database of Mexican hometown federations provided by the Mexican Consulate in Los Angeles. The research strategy was to contact prospective interviewees through e-mail or phone, beginning with leaders of hometown federations. We first conducted interviews with federations, followed by interviews with presidents of individual clubs based on a random sample of referrals from federation leaders. A total of 17 interviews were conducted with immigrant HTAs, with stratification based on state of origin in Mexico: Hidalgo, Jalisco, Nayarit, Puebla, Yucatan, and Zacatecas. Regions were chosen to include those states that are traditional immigrant-sending areas such as Jalisco and Zacatecas, as well as newer immigrant-sending regions such as Nayarit and Hidalgo.

Mexican HTAs in the Los Angeles Area

As we have noted, the Los Angeles metropolitan area is home to the greatest number of HTAs, with estimates ranging upward of 400. The large presence of HTAs in Los Angeles can primarily be attributed to the long and continuing history of Mexican migration to the region, as well as the size of the Mexican immigrant community and their concentrations of settlement in particular municipalities and neighborhoods. Migrants from the states of Zacatecas established the earliest HTAs in the area and were pioneers in creating a larger federation of home-region clubs in 1972: the Federation of Zacatecan Clubs of Southern California. Currently, the federation serves as the umbrella organization for approximately 75 clubs in the Los Angeles region. While Zacatecan migrants have forged the most durable migrant civic organization in Los Angeles, migrants from various other regions in Mexico have also developed a dense network of associations. Indeed, among the regions that formed the basis of our stratification, the greatest number of clubs had ties to Jalisco (128 clubs), followed by Zacatecas (75), Puebla (39), Nayarit (31), Colima (7), Yucatan (6), and Hidalgo (2).

Mexican HTAs in Los Angeles can be best described as localized and grassroots organizations initiated by small groups of immigrants hailing from the same

town or village in Mexico. Intended initially as informal networks of family members and friends, many of these localized groups have grown to include hundreds and sometimes thousands of members who seek to maintain cultural traditions in the United States, while "looking backward" to their homeland by raising funds to assist their compatriots left behind. A defining characteristic of these organizations is the overwhelming share of first-generation immigrants—a characteristic that has influenced to a large degree the nature and scope of activities undertaken by these groups, as discussed below.

The information we gathered from organization leaders indicates that most HTAs are led by first-generation men, while their memberships have greater diversity by gender, age, and immigrant generation (Table 1). In line with the findings of Jones-Correa (1998) in New York City, we find that women are rarely found in the leadership of Mexican HTAs. The vast majority of these migrant leaders are also in their forties and fifties—a pattern consistent with the fact that much of the leadership of the HTA movement in Los Angeles immigrated to the United States in the 1970s. Not surprisingly, most of these long-term immigrants are naturalized U.S. citizens. When queried about their class background, leaders of HTAs described themselves as self-employed or as middle-class business professionals, with much greater economic security than their memberships. Several HTA leaders own their own businesses. As established immigrants, they also have a better grasp of English than most of their members. Still, HTA leaders who are fully proficient in English are the exception rather than the rule: only 3 of the 17 leaders we interviewed considered themselves fully bilingual.

While HTAs appear to be overwhelmingly led by immigrant men with permanent residence status or naturalized citizenship, our fieldwork indicates that their memberships are far more diverse. The associations certainly attract first-generation immigrants, who are most interested in maintaining their identities and connections to their hometowns. At the same time, the programmatic activities of HTAs include family fund-raisers to raise money for homeland projects, which inevitably draw a substantial number of second-generation youth. Notably, however, youth participation is relatively circumscribed, restricted mostly to playing for sports teams for boys, or participating in beauty pageants for girls (rarely, associations like the Club Cañadas de Obregon have fielded all-women soccer clubs composed mostly of native-born youth). Despite significant youth involvement in HTA activities, few have assumed leadership positions in these organizations.

Continued migration from the states of Jalisco and Zacatecas and the more recent increase in migrants from such regions as Colima, Hidalgo, and Yucatan has also given way to a large number of undocumented migrants who form the membership of HTAs. Our fieldwork indicates that hometown groups provide recent immigrants with access to social networks that provide assistance on matters such as employment and housing, and help them maintain contact with their home customs and traditions. Thus, in a socially and politically charged

Table 1. Profile of Select Immigrant Hometown Associations in Los Angeles

Hometown Group	Number of Participants	Region in Mexico	Immigrant Generation	Gender	Socioeconomic Class	Language Proficiency	Age
Club El Rincon							
Leadership	8	Jalisco	First	Mostly male	Middle-class business professionals	Primarily monolingual	40s to 50s
Membership	350–400		First and second	Male and female	Working-class and some middle-class business professionals	Primarily monolingual first generation; bilingual second generation	Teens–65 years, 70% under 30 years
Club Cañadas de Obregon							
Leadership	11	Jalisco	First	Mostly male	Middle-class business professionals	Primarily monolingual	40–45 years
Membership	100s		First and second	Male and female	Middle class and working class	Primarily monolingual first generation; bilingual second generation	Teens–50s
Club Santa Rita							
Leadership	6	Jalisco	First	Mostly male	Working class	Primarily monolingual	40s to 50s
Membership	100		First	Male and female	Working class	Primarily monolingual first generation; bilingual second generation	0–50s

Club San Pedro							
Leadership	12	Zacatecas	First	Mostly male	Working class	Primarily monolingual	30s to 40s
Membership	250–400		First	Male and female	Working class	Primarily monolingual	Teens–60s
Club Fraternidad Las Animas							
Leadership	12	Zacatecas	First	Male and female	Middle and working class	Primarily monolingual; a few bilingual	44–70 years
Membership	1,000		First and second	Male and female	Working Class	Primarily monolingual first generation; bilingual second generation	Teens–80 years
Club Tuxpan							
Leadership	10	Nayarit	First	Mostly male	Middle and working class	Primarily monolingual	30–60 years
Membership	150		First	Male and female	Working class	Primarily monolingual	30–60 years
Club San Martin de Bolaños							
Leadership	5–6	Jalisco	First	Mostly male	Middle-class business professionals	Primarily monolingual	40–50 years
Membership	300		First	Male and female	Working class	Primarily monolingual first generation; bilingual second generation	40–50 years 20% under 30 years

climate where undocumented immigrants are treated as criminals, job-stealers, or "English-destroyers," HTAs offer a safe civic space where their cultural and material contributions are valued. Still, in most HTAs, those without legal status are less likely than long-term legal residents to occupy leadership positions.

The predominance of first-generation immigrants among HTA members is evident, not only from our interviews of organization leaders but also in data from the 2006 Latino National Survey (LNS) from Los Angeles and nationwide. The LNS data enable us to compare the participant characteristics of those involved in HTAs versus those involved in other types of civic associations. As Table 2 indicates, participants in HTAs are much more likely to be foreign born than those who participate in other civic organizations. (By way of reference, 68% of Mexican Americans in the LNS are foreign born.) The data from the LNS also support other findings from our fieldwork that HTAs are more likely to elicit civic participation among men, those with limited English proficiency, and those with low educational attainment.

While data from surveys such as the LNS are helpful in providing demographic comparisons of participants in HTAs versus other community organizations, they have several limitations. First, these data do not distinguish between leaders and members. Furthermore, the LNS data are of limited value in explaining how HTAs manage to draw greater participation among the foreign born, and the consequences of such mobilization for the civic and political empowerment of immigrants who are disadvantaged by limited English proficiency and low educational attainment.

Table 2. Profile of Participants in Hometown Associations and Other Organizations among Mexican Americans (data in percentages)

	Los Angeles		National	
	HTAs	Other Civic Organizations	HTAs	Other Civic Organizations
Foreign born	78	45	73	46
Speak English well	43	85	58	83
Less than high school	48	14	33	18
High school or GED	26[a]	23[a]	31[a]	28[a]
College degree	26	63	35	54
Female	30	61	37	54

Note. Except for the data noted with [a], all differences are statistically significant at the .10 level. Mexican Americans are those respondents who report Mexican ancestry.
Source. Latino National Survey, 2006.

Civic Marginality

Several factors have contributed to the isolation of many Mexican immigrants, not only from mainstream civic groups but also from many U.S-based Latino organizations. As historians have well documented, the gulf between immigrants and U.S-born Latinos stems from long-held beliefs that engagement in one country's civic life (the United States or Mexico) limits progress in the other. For instance, Gutiérrez (1995) describes how many U.S.-based Latino organizations have often viewed the focus on homeland issues as incompatible with U.S incorporation. Acuña (1996) also describes how, in the Southern California, the push for Latino electoral representation has often limited the engagement of Latino elected officials with immigrant communities. Moreover, U.S-based Latino organizations have historically operated within a civil rights framework, as opposed to a more comprehensive framework of economic development, cultural expression, and human rights that guide many transnational migrant organizations. Finally, the modes of organization and empowerment also seem to be different, with native-born Latino groups having more established and differentiated organization structures. Reflecting on the challenge posed by these differing modes of organization, the executive director of a federation noted

> When you look at the agenda of the Latino Legislative Caucus, the agendas of NALEO, MALDEF, and our topics, they are the same. But when you look at our vision of implementing and addressing those issues, it's a bottom up focus; it's a families-first focus. We've got to focus on families first. We've got to raise their leadership and their ability to help themselves, first, organizationally. These other organizations serve a different role. They provide policy advocacy and are focused on [the] big picture. (Interview, August 25, 2006)

The disconnect between HTAs and more visible established Latino civil rights organizations is a concern expressed by nearly all HTA leaders in our study. HTA leaders recognize the civic and political clout that these groups enjoy and express the differing vision guiding the work of these groups. For instance, a HTA established over 20 years ago had not yet made contact with the NALEO, one of the most prominent Latino empowerment groups in Los Angeles. As the leader of the group noted

> I believe NALEO has a different vision. They are much more in tune with Mexican-Americans, not immigrants. But, we have to encourage them to shift their attention toward us, because ultimately, when we improve our organizational capacity, we will serve as an important point of reference, and serve their interests as well. (Interview, August 29, 2006)

Autonomous Civic Spaces

As we shall soon see, there has indeed been a shift in the past 5–10 years, where hometown federations and a few individual associations have entered into collaborations with established civil rights groups, and many have begun to

incorporate themselves as nonprofits and are building more formal organization capacity. However, it is also important to note that the prior period—of civic and political marginality—had some counterintuitive benefits to members and leaders alike. Importantly, the lack of English fluency was not a liability for participation or for the development of civic skills, either for the members or leaders of HTAs. By contrast, participation and leadership in mainstream organizations often require linguistic fluency in English, as well as also cultural fluency in American customs and mores (Ramakrishnan & Viramontes, 2006). Our interviews with HTA leaders and focus groups with Spanish-dominant Mexican immigrants indicate that the problem of limited English proficiency is also a barrier for immigrants wishing to join or advance in ethnic Latino organizations. In these cases, the barrier is not as much one of discrimination as a sense among Spanish-dominant immigrants of unease or "not belonging" in such organizations, and feeling that the activities and policy priorities of such groups do not resonate with their own interests and priorities.

By contrast, HTAs are a far more welcoming place for Spanish-dominant immigrants. Most clubs conduct meetings in members' homes and do so exclusively in Spanish. This stands in sharp contrast to civil rights organizations, whose meetings are often held in organization offices and conducted mostly in English. Larger public events held by HTAs are also conducted in migrants' native language, thus facilitating their entry into the larger civic sphere of the city. For instance, the Federation of Puebla Clubs was created in 2004 at a Cinco de Mayo event held at the Plazita Olvera in the heart of downtown Los Angeles. The cultural event was promoted and advertised through Spanish-language radio and attracted hundreds of Puebla immigrants living in the metro area. The event, which served as a catalyst to unite various small and informal groups, relied heavily on Spanish-language media to bring these immigrants out into the more public spaces of the city.

The creation of safe spaces for Spanish speakers also has significant implications for the political empowerment of Mexican immigrants. For instance, the Federation of Jalisco Clubs organizes a week-long cultural event known as "Semana Jalisco." The event has drawn thousands of Jalisciences from Southern California and provided opportunities for immigrants to interact with state-government officials from Jalisco. Similarly, the Federation of Nayarit Clubs recently celebrated its Expo in August 2007, an event that included the visit of the governor of Nayarit to meet and discuss, among other things, the progress of development projects in Mexico. These events thus seem to be in line with the "identity safety" model of community, where the focus is not on what these immigrants may lack (legal status or citizenship in the United States), but on what they possess (resources, votes, and the determination to improve conditions in their home regions).

Empowering Undocumented Immigrants

The political empowerment of Spanish-dominant residents through HTAs has not been limited to Mexican politics and policy. In fact, one of the first public actions against HR 4437—a bill introduced in Congress in late 2005 that would make felons out of undocumented immigrants and those who aid them—was not a march in the streets of Los Angeles, but a massive rodeo and cultural show on March 19, 2006 (Truax, 2006). Organizers used advertisements and news coverage in Spanish radio and newspapers to draw participants to the Pico Rivera Sports Arena, with the explicit goal of raising consciousness about the pending legislation and encouraging members from various federations to act in concert and help defeat the proposal. The participation of immigrants in these large public events, conducted almost entirely in Spanish, attests to the important role that language plays—not only in helping to consolidate the network of migrant clubs but also in activating migrants' collective mobilizing potential with regard to policies in Mexico and, increasingly, in the United States.

In addition to helping immigrants overcome language barriers to civic participation, HTAs also help to create safe spaces for the civic and political activation of undocumented immigrants. Although these associations do not keep track of the documentation status of their members, all of the HTAs in our study indicated that one of the most significant policy issues for their memberships was the status of undocumented immigrants, including their ability to obtain drivers' licenses and to live without fear of deportation. Indeed, the demographics of their memberships played a significant role in prompting HTAs in Los Angeles to get involved in these issues—not only in response to HR4437 in 2006 but also earlier in response to Proposition 187 in 1994 which sought to exclude undocumented immigrants from public benefits in California, and more recently in support for California state legislation that would grant drivers' licenses to any resident regardless of their immigrant status. Our interviews with HTA leaders indicate that they have had some success in getting undocumented immigrants to be politically involved, although challenges still remain because of the costs associated with public participation. As one federation leader noted

> Many times, when we try to broach this subject, the members aren't prepared to jump in yet. We encourage them to write to elected officials. For instance, we did write letters for the drivers' license bill for undocumented immigrants and we're writing in support of a legalization program. Yet, there is a fear on the part of undocumented immigrants to speak out in public. But I think people realize there is so much at stake (Interview, August 2, 2005).

Whatever the challenges that HTAs face in mobilizing undocumented immigrants, they are much farther ahead than other civic organizations. In some of the same cities that we interviewed Mexican HTAs, we found that religious, educational, and athletic associations had difficulty attracting and maintaining

the membership of undocumented immigrants. This was particularly true after deportation raids, which reduced participation by former members by dramatically raising the costs of public participation. For instance, the president of an elementary school PTA noted

> Something happened at one of our local markets, an immigration raid, and that became an issue. Somebody started talking about this and saying that because PTA is political, that their name would get on their list, and somehow we would give list to government, and this scared all these folks. I explained [to members] that this is not true. This is not a reporting agency. A parent who had always been involved with the jog-a-thon stopped coming. (Interview, May 5, 2005)

We found similar evidence of declining participation among undocumented immigrants in informal soccer leagues after a few well-publicized raids. Even in Catholic churches, which have for long been viewed as safe havens for Mexican immigrant civic participation, spiritual and civic leaders noted that a climate of fear surrounding immigrant deportations had made many Mexican immigrants reluctant to sign the church registers. Aside from these immigrant-friendly organizational venues, we found that other mainstream organizations in fieldwork cities (such as Rotary clubs, performing arts groups, and chambers of commerce) had planned no efforts to reach out to any immigrant communities, let alone undocumented immigrants. Thus, we see that HTAs are much farther ahead than other groups when it comes to the civic incorporation of undocumented immigrants from Mexico.

The implications of this gap for immigrant political incorporation are also unmistakable, with Mexican HTAs consistently pushing for the rights and interests of undocumented immigrants, even on issues that seem to be losing propositions. Thus, for instance, HTAs were the earliest and strongest advocates for the right of undocumented immigrants in California to be able to obtain drivers' licenses, and continue to see this as an important policy priority. As one leader of a federation of HTAs noted with respect to the various drivers' license bills introduced in the California State Senate

> We did belong to a commission that supported Gil Cedillo with [Senate Bill] SB60 initially, then SB 1160. We have been making noise with regards to this issue and will continue to do it. In fact, we suggested to the state governor of [our region in Mexico] that they get involved by visiting the governor, and pleading that together, we do something to advance on this issue. (Interview, April 17, 2005)

Admittedly, other immigrant-serving organizations in California, such as MALDEF and the Catholic Diocese of Los Angeles, have also spoken in favor of the drivers' license bill. Still, compared to HTAs, these other organizations have given the issue much less attention, partly because of its competition with other organizational and policy priorities. For instance, MALDEF occasionally advocated for the passage of a drivers' license bill since 2000, but this measure was only one of over 50 legislative bills commanding the organization's attention.

In addition, the drivers' license bill became politically unfeasible following the recall of Democratic Governor Gray Davis and the subsequent election of a Republican governor who had pledged to repeal any measure providing licenses to unauthorized immigrants. With the measure increasingly seen as a quixotic attempt by a state senator fixated on a single issue (Garcia, 2006; Schrag, 2004), advocacy on the drivers' license issue has become a lower policy priority for many civil rights groups, but it remains a high priority for Mexican HTAs even today.

The Civic Binationality of HTAs

The political mobilization of Los Angeles-based Mexican HTAs on domestic issues—starting with Proposition 187 in 1994, revived in the late 1990s with the drivers' license issue, and again in 2005 with HR4437—is perhaps the clearest indicator of what scholars of immigrant transnationalism have termed simultaneity or civic binationality (Fox, 2005; Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004). It is important to note, however, that the civic binationality practiced by Mexican HTAs extends well beyond politics. Indeed, many HTAs were created with economic development in mind, with immigrants seeking to improve infrastructure in their home regions, and most continue to do so today. The initial work of HTAs primarily involved mobilizing and coordinating efforts to raise donations to send back home, and specifying their uses for infrastructural and economic development. Through their participation in the Mexican government's 3 × 1 program—a matching funds scheme by which every dollar donated by migrants is matched by the federal, state, and local governments—many HTAs have successfully introduced projects ranging from bringing potable water to their town to building roads and schools. They do so with the help of their fellow compatriots in Mexico, who have formed a "*comite de apoyo*" or support committee to oversee the progress and completion of the projects, although in the instance of clubs such as Club Fraternidad Las Animas, leaders do most of the project supervision themselves, often shuttling back and forth between Los Angeles and Mexico.

Our interviews indicate that the mobilization of HTAs on domestic policy issues first arose during the campaign against Proposition 187 in 1994 but declined soon after the federal courts invalidated the measure on constitutional grounds in 1995. This is in line with findings of Zabin and Escala-Rabadan (1998) that mobilization over the proposition "proved to be more the exception than the rule for the clubs in the years that have followed" (p. 21). Still, the stage had been set for binational civic and political engagement, and leaders of Mexican HTAs in Los Angeles began to mobilize in the early part of this decade over issues such as access to drivers' licenses and higher education for undocumented immigrants. In mobilizing, HTAs began to enter into more enduring coalitions and collaborations with organizations such as the NALEO and the MALDEF. For instance, in 2003, individual presidents of state federations and the MALDEF engaged in a series

of meetings to devise a partnership that would draw upon the collective strength of the former and the leadership development skills of the latter. In the spring of 2005, MALDEF's Liderazgo Inmigrante de Desarrollo Educativo Responsable (LIDER) program offered its first 15-week intensive leadership training session which represented a significant first step in subsequent collaborations and alliances which immigrant HTAs would forge with more prominent U.S.-based Latino groups. The sessions included training on attaining nonprofit status, interacting with mainstream media, and facilitating decision-making processes at meetings. The leaders of state federations also played a significant role in the 2003 Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride, and their collaboration with labor unions, religious groups, and other advocacy groups laid the foundation for the immigrant rights rallies in the spring of 2006.

Given the growing formalization of HTAs, their increasing collaboration with Latino civil rights organizations, and taking on more public roles on domestic policy issues, it is important to assess the implications of these shifts on the continued participation of previously marginalized constituents. For instance, does greater public visibility on domestic issues mean that undocumented immigrants are no longer safe to participate in HTAs? Our field visits and interviews with HTA leaders indicate that undocumented immigrants are not being pushed back into the shadows of nonparticipation. Unlike in the case of Catholic groups and PTAs, which saw declining involvement among undocumented immigrant members following deportation raids, HTAs in these same cities did not report similar declines. Indeed, undocumented immigrants continue to participate in Mexican HTAs, not only in civic activities such as cultural festivals and economic development meetings but also in political activities such as the massive street demonstrations of 2006, where HTAs played a significant supporting role in getting millions onto the streets, particularly in Los Angeles and Chicago.

And yet, the mobilization over HR4437 also indicates the limits to which HTAs can continue to empower undocumented immigrants on domestic political issues. Public participation among undocumented immigrants has so far been limited to relatively anonymous settings such as peaceful street marches, where participants faced little fear of arrest and deportation. We found scant evidence of undocumented immigrant members of HTAs engaging in other political activities such as speaking out in local meetings on restrictionist ordinances, writing letters to elected officials, or taking the stage at protests and rallies. By contrast, these undocumented immigrants would face no risk to public participation when interacting with government officials from Mexico. Their value as participants and political subjects to Mexican officials would depend on their economic and political resources such as remittances and votes, but their legal status in the United States would matter little. Thus, while HTAs have largely been able to maintain the involvement of undocumented immigrants while taking on more prominent public roles in domestic politics and policy, such involvement is still constrained

by the laws and police actions of the federal government and local governments in the United States.

Finally, there seem to be other advantages to civic binationality, as partnerships with groups such as MALDEF have given HTAs the ability to incorporate as nonprofits, organize staff responsibilities, and to interact effectively with mainstream media. Such partnerships also have the potential to increase leadership recruitment and training among women and second-generation immigrants, who so far have been rare among HTA leaders. However, this greater visibility and formalization among HTAs may also carry some drawbacks. For instance, these associations have largely avoided the problem of oligarchy, where leaders pursue activities or advocate policies that diverge from the interests of HTA members. With greater formalization of tasks, a greater divergence in the linguistic and organization skills of members and leaders, and possibly the creation of full-time paid staff, Mexican HTAs will likely begin to experience more serious problems of divergence in the interests of members and leaders (Piven & Cloward, 1977). Finally, the development of a full-time staff and the imperative to raise funds from domestic sources for program and staff expenses may also breed greater competition among federations and clubs. (Previously, the focus on development in the home region would have limited competition to clubs from within the same region and, even then, competition was related primarily to 'bragging rights' on development projects instead of struggles for organizational survival.) Indeed, conflicts between federations are now starting to emerge, with a few federations leaving Consejo de Federaciones Mexicanas en Northeamérica (COFEM) to create a new organization FOMUUSA (Federaciones y Organizaciones de Migrantes Unidas en USA), which has sought to create an alternative space for immigrant leadership development (Truax, 2007).

Gender Inequalities

The shift from a homeland focus to a binational one also carries some important implications for leadership roles by gender. While HTAs provide a unique space for migrant empowerment precisely because they do not pose limitations on individuals' participation—in terms of cost of entry, language, or cultural barriers—they are nonetheless marked by gender hierarchies that can greatly limit the degree of empowerment experienced by members. While hometown civic and cultural activities involve the participation of whole families including women and children—particularly with regard to fund-raising dinners or *quermeses* (small-scale festivals)—it is noteworthy that women's participation in such activities is largely shaped by gendered notions of female roles within the family, and by extension, other aspects of Mexican culture. This is a trend noted by several scholars who have examined the intersection of immigrant transnationalism and gender, with men showing greater interest in homeland politics when facing downward

mobility or loss of status in the host country (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Jones-Correa, 1998), and many women drawn to community work in the host country that intersects with issues of health, education, and environmental issues (Pardo, 1998).

Our research in Southern California is in line with these findings from elsewhere in the United States. As we show in Table 1, men constitute the vast majority of organization leaders. Moreover, our field observations illustrate the "uneven exercise of citizenship" (Goldring, 2001) that takes place in meetings, social events, and transnational activities. For instance, at a general meeting of a federation, the head table was composed entirely of the male leadership board, with the exception of a young woman recently honored as a beauty pageant winner. One particularly active woman within the federation expressed her frustration in getting the organization to incorporate more women into leadership roles, noting

> It's very hard to work in a male-dominated environment. Our federation has opportunities for women to get involved, but it's very temporary. The young ladies ages 17–24 go to Mexico for two weeks, learn about the culture and traditions, and they see the work we do as clubs. But then after the [. . .] beauty and culture contest finishes, there's no transitioning them . . . It would be nice if some of those young ladies could become board members. But it doesn't take place. (Interview April 2, 2005)

Similar sentiments were expressed by women involved with hometown groups from other parts of Mexico. Moreover, it was common for women to emphasize the need to take care of family first, before delving into any other civic or volunteer activities outside the home. The "double duty" of caring for family and becoming civically involved figured prominently in interviews with female leaders, and the concept was largely absent from interviews with men.

We also find that women in HTAs show a stronger desire to engage U.S.-based civic entities relative to their male counterparts. In this regard, it is noteworthy that several of the women we interviewed cite their involvement in such groups as Neighborhood Watch, as board members for foundations, and other civic groups. By contrast, male leaders of HTAs were hard-pressed to identify U.S-based civic groups or associations to which they belonged either formally or informally, with most of them noting that the hometown group took up all their volunteer time. Women's more active involvement in U.S-based civic and community groups, coupled with the growing binational civic agenda of HTAs, suggests the possibility for women to make greater inroads in the leadership of HTAs. Indeed, the recent elevation of two women into leadership roles in the HTAs we interviewed suggests that their collaborations with domestic-focused organizations such as MALDEF played a significant role.

Thus, while the move by HTAs toward a full-fledged civic and political binationality may have considerable benefits for the empowerment of Mexican immigrants in the United States, there are still some significant limitations related to the internal governance of these organizations. As one female organization member put it "I haven't given up the struggle. Because if I leave [the hometown

federation], I have more to lose. My community needs justice over there [Mexico]. And this is the platform to do it. But it needs justice here too" (Interview, April 2, 2005).

Conclusions and Implications

Civic engagement in the United States is marked by considerable inequality—what is true at the individual level with respect to voting behavior and volunteerism is also true at the organizational level with respect to resources, visibility, and influence over policy decisions. We find that, on these metrics, Mexican HTAs are disadvantaged relative to Latino ethnic and civil rights organizations, which in turn are disadvantaged relative to White, mainstream organizations. Amid this dual disadvantage, however, is a glimmer of hope—namely that the marginality of these transnational associations has enabled the creation of safe spaces where immigrants can participate in the civic lives of their communities. These venues are especially helpful in fostering identity safety and civic skills among undocumented immigrants and those with limited English proficiency and lower socioeconomic status.

At the same time, challenges in civic and political incorporation remain. For instance, there are few signs that women, immigrants of lower socioeconomic status, and second-generation youth are being incorporated into leadership positions within these associations. Furthermore, the lack of legal status among many members constrains the skills and resources that the associations can bring to bear on domestic policy issues (McAdam, 1982) and provides a limited form of identity safety (Markus et al., 2000) with respect to civic engagement in American society. Some may argue that these limited forms of identity safety are preferable, since the United States should not seek to foster civic participation among undocumented immigrants or those with limited English proficiency. However, past experience suggests that most of these immigrants are permanent members of American society, and that they will eventually gain legal status through amnesties or other adjustments of status (Massey, Durand, & Malone, 2002). HTAs will thus likely remain important organizational actors in immigrant civic engagement, and it will be important to conduct more studies of these associations in various regions, and across time, to determine the extent to which they continue to foster civic participation among Latinos of varying backgrounds.

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