

**New Destinations in an
Old Gateway: The Interplay
between Public and Private
Actors in Shaping Local
Immigrations Policy**

Contributors:

PI: Nilda Flores-Gonzalez

Andy Clarno (Sociology)

Xochitl Bada (LALS)

New Destinations in an Old Gateway: The Interplay between Public and Private Actors in Shaping Local Immigration Policy

**University of Illinois at Chicago
College of Liberal Arts & Sciences**

Nilda Flores-Gonzalez, Department of Sociology and Latin
American and Latino Studies

Our IPCE study examines civic engagement among citizens and non-citizens in six localities in the Chicago Metropolitan Area. This study is part of a multi-year, multi method research project analyzing how localities in the Chicago area have responded to high levels of immigration from Latin America over the last 30 years. Local government reactions to increased immigration range from integrative or inclusive policies to extremely restrictive and exclusionary—indeed often ruled unconstitutional—policies. This disparity in local immigration policy across the United States requires an analysis of the political process in order to understand why localities respond in a broad spectrum of ways to demographic changes brought on by immigration. In general, our study asks how, why, and when do new destinations adopt integrative or restrictive immigration policies? To understand the policy direction taken by localities, we raise the following interrelated questions: How do different kinds of new destinations (cities vs. suburbs vs. exurbs vs. rural) experience and deal with a rapid influx of immigrants? Do different localities experience similar or different local policy-making processes? How does proximity to a traditional gateway affect policy in new destinations? How do local, regional and national state and non-state actors engage in the local political process to shape policy in new destinations?

**New Destinations in
an Old Gateway: The
Interplay between
Public and Private
Actors in Shaping
Local Immigrations
Policy**

Underlying the political processes that shape local policy is the issue of civic engagement by citizens and non-citizens.

In order to understand local immigration policy, our research team is taking a close look at local governance, particularly at the formal and informal ways in which policy is crafted. We are examining the role of non-state actors in defining, determining and implementing local policy. To address our research questions, we are working to identify and explain the roles played by public and private actors and the interplay between these actors in shaping local immigration related policy. We are particularly interested in examining how new political actors engage in the local political process. These new political actors include immigrants and immigrant-oriented institutions that develop to incorporate immigrants socially, economically and politically. With this study, we seek to understand how citizens and non-citizens engage as political actors, how their participation is facilitated or hindered by public and/or private institutions and organizations, and how the local context of immigrant reception affects their participation.

In this report, we provide a detailed summary of the research activities funded by IPCE as well as a summary of our data, findings, and analysis.

Summary of Activities Funded by IPCE

During the Spring 2011, we hired three research assistants with funds provided by IPCE: one at 50%, one at 33%, one at 17%. The RAs began by mapping out a research plan for the two areas of the study funded by IPCE: (1) government and public institutions and (2) non-citizen individuals and organizations. They also conducted, transcribed, and coded interviews; entered data into our database; and conducted preliminary data analysis. Their work included assessing the data already collected, doing further archival research in the communities, and coming up with lists of potential sites for ethnographic observations and participants for qualitative interviews.

On May 16, we began intensive data collection with four RAs funded by IPCE (all at 50%) as well as 13 additional RAs funded by the Russell Sage Foundation and the Chicago Area Study. Two of the IPCE RAs became coordinators for our research teams: Team 1 (Government and Public Institutions) and Team 2 (Non-Citizen Civic Engagement: Individuals and Organizations). And one of the IPCE RAs became the Director of Field Research. Her duties include overseeing the field placement, coordinating the activities of the four research teams, and facilitating communication between the principle investigators and the research assistants. Funding from the Russell Sage Foundation and the Chicago Area Study enabled us to add Team 3 (Education) and Team 4 (Private Sector: Business and Finance).

In this report, we focus on the research activities funded by IPCE: (1) government and public institutions and (2) non-citizen civic engagement (individuals and organizations).

Government and Public Institutions

In order to examine how government and public institutions foster or hinder non-citizen civic engagement, Team 1 has collected data from three sources: (1) archival data from public documents such as city council minutes and other city documents, reports from public institutions, and local newspapers, (2) ethnographic data from observations of public meetings and events such as city council meetings, protests and festivals, (3) interview data collected from decision makers and representatives of public institutions.

Non-Citizen Civic Engagement (Individuals and Organizations)

In order to assess non-citizen civic engagement, Team 2 first conducted interviews with organizations (grassroots, advocacy, social service and voluntary) that work directly with immigrants. This allowed us to gain a better grasp of the issues that non-citizens face and how they address

these issues. Most important, these organizations helped us identify immigrant leaders and community “gatekeepers” that could facilitate access to non-citizen individuals and organizations as well as identify non-citizens willing to participate in the study.

It has proven challenging to recruit non-citizen individuals to participate in qualitative interviews. Many non-citizens feel vulnerable and uncomfortable speaking about controversial issues with people they do not know. Researchers have found that conducting interviews with non-citizens (documented and undocumented) is difficult due to their vulnerability. Therefore, after consultation with local community leaders and colleagues at other institutions, we are developing focus groups that will enable us to recruit non-citizens to discuss their experiences as immigrants. Building on existing research and our previous experience, we believe that focus group discussions will more effectively enable us to learn about the issues affecting immigrants and their civic engagement. With the support of grassroots and informal leaders, we hope to gain the trust of participants and help them feel more comfortable by having familiar faces around. Rather than bringing strangers together, we will conduct focus groups with immigrants who already work together on community issues through local grassroots/informal groups. Therefore, we are targeting groups with experience engaging in discussions together, particularly on issues about immigration. These informal groups are made up of community members who work together to advocate for their immigrant community. The protocol for these focus groups is currently under review by the IRB.

Data Collection

Overall, our research teams have amassed a wealth of data. Over the last two years, we have collected over 500 public documents, over 300 interviews, scores of observations at public meetings and events, and more than 1000 responses to an attitude survey. Since receiving the IPCE grant in January 2011, we have collected more than 200 interviews. This summer, our intensive ethnographic data collection efforts have been highly productive. With 17 researchers in the field, we are finalizing data collection for the entire project.

Government and Public Institutions

Between May 16 and June 30, members of Team 1 conducted 31 interviews with elected officials (e.g., mayors and city council members), representatives of city government (e.g., city planners, economic development officers, housing officers), and representatives of public institutions (e.g., police and fire departments, schools, park districts, libraries, and health clinics). They have also collected minutes from city

council meetings and attended city council meetings to conduct ethnographic observations.

Non-citizen Civic Engagement

Between May 16 and June 30, members of Team 2 conducted 31 interviews with non-citizen residents and representatives of grassroots, advocacy, social service and voluntary organizations in our research locations. To assess non-citizen civic engagement, they have also collected archival data (e.g., newspapers) and observed public meetings/events (e.g. workers groups).

Analysis

Because our project is ongoing, we have only begun analyzing the data. We have coded and analyzed our newspaper archives, conducted preliminary analysis of our survey data, and compiled a database of qualitative interviews. Our research assistants transcribe and code their interviews and then enter them into the database. At this point, the database contains more than 200 transcribed and coded interviews along with more than 100 interviews pending transcription. During the Fall 2011 semester, our RAs will enroll in a course (SOC 509) that will focus on analyzing the qualitative data that we are collecting this summer. Analysis of data will be complete in December 2011.

Findings

Based on preliminary data analysis, our project is pointing to interesting directions in non-citizen civic engagement. Some of what we are finding is expected and aligned with previous research. However, we also have unanticipated findings that contribute to new insights or challenge what others have found. What we know so far is that the picture is a lot more complex than we expected. To understand this complexity, we have to go beyond classifying communities based solely on the direction of local ordinances or policies. It is only through an in-depth and extensive examination of communities that a more complete picture emerges. There are no “pure” integrative, restrictive, or neutral communities. With our project, we want to tease out the community dynamics that tilt the scale in particular policy directions. Following are some examples of our preliminary findings:

- Based on previous research, we expected to find that communities in which residents hold negative views of immigrants would have more restrictive policies. Yet, we are finding that residents’ attitudes are not necessarily reflected in policy. For example, residents of Round Lake Beach and North Chicago have very negative attitudes, but policies tend to be integrative.

**New Destinations in an
Old Gateway: The
Interplay between
Public and Private
Actors in Shaping Local
Immigrations Policy**

- We also expected that lower-income and working class communities would take a more restrictive stance towards immigrants. However, our preliminary findings show that being a lower-income and working class community does not translate to restrictive policies as both Round Lake Beach and North Chicago have integrative policies (although their residents hold negative attitudes).
- In line with our expectations, we have found that affluent communities such as Highland Park have more integrative policies (as well as more positive attitudes from residents).
- From previous research, we expected to find that the racial makeup of the community plays a role in the direction of policy towards immigrants – with communities that are predominantly white or black taking a more restrictive stance. So far, we have found that the racial composition of a community may not play as large a role as expected. For instance, Highland Park and North Chicago which are predominantly white and black respectively have integrative policies, and North Chicago is following an immigrant integration initiative promoted by the National League of Cities. By contrast, Waukegan, a predominantly Latino city, is the most restrictive of the five communities.
- While the size of the immigrant may not affect policy, we expected that the speed of growth of the immigrant population would be conducive to restrictive policies (and support for these among residents). Our preliminary findings are inconclusive. For instance, Round Lake Beach has experienced the most rapid growth in its immigrant population, and while residents hold negative views of immigrants, the city has taken an integrative approach. At Highwood, another community that experienced precipitous growth, residents hold more positive views of immigrants but city policies lean towards restrictive.
- We expected to find that communities with a denser immigrant civil society (numerous social service, advocacy, and grassroots immigrant-oriented organizations) would have more integrative policies. What our preliminary data shows is that density does not translate into more integrative policies. Rather, it is connections to the political power structure that are crucial in shifting policy to a more integrative approach. For example, Waukegan has restrictive policies even though it has a dense civil society characterized by diverse immigrant-oriented organizations. Although numerous, these organizations are often disconnected from each other and from the power structure of the city. By contrast, Round Lake Beach follows an integrative approach even though it is serviced by one, and only one, immigrant oriented

**New Destinations in an
Old Gateway: The
Interplay between
Public and Private
Actors in Shaping Local
Immigrations Policy**

organization located in neighboring Round Lake Park. This sole organization is well connected to the political structure of Round Lake Beach and its surrounding towns, and is able to effectively advocate for immigrants.

- Although cities might appear to follow uniform policy directions, not all community actors are necessarily working in unison. In fact, local ordinances or policies often do not match residents' (both citizens and non-citizens) attitudes towards immigrants. Neither are policies fully, if at all, enforced: while some actors may enforce official policies, others ignore them and render them ineffective.
- The label "inclusive" may be misleading as some communities which appear inclusive do so in principle but not in action. For instance, Highland Park has the most inclusive attitudes among residents, yet there has been strong community opposition to an affordable housing initiative and to the placement of a county health clinic in the downtown area. Similarly, the immigrants who are primarily involved in city initiatives are generally naturalized citizens in white collar professions, while new immigrants (regardless of legal status) tend to remain on the outside.
- Some communities' approach towards immigrants is best described as "benign neglect." These communities overlook their immigrant population not because of competition or negative attitudes towards immigrants, but because they do not have the human or material resources to assist immigrants. For instance, North Chicago does not focus on issues related to immigrant integration because: 1) the city is small and does not have an infrastructure of community organizations, 2) the city concentrates its resources on addressing economic decline, increased crime, and a lagging school system; and 3) community building efforts are focused on bridging neighborhood divides between African-American and Latino residents.
- Other communities that seem fairly inclusive are best characterized as "colorblind," in that a lack of services for immigrants is due to their desire to serve all residents without regard to race. Officials explain that they seek to serve their communities as a whole and provide no specific services or programs for Latino immigrants. Interviewees were generally focused on describing general procedures, utilizing a "colorblind" rhetoric in which they do not isolate the needs of one group over others.
- In general terms, residents and social service providers cite networks as the principal "sites" where residents obtain information about access to available services. This applies in

**New Destinations in an
Old Gateway: The
Interplay between
Public and Private
Actors in Shaping Local
Immigrations Policy**

particular to registering children for school, obtaining basic services (water, electricity, trash collection, etc.), and accessing health care and insurance. The networks that migrants access are typically made up of family members as well as residents from towns and regions of origin. Some residents have mentioned that having children is an important factor in accessing networks. Others have pointed to gender as an important factor, noting that divorced women with children are often excluded from networks if they accompanied their former husbands to locations where his family resides.

- Various community leaders have reported that immigrants come to them to seek information about services, authorities and other issues, rather than seeking the information themselves. These leaders reportedly prefer to provide immigrants knowledge that will enable them to seek out their own answers. Yet they continue to receive questions from the same immigrants. The leaders attribute this “dependency” to a lack of motivation as well as a fear of being taken advantage of.
- A sense of isolation in the suburbs seems pervasive (relative to Chicago). There seems to be little sense of protection for immigrants if they speak out or get involved in organizing. Further, those who have been involved in efforts to increase immigrant civic engagement have experienced a backlash. This sense of isolation (organizational, political, etc.) seems to be an important factor in shaping the extent of non-citizen civic engagement in suburban areas.
- Overall, it seems that the undocumented community is highly mistrustful of police and other city officials – especially health inspectors. Many have reported that women are particularly fearful of calling the police when they experience domestic violence. More generally, many are reluctant to report crimes when they occur, for fear of exposing themselves to police and having their legal status detected. Multiple respondents have reported concern about health inspectors coming to their homes on the pretext of complaints from neighbors but using the visits to document the number of residents living in an apartment.
- There seems to be a relationship between low Latino voter turnout and high barriers to political participation. Because many Latino immigrants do not participate in local elections, local councils have remained relatively unchanged over the past ten years and/or have determined that there is no need to address the concerns of the (non-voting) Latino population.
- Communities with more restrictive immigrant policies seem to be characterized by a power structure comprised mainly of an “old

guard.” Despite drastic demographic changes, these communities continue to be ruled by a group of long-term, older white residents who seek to return the community to its previous racial composition by passing restrictive measures and/or gentrifying the downtown areas through new housing and business developments.

Next Steps

Based on support from other funding sources, data collection will continue through August 15, 2011. In the Fall 2011, we will concentrate on coding and analyzing all of our data. And the research team will begin holding public meetings to disseminate our findings in the Spring 2012. Because of the nature of the data collection (interviews with public officials and leaders of voluntary associations, for example), we feel it is important to conduct public meetings to report the results of our study to those who helped make the study possible. As such, we intend to hold events in each of the six localities in English and Spanish in order to report the findings of our research. This kind of public sociology—or engaged scholarship—is a hallmark of the University of Illinois at Chicago, and we seek to ensure that the results of our study grace the halls of academia as well as the streets of the communities we study; and reach audiences of academics as well as community leaders, concerned citizens, and other stakeholders who are concerned with the challenges and opportunities presented by the increasing presence of immigrants in their communities.