

Urban Affairs Review

<http://uar.sagepub.com/>

Latino Mobilization in New Immigrant Destinations : The Anti—H.R. 4437 Protest in Nebraska's Cities

Jonathan Benjamin-Alvarado, Louis DeSipio and Celeste Montoya

Urban Affairs Review 2009 44: 718 originally published online 27 August 2008

DOI: 10.1177/1078087408323380

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://uar.sagepub.com/content/44/5/718>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



The Urban Politics Section, American Political Science Association

Additional services and information for *Urban Affairs Review* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://uar.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://uar.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://uar.sagepub.com/content/44/5/718.refs.html>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Apr 9, 2009

[OnlineFirst Version of Record](#) - Aug 27, 2008

[What is This?](#)

Latino Mobilization in New Immigrant Destinations

The Anti-H.R. 4437 Protest in Nebraska's Cities

Jonathan Benjamin-Alvarado

University of Nebraska, Omaha

Louis DeSipio

University of California, Irvine

Celeste Montoya

University of Colorado, Boulder

We use the 2006 immigrant-rights protests as a point of departure to test whether political opportunity structures aligned to spur widespread immigrant mobilization in new immigrant destinations. The existing immigrant mobilization scholarship would predict the absence of protest in areas of new migration because of their low levels of immigrant civic infrastructure. Through a detailed study of the immigrant-rights protests and their aftermath in Nebraska, we find that the unifying effect of the anti-immigrant legislation on immigrant-ethnic communities nationally allowed immigrants and their leaders to seize the opportunities presented by shifting local politics, new communications technologies, and the growing migrant civil societies in new destinations to spur widespread, if short-lived, mobilization.

Keywords: *immigration; new destinations; protests; Latinos; mobilization*

In early 2006, immigrant-rights protests were organized to demonstrate opposition to H.R. 4437's criminalization of unauthorized status.¹ This mobilization was impressive not only for the sheer number of the protests and people involved but for the national scope. Although there is no complete tally, immigrant protests between February and May 2006 occurred in more than 150 cities and included at least 3 million and possibly as many as 5 million protestors (Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars 2007). Protests occurred not just in cities such as Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago that have long been the primary destinations of newly arrived

immigrants but also in cities such as Milwaukee, Charlotte, Atlanta, Omaha, and many others not popularly understood as immigrant destinations. Marches in nontraditional immigrant destinations in some cases preceded the demonstrations in the traditional destinations. The broad national scope of immigrant mobilization signaled the political significance of the wide dispersion of immigrants in U.S. society.

Why and how did we see such dynamic mobilization in these new immigrant communities? The conventional wisdom from the literature on immigrant incorporation predicts that networks supporting mobilization are more likely to appear in areas of long-term immigrant residence that have a richer mix of immigrants based on legal status and a denser network of ethnoimmigrant civic organizations. According to this scholarship, the characteristics of the migrant populations within the new destination cities are not conducive to the degree of mobilization that was witnessed in the spring of 2006. What, then, explains this phenomenon? In this article, we argue that newly emerging political opportunity structures aligned to result in such widespread mobilization. In particular, we look at the unifying effect of the anti-immigrant legislation on ethnoimmigrant communities, the shifting politics of local and national venues and the use of communications and information technology that served to unite communities across the nation, as well as the growing migrant civil societies in new destinations. To demonstrate how these political and social factors came together, we focus on immigrant mobilization in one new destination, Nebraska. While much work has gone into understanding immigrant communities in traditional locations, there is significantly less scholarship on the new destination cities in the Midwest and the South. By examining the dynamics of immigration politics in Nebraskan cities through participant observations, interviews, and newspaper reports, we highlight what the 2006 rallies can portend for the future of Latino and immigrant politics outside of the traditional cities where the scholarship has long been focused.

The Emergence of New Immigrant Destinations in the 1990s

The past two decades have seen a diversification of intended initial residence destinations for U.S. immigrants. Among immigrants to permanent residence, there has been a decline in intention to reside in the top five destination states: California, New York, Texas, Florida, and New Jersey. These

states were the intended homes of 66% of immigrants in the mid-1980s and 60% today (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service 1991; U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2006). The dispersion is even more evident among unauthorized migrants. In 1990, 45% of unauthorized migrants lived in California. By 2004, just 24% did (Passel 2005). More dramatically, in 1990, 12% of unauthorized migrants lived in the other 45 states; by 2004, the percentage had increased to 39%. The consequence of this new migration is particularly seen in the Latino community. By 2000, 33 cities in the Southern and Midwestern states that had not traditionally received many Latino immigrants had Latino populations exceeding 5,000 (see Table 1). The Latino population in these cities more than doubled in the 1990s.

Population growth alone, however, is not enough to facilitate mobilization. Latinos migrating to the new destination cities are, for the most part, recent immigrants. Because the increase in immigrant population is recent and because these Latinos still make up a comparatively small percentage of the population, the networks found in these communities are less well established than those found in traditional destinations. Communities with well-established and mature networks are thought to provide more support and resources, providing social capital to assist migrants into adapting and engaging in their new environment (Hagan 1998; Bailey and Waldinger 1991; Browning and Rodriguez 1985). Networks are crucial in fostering political participation because they help subsidize the costs of obtaining political information and use peer influence (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001). Immigrant political mobilization rarely occurs without a rich civic infrastructure. This infrastructure, however, has traditionally been weaker in new areas of migration, thus resulting in a dearth of documented mobilization in immigrant ethnic communities (DeSipio 2001). In fact, the ongoing immigration, which includes migrants from a wider array of countries, has changed the character of even more-established communities, making them more complex, dynamic, and difficult to organize (de la Garza and DeSipio 1998).

Despite the pessimistic predictions, it is important to note that much of the scholarship on immigrant incorporation and mobilization is focused on a handful of traditional destination cities that receive large numbers of immigrants. Although never explored analytically, this scholarship of previous migrations would suggest that a certain density of immigrant population is required to ensure that civic organizations form to organize immigrants. It does not anticipate the geographic dispersion of this mobilization nor the rapidity in civic organization among migrants in the new destination areas. The contemporary protests suggest that such a politics

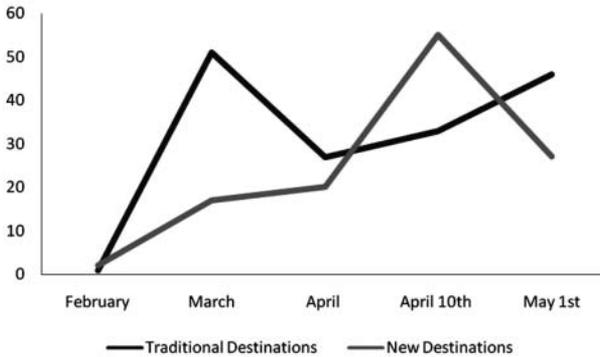
Table 1
Latino Population in Midwestern and Southern Cities, 1990 and 2000

| City | 1990 (#) | 2000 (#) | 1990 (%) | 2000 (%) |
|------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Kansas City, KS | 10,705 | 24,639 | 7.1 | 16.8 |
| Alexandria, VA | 10,778 | 18,882 | 9.7 | 14.7 |
| Grand Rapids, MI | 9,394 | 25,818 | 5.0 | 13.1 |
| Milwaukee, WI | 39,409 | 71,646 | 6.3 | 12.0 |
| Rockford, IL | 5,841 | 15,278 | 4.2 | 10.2 |
| Lansing, MI | 10,112 | 11,886 | 7.9 | 10.0 |
| Wichita, KS | 15,250 | 14,570 | 5.0 | 9.6 |
| Topeka, KS | 6,930 | 10,847 | 5.8 | 8.9 |
| Winston-Salem, NC | 1,236 | 16,043 | 0.9 | 8.6 |
| Durham, NC | 1,610 | 16,012 | 1.2 | 8.6 |
| South Bend, IN | 3,546 | 9,110 | 3.4 | 8.5 |
| St. Paul, MN | 11,476 | 22,715 | 4.2 | 7.9 |
| Minneapolis, MN | 7,900 | 29,175 | 2.1 | 7.6 |
| Omaha, NE | 10,288 | 29,397 | 3.1 | 7.5 |
| Charlotte, NC | 5,571 | 39,800 | 1.4 | 7.4 |
| Cleveland, OH | 23,197 | 34,728 | 4.6 | 7.3 |
| Green Bay, WI | 1,063 | 7,294 | 1.1 | 7.1 |
| Raleigh, NC | 2,940 | 19,308 | 1.4 | 7.0 |
| Kansas City, MO | 17,017 | 30,604 | 3.9 | 6.9 |
| Des Moines, IA | 6,614 | 13,138 | 2.4 | 6.6 |
| Clarksville, TN | 2,911 | 6,241 | 3.9 | 6.0 |
| Fort Wayne, IN | 6,268 | 11,884 | 2.7 | 5.8 |
| Fayetteville, NC | 2,381 | 6,862 | 3.1 | 5.7 |
| Toledo, OH | 13,207 | 17,141 | 4.0 | 5.5 |
| Detroit, MI | 28,473 | 47,167 | 2.8 | 5.0 |
| Gary, IN | 6,690 | 5,065 | 5.7 | 4.9 |
| Nashville-Davidson, TN | 4,632 | 25,774 | 0.9 | 4.7 |
| Columbus, GA | 5,290 | 8,368 | 3.0 | 4.5 |
| Atlanta, GA | 7,525 | 18,720 | 1.9 | 4.5 |
| Greensboro, NC | 1,765 | 9,742 | 1.0 | 4.4 |
| Virginia Beach, VA | 12,137 | 17,770 | 3.1 | 4.2 |
| Newport News, VA | 4,710 | 7,595 | 2.8 | 4.2 |
| Madison, WI | 5,744 | 8,512 | 2.0 | 4.1 |

Source: Authors' calculations from the 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census.

Note: We include cities with populations of more than 100,000 and a Latino population of more than 5,000 or 4% in the following Southern states: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Texas, Oklahoma, and Florida were excluded because they have a longer tradition as a destination for Latino immigrants. We also included cities in the Midwestern states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Chicago (and surrounding suburbs) was excluded because it has traditionally been home to a significant Latino population.

Figure 1
Number of Immigrant-rights Protests, February–April 2006



Source: Authors' compilations from estimates from the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars (2007).

can develop before citizens make up a high share of the ethnic population. Although the traditional immigration destinations accounted for the majority of protests in March (see Figure 1), by April, and particularly on the two days of “national” protest, the traditional immigrant-destination cities made up a smaller share of the march locations. Cities that have never received many immigrants, particularly in the South and the Midwest, saw more protests on April 10 than did the cities of traditional immigrant destination.

We provide this listing cautiously. The largest protests were certainly in the traditional immigration cities. We believe that the dispersion is, however, important because it changes the political landscape of immigrant organizing and offers the potential that immigrants in areas of new migration may become politically engaged more rapidly than the existing scholarship would predict.

Insights from the Existing Scholarship

Despite predictions that newer immigrant destinations will have weaker, less established networks making mobilization, there are several characteristics of the political landscape that contradict these expectations and help to explain the nationwide scope of the 2006 protests. Social-movement scholars use the language of political opportunity structures (POS) to discuss the shifting

possibilities of mobilization. The POS literature theorizes that certain political contexts are more conducive to mobilization than others. Although the concepts of POS have been broadly conceived, the initial precept was that the timing and fate of movements largely depend upon the opportunities that emerge from shifting institution structures and the ideological dispositions of those in power (McAdam 1996, 23; Jenkins and Perrow 1977; Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1983). Whereas the political incorporation literature emphasizes the incremental development of community ties as necessary for mobilization, the political opportunity structure allows for windows of opportunity to open (and close) in which unanticipated mobilization can occur. We find that in 2006, there were two important changes in the civic organizational patterns of immigrants that prompted such widespread mobilization. First, the rise in national anti-immigrant, anti-Latino rhetoric and legislative proposals served to reinforce a sense of pan-ethnic identity. This united otherwise dispersed communities in many localities. Second, the proposed national legislation shifted the politics from local to national venues, serving to connect the Latino ethnic immigrant communities across the nation, to ensure that ethnic media could reach these immigrant communities nationwide with a common message about the consequences of H.R. 4437, and to promote a collective sense of the need for an urgent response. In addition, unique characteristics of the new destinations, communities whose economic growth has become dependent on new immigrants, particularly unauthorized immigrants, provide the basis for the development of “migrant civil society” that supplements and expands the possibility for mobilization by the relatively new and smaller ethnic immigrant networks.

The rise in anti-immigrant sentiments is, in part, a response to the recent increase in immigration during the past 10 to 15 years. Cities are frequently divided by social cleavages, such as ethnicity, race, and income, that can become the source of intense conflict, particularly when these cleavages serve as boundaries for distribution of wealth and power (Bollens 1998; Massey and Denton 1993; Goldsmith and Blakely 1992). The dynamic nature of social cleavages raises levels of uncertainty and contributes to a fear of deprivation that can exacerbate existing political conflict. Dramatic shifts in the demographics of urban localities—such as the dramatic increase in immigration to new destinations in the 1990s—can potentially destabilize power distributions, serving to intensify group fears about loss of power or wealth. An important role of urban politics and policy making is to manage the conflict between groups (Bollens 1998; Gurr 1993); however, it is a tenuous process that can be complicated by issues outside the scope of local jurisdiction.

Immigration policy reflects a tension between national and local politics. Since the 1790 Naturalization Act, the federal government has held jurisdiction over immigration policy. Immigrants settle within cities, however, so the conflict over immigration is also played out in urban politics. Local policy responses to anti-immigrant sentiments occurred in 1994, with California's Proposition 187. This legislation prompted mobilization by the Latino communities, making many California cities the site of immigrant-native political conflict. The pressure placed on the federal government to reform immigration policies originates in localities with larger and/or growing populations of immigrants. With the greater dispersion of immigrants to different locals, growing anti-immigrant sentiments placed increased pressure for a national response, the result of which was H.R. 4437. The passage of this legislation by the House and the rhetoric surrounding it were perceived not only as anti-immigrant but also as anti-Latino. This interpretation served as a unifying point for the diverse Latino populations. Latino communities have a long history of organizing to protect themselves against racial discrimination (Marquez and Jennings 2000). Scholars of Latino politics have predicted that to the extent that Latinos feel threatened because they are Latinos, they will embrace a unifying pan-ethnic identity (Schmidt, Barvosa-Carter, and Torres 2000). Anti-immigrant actions can serve as the catalyst that spurs Latino mobilization (Sierra et al. 2000; Hero et al. 2000; Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001).

The scholarship on immigrant mobilization predicts that immigrant protest is largely an urban phenomenon that appears when immigrants face challenges to their status (Muller 1993; DeSipio 1996; Pantoja, Ramírez, and Segura 2001). Urban mobilization may appear in response to local inequalities, but it can also be connected to mobilization at a much larger scale. Nicholls and Beaumont (2004) propose that the city constitutes a crucial node within a larger network of mobilization. They characterize urban social movements as "modes of collection action that result from individual actors co-operating with one another in order to enhance their abilities to contest power relations" (Nicholls and Beaumont 2004, 108). Beyond the linkages made in urban localities, an urban movement's success is also contingent on the ability of local activists to coalesce with actors, organizations, and movements operating at different geographic scales (Somerville 2004). The recent immigration protests illustrated precisely these types of linkages. Using the increasingly available tools of communication and information technologies (CITs), organizations across the country were able to coordinate and advertise events using cell phones, text messaging, e-mail, and Internet Web sites. They were aided by the Spanish- and sometimes English-language

news media at local and national levels. In this way, immigrants in new locales were unified not only with each other but with organizations across the country. Local organizations and networks were linked nationally in a way previously unseen.

Finally, the new destinations themselves do possess characteristics conducive to mobilization. Social-movement scholars address the importance of resources and mobilizing structures in understanding the trajectory of a social movement (McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977; McCarthy 1996). Mobilizing structures are those existing connections, such as personal or professional networks built in neighborhoods, churches, and civil associations, that can be used to prompt collective action or protest. These networks are not inherently political but can become politicized as a result of catalyzing events. The existence of these networks increases the possibility for a mass mobilization, as occurred in the spring of 2006. Although the new destinations often did not possess the same established ethno immigrant organizations of the traditional destination, they did possess evidence of burgeoning networks. Scholars have suggested that “migrant civil society” may develop, particularly within the context of locals with increasing numbers of noncitizens, documented or undocumented. Mass migration has opened up new spaces of engagement for nonstate actors to be involved in the processes of political incorporation and contentious politics (Theodore and Martin 2007; Clarke 2005; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). Noncitizens practice a “politics of in-between” (Jones-Correa 1998) that includes not only social, cultural, and religious organizations but also other types of organizations with missions related to these noncitizens. This might include organizations in which a substantial share of clients and constituents are migrants or industries that rely on immigrant labor. Whereas ethnoimmigrant communities within these new destinations may not be able to compose the same type of established networks found in traditional destinations, because they have been such an important part of maintaining economic growth in areas vulnerable to population loss in the Midwest and South, they are placed within the larger context of these migrant networks.

Nebraska Cities as New Destinations

Between 1990 and 2000, Nebraska’s foreign-born population, a majority of whom are of Latino origin,² grew faster than that of any other Midwestern state (U.S. Census Bureau 2004). The influx of international immigration has been responsible for offsetting the population losses among non-Latino

Table 2
Change in Hispanic/Latino Population in
Selected Nebraska Cities, 1990–2000

| City | 1990 (#) | 2000 (#) | 1990 (%) | 2000 (%) |
|------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Omaha | 10,288 | 29,397 | 3.0 | 7.5 |
| Lincoln | 3,764 | 8,154 | 2.0 | 3.5 |
| Bellevue | 1,213 | 2,609 | 3.9 | 5.9 |
| Columbus | 167 | 1,395 | 0.9 | 6.7 |
| Freemont | 165 | 1,085 | 0.7 | 4.3 |
| Grand Island | 1,887 | 6,845 | 4.8 | 15.9 |
| Hastings | 268 | 1,343 | 1.2 | 5.6 |
| Kearney | 667 | 1,118 | 2.7 | 4.1 |
| Lexington | 329 | 5,121 | 5.0 | 51.1 |
| Norfolk | 299 | 1,790 | 1.4 | 7.6 |
| North Platte | 1,355 | 1,596 | 6.0 | 6.7 |
| Schuyler | 164 | 2,423 | 4.0 | 45.1 |
| Scottsbluff | 2,720 | 3,476 | 19.8 | 23.6 |
| South Sioux City | 545 | 2,958 | 5.6 | 24.8 |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 1990, 2000.

Whites in communities hit hard by the farm and rural crises of the 1980s (Gouveia 2006). Nebraskan cities across the state have seen a rapid increase in the Latino population (see Table 2). For Nebraska's larger cities, Omaha and Lincoln, the population more than doubled, but Latinos still remained a small percentage of the larger population. In some of Nebraska's smaller communities, such as Shuyler and Lexington, the Latino population grew to approximately half of the population. Since 2000, the Census Bureau estimates that the Latino population has increased another 32%, accounting for two-thirds of Nebraska's population growth (Robb 2006).

While population growth alone does not guarantee that civic organization structures will emerge, characteristics of Nebraska's immigration did help facilitate new modes of immigrant civic organizing. Active labor recruitment by the meat-packing plants in Nebraska has been an impetus for the growing immigrant population (Gouveia 2006). This process of recruitment ensures that Latinos are present throughout the state's urban areas. Although Latinos work in a diverse array of industries and at various pay scales, immigrants are more likely to be found in labor-intensive, low-pay jobs. A 2005 estimate by the Pew Hispanic Center estimates Nebraska's undocumented migrant population at anywhere between 35,000 and 50,000 (Passel 2005; Benjamin-Alvarado 2006). Immigrant concentration in the

labor-intensive meat-packing industries offered a common point of contact for march organizers.

Analyses of census data, task reports, politicians, and the media have repeatedly pointed out that international migration has saved Nebraska from losing population vital to its economic well being (Gouveia 2006). State and local governments have, in the past, worked alongside industry in facilitating immigration integration. Until recently, the state had few if any anti-immigrant groups. However, as found in other parts of the country, the climate has changed in the past several years. The passing of immigration bill H.R. 4437 in the U.S. House of Representatives played a big role in changing Nebraskan politics in both negative and positive ways.

The Nebraska Marches

Latinos in Nebraska, as elsewhere in the United States, are not a monolithic political bloc. Ethnic, racial, and national origin divisions have previously reduced their ability to ever approach political issues with a single voice. However, H.R. 4437 served as a catalyst to unify into a community what previously had been separate groups with loose connections. Echoing the past history of social movements, the mobilized reaction to H.R. 4437 started with students. On March 30, 2006, high school students led 250 protesters on a four-block march to the federal court house in Omaha (González 2006a). They carried signs with messages such as “We Love the U.S.A” and “hard-working immigrants are not criminals.” The next day, an estimated 800 Omaha students attended two rallies (Cole 2006). According to one of the student organizers, a member of the student organization Latino Leaders, the immigrant protests across the country, including the student walkouts in California, Arizona, and Texas, were an important part of the motivation for organizing these events. Information about this immigrant civic organizing in other states spread quickly in Nebraska’s immigrant communities. Whereas in earlier periods, the dispersion of such information would occur—to the degree that it did at all—primarily through organizations, immigrant-focused media such as Spanish-language radio, the Internet, and text messaging got the word out in 2006. Immigrants in Nebraska quickly learned from the protests in areas with larger and more established immigrant populations.

Less than two weeks later, as part of a day of national action, the numbers of protesters in Nebraska grew from the hundreds to the thousands. Responding to the national call for action from immigrant advocacy

networks in other cities, Nebraskan community leaders planned events in the new immigration destinations of Nebraska. Groups such as Omaha Together One Community (OTOC), the Chicano Awareness Center, the Lincoln Hispanic Community Center, the Union of Food and Commercial Workers, Local 271, and church congregations in South Omaha's Latino enclave helped coordinate the events, publicizing them in English and Spanish news media. Reflecting technological changes, participants reported hearing about the protest via e-mail, the Internet, and text messages overcoming the traditional barriers to civic activism among immigrants in nontraditional destinations (Sosa 2008).³

In Omaha, an estimated 15,000 marchers took the streets.⁴ This time the participants included a more diverse array of ages, nationalities, and races (González and Stickney 2006). The second largest event took place in the small town of South Sioux City, Nebraska, where 5,000 people marched across a Missouri bridge into Sioux City, Iowa. In Lincoln, 4,000 protestors marched from downtown to the state capitol. Rallies occurred in small cities as well; 3,000 marched in Schuyler and 2,000 in Grand Island. In addition, immigrants were bused into Omaha from cities such as Columbus, Fremont, Lexington, and Schuyler to participate in the larger event.

The Omaha march was a picture of contrasts. The marchers, led by a diverse representation of local clergy, clad in white, carrying American and Mexican flags, banners, and signs in Spanish and English, made their way west from the Missouri River up Douglas Street through the downtown high-rise office buildings to the plaza and street opening in front of the Federal Building, with hundreds of office workers peering through windows. In regard to mass mobilization, the April 10 marches were unparalleled in mobilizing Omaha's immigrant communities. March organizers were overwhelmed by the turnout.

Several weeks later, on May 1, the movement appeared to have lost steam, when fewer marches were held with decidedly fewer participants. In Omaha, police estimated that only 3,000 marchers showed up, although OTOC organizers said it was twice that size (González and Burbach 2006). While these figures may have appeared troublesome for mobilization, they actually reflect, in part, a change in strategy by some of the community leadership. One of the themes of April 10 was "*Hoy Marchamos—Mañana Votamos*" ("Today We March—Tomorrow We Vote"). Many groups that played a key role in organizing the April 10 marches incorporated this theme into Cinco de Mayo events. For example, the Lincoln Hispanic Community Center held a candlelight vigil on May 1 but decided to focus its mobilization efforts on a get-out-the-vote campaign.

During the six-week period of active protests in Nebraska, immigrants and their supporters overcame the traditional barriers to organizing. Central to their success was H.R. 4437. It offered a resource to unify disparate elements of the Latino community. Although these protests were statewide, they focused on cities, and particularly, cities with new immigrant populations that had small nuclei of immigrant-serving organizations. These nascent networks were able to translate the national immigrant outrage into tangible activities that immigrants and their families could undertake in Nebraska cities. As the immigrant protests began to ebb in the state, these organizations focused protest activity on Omaha. The protests during this six-week period would not have come together as successfully as they did without H.R. 4437 as a catalyst and the presence of the immigrant-serving organizations. Although these organizations were primarily service and protest organizations before March 2006, they were able to use the national protests as models to reshape their activities during a period of immigrant willingness to go (peacefully) into the streets. Their message of the value of peaceful protest resonated with the message that was being broadcast nationally in the Spanish-language media. As long as H.R. 4437 remained in the policy debate, protests continued nationally and in Nebraska.

Keeping Up the Momentum?

The alternative model that we propose here for immigrant mobilization in nontraditional destinations presages a decline in mobilization when the political opportunity triggers disappear and the absence of pre-existing civic organization reassumes its prior role to diminish the likelihood of mobilization. This has happened following the spring 2006 rallies. The House leadership (and Republican leaders more generally) dropped the threat of criminalization from the policy discussion. As a result, institutional support for protest declined nationally as well as in Nebraska, and the strong pan-ethnic/pan-immigrant identity diminished. Following the failure of Congress to pass any type of immigration reform, there has been an increase in local anti-immigration policy. Immigration advocates have, thus, necessarily shifted their focus to local issues. The result has been a decrease in widespread, visible, and unified mobilization. This is not to say that advocacy has altogether disappeared; however, the moment for mass mobilization appears to have passed.

The summer following the marches had several notable events for Nebraska Latinos. In July, a voter registration drive was held in Omaha's Plaza de la Raza.

Also in July, Omaha held its first Latin American Summer Picnic, sponsored by the Nebraska Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. The goal was to provide a place for immigrants to celebrate native independence days together and to become better acquainted with one another. The gathering demonstrated how diverse the Nebraskan Latino community had become (González 2006b), but it also showed the effort being undertaken to maintain and continue building ties across the community. In November, an event was held to promote U.S. citizenship. Community members, along with 100 lawyers, volunteered time to help eligible Nebraska immigrants to apply for naturalization. These naturalization workshops were sponsored by a coalition of Latino advocacy groups, corporations, and Catholic charities. This growing coalition included the Iowa–Nebraska Immigrant Rights Network, a civil rights advocacy group network convened to educate the public about immigration related issues, and the Omaha branch of Justice for Our Neighbors, a no-cost legal service to immigrants sponsored by the East Nebraska District of the United Methodist Church. In addition, plans for a new immigrant and refugee center were announced. The plans are for the creation of a multicultural “campus of opportunity” where immigrants and refugees can obtain essential services in one location. The Omaha Kroc Center, as the center will be named, is a community cooperative venture between the Salvation Army and Heritage Services of Omaha, a nonprofit Omaha organization that served as the fundraising vehicle for several successful projects with many influential executives on its board.

While there are many positive signs of continued Latino mobilization, the obstacles have grown. The marches fueled an anti-immigrant movement in Nebraska, which has been all but absent in the past. New local groups, such as the Nebraskans Fed-Up with Illegal and a chapter of the Minute-Men Civil Defense Corps have become more visible. Some of the same public officials, who only years before had welcomed immigration as a solution to labor woes, started to respond by pushing for harsher immigration regulations in the state and national legislatures.

Federal immigration authorities also targeted Nebraska, including the raids at the Swift Company in Great Plains on December 12, 2006, which received national publicity (Morton and González 2006). Swift had made effort to block the raids by offering to investigate suspect workers; however, a federal judge in Texas rejected the request. In Great Plains, hundreds of workers, citizens and noncitizens alike, were rounded up. Eventually, 261 arrests were made, of whom many were deported. The raids separated many families as parents were deported, leaving their children behind.

The community has responded to these obstacles, although not on the same scale as the April protests. In addition to holding candlelight vigils in

Grand Island and Omaha, a diverse coalition of actors integrated their efforts to provide aid to the families, particularly the children, affected by the raids. This included government groups (health, housing, human services, education, local law enforcement), immigration outreach centers, Latino advocacy organizations, community activists, religion leaders, and corporations.

The decline in immigrant organizing in Nebraska after May 2006 reflects a national phenomenon. Efforts to reinvigorate the protests on their first anniversary led to disappointing turnouts in all cities nationally except Chicago (where marchers numbered 150,000). By 2008, no protest reached 5,000, and many large immigrant cities saw no protests. This decline—which follows almost directly from the removal of H.R. 4437 and the exclusion of serious legalization proposals from the legislative debate—shows the costs of political opportunity structures on immigrant organizing. The traditional barriers to immigrant organizing were unchanged by the 2006 protests, and without the symbiotic combinations of a unifying foci, network mobilization, and media encouragement, it was not possible to again overcome these barriers.

While national legislation has stalled, local anti-immigration legislation is spreading. Ironically, perhaps, the outcome of this anti-immigration backlash may serve to unify the Latino community and its larger advocacy coalition in the long term. This unity, however, will be local and regional, rather than the national unity that was achieved during the spring 2006 marches. This shift from national to local may prove to be detrimental in the long run. Mara Sidney argues in *Unfair Housing: How National Policy Shapes Community Activism* (2003) that weak national policy can serve to splinter and silence grassroots activists. Without a strong national movement, local groups will be left to fight their own battles. For newer communities with fewer resources, this may prove to be too big of a challenge.

Conclusion

The 2006 national immigrant-rights protests highlight a significant weakness in the existing scholarship on immigrant political incorporation. Where it would predict that the core of these protests would take place in the cities that have long received immigrants, the reality on the ground was that the volume of protests (if not protesters) and the energy were equally felt in new destinations and old. Our analysis here provides a model for when we can expect to see civic activism, including marches, in new

immigrant destinations. Building on insights from the social-movement scholarship, we identify key elements of the immigrant political opportunity structure in 2006. The national anti-immigrant rhetoric—and specifically, the criminalization provisions of H.R. 4437—nationalized ethnic and immigrant identity, which allowed for what had been local debates in areas with new immigrants and changing local power structures to become national. This ensured the development of linkages between local organizations in the new destinations that spurred a nascent civil society driven by immigrant organization. New communication technologies allowed word to spread rapidly to the new communities and for organizations and immigrants in these communities to participate as equals (down to the level of dressing similarly and articulating the same, simple messages).

The marches began the process of establishing a new organization infrastructure to support the policy needs of Latino immigrants. Traditional immigrant service organizations and human rights organizations were reinforced by new players such as service employee unions, industries, transnational federations, and the Spanish-language news media. The coalition of organizations that united to join the national protests overcame the structural barriers that have limited the immigrant and Latino voices in politics.

It is likely that the promise of Nebraska Latino politics will take some more time to achieve. The Latino population in Nebraska is still young, and it is estimated that it will triple in size in the next 20 years; in that same time period, the Latino voting bloc will increase fourfold (Benjamin-Alvarado 2006). The tentative efforts to register voters and naturalize citizens that grew from the spring 2006 protests are the first step to build immigrant political institutions in Nebraska that will allow for a more routinized immigrant/ethnic voice.

Notes

1. H.R. 4437, a bill “to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to strengthen enforcement of the immigration laws, to enhance border security, and for other purposes,” was introduced by Representative F. James Sensenbrenner Jr. on December 6, 2005, and passed in the House on December 14, 2005. In addition to taking measures toward “securing United States Border,” this bill also made illegal U.S. presence a crime, provided for mandatory minimum sentences, and increased prison penalties for unauthorized persons.

2. According to González (2007), it is estimated that of the 96,127 foreign-born immigrants in Nebraska, 43,486 are from Mexico, 3,804 from El Salvador, 4,408 from other central American nations (mostly Guatemala), and 1,194 from South America (Colombia and Venezuela).

3. Community and labor organizers used pre-existing telephone lists to disseminate information about the marchers to leaders across the Omaha Latino and immigrant community. These organizers also made use of various Listserv databases to reach further into the

community. Following the lead of media in other metropolitan areas, the Spanish-language media of Omaha was effectively used by organizers as a means of disseminating information relevant to the marches (appropriate dress, transportation and parking, and public safety information).

4. Early reports of the protest estimated 10,000 to 12,000. However, later police reports increased this estimate (González and Burbach 2006).

References

- Bailey, T., and R. Waldinger. 1991. Primary, secondary, and enclave labor markets: A training system approach. *American Sociological Review* 56:432-45.
- Benjamin-Alvarado, J. 2006. Latino political participation in Nebraska: The challenge of enhancing voter mobilization and representation. OLLAS Special Report No. 3. Omaha, NE: Office of Latino/Latin American Studies, Univ. of Nebraska at Omaha.
- Bollens, S. A. 1998. Urban policy in ethnically polarized societies. *International Political Science Review* 19 (2): 187-215.
- Browning, H. L., and N. Rodriguez. 1985. The migration of Mexican indocumentados as settlement process: Implications for work. In *Hispanics in the U.S. economy*, edited by G. J. Borjas and M. Tienda, 277-97. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Clarke, S. 2005. Splintering citizenship and the prospects for democracy. In *The politics of democratic inclusion*, edited by C. Wolbrecht and R. Hero. Philadelphia, PA: Temple Univ. Press.
- Cole, K. 2006. Students protest immigration reforms. *Omaha World-Herald*, April 1.
- de la Garza, R. O., and L. DeSipio. 1998. Interests not passions: Mexican American attitudes toward Mexico, immigration from Mexico, and issues shaping U.S.-Mexico relations. *International Migration Review* 32 (2): 401-22.
- DeSipio, L. 1996. After proposition 187, the deluge: Reforming naturalization administration while making good citizens. *Harvard Journal of Hispanic Policy* 9:7-24.
- . 2001. Building America, one person at a time: Naturalization and political behavior of the naturalized in contemporary U.S. politics. In *E pluribus unum? Immigrant, civic life and political incorporation*, edited by J. Mollenkopf and G. Gerstle, 67-106. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Goldsmith, W., and E. J. Blakeley. 1992. *Separate societies*. Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press.
- González, C. 2006a. Immigrant-rights rally is democracy in action. *Omaha World-Herald*, March 29.
- . 2006b. Immigrants sought for voter sign-up. *Omaha World-Herald*, July 22.
- . 2007. Reflecting changes. *Omaha World-Herald*, July 31.
- González, C., and C. Burbach. 2006. Latinos take to the streets. *Omaha World-Herald*, May 1.
- González, C., and V. Stickney. 2006. Immigration rally cry "today we are making history." *Omaha World-Herald*, April 11.
- Gouveia, L. 2006. Nebraska's responses to immigration. In *Immigration's new frontiers: Experiences from the emerging gateway states*, edited by G. Anrig Jr. and T. Andrea. New York: Century Foundation Press.
- Gurr, T. R. 1993. Why minorities rebel: A global analysis of communal mobilization and conflict since 1945. *International Political Science Review* 14 (1): 161-201.

- Hagan, J. 1998. Social networks, gender, and immigrant incorporation: Resources and constraints. *American Sociological Review* 63 (1): 55-67.
- Hero, R., C. Garcia, J. Garcia, and H. Pachon. 2000. Latino participation, partisanship, and office holding. *PS: Political Science & Politics* 33 (3): 529-34.
- Jenkins, C. J., and C. Perrow. 1977. Insurgency of the powerless: Farm worker movements (1956-1972). *American Sociological Review* 41:249-68.
- Jones-Correa, M. 1998. *Between two nations: The political predicament of Latinos in New York City*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press.
- Marquez, B., and J. Jennings. 2000. Representation by other means: Mexican American and Puerto Rican social movement organizations. *PS: Political Science & Politics* 33 (3): 541-46.
- Marrow, H. 2005. New destinations and immigrant incorporation. *Perspectives on Politics* 3:785-86.
- Massey, D., and N. Denton. 1993. *American apartheid: Segregation and the making of the underclass*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- McAdam, D. 1982. *Political process and the development of Black insurgency, 1930-1970*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.
- . 1996. Conceptual origins, current problems, future directions. In *Comparative perspectives on social movements*, edited by D. McAdam, J. D. McCarthy, and M. N. Zald. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- McAdam, D., S. Tarrow, and C. Tilly. 2001. *Dynamics of contention*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- McCarthy, J. D. 1996. Constraints and opportunities in adopting, adapting and inventing. In *Comparative perspectives on social movements*, edited by D. McAdam, J. D. McCarthy, and M. N. Zald. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- McCarthy, J. D. and M. N. Zald. 1973. *The trend of social movements in America: Professionalization and resource mobilization*. Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press.
- . 1977. Resource mobilization and social movements: A partial theory. *American Journal of Sociology* 82 (6): 1212-41.
- Morton, J., and C. González. 2006. Swift tried to forestall plan raids. *Omaha World-Herald*, December 13.
- Muller, T. 1993. *Immigrants and the American city*. New York: New York Univ. Press.
- Nicholls, W. J., and J. Beaumont. 2004. Guest editorial: The urbanisation of justice movements? *Space and Polity* 8 (2): 107-117.
- Pantoja, A., R. Ramirez, and G. Segura. 2001. Citizens by choice, voters by necessity: Patterns in political mobilization by naturalized Latinos. *Political Research Quarterly* 54 (4): 729-50.
- Passel, J. 2005. *Unauthorized migrants: Numbers and characteristics*. Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center.
- Ramakrishnan, K., and T. Espenshade. 2001. Immigrant incorporation and political participation in the United States. *International Migration Review* 35 (3): 870-909.
- Robb, J. 2006. Hispanic population rising fast in midlands. *Omaha World-Herald*, August 4.
- Rosenstone, S., and J. M. Hansen. 1993. *Mobilization, participation, and democracy in America*. New York: Macmillan.
- Schmidt, R., E. Barvosa-Carter, and R. Torres. 2000. Latina/o identities: Social diversity and U.S. politics. *PS: Political Science & Politics* 33 (3): 563-67.
- Sidney, M. 2003. *Unfair housing: How national policy shapes community action*. Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas Press.

- Sierra, C. M., T. Carrillo, L. DeSipio, and M. Jones-Correa. 2000. Latino immigration and citizenship. *PS: Political Science & Politics* 33 (3): 535-40.
- Somerville, P. 2004. State rescaling and democratic transformation. *Space & Polity* 8 (2): 137-56.
- Sosa, Sergio. 2008. Interview by Jonathan Benjamin-Alvarado. March.
- Tarrow, S. 1983. *Struggling to reform: Social movements and policy change during cycles of protest*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press.
- Theodore, N., and N. Martin. 2007. Migrant civil society: New voices in the struggle over community development. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 29 (3): 269-87.
- Tilly, C. 1978. *From mobilization to revolution*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- U.S. Census Bureau. 1990. *1990 census of population*. Washington, DC: Author.
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security. 2006. *2004 yearbook of immigration statistics*. Washington, DC: Author.
- U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. 1991. *1990 statistical yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars. 2007. Immigrants' rights marches, spring 2006. http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=5949&fuseaction=topics.item&news_id=150685 (accessed February 5, 2007).

Jonathan Benjamin-Alvarado is an associate professor of political science and the assistant director for research and outreach of the Office of Latino/Latin American Studies at the University of Nebraska, Omaha.

Louis DeSipio is an associate professor of political science and Chicano/Latino studies at the University of California, Irvine. He is the author of *Counting on the Latino Vote: Latinos as a New Electorate* (1996, Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia) and the co-author, with Rodolfo O. de la Garza, of *Making Americans/Remaking America: Immigration and Immigrant Policy* (1998, Boulder, Colorado: Westview). DeSipio serves as chair of the University of California, Irvine Department of Chicano/Latino Studies.

Celeste Montoya is an assistant professor of women & gender studies at the University of Colorado. She studies the politics of marginalized groups. Her research focuses on the structure and strategies of advocacy coalitions (including local, national, and international actors) in working toward better human rights.