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VOICES FROM THE VALLEY OF VULNERABILITY

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ABSTRACT

“Voices from the Valley of Vulnerability”

by Randy Villegas

How do different localized political contexts shape the political participation, strategies, and civic engagement of youth from mixed-status families? This dissertation investigates the relationship between the political participation of youth from mixed-status families and their political contexts through a comparative case study design. More specifically, it examines the experience of youth in two counties within California’s high poverty Central Valley, Kern and Fresno. In this comparative case study design, I utilized ethnographic methods, immersing myself in the field, conducting semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and participant observations with youth from mixed-status families in the Central Valley region.

The political opportunity structures within Kern and Fresno counties offered both constraints and opportunities for youth from mixed-status families to organize and make claims. On the one hand, an “anti-political” climate suppressed traditional socializing agents; on the other, community-based organizations and youth organizing groups could bridge this gap to participation if youth felt as though they were empowered to be agents of change. Even so, youth within both contexts demonstrated levels of engagement that seemed to be increased as a result of their mixed status. Finding motivation through their lived experiences and identities, youth from mixed status families found a mobilizing identity growing up in Latinx immigrant families. In the chapters and case studies that follow, I argue that youth from mixed status

families are more engaged than one might expect. Second, while there is a limited role of parents and schools in motivating engagement, Community based organizations and youth organizing groups have acted as a bridge to galvanize participation in this region. Finally, I contend that local political contexts can deeply shape political engagement as well as the constraints and opportunities that youth from mixed-status families must navigate.

Acknowledgments and Dedication

This dissertation would not have been possible if not for the youth participants who shared their stories with me. Their struggles, resilience, passion and commitment to their communities is something I hope to have captured in the pages to come. I am forever grateful to each of them, and am inspired by their continuous efforts to be agents of change.

The original conversation that sparked this dissertation project was a discussion I had with Steven Carmona Mora, as we discussed voter registration efforts. As we discussed low voter turnout for youth, low socio economic communities and communities of color, he asked me about participation of youth from mixed status families. Excited in one of those “lightbulb” moments, I remember telling him I would thank him years later if I pursued this as my dissertation project. Here we are, and I give thanks to Steven and all the individuals working to engage young people and underrepresented communities in politics and their communities.

Throughout this journey I have had the support of family members, peers and mentors who have encouraged me to always keep pushing forward. My siblings, Angel, Bryan, and Arely have always inspired me as they each pursued their own respective journeys. Always ready to crack a joke, or even just to remind me to take a break from working, they kept me grounded. A community of scholars and friends created, a network of support as we collectively faced qualifying exams, a global pandemic, wildfires evacuations, power outages, and a series of other challenges

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This dissertation, and completion of this degree would not have been possible if not for the generous financial support from several fellowships and organizations. I am thankful for the Wonderful Public Service Graduate Fellowship and the Maddy Institute, the UC Cota Robles Fellowship, the UC Blum Center, UCSC Graduate Student Association travel grant program, the American Political Science Association (APSA) Fund for Latino Scholarship, the APSA Minority Fellows Program, and the CARE-UC Innovation Fellowship program for their support of this work.

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Finally, I want to express my deep gratitude and thanks to my wife, Carina Villegas and my parents. 10 years ago Carina and I started dating in high school, neither of us ever imagining what the next decade had in store for us. From our classes together at Bakersfield College, to today, she has been my biggest supporter, my best friend, and my rock. Believing in me whenever I didn't believe in myself, she continues to amaze me, inspire me, and motivate me to be the best person I can be. As I conclude my Ph.D. I am excited to root for her, as her number one fan, as she begins her own journey. Throughout the last two years, our family grew as we rescued our two dogs, Cinnamon and Spice. Obligatory thanks goes to both of them for the continuous joy they bring into our lives and the laughs they give us each and every day.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Angel Villegas and Lucia Cano. My parents immigrated to the United States to give their children opportunities that they were not afforded. Their sacrifices paved the way through blood sweat and tears for their children, as we contended with the realities that mixed status families faced. Working multiple jobs (including the swap meet on weekends growing up), not being able to visit or attend the services for my grandparents when they passed, my family experienced what thousands of other mixed status families continue to face today. My

work, my efforts in organizing as a scholar activist, and the work towards completing this dissertation, is not to be celebrated individual accomplishment, but rather an accomplishment of my family and their struggles. In this work I hope to honor the memory of my grandparents *Abuelo Cruz Villegas Saucedo*, *Abuela 'Cuca' Maria Del Refugio Garcia*, and *mi Abuela Silvia*, who are no longer with us physically, but always with us spiritually. Their sacrifices too, remind me of this importance, and the fact that there remains much work to be done. This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of my wife, mentors, family, friends, my committee, and the Valley that believed in me.

Chapter I: Beyond “Fight or Flight”: The Political Participation of Youth from Mixed-Status Families

“I think there are certain privileges you don’t really have...When I was a kid I used to think, why don’t we go on family vacations all the time like other kids in my class? You grow up thinking things like that and as you grow up, you realize that it’s because of their status. My grandmother recently passed away and my own mom couldn’t go visit her...That really just broke my heart and got me thinking about this situation.” – 22-year-old Lupe from Kern County

Like many other youth in mixed-status families, Lupe has had to struggle with multiple responsibilities as well as financial and emotional challenges. For Lupe, growing up in a mixed-status family shaped many decisions she made throughout her life, from her choice of a college major to her determination to cast a ballot where her own parents could not. Yet for Latinx youth from mixed-status families there are several challenges and influences surrounding the decision to participate, particularly when a conservative political climate and anti-immigrant rhetoric may dissuade them from getting politically involved.

From Proposition 187 to the 2006 marches in response to the infamous Sensenbrenner Bill to more recent mobilizations in response to the Trump administration’s immigration policies, Latinx undocumented communities have had to contend with the daily threat of deportation as well as national and localized policies that target them in various ways. All the while, youth from mixed-status

families face a precarious dilemma: whether to raise their voices on these issues or keep their head down in order to avoid any attention that may put them or their families at greater risk. What factors may drive youth to participate or to remain in the shadows? How do different localized political contexts shape the political participation, strategies, and civic engagement of youth from mixed-status families? This dissertation investigates the relationship between the political participation of youth from mixed-status families and their political contexts through a comparative case study design. More specifically, it examines the experience of youth in two counties within California's high poverty Central Valley, Kern and Fresno.

In this dissertation, *mixed-status family* refers to households in which one or more persons in the immediate family are undocumented—for example, a household in which both parents are undocumented, while two out of their three children are U.S.-born citizens. In discussing “youth” participation, I center Latinx youth from mixed-status families aged 14-24. The age range is intentional, as this is the period of maximum change and maximum concentrated teaching of political material (Niemi and Hepburn 1995, 11). This dissertation investigates why and how youth get engaged in politics when dominant political forces seem to be directed against their political participation. On the one hand, youth may feel empowered to be civically engaged in order to advocate and make claims on behalf of their mixed-status families. On the other hand, youth may hesitate to become involved for fear of disclosing their families' precarious status. This project seeks to contribute to the

growing body of literature around immigrant mixed-status families, political socialization, mobilization, political participation, and civic engagement.

Participation Beyond the Ballot

Before exploring the participation of youth from mixed-status families, we must conceptualize what participation and political and civic engagement look like. Karthick Ramakrishnan and Irene Bloemraad argue that scholars should distinguish between civic engagement and political engagement, defining civic engagement as “involvement in communal activities that have some purpose or benefit beyond a single individual or family’s self-interest” and political engagement as “involvement in activities related to the formal political system, often with the intention of influencing government policies and practices” (Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad 2008, 16). However, this binary categorization makes it difficult to recognize that political acts are not mutually exclusive to either of these two categories. For example, an individual may be attempting to organize a community around a particular political issue both for the public benefit and also to influence more formal political engagement or government policy.

Therefore, I use a definition of political participation that is more inclusive and recognizes that while not all individuals have the ability to participate in conventional forms of participation like voting and donating to a campaign (due to legal status or age for example), the actions these individuals take may in fact be political. In conceiving of *political participation* in this way, I draw from Wong et al.

(2011), who define political participation via five key participatory acts: voting, political donations, contacting government officials, working with others in the community to solve a problem, and protesting. Additionally, I draw from Earl et al. (2017), who note that scholars still know very little about youth participation via social media and the internet. Furthermore, in recognizing how youth strategies and organizing tactics shifted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, I also extend this definition to include political participation in virtual spaces. Rather than limiting political participation to “traditional” forms of participation like registering to vote, voting, and donating to political campaigns, this definition recognizes protesting, organizing, and advocating for political issues in one’s community as forms of political participation.

Why focus on youth from mixed status families? With an estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants living across the United States, there are roughly 5.1 million children under the age of 18 who live with at least one unauthorized immigrant parent (Capps, Fix, and Zong 2008). These youth, be they U.S.-born citizens who will gain the ability to vote at 18 or DACA/unDACAmented youth who advocate for change in their communities, can exert consequential political pressure. As noted by other scholars, “Youth from immigrant families, consisting of the 1.5 generation (those born abroad and raised in the US) and second-generation (those born and raised in the US), also present a theoretically interesting case for understanding the intergenerational transmission of political behaviors and family relations” (Terriquez and Kwon 2015, 426). From this group, this dissertation focuses

on Latinx youth from mixed-status families, given that in the larger immigration narrative Latinx individuals are often racialized and disproportionately associated as an ethnic group when it comes to immigration. For example, even though Asian immigrants make up the second-largest group of unauthorized immigrants—an estimated 14 percent of all unauthorized immigrants in the United States—Asian Americans are significantly less likely to see themselves as the targets of anti-immigrant legislation or rhetoric (Rim 2009; Zepeda Milan 2017). Given the racialized aspect of immigration policy (amplified by the media), the history of draconian anti-immigrant legislation targeting Latinx families, and the Trump administration’s rhetoric attacking Latinx immigration, it is particularly important to study how Latinx youth from mixed-status families are responding.

Existing literature on mixed-status families suggests that they are more likely than other groups to experience food and housing insecurity and to avoid contact with government authorities; consequently, they are less likely to seek resources and welfare assistance even if legally entitled based on children’s birthright citizenship (Menjívar and Gómez Cervantes 2016; Pedraza and Osorio 2017). Other scholarship has noted how mixed-status families have the lowest rates of health insurance coverage in the United States, limited access to medical care, and high exposure to chronic stressors that affect both mental and physical health (Perreira and Pedroza 2019). Additionally, the effects of increased immigration enforcement (particularly at a local level) not only disrupt immigrant families’ daily lived experiences but also negatively impact their participation at work, school, and in their communities

(Valdivia 2019). The localized context that youth in the Central Valley must contend with only makes matters worse.

Exacerbating these barriers to participation and health challenges, youth from mixed-status families in California's Central Valley live in some of the state's most impoverished communities. The two major cities in this project's case studies (Fresno and Bakersfield) were ranked the two worst cities in terms of extreme poverty in the United States (Stebbins 2018). Despite being home to thousands of migrant farmworkers who quite literally feed the world as they toil in the hot agricultural fields, more than a million residents in the region still do not have access to safe, clean drinking water due to high levels of arsenic and chemical fertilizers used to grow crops (Real 2019). The Central Valley counties in my study also rank among the highest for severe air pollution in the nation (Borrell 2018; Weaver 2022).

As children from mixed-status families, many Central Valley youth experience a low likelihood of familial exposure to the voting process when compared to the children of their more affluent and non-immigrant counterparts. While four-year higher education institutions play a role in galvanizing civic and political activity among young adults, comparatively small proportions of low-income students attend bachelor's degree-granting institutions. What also distinguishes this region of California from its more urban and coastal counterparts is the conservative political climate, particularly at the local level of government.

Though California as a state has supported immigrants via inclusive legislation, many of these Central Valley communities have anti-immigrant local officials who have remained staunchly opposed to immigration. This places Central Valley communities on the front lines of conflicts around race and immigration, and youth who come from mixed-status families are in a politically thorny position. Should they take action and mobilize in order to advocate on behalf of their families, or keep their heads down in order to survive and minimize the risk of disclosing their families' (or their own) precarious status?

Conceptual Frameworks: Political Socialization, Social Movements, Political Opportunity Theory, and Contexts of Reception

In order to understand this phenomenon, this study draws upon theoretical insights from a variety of literatures, including (but is not limited to) scholarship on political socialization, social movements, mixed-status families, and contexts of reception. Though my research draws from these theoretical frameworks, it also seeks to build on this scholarship by exploring how anti-immigrant, politically hostile contexts may shape the political participation and engagement of youth from mixed-status families.

Political Socialization

For decades scholars have studied how individuals learn political behavior, paying attention to traditional political socializing agents such as parents, schools, peers, and voluntary associations. One strand of research views these voluntary

organizations as inadequate and argues against overstating the value of participating in civic associations and organizations (Theiss-Morse and Hibbing 2005). Meanwhile, other scholarship contends that Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), voluntary associations, and youth organizing groups are crucial in fostering participation and are particularly influential for young people (Putnam 2001; Terriquez 2015b; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). At the same time, scholarship has not deeply explored how mixed-status youth decide whether to operate within or outside of community-based organizations due to their local contexts and constraints. Moreover, the literature has not adequately considered more traditional socializing agents such as parents when it comes to the socialization of youth from mixed-status families.

When it comes to the participation of youth from mixed-status families, political socialization literature tends to be too fatalistic, as there is often a narrative that individuals are doomed by their own characteristics. The assumption is, for example, that youth from immigrant families are primed for low levels of civic engagement due to their parent's inability to model traditional forms of political participation. The likelihood that they also come from a low-income household only further negatively impacts their participation, so the theory goes. And indeed, scholars have long noted that marginalized populations, as well as ethnic and racial minorities, are less likely to be civically engaged when it comes to conventional forms of participation like voting (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995).

The role of parents is particularly crucial in the process of political socialization. Specifically, parents act as models who can demonstrate behaviors to their children, such as taking them to the polls or giving them verbal cues on the importance of voting and/or civic engagement (Gidengil, Wass, and Valaste 2016). Children, in turn, will then imitate this behavior, which they will later reproduce in the political arena. This is particularly relevant to the discussion of mixed-status families because so much emphasis is placed on the role of parents. Undocumented immigrant parents, for example, may be less likely to take the time and effort to learn about a political system that excludes them, and they may additionally face additional barriers to political engagement and participation (Terriquez and Kwon 2014; J. S. Wong et al. 2011; Humphries, Muller, and Schiller 2013b). Undocumented parents are unable to model traditional forms of participation like registering and voting and are barred by federal law from contributing to any political campaign. However, research conducted by Street, Jones-Correa, and Zepeda-Millan (2017) on the political participation of children with undocumented parents illustrated that there was no evidence of lower political engagement from individuals with undocumented parents based upon survey evidence.

This study seeks to build off this scholarship by investigating the ways in which traditional and nontraditional socializing agents in conservative contexts either succeed or fail to orient youth from mixed-status families to politics and participation. It also seeks to contribute to scholarship on the ways in which youth from immigrant families illustrate trickle-up political socialization or a bidirectional political

socialization process from youth to parents (Bloemraad, Sarabia, and Fillingim 2016a; Bloemraad and Trost 2008; Terriquez and Kwon 2014).

This dissertation also seeks to advance the research conducted by Street et al. on the political participation of children with undocumented parents by using qualitative methods. As the authors of this study note, there are possible effects that may limit their sample: “One possibility is that the ‘chilling’ effects might be so deep that some young, US-born Latinos with undocumented parents refuse to participate in surveys such as ours... It is also worth considering how a distinct but related reluctance to discuss the immigration history of one’s parents could affect our results” (Street, Jones-Correa, and Zepeda-Millán 2017, 11). This study therefore tries to reach out to a greater share of this population that previous research might have overlooked. Moreover, the present study confirms evidence from Street et al. that having undocumented parents may in fact have mobilizing political effects.

Social Movements and Political Opportunity Theory

Social movement scholars have long interrogated what conditions allow for mobilization and participation. Some scholars point to the resource mobilization school of thought and highlight the role of Social Movement Organizations (SMOs) and elite support as the answer to the mobilization question (McCarthy and Zald 1977), emphasizing these as preconditions for success. Increasingly, however, the social movement literature has embraced political process theory and the role of political opportunities (McAdam 1999) in explaining how and why particular

movements have succeeded or failed. For example, in comparing the farmworker movements of the 1940s and 1960s, scholars have pointed to the friendlier political opportunity structure and more robust elite support in the 1960s as the basis of successful reforms . In contrast, in the 40s there was little to no elite support and a practically nonexistent political opportunity structure for farmworkers to engage with (Jenkins and Perrow 1977). Political opportunity theory suggests that exogenous factors and conditions may play a role in enhancing or inhibiting the success of a social movement. Therefore, when faced with a friendlier political opportunity structure, individuals may be more likely to mobilize; alternatively, they may be less likely to mobilize when faced with a more hostile political opportunity structure.

When it comes to resources and political opportunity structure, the Central Valley, unlike other urban areas of California like San Francisco and Los Angeles, lacks a strong civic infrastructure , and immigration activists face a political opportunity structure with little to no support from elites. This seems to spell doom for Central Valley political organizing. However, because political opportunity theory offers a narrow perspective on when and how social movements, mobilization, and participation can emerge, the role of emotions and threat in social movements has mostly been obscured (D. Gould 2004; Zepeda Milan 2017; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001). This paradigm thus fails to explain, for example, how Central Valley immigrant communities were able to successfully mobilize in 2006 with no friendly political opportunity structure and strong elite opposition.

Additionally, though they have not had the windows of opportunity to expand rights under favorable conditions, immigrant communities have nonetheless responded effectively to hostile threats from both local and national governments (M. Varsanyi 2010). All this to say that political process theory has severely limited the scope of social movement research to questions of emergence, decline, and outcomes, failing to explain how movements arise when political opportunities tighten rather than expand. Emotions, however, provide some clarity into how some movements may rise and fall. For example, using the case of ACT UP during the AIDS crisis, Gould illuminates how emotions and emotional threats can fundamentally shape social movements and help them emerge, particularly when there is no friendly political opportunity structure (Gould 2009; Gould 2004). As Gould explains, shifting our focus away from the structuralist perspective and focusing instead on the *power and force* of emotions can allow scholars to move beyond their rational actor assumptions and offer greater insight into individuals' decisions to participate (Gould 2004). In fact, from this perspective, youth from mixed-status families may be *more* civically engaged based on their family's legal situation and lived experiences. Rather than suppressing youths' civic engagement, it is *because* youth come from mixed-status families that they may be spurred to participate on behalf of their parents or other undocumented family members. The role of emotions like fear and threat can, therefore, illuminate why a traditionally under-mobilized group or individual decides to participate.

Further evidence also supports the notion that anti-immigrant and nativist legislation does in fact lead to higher voting participation from first- and second-generation immigrants (Okamoto and Ebert 2010; S. K. Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001). In line with these findings, recent research demonstrates that punitive immigration policies and discrimination are correlated to an increased sense of a “Linked Fate” among U.S. Latinos (Vargas, Sanchez, and Valdez 2017), thus potentially increasing their solidarity. With this research in mind, this study interrogates how Latinx youth from mixed-status families overcome barriers to participation within two different localized contexts in the Central Valley.

Contexts of Reception & Segmented Assimilation Theory

A large body of work has illustrated how governments can largely shape immigrant families’ trajectories and opportunities through their responses to immigrant groups. Portes and Rumbaut (2014) point out that governments have three basic options when responding to increased migration flows: exclusion, passive acceptance, or active acceptance. Each of these stances can lead to drastically different effects on immigrant incorporation as well as on the youth movements that emerge. Segmented assimilation theory further emphasizes that context that immigrant families face may have significant consequences for children from mixed-status families. As noted by scholars, “Along with individual and family variables, the context that immigrants find upon arrival in their new country plays a decisive role in the course that their offspring's lives will follow” (Portes and Zhou 1993, 82).

What specifically is it about these contexts that can shape daily life as well as the way that mixed-status youth experience politics?

Through comparative research, scholars have demonstrated that in urban contexts, certain conditions (left-leaning governments, large immigrant electorates, and CBO infrastructure) may lead cities to adopt more inclusive immigrant policies despite a hostile national context (de Graauw and Vermeulen 2016). Other research also demonstrates how state and local contexts can drastically affect the opportunities afforded to immigrants and their families (e.g., Burciaga and Martinez 2017; Cebulko and Silver 2016; Golash-Boza and Valdez 2018; Valdivia 2019). For example, utilizing a rich, in-depth 2-N Case study comparison of San Jose and Houston, Shannon Gleeson illustrates how different labor standards in two contrasting cities affected the goals and outcomes of labor organizers attempting to organize for immigrant labor rights (Gleeson 2008). Additionally, the partisanship of a local community plays a significant role in determining the success of pro-immigrant or restrictionist legislation, with cities in Republican areas being twice as likely to pass restrictionist legislation as those in Democratic areas (K. Ramakrishnan and Wong 2010). As these more localized political contexts can play a vital role in shaping the daily lived experiences of immigrant families, how might they also directly impact youth participation? I draw from previous literature to investigate how varied contexts of reception in the Central Valley may shape the political opportunity structure for youth from mixed-status families and how they are able to overcome considerable barriers in order to become civically and politically involved.

Building off of Portes and Rumbaut's work on contexts of reception as well as segmented assimilation theory, Burciaga and Martinez (2017) put forth the concept of *localized contexts*. In their research, Burciaga and Martinez illustrate how undocumented youth movements may adapt their strategies, tactics, and claims-making depending on the *localized context*, classifying how accommodating, moderate, or antagonist this context may be towards immigrants. Each of these political contexts can be further conceptualized as presenting different types of political opportunity structures. A receptive and accommodating context that fits the model of *active acceptance* will provide a more open type of political opportunity structure. On the other end of the spectrum, however, a hostile and anti-immigrant context would fit the model of *exclusion* and present a much narrower (or even closed) political opportunity structure. Finally, in between is a context of *passive acceptance* in which a moderate political opportunity structure exists.

Building off previous research that has investigated youth's participation in areas like Southern California and the Bay Area (Getrich 2008a; Bloemraad and Trost 2008), my project seeks to contribute by investigating more exclusive, anti-immigrant localized contexts. As acknowledged and anticipated by scholars like Bloemraad et al.:

"The Bay Area in the early 21st century is a region quite supportive of immigrants, including undocumented residents. Police chiefs and city councils in cities around the Bay have vowed not to work with federal immigration authorities so as to protect

undocumented residents who want to report crimes or use city services... results might be different in locations more hostile to undocumented migrants.” (1538)

Because of the scholarly focus on the Bay Area, therefore, there is a crucial gap in the literature. Though studies of youth’s political participation and socialization have taken place in cities where their welcoming contexts of active acceptance, studies of conservative anti-immigrant destinations are less common. Though Burciaga and Martinez utilize the case study of Atlanta, Georgia, as a hostile context of reception due to the state’s attempts to limit undocumented immigrants’ access to education, healthcare, and higher education, more research is needed to fully understand how such localized contexts may shape youth’s experiences. Additionally, looking at local government actors as opposed to national or state policymakers can provide us more nuanced insights that have previously remained obscured.

Increasingly, American federalism has allowed many local governments and municipalities to pass their own legislation aimed at policing immigrants, increasing immigration enforcement, and enacting exclusionary and restrictionist policies (Pedroza 2018; Provine et al. 2016; M. Varsanyi 2010). My project seeks to build upon this existing literature and contribute to understandings of how hostile and inhospitable localized contexts shape the political participation of youth from mixed-status families. This study investigates how anti-immigrant contexts play an influencing role and emphasizes that scholars may benefit by investigating the

politics of participation and resistance in more conservative and moderate political contexts.

Arguments: Engagement of Youth from Mixed Status Families, A Failure of Traditional Socializing Agents, and Strategizing within the Opportunities and Constraints of Localized Contexts

Though the youth in this study all had their own unique story, they each grew up within a localized structure that either constrained or opened up opportunities. For some, their experience with local institutions and elected officials led them to keep their head down, while others were motivated to organize more fiercely in their community. One of the key arguments that I make in this study is that youth from mixed status families are more politically engaged than political socialization literature may assume. The political opportunity structures within Kern and Fresno counties offered both constraints and opportunities for youth from mixed-status families to organize and make claims. On the one hand, an “anti-political” climate suppressed traditional socializing agents; on the other, community-based organizations and youth organizing groups could bridge this gap to participation if youth felt as though they were empowered to be agents of change. Even so, youth within both contexts demonstrated levels of engagement that seemed to be increased as a result of their mixed status. Finding motivation through their lived experiences and identities, youth from mixed status families found a mobilizing identity growing up in Latinx immigrant families (Bedolla and Michelson 2012). In the chapters and case studies that follow, I explore in depth the following three themes: 1. Increased

engagement of mixed status youth; 2. a limited role of parents and schools in motivating engagement, with CBOs community-based organizations empowering youth to participate instead; and 3. local political contexts shape political engagement by youth from mixed-status families.

Regarding the first theme, based on data collected in this study from interviewees, focus groups, and observations, youth from mixed status families exhibited higher levels of engagement than expected. Furthermore the engagement of these youth appeared to be positively influenced by their identities and lived experiences being raised in a mixed status family. As forthcoming chapters will illustrate, actions like voting, organizing, writing, and strategizing were all examples of ways that youth considered their own political engagement an extension of their family. Often youth would reference their own political participation and engagement not as an act in the service of themselves, but in the service of their families and the broader undocumented community. Exhibiting a sense of “linked fate” among mixed status families and the latinx immigrant community, youth sought to advocate for policies, actions and strategies that would further protect or liberate immigrants and marginalized community members (Dawson 1994; Zepeda Milan 2017; Vargas, Sanchez, and Valdez 2017; G. R. Sanchez and Vargas 2016). Even though youth were mobilized to take action often as a result of this linked fate, and being motivated to protect their parents, parents themselves, along with schools played a more limited role in political socialization of youth.

My second argument contends that traditional socializing agents such as educational institutions, parents, often failed to orient youth from mixed-status families to politics. Except for a few instances in which youth cited a teacher who encouraged them to register to vote or become engaged in their community, most youth felt that their schools did very little to encourage and support political participation. Instead, educational institutions were described as “anti-political,” with community service typically framed as a requirement and with little political discussion of community issues. In some instances, school districts or administrators actively suppressed or discouraged youth participation, youth voice, and engagement. As for parents, youth from mixed-status families often described their engagement as limited, not due to their lack of passion but rather parents had to focus on putting food on the table for their family. There were cases in which parents discouraged participation, not necessarily with the intent to silence their children but out of concern that participation could put their child (and other family members) at risk for deportation.

Instead, whereas these traditional socializing agents were either absent or actively working against youth’s political participation, local community-based organizations and youth organizing groups provided an opportunity to overcome local challenges and barriers to participation. Community-based organizations were often described as a catalyst for youth from mixed-status families to become engaged and politically organize in their communities. Illustrating that these community based organizations can help overcome a politically conservative context and barriers to

participation, this study lends support to the argument that horizontal socializing agents and CBOS can help increase participation of Latinx youth from mixed status families (Terriquez et al. 2020). Importantly, participants emphasized that the *type* of community-based organization—and whether or not they authentically valued and listened to youth voices—made a crucial difference. Going beyond volunteerism, these community-based organizations empowered mixed-status youth to realize their full political potential and act as agents of change within their own communities. Nonetheless, to some youth, even community-based organizations were perceived to constrain their activism, leading a select group of youth to operate and strategize beyond these groups. Fostering political engagement and actively encouraging youth to reflect on their own lived experiences, these CBOs led youth to embrace rather than shun their identities as immigrants or the children of immigrants. However, this study also illustrates some of the constraints of community-based organizations, noting how some youth chose to leave these organizations behind in order to more freely strategize and organize under local conditions.

Finally, this study argues that the strategic choices and organizing tactics used by youth from mixed-status families are dramatically shaped by their localized context. Local governments, institutions, and the experience of being part of a mixed-status family can shape the way in which youth participate and strategize. For example, the effectiveness of political organizing and lobbying can vary depending on how moderate or hostile the context for immigrant families. In a similar vein, youth from mixed status families sometimes chose to operate outside of the

constraints of community based organizations or government if they feel that governments were not being receptive to their needs or desires. Youth from mixed-status families thus opted for more “traditional” forms of engagement or more urgent and rapid response tactics depending on the local context. Problematizing the assumption that youth from mixed-status families are poised for low levels of civic engagement due to their families’ status, this study argues that this identity can actually be a source of empowerment and motivation to mobilize.

Research Design, Methodology, and Methods

This dissertation explores the relationship between the political participation of youth from mixed-status families and their political context through a comparative case study design. Beginning in the summer of 2018, I began immersing myself in the field, conducting semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and participant observations with youth from mixed-status families in the Central Valley region. My methodological approach was guided by the questions I sought to investigate and the populations I was working alongside. In a setting like the Central Valley or any other politically repressive areas for undocumented immigrants, it can be challenging to secure participants for any sort of survey, be it the U.S. Census or formalized research; this only became more difficult under the former Trump administration (Cornelius 1982; Stepick and Stepick 1990). Nonetheless, performing such surveys are vital, as ethnographic work can help inductively generate new hypotheses and illuminate *causal process observations*, similarly to process tracing (Read 2012).

A qualitative and comparative research approach across varying political contexts of reception was key to uncovering causal mechanisms in this study. As noted by Bowen and Petersen (1999, 4), "We use comparisons not for their own sake, but because we find that they allow us to understand better processes and mechanisms, the how, and why, narrative and explanation, of social phenomena." And as Perreira and Pedroza put it, "Qualitative approaches to evaluating US immigrant integration policies allow researchers to understand how policies and practices shape the daily life experiences of immigrants, their families, and those who provide services to them" (Perreira and Pedroza 2019, 158). A comparative ethnographic approach can thus carry a distinct advantage in illuminating contrasts between multiple cases. As noted by Schatz (2017), "By comparing two or more cases analysts might see concepts, ideas, or practices that seem coherent when observed in a single case become much less so (and therefore much more interesting politically) when examined comparatively." (pg. 15).

Additionally, central to my research design and methods was centering the safety and wellbeing of participants throughout this study. When conducting interviews, participants were assured that all the information they provided would be confidential and coded in a manner that would be untraceable. As a former community organizer and journalist, I leveraged my experience and network to conduct extensive interviews with youth, relevant community-based organizations staff, and community leaders. Throughout the years I have been involved in organizing and supporting marches, protests, meetings, and supporting immigrant

organizing groups and organizations. As mentioned earlier, I myself am part of a mixed status family and have had experiences that inform my research as we have continuously been faced with the realities of immigration policies, rhetoric, and consequences. These experiences inform my work in this dissertation and reflexivity as a community engaged scholar and educator. Conducting participant observations with local community-based organizations during meetings and workshops, I also gathered participant observations at protests and community forums. These methods allowed me to consider how a deeper localized context (going beyond local government and policy) such as geopolitical context, social movement infrastructure, and natural geography in the Central Valley served as a barrier to organizing in the area. In total I collected thirty three interviews with participants from Kern, twenty two from Fresno, and conducted a total of three focus groups.

As mentioned earlier, the varying *contexts of reception* of my case studies hinge on government responses to immigration. However, it is essential to acknowledge that there may be other intervening and rival independent variables that may have impacted my findings. These case studies not only exhibit differing governmental responses to immigration but also have different levels of poverty, education, pollution, and infrastructure (both social movement and physical) that may impact levels of engagement among youth from mixed-status families. Other intervening variables may also include the emergence of legislative threats (like the Trump administration's family separation policies), or elevated or depressed participation due to an election season or the COVID-19 pandemic, respectively.

While not neglecting these variables completely, my research centers how these two case studies' unique contexts of reception—that is, the local response from governments to immigration—shaped the participation of youth from mixed-status families.

As a former community organizer and scholar activist, I remained conscious of my own participation and reflexivity in the research process. As a strong supporter of community-engaged research, I also understood that the relationship between scholars and organizations must be a reciprocal one, and I was therefore willing to assist in whatever capacity I could. Recruiting participants from these organizations initially, I utilized the snowball sampling method in which existing study participants help recruit future participants from among their networks (Lucas 2014). Snowball sampling was particularly suited for this project, as previous studies have shown how it can be effective when discussing sensitive issues or when working with vulnerable populations. Additionally, snowball sampling allows the researcher to build a sense of rapport with the referred participants (Frey 2018). Finally, snowball sampling allowed me to recruit from a broader pool of participants and identify youth from mixed-status families who were both engaged and not engaged in their communities.

My research approach as a publicly engaged scholar is to emphasize the co-production of knowledge and expertise with community members. After completing data collection, I analyzed and interpreted data by qualitatively coding transcripts and field notes using *Dedoose* mixed-methods software. Inductively, I looked for emerging patterns and differences in participation while deductively, I examined

socializing agents based on existing literature (Schools, Parents, Peers) as well as the role of CBOs and youth organizing groups. While analyzing these socializing agents, I coded how youth were learning about issues in their community and whether they were learning about how to take action on those issues from these various socializing agents. Additionally, I coded instances of a hostile context in which young people experience hostility and were discouraged from participating. In thinking through how youth from mixed-status families navigated risk and their decision to participate, I also paid close attention to youth reflections on their mixed-status identity and the emotions of participants, whether explicitly mentioned in interviews or demonstrated in participant observations.

Case Study Justification and comparison:

In an attempt to operationalize and categorize my two case studies as immigrant-friendly/immigrant hostile contexts, I draw from Portes and Rumbaut (2001) and their conceptualization of *contexts of reception*, as well as from Burciaga and Martinez's (2017) notion of *localized contexts*. As noted earlier, *contexts of reception* illustrate how governments can respond to immigrants through three different options: exclusion, passive acceptance, and active acceptance. My two case studies of Fresno and Kern illustrate two of these contexts, as I demonstrate below. In trying to categorize my case studies within this paradigm, I examined:

The types of local government policymaking and policy implementation in relation to immigration (pro-immigrant, restrictionist, or none)

Whether local governments supported or opposed SB54, the state sanctuary law

The partisan ties of local elected officials, as well as their rhetoric or public stances on immigration, and the overall partisanship of each of these counties.

Illustrating how these sub-federal policies shape immigrant inclusion or exclusion, I investigated how these contexts also shaped the participation of youth from mixed-status families. Though local elected officials and races in California are designated as nonpartisan, the partisanship and ideology of elected officials and community members significantly influence the types of legislation that pass at the local level (Ramakrishnan and Wong 2010). Therefore, examining the partisanship of local elected officials as well as the party registration of these counties may illustrate the overall political attitudes toward immigrants in a community. As Ramakrishnan and Wong (2010) explain in their study “...the proportion of Republicans in a region can be seen as a proxy for political ideology and issue preferences on immigration at the local level” (77).

Fresno County illustrates an in-between stance of *passive acceptance*, as their city decided not to take a position or even debate a resolution on SB54, the state sanctuary law. Though the Fresno City Council now leans Democratic, the board of supervisors is divided between three Republicans and two conservative-leaning Democrats. Though Fresno County has voted Democratic in most recent three presidential elections and holds a slight Democratic advantage in terms of party registration (39 percent D, 32 percent R), local elected officials are a political mix.

Moreover, Fresno County has an anti-immigrant sheriff and a Republican mayor who has expressed support for anti-immigrant policies and increased enforcement. Fresno thus illustrates a moderate context of passive acceptance with a relatively open political opportunity structure.

On the other end of the spectrum lies Kern County, which illustrates a reception context of *exclusion*. Though partisanship in this county does not seem drastically in favor of Republicans (36 percent R, 34 percent D), local elected officials exhibit a more anti-immigrant ideology than in Fresno. The board of supervisors is dominated by four Republicans and one self-described moderate Democrat. The county board of supervisors voted to oppose SB54, and one local city council member in Bakersfield attempted to exclude all undocumented immigrants from city services. Now a member on the board of supervisors, that same elected official—along with Kern’s Sheriff Youngblood—tried to pass a “non-sanctuary” county resolution in favor of establishing a “law and order” county instead. Sheriff Youngblood has been very vocal about his opposition to illegal immigration and has outright refused to cooperate with previous legislation like the TRUST act that aimed to protect immigrants (Linthicum 2015). Additionally, Youngblood has appeared numerous times with former President Trump, supporting his proposed policies for a border wall and increased immigration enforcement. Given this hostility and dominant conservative ideology, Kern illustrates a very narrow (and almost nonexistent) political opportunity structure.

Another critical aspect to highlight with respect to the comparison of Fresno and Kern County is both the capacity of local governments and the nuanced positions each Sheriff takes on U Visa Policies. For example, it is important to note that while both sheriffs of each respective county support more hardline restrictionist immigration policies, there is a key difference between both. When it comes to U Visas, (a specialized visa that allows undocumented immigrants to obtain a protected legal status and path to citizenship) Sheriff Youngblood of Kern has long opposed and denied the vast majority of Visas that have come to him for approval (Linthicum 2015). In contrast, Sheriff Mims has not hold a similar position on U visas and this does not appear to be a prevalent issue of immigration within Fresno county. This is notable as previous research has noted that Sheriff's ideologies can shape their personal attitudes around immigrants, and in turn, can play a role in influencing local enforcement decisions (Farris and Holman 2017). Thus drawing another distinct contrast between a moderate and hostile context of reception, mixed status families in Fresno do not face the same challenges when they are victims of a crime compared to Kern.

Another key distinction between both counties lies in the composition and compensation of each of the major cities councilmembers, Bakersfield and Fresno respectively. In Bakersfield, councilmembers that are elected serve in a part time position with a meager monthly stipend of \$100 a month. In contrast Fresno's city council boasts a full time salary for council members and the city's mayor, each also with respectively funded staffs. This in turn provides for a more moderate context of

reception in several key ways. First, this creates one less barrier to participation and may allow for underrepresented or low income community members to run for office. As political science literature widely acknowledges, politics, and even elected officials tend to be overly representative of those who are wealthier and well off in society (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Yet at the same time, the fact that each councilmember in Fresno has their own respective staff members to help them address constituent concerns, research policy, and provides more avenues for engagement than residents in Kern County have, with no city within the county having a full time council.

Research demonstrates that different policy contexts can affect the strategies employed by Latino immigrants. Gleeson's cross comparison of San Jose California and Houston Texas illuminates how these varied state policies and political opportunity structures can affect unionization efforts. Contrary to what one might expect, Gleeson illustrates how "Despite the more favorable state opportunity structures in California, organization around basic Latino immigrant labor rights is greater in Houston... As I explain, local governments can be key catalysts for this civic engagement" (Gleeson 2008, 107-108). Crucially Gleeson emphasizes the role of local governments in shaping participation, and can lead to variation of partnerships and strategies. Other research supports this notion that local contexts can create unique opportunities and challenges for immigrant rights organizations, particularly when partisan majorities are in control. For example "Democratic policy makers in San Francisco and Chicago who are in the majority have strong

connections to labour and immigrant rights organizations. They stand in stark contrast to the more mixed political landscape in Houston where local policy makers are more hostile towards the concerns of immigrants and workers.”(de Graauw, Gleeson, and Bada 2020, 742). Illustrating a moderate context of reception and Democratic majority city council in Fresno, compared to a Republican dominant city council of Bakersfield in Kern, my research builds upon these contributions and supports the notion that localized contexts shape participation.

Just as Gleeson (2008) demonstrated how different labor standards in two contrasting cities affected the goals and outcomes of labor organizers, my project compares how these two different political contexts vis-à-vis immigrants have affected the opportunities and strategies of youth from mixed-status households. Similar to Houston, Kern is a much more narrow political opportunity structure, with a conservatively dominant local elected officials. Just like Houston however, this does not mean engagement is significantly lower, but rather simply shaped by the conditions and structural constraints in Kern. Likewise, similar to how unions in San Jose in Gleeson’s study have expanded and broadened their political focus (rather than solely focus on immigration), youth from mixed status families in Fresno have broadened the scope of their own community work and engagement, including campaigns aimed at restorative justice in education and parks. Meanwhile Kern which has not attained similar victories for undocumented community remains more rooted in immigrant rights organizing. The forthcoming chapters will explore these nuances and cross comparison of these case studies in further detail. In-depth and intensive

scrutiny of different communities introduces new ways of understanding how social and political conditions that remain unmeasured through traditional survey methods can genuinely affect how youth from mixed-status households engage in their communities.

It is important to note that my categorizations of these two cases and their reception contexts may not necessarily fully encapsulate what immigrants and mixed-status families may experience in these communities. Rather, these *localized contexts of reception* capture the responses of local *governments* and the partisanship of elected officials and community members. As mentioned earlier, context may thus serve as a proxy for political ideology and preferences on immigration at a local level. For example, while support for, opposition to, or neutrality on SB54 does not fully define the political hostility toward immigrants in a community, it is a starting point to dive deeper into immigrant's sense of belonging in a given area. Regardless, deportations and immigrant discrimination are experienced in Fresno County, even though it is a more moderate context, and there are welcoming environments for immigrants in Kern County despite its hostility.

Another advantage to case study research is how with this method, the story or narrative rather than the data becomes the focus. Utilizing this methodology how allowed me to study the universe of local organizations active on the issues of civic engagement and immigration, which would simply not be feasible in a study with a larger number of cases. I thus chose to conduct a case study (comprising one or several cases) as opposed to a cross-case study (comprising many cases) since this

phenomena of youth political participation should, I argue, be studied in a new way (Gerring 2016). Though I concede that this strategy, as opposed to conducting a large-N study, will limit my generalizability, it is precisely this “fuzziness” that has allowed me to explore these cases in depth, as a smaller number of cases allows one to test a multitude of hypotheses in a “rough-and-ready way” (Gerring 2016).

Unlike a purely positivist approach which can at times place too much emphasis on measurement and causality, this dissertation seeks to understand and interpret the beliefs of individuals, their experiences, and motivations, blending both positivist and interpretivist sensibilities to situate knowledges of youth within two Central Valley contexts in a distinct political time period. I utilized a grounded theory approach in which I describe statements about how actors interpret their reality, and within this interpretive paradigm, I as the researcher am considered an active element of the research process. Therefore, I have attempted to remain reflective of my own personal biases, world-views, and assumptions while collecting and analyzing data (Suddaby 2006). It is crucial for scholars to situate their work and choose methods not necessarily with the aim of producing the most generalizable results but rather to answer the research questions best. However, I emphasize that my choice of methodology was also sensitive to the populations that I was working alongside, which social scientists should always keep in mind, particularly if community members and participants are in a precarious or marginalized situation.

For a variety of reasons, I feel that I am uniquely situated to conduct this study. As a bilingual first-generation Latinx scholar from a mixed-status family

household in this region, I acknowledged my own positionality in order to make sure that participants felt safe, comfortable, and secure in the confidentiality of their responses. This involved disclosing my own story as someone who comes from a mixed-status family with interviewees. Moreover, As someone who can relate to participants in this manner, and as a researcher from this region, I was uniquely situated to conduct this study. As a former community organizer, I had established the credibility to approach organizations and community activists and had others vouch for my experience. Finally, as a Ph.D. candidate, I did my best to fully acknowledged power dynamics in these interviews and spaces as I attempted to redistribute the ownership and co-creation of knowledge with participants, whom I continually attempted to reaffirm as experts in their own experiences (Karnieli-Miller, Strier, and Pessach 2009). Even with my efforts to challenge power dynamics. I also acknowledge that research is an extractive process, and do not seek to perpetuate these stories in advancement of my own research, but rather to amplify the voices of young people and their families within these contexts.

At the same time, I acknowledge my own privilege as a Ph.D. candidate and researcher within this community. As a result I have done my best to support grassroots organizations and organizing efforts in the region through any capacity that I have been able to. These efforts have included not only showing up to demonstrations, events, and actions, but seeking to use my own skills and privilege to uplift the stories and solutions offered by those most deeply impacted. For example, in working with community based organizations and youth from mixed status

families I penned several opinion editorials lobbying for community driven solutions and bills. The first of which directly called upon a Central Valley legislator who had dodged questions about whether or not they would support SB54, more commonly known as the CA State Sanctuary law. In other pieces I highlighted policies that also negatively impacted mixed status households in the Valley such as the deportation of veterans. More recently I helped Nestor Chavez, a farmworker who had been unjustly imprisoned in a local jail and then transferred to an immigrant detention center tell his own story in *the Bakersfield Californian*. Highlighting a state policy allows the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to facilitate the transfer of people to immigration detention centers, I helped Nestor tell his story and call on valley legislators to stand with local immigrant communities to pass the Voiding Inequality and Seeking Inclusion for Our Immigrant Neighbors (VISION) Act. Acknowledging the ethical complexities of research and engaging in community based research, I hope to continue efforts in supporting these communities in every capacity that I can (Reyna et al. 2021; Glass and Newman 2015).

In regards to my own positionality and reflexivity within this research, I recognize that questions may arise around “objectivity” and “bias”. Some scholars might critique that I am somehow bringing a perspective that is not objective to this work. I contend that my own experiences and identity actually allow me to pursue this research in a way that other scholars may not have been able to replicate. I argue that my own lived experiences and situated knowledge have allowed me to (and in fact demanded) that my research be as accurate as possible. It is *because* of my

activism and commitment to the region that I was able to build rapport with organizers in order to gain access to critical data that otherwise would have remained obscured. My own personal identity and lived experiences demand that my research be as accurate as possible, both for the communities and movements that I have been a part of. As Zepeda Milan notes in his appendix, scholars in mainstream disciplines like Political science are rarely encouraged to reflect upon our roles and identities within research, that biases and should be avoided and controlled in some aspect (Zepeda Milan 2017). As he writes:

In fact, especially for scholars of color who study the communities we come from, and movements we consider ourselves to be a part of, my contention is that rather than limit or harm the quality and accuracy of our studies, these “biases” can actually be assets that help us produce more rigorous, reliable, and relevant research (Zepeda Milan 2017, 225).

Throughout the research process it was my own involvement, experiences and transparency as an engaged scholar that allowed me to access to collect data from individuals and organizations who would vouch for my commitment to the communities I was engaging. Conducting this research during a time period in which immigration was at the forefront of contentious national conversations and immigrant communities were under attack, this study aimed to understand how youth from mixed-status families, (whose families were most vulnerable due to their socioeconomic and legal status) responded. In addition to providing a deeper understanding into the politicization of youth from mixed-status families, this study

also reveals new insights and motivations from the future electorate in this region-opening the field of who counts and gets counted, as constituting “the American voter” in conventional politics-, and illustrates how multiply marginalized communities in a conservative political context can still mobilize to fight for their communities.

Roadmap:

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters. This introduction presents the study, conceptual frameworks, and the research design. Chapter 2 will further situate this study within the literature and explore the political opportunities, constraints, and motivations of Latinx youth from mixed-status families. It will survey literature that focuses on mixed-status families, social movements, political process theory, and political socialization, including both the role of traditional socializing agents like parents, peers, and educational institutions as well as a more in-depth analysis of the role of community-based organizations (CBOs). The chapter concludes by emphasizing the need for scholars to focus on localized contexts that have yet to be thoroughly investigated, in particular on regions that may be more hostile to undocumented immigrants, a gap in the literature that this dissertation hopes to build fill.

The next two chapters (3 & 4) present a case study of Kern County. The third chapter sets the historical and present-day political context, describing Kern as a site of continued immigrant repression and struggle and exploring how this has

contributed to a very narrow and exclusionary political opportunity structure. Chapter 4 then explains how this opportunity structure has affected the participation, organizing, and strategies utilized by youth from mixed-status families. In this chapter, I explore how youth in Kern navigated this bleak opportunity structure while encountering pushback and opposition from local educational institutions, law enforcement, and Geo Group, a private prison corporation operating a detention center in Bakersfield, California.

The following two chapters introduce us to the more moderate or *passive acceptance* of Fresno County, which like Kern also contains a unique political and historical context. Setting the stage for this more moderate political opportunity structure in Chapter 5, I explore the physical and metaphorical divisions in Fresno that have created vast conditions of structural inequality. Examining historical redlining practices and the conflicts between growers and farmworkers (as well as their children) in the fields and within educational institutions, I illustrate how despite this disparity, Fresno has been a battleground county, provided an immigrant defense fund for undocumented residents, boasts a majority Latinx city council, and has passed a safe place sanctuary resolution for students. Chapter 6 goes on to explore how this localized context has allowed youth from mixed-status families to engage in activism in new ways. Working both within the confines of traditional politics and outside of them, this chapter illustrates how youth have claimed several victories in the county, further exploring the role of community-based organizations in empowering authentic youth participation and voice. Serving as a potential bellwether

for other areas in the Central Valley, Fresno serves as a case study for how youth from mixed-status families organize, strategize, and participate while often at the forefront of conflict on issues of race, immigration, and education.

Finally, my concluding chapter summarizes key implications of this study beyond the Central Valley, acknowledging that while not entirely generalizable, this dissertation provides insights into how youth from mixed-status families can overcome barriers to participation and create meaningful change even when local conditions are not ideal. Theorizing, analyzing and exploring participation within this more hostile context can contribute to our overall understanding of how to work toward alleviating some of these structural inequalities and power imbalances and encourage sustained participation of youth from mixed-status families in political processes.

Chapter II: Mixed-Status and Mixed Motivations: Exploring Political Opportunities, Constraints, and Motivations of Latinx Youth

Introduction:

Mixed-status families, or “mixed-legal status families” to use the more technical term, encompass a variety of legal statuses of family members ranging from citizenship to resident to undocumented (Menjívar, Abrego, and Schmalzbauer 2016). In this dissertation, *mixed-status family* households refer to those in which one or more persons in the immediate family are undocumented. Regardless of individual legal status, the anxiety and insecurity of having a family member vulnerable to deportation can affect all household members, as family members feel pressured to keep the status a secret with silence. The fear around deportation and immigration enforcement can become even more intense in localities with restrictionist rhetoric and policies.

Contrary to the politically liberal depiction of California, the Central Valley region of California stretching from Bakersfield in the south to Stockton farther north is typically more associated with conservative politics. This rural landscape with patches of extreme poverty has been heavily understudied and undertheorized. Several counties in the region such as Kern, Kings, and Tulare voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election. Driving down Highway 99, “Build the wall” and “Farmers for Trump” signs are still ubiquitous in a region that relies on an estimated 70 percent undocumented labor force in its agricultural fields (Serrano 2012). This political context, intertwined with the precarious experience of growing

up in a mixed-status family, directly shapes the socialization and political participation of youth. Major schools of literature on political behavior, civic engagement, participation, and movements can help us understand the possibilities and constraints on Latinx youth from mixed-status families.

Several questions must be raised when thinking about the experiences of Latinx youth from mixed-status families. How does being part of a mixed-status family household affect levels of civic engagement among youth? How do these youth experience political socialization differently? How do they navigate whether or not to disclose their own identity or that of their families? How does being from a mixed-status family affect their decision to participate and the extent to which they do? How does the particular pro- or anti-immigrant political context depress or encourage political participation among these youth? What is the role of community-based organizations (CBOs) and the broader social movement infrastructure (or lack thereof) in fostering young people's participation, especially when they come from families with precarious immigration status?

With an estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants living across the United States, approximately 5.1 million children under the age of 18 live with at least one unauthorized immigrant parent (Capps, Fix, and Zong 2008). As noted by Terriquez and Kwon, "Youth from immigrant families, consisting of the 1.5 generation (those born abroad and raised in the US) and second-generation (those born and raised in the US), also present a theoretically interesting case for understanding the intergenerational transmission of political behaviors and family

relations" (2015, 426). Given that so many youth across the United States are growing up with an undocumented family member, this dissertation investigates how this familial context affects their politicization and socialization.

For decades, scholars have studied how individuals learn political behaviors, paying attention to traditional political socializing agents such as parents, schools, peers. This chapter critiques this conventional political behavior and socialization literature for its fatalism, especially the “doomed by demography” narrative that it has generated. This narrative suggests that youth from immigrant families, for example, are poised for low levels of civic engagement due to their parents’ inability to model the same type of civic engagement, their income status, and other socioeconomic factors. While SES models and previous research clearly demonstrate that higher rates of participation tend to be skewed toward those with more resources, education, and wealth, other literature also illustrates that all is not lost for marginalized communities. Indeed, marginalized communities can overcome these barriers to participation by developing an alternate set of political resources (identity groups, networks, and community-based organizations) that enable them to engage in both individual and collective action.

For example, some work has highlighted the role of community-based organizations and voluntary associations in fostering civic engagement and political participation. The role of these associations and organizations, and how much of an impact they have, is just one of the ongoing debates within the literature. While some scholars see these organizations as inadequate and argue against overstating the value

of participating in them, others point to the role of CBOs, voluntary associations, and youth organizing groups in fostering participation, claiming that they are particularly influential for young people. Still other scholarship emphasizes the role of identity and threat as a catalyst for mobilization, illustrating that identity may also be a source of empowerment that can allow youth to overcome barriers to engagement.

While the political socialization and political behavior literature might lead us to theorize that youth from mixed-status families would have low levels of civic engagement due to their parent's status, other research on social movements leads us in the opposite direction. Rather than a mixed-status background negatively affecting levels of engagement, these youth may be more inclined to be engaged on behalf of their families. However, in order to understand how, and under what conditions, youth in these precarious circumstances mobilize, we must also consider how CBOs might help them generate the resources to overcome participatory barriers.

Similarly, the literature on social movements tends to focus on the role of “windows of opportunity” as a key catalyst for mobilization but does not focus as much on examining the role of threat. More recent scholarship has looked into threat as a possible mobilizing factor in studying the 2006 marches and the Sensenbrenner Bill, which prompted millions of Latinx individuals to mobilize across the United States to defend immigrant rights. Other camps, meanwhile, challenge the role of identity and the extent to which it actually matters in terms of political participation. How, then, can major schools of literature on political behavior, participation, and movements help us understand the unique possibilities and constraints on Latinx

youth from mixed-status families? Through a review of the literature on political socialization, identity civic engagement, and mixed-status families, this chapter explore these tensions, questions, and debates while assessing their strengths, weaknesses, and moments of convergence.

The following chapter is divided into four parts. Part I will provide additional background on mixed-status families, including the hardships and challenges they face. In the following sections, I will focus on how socializing agents and localized contexts shape youth political engagement and participation. Part II will concentrate on the role of traditional socializing agents like parents, peers, educational institutions, and offers an in-depth analysis of the role of CBOs. Part III will then shift our attention to the role of social movements, highlighting how emotions and threats have been largely obfuscated within social movement literature. Finally, Part IV will conclude by discussing how the government and other institutions shape participation, setting the stage for our following chapters exploring Kern County and Fresno County as case studies. More specifically, this chapter helps us analyze how contexts of immigrant reception can profoundly affect the extent to which individuals become participants in public life.

Part I. Mixed-Status Families and the Precarious Risks of Participation

The literature on mixed-status families is vast and effectively captures the challenges and barriers facing them. For example, legal status can affect access to goods and services and also limit mobility (Menjívar, Abrego, and Schmalzbauer 2016; Capps, Fix, and Zong 2008). Mixed-status families have

the lowest rates of health insurance coverage in the United States and have limited access to medical care, as well as high exposure to chronic stressors that inhibit both mental and physical health (Perreira and Pedroza 2019). Additionally, mixed-status families are more likely to experience food and housing insecurity, more likely to avoid contact with government authorities, and less likely to seek resources and welfare assistance, even if they are legally entitled to them based on their children's citizenship (Menjívar and Gómez Cervantes 2016; Pedraza and Osorio 2017). This context creates difficulties for youth from mixed-status family households with respect to political participation.

As the Migration Policy Institute reports, three-quarters of children with unauthorized immigrant parents live in families with incomes below the threshold for free and reduced-price school lunches (Capps, Fix, and Zong 2008). Moreover, mixed-status families tend to avoid any government programs that require identification and are often unaware of the types of government programs that their children may be eligible for (Yoshikawa 2011; Pedraza and Osorio 2017). This is extremely distressing, as other research presents clear evidence that social services can help mitigate the correlation between unauthorized parental status and achievement in school; in one study, the former was a significant negative predictor of performance when compared to students with documented parents (Brabeck et al. 2016; Yoshikawa 2011). More recent efforts to expand the definition of a "public charge" under the

Trump administration further contributed to the hesitancy of immigrant mixed-status families to utilize government programs (Torrie Hester, et al. 2018). In fact, “nearly half (46%) of families who needed assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic abstained from applying for assistance due to concerns over how doing so could impact their immigration status,” and despite that rule having been rescinded by the Biden administration, advocates argue that mixed-status families may be unaware of these resources and may still be hesitant to apply (G. R. Sanchez 2022).

Latinx families in particular have been targeted more than other ethnic groups when it comes to immigration, which may be attributable to the massive Latino racialization of immigration from politicians and mainstream media outlets (Zepeda Milan 2017; Rim 2009; Valentino, Brader, and Jardina 2013). Other research has also explored how Latino youth have been targeted, racialized, and criminalized, exacerbating the school-to-prison-to deportation pipeline (V. M. Rios and Vigil 2017; Verma, Maloney, and Austin 2017; V. M. Rios 2011).

Scholars do caution, however, that mixed-status families are not monolithic, as they are shaped by many different factors, including country of origin, income, gender identity, education levels, family separation, place of settlement, and contexts of reception (Abrego 2014; Menjívar, Abrego, and Schmalzbauer 2016; Portes and Rumbaut 2014). Nonetheless, youth from mixed-status families face common challenges and are on the front lines of conflict

around race and immigration, a conflict they must navigate as they decide whether or not to participate. On the one hand, youth may feel empowered to be civically engaged and advocate on behalf of their undocumented family members. On the other hand, youth may hesitate to become involved for fear of disclosing their families' vulnerable status. Bloemraad et al. (2016) illustrate this dilemma in their piece "Staying out of Trouble" and Doing What Is Right." While youth may be cognizant of the benefits of "staying out of trouble" or "not rocking the boat," they may also feel a pressure to "do what is right" and advocate on behalf of their family members who are excluded from participation by leveraging their own voice and legal status (Bloemraad, Sarabia, and Fillingim 2016b). These dual demands create an immense amount of pressure on the children of immigrant parents who often have to navigate the political system on their own.

These dual demands can also have various consequences. One recent study by Desmond and Travis (2018) on urban neighborhoods can help us theorize how a similar framework might apply to mixed-status families. Combining statistical analysis with in-depth ethnography of poor urban residents in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, they demonstrate how living and surviving in this neighborhood may lead to adverse effects. Though residents engage in acts of resistance and resilience and enjoy support systems in their community, they are also exposed to deeply traumatic events that can alter their perceptions and behavior. While conventional social capital literature would tell us that

interactions with neighbors and support groups would increase civic capacity (Robert D. Putnam 1995a; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), this article importantly notes that in poor, marginalized neighborhoods, these interactions are not sufficient to mitigate the suppression of participation that occurs as a result of poverty and suffering (Desmond and Travis 2018). Although the poor urban neighborhood can be seen as a site of civic encouragement through the interactions and support that poor residents give one another, it also serves as a site of extreme hardship, where residents may feel disillusioned to the point that it undermines political capacity (Desmond and Travis 2018). It is here where youth from mixed-status families may fall victim to this dual reality as well.

If we apply this framework to mixed-status families, one can observe the similarity of adverse effects that undermine political capacity. Although being part of a mixed-status family can motivate an individual to take action, it may also have depressing effects due to the trauma, anxiety, and depression that youth encounter (Menjívar and Gómez Cervantes 2016; Langhout et al. 2018; Perreira and Pedroza 2019; Pedraza and Osorio 2017). As Getrich (2008) describes this duality in her work on mixed-status families: “The teens’ boundary maintenance requires that they reconcile two sometimes very different goals: affirming their immigrant roots versus proving their worth as deserving American citizen–subjects” (Getrich 2008, 552).

As illustrated above, mixed-status families face financial, mental, and health challenges as a result of their status. Youth in particular must navigate this duality of demands when it comes to the decision to participate, weighing the associated costs and navigating their own personal identities as children of immigrants and sometimes immigrants themselves. In the next section, I turn more directly to questions of political socialization, organizations, and social capital in an attempt to answer if and how youth from mixed-status families are poised for engagement.

Part II. Political Socialization, Organizations, and Social Capital

The next part of this chapter is divided as follows. First, I will explore the political socialization literature, which describes learned social behavior through traditional socializing agents like parents, peers, and educational institutions. Second, I will turn to a more in-depth discussion of organizations as socializing agents and how social capital does or does not foster political participation. Finally, I will conclude by discussing literature that argues that organizations and social capital can themselves negatively affect participation.

Why and how do individuals participate in politics or in their communities more generally? Scholarship in political science points to political socialization as the key. According to one of the founding scholars in this field, political socialization can be defined as the “learning of social patterns corresponding to his societal positions as mediated through various agencies of society” (Hyman 1959, 18). Even so, scholars have problematized the concept of political socialization since its inception. The

study of political socialization dates back to the 1950s, when scholars began to posit that political behavior was a learned behavior and that the pre-adult stage of life was critical for nurturing it (Niemi and Hepburn 1995). Other scholars critiqued the notion that any behavior learned in the early stages of life was fully determinant of political behavior at later stages (T. J. Cook and Scioli 1972; Searing, Schwartz, and Lind 1973). However, there remained a consensus that research on political socialization would contribute much-needed insights on political behavior.

Scholars have studied the various effects of learned behavior via family ties, parents schools, peer groups, media, and the increasing role of the internet and its effects on civic engagement (Robert D. Putnam 1995b; Diemer 2012; Lee, Shah, and McLeod 2013; Humphries, Muller, and Schiller 2013c; Hanks 1981; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). This paradigm emphasizes how young people absorb and learn behavior from the world around them. Within this model, there are three broad categories of influences that seem particularly relevant to the circumstances of youth from mixed-status families: parents, socio-economic status (SES), and education.

A. The Role of Parents in Political Socialization

One idea from the early literature, which is no longer as prevalent, concerns intergenerational partisan ties. The notion is that if parents are devoted to a particular party or ideology, their children will be more likely to imitate this devotion. More generally, though, Elisabeth Gidengil et al. (2016) have shown that the role of parents

is particularly crucial in the process of political socialization. Specifically, parents act as models who can demonstrate behaviors to their children, such as taking them to the polls or giving them verbal cues on the importance of voting and/or civic engagement (Gidengil, Wass, and Valaste 2016). Children, in turn, will then imitate this behavior and later reproduce it on their own. Other research suggests that parents who talk to their adolescent children about current events and public affairs have a positive influence on their civic development (McIntosh, Hart, and Youniss 2007). Research by Diemer (2012), utilizing a longitudinal panel study of U.S. high school students, demonstrates similar results, emphasizing parents' role in fostering marginalized youths' civic and political participation.

Parental influence is particularly relevant to the discussion of mixed-status families. because so much emphasis on political socialization of children is placed on the role of parents. Whereas parents who are wealthier, whiter, and born U.S. citizens may be more inclined to engage in the electorate and follow current politics and events (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), undocumented immigrant parents cannot vote, register, or donate to political campaigns. They may also be afraid to participate in other ways, and may be less likely to take the time and effort to learn about a political system that excludes them (Terriquez and Kwon 2014; J. S. Wong et al. 2011; Humphries, Muller, and Schiller 2013b). As noted by Wong et al. (2011), "For immigrants who settled in America as children, and for children of immigrants, the experience of socialization to norms and practices in a non-U.S. context are likely to linger given the long standing (if

debated) effects of intergenerational transmission of political beliefs and values from parents to their offspring” (36). Scholars have also noted the linguistic, racial, and legal barriers that immigrant parents/immigrant families must also overcome in order to participate (Terriquez and Kwon 2014; Bloemraad and Trost 2008). Although youth who have some legal status (either from having been born in the United States or through DACA) may be afforded more protection when compared to their undocumented family members, they are still deeply impacted by their families’ vulnerability to deportation (Abrego 2011).

Socialization, interestingly, can work both ways. In their research, Bloemraad and Trost discover evidence of upward socialization from teens to parents in immigrant households, not only providing translations but also passing on political viewpoints and encouragement. (Bloemraad and Trost 2008). Moreover, the authors note the role that legal status can actually encourage youth in mixed-status family households to participate, with U.S.-citizen children motivated to take action on behalf of their families: “This [citizenship] provides them with protection and more tools for political participation than those of their parents. These children might even feel a greater need and responsibility to participate for their parents’ sake” (Bloemraad and Trost 2008, 521). This is a crucial intervention in the literature, as it demonstrates that some youth from mixed-status families may in fact feel more obligated to participate as a result of their mixed status. This motivation will be further explored in the chapters that follow.

Other research also supports Bloemraad and Trost's contention that youth who are politically active can influence their parent's engagement and incorporation through a "trickle-up" model of socialization (Terriquez and Kwon 2014; Bloemraad, Sarabia, and Fillingim 2016b). Terriquez and Kwon, for example, note that while most youth do not promote their parent's participation or political engagement, youth who are particularly active and equipped with civic skills can play incorporate their families into the political arena (Terriquez and Kwon 2014; P. J. Wong and Tseng 2008). Noting the effects of this "trickle up" paradigm of political socialization is critical for understanding the political potential that youth from mixed-status families have. This demonstrates how 1.5 generation youth and 2nd generation youth from mixed-status families can challenge scholars not only to move away from "top-down" paradigms of social movements—where elites play a crucial role (McCarthy and Zald 1977) and parents directly influence the behavior of their children—but also to reconceptualize political socialization from the "bottom up" as youth socialize their elders. This has significant ramifications for not only the engagement of youth from mixed status families but perhaps also for the future engagement of their parents. In order to understand the political socialization of youth from mixed-status families, we must thus look beyond the top-down parent-child paradigm and investigate how youth may actually be politicizing their parents.

B. The Role of Socioeconomic Status (SES) in Political Socialization

Other bodies of literature have documented how lower socioeconomic status (SES) parents are less likely to model political participation to their children, a

significant predictor of youths' future political participation (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Furthermore, youth of color and youth from mixed-status families may not be likely to participate in a system where legacies of disenfranchisement have often served to exclude their voices (APSA Task Force 2004). These hesitations to participate or even discuss politics can also be seen with low-income families (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995).

Previous research, therefore, would predict that youth from mixed-status families would be at a disadvantage when it comes to their civic development, as their parents are less likely to transmit political knowledge or interest and model political behavior. Furthermore, because mixed-status families are more susceptible to poverty, limited English proficiency, and reduced socioeconomic progress (Capps, Fix, and Zong 2008), they face additional barriers to incorporation and engagement. This logic leads to a fatalistic view for youth from immigrant families, and this “top-down” model of political socialization is also supported by studies that acknowledge the barriers that immigrant parents encounter and analyze how these can negatively impact the next generation's civic engagement (Terriquez and Kwon 2014; Humphries, Muller, and Schiller 2013c). However, while the literature on political socialization emphasizes the influence of parents, they are not the only major influence on their children's participation. Education and voluntary associations can play a role as well, as we will see below.

C. The Role of Education

Research on the children of immigrants in the United States has found that education and schooling may affect youth likelihood of registering to vote and may have even more influence than their parent's level of education. Studies demonstrates that the academic rigor of courses in high school "is more consequential for political participation among Latino first- and second-generation students than it is for white third-plus-generation adolescents" (Humphries, Muller, and Schiller 2013, 1279). Other scholarship also points to the vital role of civics education and civics programs, both inside and outside of the classroom. Having access to a better civics education and exposure to active politicized programs can positively affect civic skills and the propensity to participate in civic and political life (Patrick 2002; Terriquez 2015b; Galston 2001; Niemi and Junn 1998).

Though civic education in high school is important, there is also evidence that the role of post-secondary education can also impact youth's civic engagement. Students who participate in undergraduate courses and extracurricular activities that focus on political engagement can gain a greater sense of political efficacy and understanding (Beaumont 2010; Terriquez, Villegas, and Villalobos 2019). According to Beaumont (2010), political efficacy is "the belief that political change is possible and that we have the capacity to contribute to it through deliberate judgments and actions" (516). Though previous research attempted to dismiss the role of civics courses in fostering political socialization (Langton and Jennings 1968), more recent work has illustrated that such education does in fact matter and plays a significant role in the political socialization of youth (Niemi and Junn 1998; Galston 2001;

Humphries, Muller, and Schiller 2013b). In addition, youth who planned to graduate from a four-year university have been found to be more civically engaged than their peers with plans to attend a two-year college or no higher education at all (Syvertsen et al. 2011). This matters particularly in the context of the Central Valley, where four of the five lowest-ranking cities in the nation in terms of the number of Latinos seeking a bachelor's degree are located: Bakersfield, Visalia, Stockton, and Modesto (Jones 2015). For those attending community colleges, recent scholarship illustrates how undocumented students must still navigate a landscape of “constrained inclusion” in the Central Valley in which they must deal with the demands of schoolwork along with the cumbersome reality of being undocumented (Negrón-Gonzales 2017). As Gonzales notes, this is “a group of young people who have been marginalized in the broader body of literature about undocumented college students, deprioritized both by geography (because they are located in the often-overlooked agricultural belt of the state) and constructions of prestige (because they are community college students, not yet in the 4-year university system)” (Negrón-Gonzales 2017, 106). The resilience and lived experience of this population is not to be underestimated, and it is important to acknowledge the unique Central Valley context that shapes their political participation.

In sum, traditional political socializing agents play a small part in socializing youth from mixed-status families. Since they do not have parents who are able to model political behavior and are more likely to come from lower socioeconomic families, traditional top-down socialization models argue that the transmission of

political behavior to them will be low. Furthermore, these effects may be exacerbated in the Central Valley, where higher education institutions remain out of reach for many youth, and these institutions may fail to orient youth to participation. Though this literature strongly illustrates how political behavior may be transmitted from parent to child, it does not consider the transmission of political behaviors from child to parents, a phenomenon that may emerge in mixed-status families. An overreliance on traditional political socializing agents also produces the fatalistic assumption that youth from mixed-status families will fail to become politicized. Additionally, this literature should do more to consider the role of community-based organizations as a catalyst for action, actively politicizing and socializing youth where other traditional socializing agents have failed. I discuss this issue below.

D. Can Organizations Exert a Positive Influence on Political Socialization?

Moving beyond families and schools, societal organizations powerfully shape the contours of youth political action. One of the most prominent debates that bridges the disciplines of political science and sociology is over the extent to which community-based organizations and voluntary associations foster participation, and whether membership actually translates to political participation or social capital. In one of his most influential works, *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam (1995) writes, “By analogy with notions of physical capital and human capital... ‘social capital’ refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (66). In this work, Putnam

illustrates how civil society is in decline in the United States, which he primarily attributes to the rise in television viewership.

Further, Putnam argues that America's shrinking social capital can be seen in declining voter turnout, public meeting and church attendance, labor union memberships, and in almost any measure connected to politics or communities. Putnam even notes that more Americans are bowling today more than ever, but they are doing so alone, not in any organized league. Hence the title of his seminal books, *Bowling Alone* (Putnam 2001). Though Putnam's contribution is not to be downplayed, critics have faulted it for glossing over the fact that not everyone has an equal opportunity to participate in civic associations. However, more recent scholarship clearly illustrates that race, education, and class can clearly limit the capacity for individuals to participate (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2013).

For example, unlike Putnam, Garcia Bedolla also emphasizes the importance of resources and constraints that could limit access to particular types of social capital. She writes: "Most political studies assume near-absolute agency on the part of political actors, making participation a question of personal choice, rather than of legal or structural constraint" (2005, 3). As such, social capital in and of itself can also be a form of inequality, as it is more difficult for those who come from low socio-economic or marginalized communities to cultivate it. Here, Garcia Bedolla illustrates how the capacity to develop social capital is taken for granted by most

scholars but should instead be considered within each specific context of study, which I do in this exploration of the participation of youth from mixed-status families.

Other scholars take issue with Putnam's reduction of civil society to broad "voluntary associations" and additionally argue against these voluntary associations as the sole source of social capital (Cohen 1997, 9). Cohen takes issue with the fact that Putnam does not distinguish between horizontal and vertical organizations and, like Garcia Bedolla, argues that the *type* of organization plays a crucial role, particularly for marginalized groups. Equally significant are the differences between social, charitable, and overtly political organizations, which Putnam does not explore. This critique is especially relevant because other research has demonstrated how youth who participate in youth organizing groups exhibit higher levels of civic engagement and politicization than those in public-oriented associations or even in student governments (Terriquez 2015b; Taft and Gordon 2013). In the chapters that follow, I further contribute to this debate by covering youth reactions to two different types of community-based organizations: those focused on volunteerism with an absence of political education/discussions and those that open a space for genuine youth voice, participation, and empowerment.

Aside from Putnam, other scholars have also illustrated just how empowering community-based organizations can be. In low-income and immigrant communities, CBOs can foster not only a sense of empowerment but can also lead to gains in political efficacy and cultures of engagement in Latinx communities and marginalized communities that are most at risk for poor health outcomes (Bloemraad and Terriquez

2016; Terriquez and Lin 2019; Joslyn and Cigler 2001; Diaz 1996). Though we know that the wealthier and more educated tend to participate in civic organizations at higher rates (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Putnam 2001), research demonstrates that CBOs can help youth overcome barriers to participation and develop a *critical consciousness* and *critical civic praxis*, a collective capacity to work toward social-justice-oriented goals (Watts and Flanagan 2007; Ginwright and Cammarota 2007). This is noteworthy for several reasons. These CBOs can not only catalyze participation by shaping individual motivations and attitudes but also help *sustain* participation by connecting individuals to a network of people who are likely to share similar concerns. The work of McFarland and Thomas (2006) supports this notion, as the authors use two longitudinal studies to illustrate that selective extracurricular clubs and organizations like student councils, service clubs, and performing arts clubs are crucial sites of socialization that can reinforce sustained participation.

Other research demonstrates the importance of intra-ethnic (or cross-ethnic) associational “networks of engagement” in maintaining peace (Varshney 2001). When people join voluntary associations, they may learn new civic skills that may not seem political at first (e.g., writing a letter, leading a meeting) but can then be transferred to the political arena (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Though there seems to be a consensus among scholars that these CBOs and voluntary associations improve engagement and participation (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Putnam

2001; Ginwright and Cammarota 2007; Terriquez 2015b; Hanks 1981), the question of which types foster *meaningful* inclusion is much more contested.

E. The Dark Side of Social Capital and Organizations

Would many of our political problems with respect to participation and representation simply be solved if we all just simply joined our local bowling leagues, as the title of Putnam's book suggests? Not according to Morse and Hibbing (2005), who argue against overstating the value of participating in civic associations and organizations. In fact, they argue that not only are scholars exaggerating the influence of civic participation on political participation, but that these associations may actually have *negative* effects on individuals and may make people *less likely* to become politically involved. For example, Nina Eliasoph (1998) utilizes thick description in her study of CBOs to show how rather than engaging in open dialogue, many members of organizations actually go to great lengths to avoid speaking about politics altogether. However, despite this work, other authors cling to the notion that these organizations build social capital. In order to understand why, we must briefly distinguish between "bonding" social capital and "bridging" social capital. Whereas 'bonding' social capital refers emphasizes social capital building *within* a specific group or community, bridging social capital is focused on how social capital can arise *between* social groups, from different social backgrounds, bridging religion, ethnicity, class etc. (Putnam 2001).

Though Putnam and Varshney praise the role of associations in “bridging” diverse social cleavages, Morse and Hibbing argue that it can be challenging to get people into heterogeneous groups, “and even if they do join a heterogeneous group, they are likely to gravitate toward and interact with fellow group members who are similar to them” (Theiss-Morse and Hibbing 2005, 233). Refuting the work of Varshney, other scholars argue that ethnicity either does not matter or has not been shown to matter in explaining most outcomes to which it has been causally linked (Chandra 2006). Moreover, rather than being heterogeneous, these groups tend to be homogenous. Though research shows that homogenous groups tend to develop stronger trust among members (Granovetter 1973), homogeneity may also cause members to be exclusionary to anyone who is different. Should any type of ethnic organizations be discounted then as a useful tool for cultivating participation? Not necessarily, as Garcia Bedolla (2005) explains: “Ethnic organizing, even if not explicitly political, influences social capital levels within marginal groups and seems to have a beneficial long-term effect on feelings of efficacy” (13). Still, Hibbing et al. (2002) argue that even though these homogenous groups may paint a picture of harmony, this consensus actually undermines the very idea of democracy and democratic processes, which are messy and rife with conflict.

Furthermore, these civic associations may fall victim to collective action problems. Olson’s theory of collective action argues that in groups where no single individual’s contribution makes a significant difference to the group as a whole, individuals will fail to act in their common interest, a phenomenon often dubbed the

“free riders” dilemma (Olson 2003). In order to overcome this, organizations must offer “selective incentives,” which members can only obtain if they participate in the group (Olson 2003, 51). Arguably, CBOs and other groups may offer some selective incentives to participants in the form of material goods, but may also offer selective incentives in alternative benefits like providing a sense of collective identity and a network of peers (Goodwin and Jasper 2014; Tilly and Wood 2015; Polletta 1998).

Still another challenge is that not all groups promote democratic values and dispositions. For example, Fiorina (1999) illustrates the darker side to civic engagement that produces “unsocial capital,” particularly when small groups of individuals who are unrepresentative of the population hijack democratic processes (Skocpol and Fiorina 1999, 418). Similar to some social movements, these associations may have antidemocratic goals and seek to foster inequality and exclusion, like the Tea Party and Minutemen (Tilly and Wood 2015; Skocpol and Williamson 2012; Luis Cabrera 2010; Cabrera and Glavac 2010). In direct disagreement with many of the scholars referenced earlier, Morse and Hibbing conclude that “proponents of civic participation, and social capital in particular, tell a comforting tale, one that promises better citizens, a healthier community, and a stronger democracy with little hard work involved. But this is not a realistic tale” (Theiss-Morse and Hibbing 2005, 242).

Indeed, Putnam’s original social capital theory does not recognize how past legacies of oppression, disenfranchisement, policing, and minority-targeted public policy has stripped opportunities from our most marginalized communities. Not

taking race or class into consideration, Putnam takes this for granted, whereas other scholars (Crenshaw 1991; Terriquez 2015a; García Bedolla 2005; Collins 2008) recognize the need to acknowledge and root our understandings of phenomena and motivations within those intersecting identities. Individuals may have limited time and resources and “biographical availability” (McAdam 1990) to participate due to their external commitments and constraints of daily life. Rather than considering the ever-growing inequality within the U.S., that may limit a person's ability to participate in politics, because of their long hours at work, or a 2nd job, or other family responsibilities, Putnam places all individuals on an even playing ground and the same starting line. Similarly, while previous social capital scholars utilized a deficit-minded framework when conceptualizing social capital among urban youth, Ginwright and Cammarota (2007) instead offer a framework that challenges us to conceptualize collective community action through participation in community-based organizations.

Undocumented parents are more likely to have a lower socio-economic position, putting youth from mixed-status family households at a disadvantage if we base our assumptions on political socialization theory, as discussed in Part II. However, prominent research has shown how undocumented immigrants have indeed played a crucial role in electoral politics through labor organizing, endorsing politicians, influencing party platforms, shaping local policy agendas, and leading Get Out The Vote (GOTV) efforts (M. W. Varsanyi 2005; M. Varsanyi 2010). However, this is not the case with most mixed-status families, and youth from these families do

not receive the same socialization when it comes to voting as their more affluent peers. In that same vein, many Latinx parents who emigrated from Latin American countries may also have a strong distrust in governmental institutions based upon their previous experiences, both with the sending and receiving governments.

While literature emphasizing political socialization and immigrant incorporation might lead us to theorize that youth from mixed-status families would have low levels of civic engagement due to their parent's status (Terriquez and Kwon 2014), research on social context, social movements, and the role of mobilizing identities and emotions argues quite the opposite (Street, Jones-Correa, and Zepeda-Millán 2017; García Bedolla 2005; Bedolla and Michelson 2012; D. Gould 2004). Rather than negatively affecting levels of engagement, mixed-status origins might make youth *more* inclined to become politically engaged. One recent study argues that young immigrants who moved to the United States at a younger age participate in politics at a rate that is nearly indistinguishable from native-born U.S. Citizens (Li and Jones 2020). And moving beyond socio-economic theories, Li and Jones show that immigrants who migrated at older ages tend to participate less because they spent their younger years in their countries of origin, in political environments that were very dissimilar from that of the United States.

In summary, CBOs and voluntary associations may offer opportunities for youth from mixed-status families to gain social capital and learn political behaviors. Whereas traditional socializing agents like parents, peers, and educational institutions may not thoroughly politicize or socialize youth from mixed-status families, CBOs

and voluntary associations can offer deeper avenues to participation. An alternative to political socialization theory argues that youth from mixed-status families can in fact become more civically engaged based upon their family's situation and lived experiences. Indeed, it is *because* youth come from mixed-status families that they are mobilized to become civically engaged on behalf of their parents or other undocumented family members. Though SES models and research demonstrates that those who have more resources, education, and wealth tend to participate at higher rates, other studies demonstrate that not all is lost for marginalized communities. Youth from mixed-status families can overcome these barriers by drawing upon alternative political resources in the forms of identity, emotions, networks, threats, and community-based organizations that empower them to engage at an individual and community level.

Part III. Social Movements, Emotions, and the Role of Threat

This section moves beyond families, schools, and community organizations to examine social movements, interest groups, and the more general context for mobilization on the part of Latinx youth. These groups of literature offer more insight into explaining the resources and constraints of Latinx youth from mixed-status families. One of my primary critiques, however, is that social movement literature has overlooked the role of threats and identity formation in galvanizing participation.

Scholars have long noted that marginalized populations, as well as ethnic and racial minorities, are less likely to be civically engaged when it comes to conventional

forms of political participation like voting (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). While factors like income, education, political party, organizational involvement, neighborhood composition, ethnic attachments, and mobilization are often cited as impacting Hispanic voters, some scholars argue that political socialization is to blame and that pluralism is still the best model for analyzing Latino politics (de la Garza 2004). Though leading work by Dahl (Dahl 1961; 1967) may argue that interest groups are a healthy and essential part of democracy, pluralists like de la Garza are not without their critics. As noted earlier, pluralist interest groups may fall victim to collective action problems and the “free riders dilemma” (Olson 2003), and may also be overly representative of the wealthy and elite (Schattschneider 1960).

In his review of the literature in 2004, de la Garza concluded that Latinos were part of the mainstream and have the potential to influence the system; however, he warned that if the state did not provide them political access, they would be forced to engage in political struggle rather than adopt more mainstream forms of political involvement: “Far from pluralistic, that situation would best be understood as a racially constructed unstable polity dominated by Anglo Elites. Perhaps because I am heir to the optimism that characterizes Latinos, I do not think the nation will degenerate into those conditions” (de la Garza 2004, 116). De la Garza also doubted that U.S. politicians would ever attack immigrants or the use of Spanish, which Latinos usually perceive as attacks on the group as a whole: “Current efforts by both major parties to woo Hispanic voters suggest that such attacks are unlikely to be

carried out by leaders of either party. Nonetheless, desperate candidates could emulate former California governor Pete Wilson in using such issues to polarize the electorate and mobilize Anglo voters against Latinos” (93). In an almost eerie prediction of what was to come, Neither of these two predictions aged very well, as Donald Trump kicked off his campaign by demonizing immigration from the southern border. In another scholarly analysis that has since been challenged, Lisa Martinez noted that those who identify as Latinos were significantly less likely to protest when compared to their non-Latino counterparts, which supports the idea of relations between political opportunity structure, threat, and mobilization. (Martinez 2005). Her study was published just before one of the most massive mobilizations of Latinos in U.S. history.

What, then, is the relationship between struggle or threat and political participation? While social movement literature tends to emphasize the “political process” model and the role of political opportunities (McAdam 1999), the role of emotions and threat in social movements has mostly been obscured (D. Gould 2004; Zepeda Milan 2017; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001). Immigrants have not enjoyed windows of opportunity to expand their rights under favorable conditions; rather communities are responding to threat under hostile local and national governments (M. Varsanyi 2010). Political process theory has severely limited the scope of social movement research to questions of emergence, decline, and outcomes. It also fails to explain how movements arise when political opportunities narrow rather than expand. Emotions, however, provide some clarity into how some

movements may rise and fall. For example, using the case of ACT UP during the AIDs crisis, Gould illuminates how emotions and emotional threat can fundamentally shape social movements and help them emerge, particularly when there is no friendly political opportunity structure (Gould 2009; Gould 2004). This is especially relevant for our case studies in the Central Valley, where localized contexts can present varied political opportunity structures.

On a broader level, the public and media have constantly referred to the Latino electorate as a “sleeping giant,” highlighting its vast potential but inconsistent participation (Jackson 2011; Ramírez 2013). Even so, we have seen several specific instances in which this “sleeping giant” has been awakened, particularly in instances where undocumented communities have been under threat. The specific racialization of the immigration issue, mainly targeting Latinos, also partially explains why other ethnic groups like Asians, despite having the second-largest group of unauthorized immigrants, have not mobilized to the same extent against these threats (Rim 2009; J. S. Wong et al. 2011). Though scholarship has demonstrated how windows of political opportunity have emerged for marginalized groups to make more significant claims for their rights—as was the case with farmworkers and civil rights organizers (McAdam 1999; Jenkins and Perrow 1977)—one of the deficiencies of this literature is that it tends to overemphasize the role of elites, political opportunity structures, and resources (McCarthy and Zald 1977). While I concede that these paradigms are useful for analyzing many social movements, they fail to explain how mobilization emerges under threat conditions and with little to no elite support. This is especially relevant in

contexts where those attempting to make claims are not even considered part of the polity due to their legal status and do not have access to traditional forms of political actions (e.g., voting).

Scholars have remarked upon the politicization and mobilization of Latinos in the aftermath of California's Proposition 187, which sought to exclude undocumented immigrants from any state services (Jacobson 2008; Street, Jones-Correa, and Zepeda-Millán 2017). Although the initiative was initially passed by voters, it was later struck down by the California State Supreme Court. More important, however, were the lasting effects of the legislation that can still be witnessed in California today, which has become a leading state of resistance against nativist and racist policies (Pastor 2018). As a result of this hostile anti-immigrant initiative, Latino voter turnout increased dramatically, as did the Latino naturalization rate, which can itself be viewed as a political act (Adrian D. Pantoja, Ricardo Ramirez, and Gary M. Segura 2001; Félix, González, and Ramírez 2008). Further evidence also supports the notion that anti-immigrant and nativist legislation does in fact lead to higher voting participation from first- and second-generation immigrants (S. K. Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001).

Even more significantly, we have seen Latinos take action both on the streets and at the ballot box in response to legislative threats at the national level. For example, the *Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 (H.R. 4437)*, more commonly known as the "Sensenbrenner Bill," was the catalyst for one of the largest Latino mobilizations in U.S. History, the 2006 marches.

The bill would have increased border enforcement (as well as internal enforcement), changed being undocumented in the United States from being a civil offense to a felony, and also criminalized anybody who assisted undocumented persons in the United States (Zepeda-Millán 2016). As a result, as many as 5 million Latinos took direct action by participating in nationwide protests to call for an end to the bill and advocate comprehensive immigration reform (Zepeda-Millán 2016; Street, Jones-Correa, and Zepeda-Millán 2017; Bloemraad and Trost 2008; Pantoja, Menjívar, and Magaña 2008). Notably, scholars have demonstrated how unlike past movements, in which older Chicano males took on leadership roles, these efforts were led by women, young people from mixed-status families, and undocu-queer youth leaders who utilized their multiply marginalized identities to spur intersectional and inclusive mobilization efforts within undocumented youth movements (Milkman and Terriquez 2012; Bloemraad and Trost 2008; Terriquez 2015a).

Young people, many of whom belonged to mixed-status families, participated in walkouts and in many cases marched directly alongside their undocumented parents (Zepeda Milan 2017; Bloemraad and Trost 2008; Getrich 2008b; Rim 2009). As noted by Bloemraad and Trost, the conventional paradigms of adult political participation and “top-down” socialization do not seem to fully explain or capture the massive youth involvement in the 2006 protests, and these models more generally do not account for immigrant families (Bloemraad and Trost 2008). Also significant about the 2006 marches were the mobilization sites operating within Latino communities. Whether in cities with a sizeable civic infrastructure or communities

with little to no infrastructure, youth and families successfully mobilized in spaces from schools to soccer fields in response to this threat (Zepeda-Millán 2016; Bloemraad and Trost 2008; Zepeda Milan 2017). Work on these protests has shown that rather than acting as a deterrent, being from a mixed-status family can spur politicization.

Young people in particular can become a voice for their family members who are marginalized in society. For example, in her study of teenagers from San Diego who participated in the 2006 marches, Christina Getrich found that they “were actively advocating for the social inclusion of their family members and peers who were not being adequately included in legislative and social views of the nation” (2008, 551). Studies like this also illustrate how youth from mixed-status families participate in their communities in ways that expand our notions of citizenship, inclusion, and civic responsibility (Getrich 2008b; Pérez 2015; Bloemraad, Sarabia, and Fillingim 2016b; Bondy 2014). Rather than limiting our conception of citizenship to the dominant discourse of legal status, young people have demonstrated how expanding ideas of social belonging have developed a new sense of political consciousness within their communities. These scholarly engagements also challenge common theories of American political behavior holding that only “the wealthy the educated and the partisan are most likely to be targeted by politicians and political parties for mobilization in electoral politics” (Chris Zepeda Millan 2017, 3). Moreover, as noted by Zepeda Milan, with both Proposition 187 and the Sensenbrenner Bill, Latinos responded to dangers or threats rather than to windows of

opportunities (Goodwin and Jasper 2014, 297; McAdam 1999), challenging certain tenets of social movement theory (Zepeda Milan 2017).

Even if they are not in immediate danger due to their (possibly) privileged citizenship status, youth from mixed-status families may be motivated to act based upon their family member's status. As noted by White, "For voters in families or neighborhoods that include undocumented residents, the threat or actual experience of seeing their family members, friends, or neighbors face detention or deportation could affect their political behavior" (2016, 356). In a study of communities where deportations and removals increased after the "Secure Communities" program was instituted, White demonstrates how Latino voter turnout increased: "This suggests mobilization in response to threat of a specific kind: people being mobilized by (or in the wake of) policies that by definition did not target them personally" (2016, 372). This finding again lends weight to the theory that rather than suppressing mobilization or engagement, mixed-family status and threat may actually increase youth's civic engagement.

The key aspect of these moments was that under-mobilized and "unconventional" actors took direct action despite barriers to participation or threats. These instances help us understand how Latino communities respond under threat in ways that are not predicted by the political socialization literature. In sum, though social movement literature does provide some insight into why movements emerge and why individuals choose to participate, the current paradigms of analysis do not seem to explain how movements can emerge under conditions of threat and hostility,

nor how youth from mixed-status families navigate participation. If we were to apply the “political process” model or utilize Jenkins and Perrow’s resource-driven model to explain why youth from mixed-status families participate, we would be surprised to find that movements have, in fact, emerged even when there was neither a friendly political opportunity structure nor traditional resources available. Furthermore, while focusing on national (the 2006 Sensenbrenner Bill) and statewide threats (Proposition 187 in California) has contributed to our understanding of response, threats and mobilization at the local level have been less thoroughly investigated, particularly in moderate and hostile immigrant contexts. By shifting our attention to literature on emotions, the role of collective identity and threat within social movements helps us understand how marginalized and oppressed communities can utilize alternative and community resources to mobilize against a threat and overcome barriers to participation.

Part IV. Governmental & Institutional Context: The Theoretical Contribution of California’s Central Valley

Thus far, this chapter has discussed the ways in which political socialization, organizations, emotions, and identity may influence the political participation of individuals. However, another crucial variable that must be considered is how governmental and institutional contexts shape engagement. How much does context matter when it comes to immigrants and Latinos more broadly? Research overwhelmingly points to how different legal, political, and social contexts shape not only the opportunities afforded to Latinos and immigrants and their children but also

their sense of political efficacy, engagement, socialization as well as their social movements.

Governments in particular can shape immigrant trajectories and opportunities through their responses to foreign groups. Specifically, Portes and Rumbaut (2014) point out that governments have three basic options when responding to increased migration flows: *exclusion*, *passive acceptance*, or *active encouragement*. Each can lead to drastically different immigrant incorporation outcomes and determine what kinds of youth movements emerge. Depending on the *localized context* (Burciaga and Martinez 2017), undocumented youth movements may adapt their strategies, tactics, and claims-making depending on these localized contexts and how accommodating, moderate, or antagonistic they may be toward immigrants. Other comparative research demonstrates that in certain urban contexts (e.g., left-leaning governments, large immigrant electorates, a well-developed CBO infrastructure), cities may adopt more inclusive immigrant policies despite a hostile national context (Graauw and Vermeulen 2016). Though we might expect that immigrant rights' mobilizations would be more likely to occur in friendlier contexts (given the risks of participation for undocumented individuals), immigrant groups like the "Dreamers" have created what Nicholls (2014) calls "niche openings" in which they have been able to mobilize effectively, even within inhospitable contexts. Localized political contexts, then, can play a vital role in shaping the daily lived experiences of immigrants and their families.

In addition to the role of government and labor markets, immigrant ethnic communities can facilitate access to resources, information, and social networks that can create job opportunities. Though educational, social, and economic capital can certainly help immigrants overcome barriers to success, human capital does not solely determine contexts of reception. Though better-educated groups should in theory elicit a more robust governmental and societal participation, this is not always the case (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 281). For Latinos in particular, we have seen that these local political contexts of reception do matter when it comes to engagement. For example, Hoi Ok Jeong notes in her research that Latinos who live in states with pro-minority policies are significantly more likely to take part in politics (Jeong 2013). Additional research demonstrates how variation in restrictive policies from state to state can profoundly affect the incorporation or alienation of young DACA immigrants (Cebulko and Silver 2016). Legal status in and of itself can be a central determinant of incorporation, as well as the contexts of reception that shape their daily lives and experiences (Abrego 2011; Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

A national report conducted by Bada et al. (2010) further emphasizes the crucial role that context plays for Latino's civic engagement. It demonstrates the extent to which local and state governments either facilitate or inhibit immigrant integration. Larger cities, the study found, tended to be more tolerant to Latino immigrants, whereas smaller cities and rural areas tended to be less welcoming. This differential can have deep ramifications not only for immigrants but for their mixed-status families as well (Bada et al. 2010).

It is within this context that the Central Valley of California offers a pivotal contribution to the study of immigration and political socialization of mixed-status families. As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, the racialization of immigration itself complicates participation, and the Central Valley case thus leads us to another underlying question within the literature: whether we can utilize racial threat theory to explain immigrant hostility and the shifting power dynamics in this region.

Though it is more commonly associated with conflicts between Blacks and Whites, some scholars have attempted to use the racial threat hypothesis to explain when and why immigrants will face hostility. Racial threat occurs when "the presence of an outgroup in sufficient numbers will generate competition for scarce resources and thus local hostility" (Hopkins 2010, 41; Abrajano and Hajnal 2017). It argues that once immigrants become a large enough presence, their growing political clout should force legislators to create more welcoming and non-restrictionist policies. This racial threat hypothesis has been subject to critique, however, as research has found contradictory evidence. For example, recent work suggests that under the Department of Homeland Security's "Secure Communities" program, a tiered influence hypothesis better explains how Latinos who were arrested in counties where there is a "sizeable [Latino] minority" (between 20-40 percent of the population) were subjected to deportations at markedly lower rates than in communities with Latino populations over 40 percent. In these larger Latino communities, researchers found the highest rates of deportation, with sheriffs eager to cooperate with federal immigration enforcement authorities (Pedroza 2018). In this case, having greater

numbers increased the threat rather than leading to more welcoming policies and deportation discretion (release of noncitizens who committed low-level offenses/misdemeanors).

Furthermore, Hopkins (2010) argues that immigrant backlash does not necessarily occur solely from a sudden change in a local community's demographics. Instead, local hostility occurs when salient national rhetoric *politicizes* this demographic change and provokes distinctively anti-immigrant sentiments. Both Pedroza's and Hopkins's studies are particularly relevant to the Central Valley context, where Hispanic populations greatly exceed the 40 percent population threshold, and where *both* national and local anti-immigrant rhetoric circulate within the communities. Additionally, the data collected in this dissertation occurred during a time period in which national rhetoric from President Trump deeply politicized demographic change and immigration from around the world, particularly from Latin America.

Immigrants must contend with a patchwork of policies that change from state to state or county to county (Menjívar, Abrego, and Schmalzbauer 2016; Cebulko and Silver 2016). In the Central Valley, many counties have remained resistant to inclusive immigrant policies. Sheriff Donny Youngblood of Kern County, for example, has repeatedly denied U-Visas for undocumented immigrants who have been victims of crimes and resisted state "sanctuary" laws, calling for an anti-sanctuary policy to be implemented instead (Linthicum 2015; Winton 2017; American Civil Liberties Union 2018). As Hopkins (2010) notes, the rhetoric and

policies championed by conservative leaders in these areas may have grave ramifications for Latinx families living there and affect local levels of hostility. As a result, scholars must address how racial threats and rhetoric affect the participation of Latinx youth from mixed-status families. Mains emphasizes that “borders are not only created by the construction of fences, walls, and floodlights, but also through discourses that mark immigrant bodies and the places with which they are associated as separate, marginal and different” (Mains 2000, 151). Given that anti-immigrant political discourse regards immigrant bodies as “discardable” and “replaceable,” it becomes even more important to study how immigrant families push back (politically and otherwise) in areas where the political climate is hostile. Though numerous studies have looked at political socialization and mobilization in large urban sites like Los Angeles (Zepeda Milan 2017; P. J. Wong and Tseng 2008), San Diego (Getrich 2008b), and the Bay Area (Bloemraad and Trost 2008; Bloemraad, Sarabia, and Fillingim 2016b), less attention has been paid to smaller cities (Zepeda-Millán 2016) and contexts in which mobilization is not as expected.

This is the case in the Central Valley, where many local elected officials were eager to work with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), gave press conferences alongside then-President Trump, and attempted to defy or undermine any pro-immigrant state legislation that is passed. Along with Proposition 187 and the Sensenbrenner Bill, there have been other localized threats to immigrant communities and mixed-status families in the Central Valley. For example, just a year after the 2006 marches, and thirteen years after the original Proposition 187 initiative,

Bakersfield city council member David Couch proposed his own localized version of Prop 187 asking that: 1) English be declared the official language in the city of Bakersfield; 2) Bakersfield be declared a “non-sanctuary” city; and 3) the city staff investigate what city services could be denied to undocumented immigrants (Californian 2007). More recently, Couch, since elected to the Board of Supervisors, also supported (along with the sheriff) declaring Kern a non-sanctuary county (Winton 2017). Other rural areas across California have exhibited similar behavior in resisting sanctuary policies and unequally enforcing state laws meant to protect immigrant communities (Aleaziz 2018; Gorn 2018; Luis Hernandez 2018). Other localities like Fresno, for example, have shifted to a more moderate context in which the local sheriff and county elected officials still align themselves with restrictionist policies (though the Sheriff in Fresno does approve U Visas); in contrast to a now Latinx majority city council which has taken the bold step of establishing an immigrant defense fund for undocumented residents and youth from mixed- status families successfully advocated for a sanctuary resolution in the Fresno Unified School District.

This dissertation investigates how the political socialization process differs in mixed- status families, who organize to protect their undocumented relatives, and how youth from mixed-status families are affected by this politically paradoxical dilemma. The dual demands on youth from mixed-status families present a theoretically interesting puzzle that scholars have yet to fully investigate in moderate and politically hostile climates.

Conclusion:

As researchers continue to study questions of political behavior, political socialization, and mobilization within immigrant families, they must reconcile competing arguments raised from different perspectives. Whether debating the role of community-based organizations and voluntary associations or the impact of civic education, scholars have put forth compelling arguments arguing both for and against these factors fostering participation and politicization. Though the extent to which parents, peers, schools, and organizations have an impact is contested, there still appears to be a consensus that these socializing agents can indeed provide some insight into how political behavior is learned and negotiated among youth. Paying attention to different contexts—be it legal status, political climate, or social contexts—can also help illuminate why some individuals choose to become involved and how political actors are also constrained by their environments and obligations to their families. Rather than assuming absolute agency for every individual and an “equal” playing field in which everyone is free to join voluntary associations and gain social capital, scholars must remain cognizant of the unequal distribution of resources and constraints that may make it more challenging for groups to obtain social capital. Though political process theory provides excellent insights into why movements emerge during “windows of opportunity,” this paradigm fails to explain the emergence of immigrant movements in the face of threat and narrow (or closing) opportunity windows. Finally, varying contexts may also shape the trajectory not only

of immigrant incorporation but also of their political participation, engagement, and the strategic tactics that immigrant rights movements adopt.

This dissertation contributes to the growing body of literature around political socialization, civic engagement, mixed-status families, and social movements by exploring participation within the moderate and hostile contexts of Kern County and Fresno County. In addition to helping us understand the politicization of youth from mixed-status families, this study contributes to our understanding of how to mobilize multiply marginalized communities facing additional barriers in more conservative political contexts. Remaining cognizant of these debates and conversations within these literatures, I highlight how individuals encounter different types of resistance and oppression in this mixed-status family context due to their intersecting identities. Kern County and Fresno County are case studies that, though not entirely generalizable, reveal insights applicable to other areas across the United States where Latinx communities remain under-mobilized despite their population size and potential electoral power.

Chapter III: Setting the Historical and Political Context: Kern County as a Site of Continued Immigrant Repression and Struggle

“When a deputy shoots somebody, which way is better financially? To cripple them or kill them? Absolutely [to kill them]. Because if you cripple them, you gotta take care of them for life, and that cost goes way up..” – Sheriff Donny Youngblood of Kern County (Burger 2018a)

Introduction

For the first time in years, Sheriff Donny Youngblood was facing a challenger during the 2018 election cycle. In April of 2018, The Kern County Detention Officers Association voted to endorse his opponent Justin Fleeman in the race (an endorsement that would later be rescinded). Even more notably, the union released a 12-year-old video from Youngblood’s first campaign in 2006 in which the sheriff was caught on tape saying it was cheaper to kill suspects rather than cripple them. After garnering national media attention and headlines for this statement, outsiders looking in might have questioned whether this one video would have ruined Youngblood’s re-election prospects. Not so in Kern County, however, where Youngblood soared to victory over his opponent, capturing 66 percent of the vote. Often called the “Joe Arpaio” of California by outlets like the *Los Angeles Times* (Linthicum 2015), Youngblood does not stray too far from the norm of the tough-on-crime approach common in the Central Valley. Contrary to the typical liberal politics of urban California, the Central Valley is dominated by a bastion of conservative politics in a

rural landscape with extreme poverty. Widely understudied and undertheorized, the Central Valley is one of the key regions in California, one in which Donald Trump won several counties in both 2016 and 2020. Local elected officials support hardline immigration policies despite the region relying on an agricultural labor force made up of an estimated 80% of undocumented workers. In contrast, other urban areas and counties in California have taken an almost polar opposite approach when it comes to immigration, with, for example, many cities and counties declaring themselves “sanctuaries” for immigrant and refugee communities. In order to understand Sheriff Youngblood’s electoral victories and the present-day struggles of mixed-status families and youth in the Central Valley, we must understand some of the history and broader context of the Valley.

Why does this context matter? Social movements, organizing and strategizing does not exist within a vacuum, but is instead shaped by the local conditions and political opportunities afforded to them. As David Meyer argues, “Activists' prospects for advancing particular claims, mobilizing supporters, and affecting influence are context-dependent.”(2004, 126). Other scholars have contended that an expansion of “political opportunities” can occur when activists gain access to authorities, repression declines, elites are divided, or elites or other influential groups begin to support their efforts (McAdam 1999; Goodwin and Jasper 2014; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). Therefore by understanding the historical political opportunities and constraints in Kern County, we are better able to understand how youth from mixed status families have contended with this political opportunity

structure both historically, and within present day. As Meyer adopts Marx's ideas emphasizing the importance of inherited circumstances for shaping and constraining movements, he writes, "Social protest movements make history . . . but not in circumstances they choose." (Meyer 2004, 125). This chapter explores this history of repression and resistance to illustrate how youth from mixed status families have inherited a political opportunity structure that has marginalized communities and created very narrow conditions for engaging within existing institutions.

To do so, this chapter explores some older and more recent manifestations of the region's conservatism, anti-immigrant politics, punitive tough-on-crime approach and legacy of white supremacy. We will first begin by examining the political and social history of the Central Valley and Kern County more specifically, focusing on displacement, conflict and racism toward indigenous populations, Chinese laborers, immigrants, and communities of color. Through exclusionary policies that restricted opportunities in labor, housing, and education, marginalized communities in the Valley had not only to contend with white supremacy embedded within institutions but also with potentially fatal violence at the hands of the Ku Klux Klan and police brutality that terrorized these communities. This is then followed by illustrating the "prison alley" of California as well as a brief exploration of a local political machine that has consolidated conservative political power in the county of Kern alongside powerful special interests. This legacy and history of the Valley provides the current context and narrow political opportunity structure that contemporary social movements for immigrant rights and justice must navigate. At the same time, the Central Valley also

and Kern County also have a rich history of organizing and mobilization in spite of this repression. Exploring the Valley as an epicenter for the farmworker movement, I then turn to historical mobilizations in Kern in 2006 and subsequent May Day protests, as immigrant communities mobilized advocate for more humane and just immigrant policies. Taken together, these legacies include both a history of discrimination and backlash, as well as a history of organizing and mobilization. This chapter helps demonstrate the historical context and the legacies that have shaped the political opportunity structure that contemporary movements for immigrant rights and justice must navigate.

Central Valley Political and Social History: Displacement, Conflict, and Racism

As with California, the history of the Central Valley features a pattern of colonization and settlement in which European-Americans used a combination of violence and law to establish rule. Prior to Colonization, the Central Valley was home to numerous Native American Tribes including the Maidu, Miwok, and the Yokuts, who survived off of the Valley's natural resources. With the arrival of Spanish Colonizers, and eventual migration of Americans moving west, these tribes experienced continued displacement, brutality, and genocide.

Native Americans were not alone in their suffering, however. The Chinese laborers who had once helped build railroads in California subsequently sought to work in the Valley's flourishing agriculture economy. Unfortunately, they were excluded from these jobs because anti-Chinese sentiment and racism prevailed, and

they were even barred from owning land (Buckley and Littman 2010). Though Japanese laborers in California were also driven away from agricultural jobs, they were able to achieve relative success because they were not prohibited from owning land. Additionally, as a result of US occupations of the Philippines in 1899-1902, Filipinos also migrated to the Central Valley, establishing roots in agriculture, and their numbers greatly increased after 1910 (Espiritu 2003).

Racial conflict shook up the farm labor force once more in the 1930s, as fears over the Depression led to the deportation of hundreds of thousands of Mexicans and Filipinos. The resulting labor shortages were filled by white “Okies” and “Arkies” who migrated to California fleeing the Dust Bowl (Walker 2004 71-74).

Approximately 40 percent of the nearly 400,000 migrants settled in the San Joaquin Valley in towns such as Oildale, Bakersfield, Fresno, and Tulare (Buckley and Littman 2010). For a brief period prior to WWII, whites made up large portion of the farm labor force; however, the war effort would eventually funnel them into manufacturing jobs in factories.

As a result, more Mexican migrants began working in agriculture, most significantly as a part of the Bracero Program (1942-1965), which actively recruited Mexican men to work in the fields in order to fill the labor shortage. In the years following WWII, however, the Federal Government under the Eisenhower administration began a massive deportation campaign aimed at both undocumented and documented Mexican individuals (García 2002). Moreover, the Mexican-Americans that stayed in the Central Valley faced violent racism and restricted

opportunities. Nonetheless, as a result of increasing migration to the Valley, Mexican families began establishing their roots and became increasingly involved in political affairs, a trend that would set the stage for conflict as farmworkers began to assert their rights leading up to the 1960s (Buckley and Littman 2010) while defenders of the status quo power structure were eager to maintain the dominant white supremacy.

The Problem of white supremacy and Racist Policies in the Valley and Kern

The development of the Central Valley involved a long history of white supremacist violence and discriminatory public policies that stretch back over 100 years. In the most dramatic manifestation of overt white supremacy, the Ku Klux Klan mobilized in several areas of the Central Valley including Kern, Tulare, and Fresno in the early decades of the twentieth century. As poor whites from the Midwest migrated towards the West Coast, they brought with them ideals of manifest destiny, conservatism, and nativism that in turn led to a call for immigrant restrictionist policies and the push for exclusionary policies that would prevent minorities from working in agriculture and owning land (K. L. Hernandez 2010). Alongside these policies, white supremacists also began violently organizing, wearing white hoods to terrorize immigrant and communities of color in the Valley.

In neighboring Tulare County, Klan members regularly organized marches and public meetings and attempted to recruit more members via announcements in local newspapers. In an effort to consolidate political power more formally, Klan members also ran for office, although known members were not very successful

(Bringhurst 2000). Notably, the Tulare chapter of the Klan was supposedly less violent than KKK chapters in Kern and other counties, which were known for violent acts including kidnappings, beatings, and tar-and-featherings. Instead, the Tulare chapter of the Klan “confined its activities to public lectures, picnics, barbecues, and an occasional ‘cross burning’” (Bringhurst 2000, 390). Illustrating the widespread acceptance and tolerance of white supremacy in the Valley are the images of Klan members marching through downtown Portersville in 1923. And by 1931, Tulare County was a focal point for Klan activity, serving as home to the annual California State Klan Convention in 1931, where hundreds of robed Klan members marched through downtown Visalia and neighboring areas. (Bringhurst 2000)

In contrast to the Tulare Chapter, the Kern County Klan exhibited violence that terrorized communities of color. The historical record demonstrates that the Klan permeated many aspects of civic and political life in Kern County as well. As D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* hit theaters across the United States in 1915, students at Bakersfield Union High school were inspired to have their senior class dress as Klansmen for a pregame parade (Rodriquez 2017). Kern County’s KKK chapter also engaged in severe violence in comparison to other Valley Chapters. After carrying out several beatings, tar-and-featherings, and other violent acts in Kern, the Klan kidnapped, bound, and flogged private investigator John Pyles, which caused widespread backlash (Rodriquez 2017). Coverage and investigations by the media and the local district attorney’s office led to increased criticism of the Klan’s activities. Following a raid of the Ku Klux Klan’s leader (the “grand goblin’s”) office

in Los Angeles, a progressive Republican, District Attorney Jess Dorsey of Kern, obtained a membership list of Kern county Klan members. The *Los Angeles Times*, along with the *Bakersfield Californian*, published a list of over 350 names to expose Klan members in Kern.

Notably, the list included the Bakersfield Police Chief Charles Stone, the fourth district county supervisor of Kern Stanley Abel, sheriff's deputies, two justices, and several county employees (Humes 1999; Rodriquez 2017). While the Tulare chapter had not been very successful in electing Klan members (at least those who were willing to admit so publicly) to public office, this membership list revealed that the Klan had succeeded in getting many members elected to political office in Kern County. Though some denounced their membership or stated that they had merely signed up but had never attended Klan meetings, others like Supervisor Stanley Abel embraced their Klan membership. Supervisor Abel stated that he was a "proud" member of the Klan and honored to be "associated with many of the best citizens of Taft and vicinity in the good work they are doing." (Rodriquez 2017). Exposing members certainly put a damper on the Kern Klan chapter's activities. However, the fact that so many elected officials in Kern were s members speaks to the county's legacy of white supremacy. The public outing of so many members was best summed up by an editorial written by the *Bakersfield Californian* in 1922: "Nowhere else in California has Ku Kluxism so permeated official life as in Kern" (Rodriquez 2017, 31). The influence of the KKK persisted for years, and the region would see modern revivals of white supremacist ideals. Indeed, the 1975

documentary *The California Reich* followed a group of Central Valley Neo-Nazis in Tracy, CA, just west of Modesto.

A History of Racist Policies and De Facto Discrimination in Employment, Housing, School, and Policing

Immigrants from non-European backgrounds not only faced Klan violence but also many decades of discriminatory national, state, and local policies and institutional practices that restricted their opportunities, prevented them from attaining equality, and relegated them to the margins of society.

Employment

In the Valley and across the United States, agricultural and domestic workers were excluded from provisions of New Deal programs, welfare policies, and The Fair Labor Standards Act (Lieberman 1998; 1995). Just as years earlier the Chinese and Japanese had been prevented from working within the agricultural industry, other communities of color continued to face occupational exclusion. As the oil industry began to grow in Kern County, companies offered well-paying jobs to White residents of White communities, depriving people from working-class communities of color of these opportunities (Schwaller 2018).

Housing

Immigrant communities and communities of color also faced racially restricted housing covenants as the practice of redlining communities of color was

prevalent (D. Rios 2018; Rothstein 2017). In Bakersfield, white residents also organized to oppose measures that would integrate communities of color. For example, when a local initiative was proposed in 1953 to expand city services to one of these racially segregated enclaves, a group of white residents formed a citizens' committee that "invoked the economic anxieties and the racial fears of white homeowners by claiming how the measure would lead to the white residents paying for the city services such as schools for 'them' as in Black residents of the Sunset Mayflower district" (Rios 2018, 19). Ultimately, the measure failed, and these racially segregated covenants only began to shift as a result of the Rumford Fair Housing Act, passed in 1963.

Schooling & Criminalization of youth

In addition to being excluded from housing, communities of color also faced patterns of discrimination and violence in their daily lives, beginning with their school experiences. According to a 1931 survey of California school districts with large Latino populations, over 80 percent of these districts were segregated in practice or used separate classrooms for Mexican-American and other Latin-American students. These segregationist practices continued well into the 1950s and early 1970s in California schools (Wollenberg 1978 , 111-116).

As desegregation efforts began in the 1950s and 60s, parents and students faced racism in schools as white teachers allegedly refused to work with Spanish speaking students. When a proposed plan by the Kern High school district emerged to

racially integrate schools in 1968, white homeowners banded together at board meetings to voice their concerns about white students being forced to attend disadvantaged schools, perhaps unintentionally acknowledging the racial disparities that existed in schools (D. Rios 2018). Similar parallels are observed today as a predominantly white group of parents have denounced boundary changes within the Kern High School district that would move students away from Bakersfield High school, into neighboring schools to relieve overcrowding (Caid 2021). Arguing that Bakersfield High School contains the widest variety of clubs, extra-curricular activities, and fine arts programs, parents at school board meetings, parents seemed primarily focused on the fact that their children would be missing out on these opportunities at neighboring high schools, rather than being concerned about how that illustrated startling inequities and disparities among high schools within Kern.

Youth of color in the 1960s also faced discrimination in other aspects of their daily lives. Over-policing of Black and brown neighborhoods led to increased conflicts among youth of color and law enforcement. For youth in Bakersfield, violence and harassment at the hands of police was normalized. As Rios (2018) notes, “Acts of police violence were not merely based in the individual actions of police officers towards residents. Rather, the presence of police brutality was part of a much more structural process related to the racialization and regulation of youth and public space” (31). For example, in 1969 in Bakersfield, police officers raided a dance hall where Black youth were enjoying their night and conducted mass arrests and beatings of attendees and chaperones. One youth was so severely beaten by an officer that they

had to be hospitalized. Contributing to the structure of white supremacy in Kern, the local media coverage, including editorials in the *Bakersfield Californian*, blamed “negro parents” for not disciplining their children, turning a blind eye to the underlying issue of police brutality.

Voting and the Prison Industrial Complex

In terms of voting rights, scholars note that Latinos were subjected to literacy tests in California, and farmworkers faced voter intimidation from local growers (Ulrich 2020). Despite young residents of color outnumbering white residents, the region's political debates continue to be dominated by a more conservative-leaning electorate and powerful interests like agri-business and oil (Terriquez, Villegas, and Villalobos 2019). The consolidation of White political power in the Valley has contributed to a long-lasting legacy of racism and discrimination in this region.

Finally, in addition to its booming agricultural sector, the Central Valley is a key site of California’s prison industrial complex, with at least thirteen new prisons having been built since 1984, composing what is known as the “prison alley” of California (Gilmore 2007). Today Latinx individuals in Kern County are incarcerated and killed by law enforcement officials at a higher rate than anywhere in the United States (Schwaller 2018).

The Long Shadow of White Supremacy

The legacy of white supremacy continues to influence culture, civic life, and the political opportunity structure of Kern County and the Central Valley. Symbols of

white supremacy in Kern have outlasted some of the institutions they represented. For example, Bakersfield's South High School was long known for its infamous mascot "Johnny Rebel," who was originally a uniformed Confederate soldier before being replaced with a tamer cartoon version years later. As late as the 1980s, students (including students of color) would pair up as Johnny Rebel and Jody Rebel, a female "rebel" wearing a southern Belle-style dress, at school events (Sasic 2020). It was not until recently, in the wake of 2020 social justice protests, that public criticism and advocacy led administrators to change the mascot from "Rebels" to "Spartans." Moreover, right down the road from South High School is the less subversively named elementary school, Plantation Elementary, whose name was scheduled to be changed sometime between the 2021-2022 school year. Nonetheless, these two schools are both located in neighborhoods with streets named after Civil War ships and groups, for example Sumter, Merrimac, Monitor, Rebel, and Raider (Belardes 2020). And the mascot and name changes were made after much resistance from alumni and community members.

Perhaps this was not too surprising in a conservative county where Confederate, and "Don't Tread on Me" flags associated with the Tea Party movement can be seen flying freely on pickup trucks and in the front yards (Terriquez, Villegas, and Villalobos 2020). Recently, likely emboldened by seeing Trump in the White House, white supremacists in Kern unleashed a series of attacks on minority and marginalized residents and groups. Less than a month after the 2016 election, a Sikh man named Balmeet Singh was attacked by a White man outside of a Habit Burger

restaurant. While wishing his cousin a happy birthday over the phone, the white man approached him and said, “You are going to blow up this country, I should f*cking kill you right now!,” after which the man threw his drink at Singh. Though there were approximately ten witnesses to this hate crime, not a single person intervened or said anything during or after the attack (Balmeet Singh 2016). The attacker David Hook, who had mistaken Singh for a Muslim, showed no remorse for his actions and took a plea deal for just three years of probation. This incident made national headlines, and although local elected officials were quick to condemn the attack, none called it what it was: Islamophobia.

Police Brutality and Violation of Civil Liberties

As illustrated by the history of the farmworker movement—during which law enforcement commonly used violence and intimidation against farmworkers protesting for better pay, working conditions, and dignity in the 1930s and the 1960s—violence against communities of color and immigrants was part of a culture of police brutality in Kern and the Valley at large. This culture sought to assert dominance over subjugated groups and silence any officer who pushed back against this norm. As noted earlier, several law enforcement officers, including the chief of police, were outed as members of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1930s. Abuse of minorities at the hands of law enforcement did not stop there however, with minority and immigrant communities continuing to endure police brutality in the following years.

In response to the previously mentioned, egregious dance hall raid, former Bakersfield Police officer Stephen Powers spoke about how the police could get away with utilizing excessive force in an era with no cameras, cell phones, or social media. He also acknowledged a culture of racism that silenced officers: “There was definitely a conservative bent there [in Bakersfield]....but I kept my mouth shut...Sometimes I would hear police use bad language like ‘Nigger.’ Some police officers would tell me, ‘This thing that we call a baton, we sometimes call a ‘Nigger knocker.’” (Rios 2018, 34). Officer Powers was also one of the officers present at this dance hall raid.

After higher-ups pushed Powers to change a report that he wrote to match the department’s false narrative of events and cover up their excessive use of force, Powers instead made the decision to resign and testify at a grand hearing for three of the youth who were being charged with failure to disperse and resisting arrest (Price 2021). Following his testimony, Powers was followed to his home outside of city limits by both a Bakersfield Police Department car and a motorcycle patrol. In what can clearly be seen as a further act of intimidation and harassment for speaking the truth, Powers was pulled over twice by police officers after leaving the house with his son, and subsequently detained and issued a subpoena. The officers stated that Powers had run a red light. The very next morning, a judge dismissed this subpoena immediately. Despite Powers’s truth-exposing efforts, however, an all-white jury convicted the youth of color for resisting arrest and assaulting an officer.

Minorities living in Bakersfield and Kern were policed both formally and informally, not only by officers but by white supremacists as well. Informal “Sundown town” laws were the norm for residents of color, with communities of color careful not to be caught outside after sunset. Reports described that a sign standing on the bridge across the Kern River between Oildale and Bakersfield read a variation of “Nigger, Don't Let the Sun Set on You in Oildale” as recently as the 1960s (Eissinger 2011, 17). With a legacy of white supremacy and discrimination towards people of color and white supremacist gangs like the Ku Klux Klan and Peckerwoods, some scholars have even described Kern County as California’s “deep South” (Eissinger 2011; Schwaller 2018).

Police brutality against residents has continued in recent years. In 2015, *The Guardian* conducted a series of investigative reports that concluded that Kern’s law enforcement was the deadliest in the nation, killing more individuals per capita than any other county in the United States (Swaine et al. 2015). Moreover, there were documented non-shooting-related incidents as well: officers disrespecting or making jokes about dead bodies, sex crimes against women, and reckless driving and crashes. One of the most infamous examples of police misconduct involved former officers Patrick Mara and Damacio Diaz. Diaz had achieved local fame upon the release of the Disney movie *McFarland USA*, which depicted him during his high school cross country days. Later, however, the hometown hero and his partner were found guilty of stealing and selling methamphetamine and marijuana from police evidence.

Sentenced in 2016, they were handed a sentence of just five years, and both Mara and Diaz were released in early 2020.

While a handful of other Kern officers were charged with various crimes and were granted another chance, many victims of police brutality did not. For example, 22-year-old James De La Rosa was unarmed when he was shot, his hands raised before the shooting according to witnesses. Furthermore, 34-year-old Jorge Ramirez was assisting the police as an informant only to be shot and killed by the same officers he was working with during a gun fight with a different individual. When questioned, officers alleged that Ramirez had reached for his waistband, even though later reports would show that he was unarmed. James Moore, 30 years old, was beaten to death by Kern County Sheriff's deputies while he was restrained in Bakersfield's Lerdo jail; one officer snapped a picture after the beating and sent it to his colleagues, noting "this dude got fucked up." Francisco Serna, a 73-year-old man with dementia who would often go on walks when he had trouble sleeping, was shot five times by Bakersfield Police Department officers after they received a call about a man with a gun in the area. What did the elderly Francisco Serna have in his pockets when officers examined his body? A crucifix.

There were yet more cases, including 33-year-old David Silva, who walked to the hospital in search of help and fell asleep outside of the clinic, quite possibly from the mix of alcohol and methamphetamine in his system. As sheriffs arrived, Silva was hog-tied, beaten with batons, and had a German shepherd police dog sicced on him for "resisting arrest." With blood pouring over Silva's face, officers placed a spit

mask on him as well. Vomiting and eventually becoming unresponsive, officers continued to beat Silva as nearby witnesses called 911 in an attempt to stop them. When paramedics finally arrived, Silva was pronounced dead. Witnessing these events from the hospital across the street, Sulina Quair, one of the individuals who called 911, told the dispatcher:

“Yeah, your depu – your police officers over here on Flower [Street] and, I think it’s, it’s... what is it Mom? Palm [Drive]. Um, there’s a man laying on the floor and... your police officers beat the [expletive] out of him, and killed him. I have it all on video camera. We videotaped the whole thing....”

Transferred to a supervisor, she continued:

“Yes. My name is Lina. I’m standing right here on the corner of Flower and Palm right now and you have one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight sheriffs. The guy was laying on the floor and eight sheriffs ran up and started beating him up with sticks. The man is dead laying right here, right now.

Supervisor OK.

Lina: “...I got everything on videotape. The man was not doing nothing. I got from when they first pulled up on him to the end. And he, and he’s still not breathing. They, they are rushing him to the hospital right here across the street at KMC [Kern Medical Center] right now. Still pumping his chest, his chest. He’s been not breathing for the last... It’s been 22 minutes. And I’m looking at the camera now.” (Swaine et al. 2015).

Subsequently, Sulina was called by a police sergeant, who threatened her with jail time if she uploaded the video to social media or shared it with anyone else. Later that night, deputies arrived at her house and seized her cellphone, only to return it a week later, allegedly with some of the video missing from her phone. Years later, the family of David Silva was awarded a \$3.4 million civil settlement. None of the officers involved in Silva's death were ever charged or disciplined in the internal review process, during which the actions were reviewed by colleagues of the perpetrators.

David Garcia. Daniel Hiler. Chrystal Jolley. Nancy Garrett. Larry Maharrey. David Silva. Francisco Serna. These are just a few of the names of individuals who have died at the hands of law enforcement in Kern County. In 2016, the California Attorney General's Office and the FBI launched investigations into both the Bakersfield Police Department and the Kern County Sheriffs for excessive use of force and possible violations of civil liberties. After a four-year investigation, the AG's office found that BPD had violated residents' constitutional rights on several occasions, engaging in "unreasonable force, stops, searches and seizures and failed to exercise appropriate supervision, in addition to other violations" (Morgen 2021). In the ultimate agreement that was reached, the city of Bakersfield could avoid fault for all of these violations as long as the department enacted a list of reforms. The county of Kern and the Kern Sheriffs reached a similar agreement, however both the Bakersfield Police Department Chief Greg Terry and Kern Sheriff Donny Youngblood continued to deny any wrongdoing by their officers. Though many local

organizers applauded these reforms, others felt that the agreement did not go far enough to hold the departments accountable. As local Kern organizers Josth Stenner, Daulton Jones, Jorge Ramirez, and Joey Williams wrote in an opinion editorial to the *Guardian*:

For us, true accountability is the police admitting what they did and reallocating money from their budget to provide services such as mental health support, counseling and community-based violence intervention... We believe that in order to start the work of building real community trust, the city of Bakersfield must make an actual good-faith effort to listen, change, and account for and to those they have harmed.” (*Guardian* 2021)

As the findings of the California Attorney General’s Office illustrates, the long tradition of police officers regularly violating the civil liberties of farmworkers, immigrants, and communities of color throughout the 1930s and 1960s in Kern County survives today. Sheriff Donny Youngblood proudly appeared numerous times with President Trump, supporting the latter’s proposed policies for a border wall and increased immigration enforcement. Prior to Trump’s election, however, Youngblood was already extremely vocal about his opposition to illegal immigration and expressed an outright refusal to cooperate with previous legislation that aimed to protect immigrants like the TRUST act (Linthicum 2015). To illustrate another example of how Youngblood’s policies affected immigrant families, he steadfastly refused U Visa requests. When immigrants are victims of a crime, they are typically allowed to petition for a U Visa, as long as they are cooperating with law enforcement

to help find their perpetrators. Yet out of the 160 requests that Sheriff Youngblood received between 2012-2014, he signed only four (Linthicum 2015). After the ACLU called on Youngblood to comply with these U Visa requests, Youngblood mockingly responded, “The ACLU letter means nothing to me...I don't believe if you're a victim of a crime you should get to stay” (Gaspar 2015).

Furthermore, when the California State Sanctuary Law Bill SB 54 sought to limit the cooperation of law enforcement with ICE and federal immigration officials, Youngblood made his position clear, requesting that the county board of supervisors pass a resolution opposing it. Youngblood took things a step further in asking the board of supervisors to declare Kern County a “non-sanctuary” county and establish a “law and order” county resolution instead. “No one knows what ‘sanctuary’ means. I just know I don’t want to be one,” he said. Ultimately the board did vote to oppose SB54 but did not go so far as to declare Kern a “non-sanctuary” or “law and order” county. The Kern board of supervisors is dominated by four Republicans and one self-described moderate Democrat. This same board of supervisors is currently under investigation by the state’s justice department for a possible violation of civil rights after they denied a \$1.2 million-plus contract to a community organization, Building Healthy Communities South Kern. These funds were supposed to be utilized by local community organizations and nonprofits to conduct educational outreach to non-English-speaking communities about COVID-19. However, the contract was denied by the four Republican supervisors after one, Zack Scrivener, took issue with the fact

that the organization supported reallocating funds in a high school district away from policing and toward counseling and other educational supports.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the city of Bakersfield has also considered taking similarly hardline stances on immigration. Though Mayor Harvey Hall did march with immigrant rights organizers in 2013, he was the exception rather than the norm. For example, just a year after thousands participated in the 2006 marches, and thirteen years after the original Proposition 187 was passed, Bakersfield City Council member David Couch proposed his own local version of Prop 187 when he proposed: 1) declaring English the official Language in the City of Bakersfield; 2) declaring Bakersfield a “non-sanctuary” city; and 3) tasking city staff with investigating what city services could be denied to undocumented immigrants (Californian 2007). Years later, after becoming an elected supervisor of the county of Kern, Couch was the sole councilmember who attempted to adopt Sheriff Youngbloods proposal to declare the county a “non-sanctuary/law and order” county.

Political Machines in Kern and a legacy of “Blue Dog” Democrats

Given the conservative politics of politicians on the right, and moderate politics of politicians on the left youth have largely felt that elected officials in the region were not doing enough to protect immigrant communities. At first glance the partisanship of Kern county does not seem drastically in favor of Republicans (36% R- 34% D), however the partisanship and power of local elected officials illustrates a

well-oiled political machine that has played an instrumental role throughout the counties history.

A well-oiled political machine

Mark Abernathy and his wife Cathy founded Western Pacific research, a local Republican consulting firm that would go on to elevate local, state and national republicans to office. Congressman Bill Thomas the powerful chair of the Ways and Means Committee would play a role in elevating Western Pacific research to prominence. Prior to becoming a politician and running for state assembly Thomas was an instructor of political science at Bakersfield College, a point we will return to shortly. Once an aide to Bill Thomas, Cathy and her husband were extremely successful throughout the years both recruiting and grooming candidates for office in Kern.

Their clients included Bill Thomas, “Congressman Kevin McCarthy, state Sen. Jean Fuller, state Assemblyman Vince Fong, former state Assemblywoman Shannon Grove, Kern County Supervisors Mick Gleason and Zack Scrivner, Bakersfield Mayor Karen Goh and Bakersfield City Council members Ken Weir, Jacquie Sullivan and Bruce Freeman “ (Burger 2018b). Notably, McCarthy began by interning for Congressman Bill Thomas later becoming his chief of staff and then running for state assembly and then running to replace Thomas in the seat he vacated. Vince Fong, a current assembly member representing parts of Kern also began his political career interning for Thomas, and then later working for his protégé

McCarthy as district director before successfully running for state assembly. The cycle of intern to aide, to district director and eventual candidate illustrates a political machine that has been well oiled and operating for decades.

Locally, Republican candidates dared not to run without kissing the ring of Mark Abernathy, with a guarantee that they would run an opposing candidate if they decided not to utilize Western Pacific Research's operation. Statewide the Abernathy's also played an instrumental role in the successful recall campaign of Governor Gray Davis and subsequent election of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (Salvaggio 2012). The consistent successful elections of Republican leaders has only strengthened anti-immigrant sentiment in the region. Literature on social movements posits that division among elites as representing a significant opening within the political opportunity structure (McAdam 1999; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). However, this powerful political machine and lack of division among political elites continues to act as a major constraint for youth organizing around immigration.

For example, At the state level local Republican state assembly representative Vince Fong who represented part of Kern vehemently opposed SB54 California's State Sanctuary law which sought to limit local law enforcement cooperation with ICE. Moderate Democratic Assembly member Rudy Salas on the other hand constantly dodged a direct response on how he would vote on this bill when approached by constituents and community based organizations, ultimately voting in favor. Dissatisfied with Kevin McCarthy's consistent opposition to immigration, and even more disheartened with the Trump administration's opposition to immigration,

youth from mixed status families have found virtually no support at the Federal Level. Though Congressman Valadao was one of the few Republicans to occasionally favor immigrant legislation (in a Democratic leaning/toss up district), youth did not have a strong ally for immigration until the election of Democrat TJ Cox to Congress in 2018. Valadao however would reclaim his former seat in November of 2020. Notably, Valadao was one of the few republicans who was not tied directly to the Abernathy machine as a client, perhaps allowing him to maintain a more moderate position. Kevin McCarthy on the other hand a long time Abernathy loyalist espouses the norm of Abernathy Republican candidates, pushing for a hard right stance on immigration as he vied for party leadership (Bade 2018). This republican political machine in Kern, along with their candidates illustrates how anti-immigrant rhetoric, and policies have contributed to an even more hostile a political climate and closed opportunity structure.

“Valleycrats” and the revolving door

Though youth in Kern would sometimes get the opportunity to meet with elected officials, it was usually only for a good photo op. As Gabriel explained in a Focus group, one Kern politician went as far as to interrupt a community cleanup effort in order to make sure to capture a photo. “ And she's like, ‘yeah, we'll clean up later’. And I'm like, ‘huh?’ I want to clean up. Like, I'm here to clean up and I'm here to do the actual work that we're talking about.” Gabriel explained. Feeling like this elected official was only there for publicity, Gabriel also vented about other politicians that would show up to community events or youth-led events, only to

leave whenever confronted by youth who began asking questions around policies or bills. Though one might expect local Democrats and Latinx candidates to rally voters and young people in this hostile context, typically this was not the case.

Even though there have been several Latinx individuals who have made their way into public office, youth found themselves increasingly disillusioned with politicians who had once mobilized the community, only to leave their positions and work for special interests such as the oil industry. Among local political circles and even within the local Democratic Central Committee Oil and Ag continue to pull levers in order to assure their interests are secured, even going as far as funding mailers for typically uncontested delegate elections. Alongside this, a pattern of Central Valley Democrats who have gone through the infamous revolving door of Sacramento.

There is a common mantra among local Democratic consultants and candidates that in order to win in the Central Valley, Democrats must play towards the middle and run as moderate candidates. Supporting this median voter theory lies a long history of self-proclaimed “Valleycrats” or “blue dog” Democrats that have been relatively successful in attaining office in statewide politics, in districts typically composed of Kern’s more Latinx and African American areas.

Michael Rubio once elected to the Kern County Board of Supervisors as the sole Democrat would later go on to win the 16th state senate district in 2010. Without finishing his first term in the legislature, Rubio would resign from his position to take

a government affairs job with Chevron (Mcgreevy 2013). Once seen as a rising star in the Democratic party, Rubio would also set a pattern that other Valleycrats would soon follow. Democratic Assemblywoman Nicole Parra, once infamously kicked out of her office in the capitol for refusing to support the state budget alongside her Democratic colleagues was also a leader within the so called “moderate” caucus of Sacramento and would later take a government affairs position with a refinery (Lauren Rosenhall 2017).

Locally, Democratic Councilmember Willie Rivera became the youngest elected official in Bakersfield city council history in 2013 at just 22 years old (Douglass 2013). Once an intern for State Senator Michael Rubio at the age of 15, in just a few years Rivera would follow in the footsteps of his once mentor. Not by running for state senate, but rather by taking a position to become the Director of Regulatory Affairs for California Independent Petroleum Association as his full time job, and then later resigning from his council seat in 2020 to take on a job with local oil and gas producer Aera energy. Assembly member Rudy Salas, another proclaimed leader of the moderate caucus in Sacramento was the sole Democrat to oppose the 2017 Gas tax, being stripped of his chairmanship in retaliation (Koseff 2017).

The political process model contends that division among elites, or the cultivation of elite allies can provide an opening within the political opportunity structure for change (McAdam 1999; Jenkins and Perrow 1977). On the right, youth from immigrant families found themselves with an impenetrable political machine that produced antagonist candidates who were eager to promote restrictionist

immigration policies at all levels of government. On the “left” youth struggled to contend with a revolving door of elected officials who resigned to become lobbyists or work in prominent government affairs jobs for the oil industry. Youth found themselves apathetic to candidates who put forth moderate platforms that supported the status quo of power. As Hector put it, "There's a lot of pandering. Politicians come out and speak Spanish as a way of voter outreach but they don't really offer concrete policies to address our problems.” Laughing, Hector said “It’s like oh they ‘show up’ but try to have mariachi in the background or something.” The cultivation of allies at any level of government proved to be a daunting and seemingly impossible task for youth from Kern.

Throughout time there has been one exception to the self-proclaimed Valleycrat mentality, and that is the single assembly term of Democrat Dr. Raymond Gonzalez. A Political Science professor at Bakersfield College in the 1960s, Gonzalez was the only Latino faculty member out of 200. It was there at Bakersfield College where he met his colleague Bill Thomas, who convinced him to run for state assembly against a 3 term Republican in 1972 (Pierce 2018). Gonzalez ran a truly grassroots campaign in a district that only held an eight percent Democratic registration, pulling off a major upset and becoming the region’s first Latino Assemblyman. Once in Sacramento he gained a reputation for being a maverick, rejecting corporate lobbyist contributions, in one case “he famously returned a \$600 check to a lobbyist with a note attached reading: “No thank you.” (Pierce 2018). His victory however was short lived, as he would be challenged for reelection by the

person who he had once considered a good friend: Bill Thomas. Convinced that Bill Thomas had convinced him to run in order to have an easier race against a minority candidate Dr. Gonzalez reflected on this betrayal in an interview with the Bakersfield Californian: ““Bill Thomas, my pal, my friend — he lured me into a trap and then ran against me...“The guy’s got smarts. No question about that. I’ll never fault him for his brains,” Gonzales said. “Just his soul.” (Pierce 2018). Dr. Gonzalez passed away in 2018, leaving a legacy and style of politics that no Democratic candidate has yet to successfully follow.

State legislation often brought about hope where local governments failed to take action or implement immigrant friendly policies. 20 year old Chuy explained just how life changing it was for him and his parents to now be able to obtain driver’s licenses. “It gives you something. I felt like they do care. For my parents, it makes them feel happy because they’ve been here 19 years...and they have nothing. Recently they got this news that they could get their license and they were all happy now.” Though the fear of immigration authorities would still loom over them, policies like AB60 (allowing undocumented immigrants to obtain licenses in CA), allowing undocumented students to pay in state tuition through the California Dream Act, and SB54 (Declaring CA a sanctuary) all played a significant role in improving living conditions for mixed status families. Yet all of these initiatives had come from the state legislature, and in many cases local governments, including Kern, sought to directly oppose these policies, and in some cases actively work to enact restrictionist policies. As mentioned previously, one local City Council member David Couch had

attempted to initiate a proposal which sought to cut off all city services to undocumented residents in Kern. Once elected into the County board of supervisors years later, he also supported a proposal to establish Kern County as a “non-sanctuary” county.

These proposed policies, combined with an overwhelming sense of fear anxiety and surveillance left some youth feeling discouraged. Several youth for example were aware of the ICE Raids in the community and worried for the future. However, a lack of information, family responsibilities, and a sense of defeat drove down participation. 18 year Teresa put it bluntly “I feel like I should probably do something about it but I don't have the information to do anything.” All in all the powerful partisanship of the Republican party combined with a strong infrastructure of the Abernathy Political machine and cycle of moderate “Valleycrats” swinging through a revolving door of lobbying illustrates the general weakness of mobilizing structures and an exclusionary political opportunity structure.

Resisting Repression

Despite these challenges for communities of color, the Central Valley has long been a site of resistance. As African-Americans migrated westward beginning in the 1900s, they sought to establish townships where they would be free from persecution and discrimination from whites. A freed slave and soldier during the Civil War, Colonel Alan Allensworth founded the town of Allensworth in 1908 in present-day Tulare County. Significantly, this community was completely financed and governed

by African-Americans. Founded on the idea that Black individuals could own property, get an education, and control their own destinies, the town unfortunately struggled to flourish without adequate resources like water rights and regular railroad service, which were largely controlled by Whites (Terriquez et al. 2021). Today, Allensworth is commemorated in a state historic park that seeks to preserve the legacy of this community.

Notably, the Central Valley was also the epicenter of the Farm Labor movement during both the 1930s and the 1960s. During these time periods, the demands of farmworkers were met with violence and abuse at the hands of law enforcement. For example, in 1933, Mexican and Filipino farmworkers organized large-scale cotton strikes. In response, ranchers, community members, and law enforcement descended upon the strikers with guns and batons, resulting in the murders of farmworkers in both Pixley and Arvin. The hostile context is best illustrated by the words of a Tulare County supervisor who stated, “Those damn Mexicans can lay out on the street and die for all I care.” One Kern sheriff’s deputy said, “We protect our farmers here.... They are our best people.... But the Mexicans are trash.... We herd them like pigs” (Guerin-Gonzales 1994, 121-122). No growers faced charges for any of the crimes committed, and at least four children starved of malnutrition during the conflict. Fearing that farmworkers would continue to organize, growers successfully pushed the Kern County Board of Supervisors to ban John Steinbeck’s novel *The Grapes of Wrath* from local libraries and schools,

claiming that it depicted Kern in a bad light (Neary 2011). Local growers also staged burnings of the book in Kern and other Central Valley cities.

In the 1960s, the farmworker movement was initially sparked by Filipino civil rights and labor leaders like Philip Vera Cruz and Larry Itliong and elder *Manongs* (Dennis Arguelles 2017). Soon these leaders would partner in solidarity with Mexican-American farmworkers and leaders Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez, the groups merging to form the United Farm Workers (UFW). The UFW made substantial progress toward creating better working conditions for farmworkers, including increased wages, unionization, adequate breaks, and dignity. Perhaps the most well-known action, the Delano Grape strike of 1965, captured the nation's attention as UFW organizers encouraged a national boycott, marches, and nonviolent civil disobedience. After a five-year struggle, the union prevailed in securing better working conditions and wages for farmworkers (Flores 2016). Just as during the 1930s, farmworkers and organizers faced brutality and arrests from local law enforcement, including the Kern County Sheriffs. At the request of growers, authorities arrested farmworkers who were peacefully protesting; consequently, the Kern County sheriff LeRoy Gayle faced a series of questions from Senator Robert F. Kennedy when the Senate subcommittee on migrant labor held a 1965 hearing in Delano. During this exchange, Senator Kennedy asked the sheriff, "How can you arrest somebody if they haven't violated the law?," to which Sheriff Gayle replied, "Well...they're ready to violate the law in other words..." As boos emerged from the audience and the committee adjourned for a lunch, Senator Kennedy slapped his

hands on the table in front of him, aghast at the sheriff's response. Smiling, he jeered "Could I suggest in the interim period of time, in the luncheon period of time... that the sheriff and the district attorney read the Constitution of the United States?"

Some social movement scholars attribute the success of the 1960's farmworker movement to a friendlier state political climate and the support of elites (Jenkins and Perrow 1977). However, we should also note that the UFW has a complex and nuanced history, as does one of its prominent leaders, Cesar Chavez. It is well documented, for example, that Chavez and the UFW initially opposed illegal immigration and would even call Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) to deport undocumented migrants whom they considered "strikebreakers" for crossing UFW picket lines (Bardacke 2013). As the Mexican-American community and the Chicano movement placed increasing pressure on Chavez and the UFW, their views shifted over time to embrace and accept undocumented workers into the union. However, union tensions remained between Filipinos and Mexicans and between documented and undocumented workers, tensions that contributed to the decline of unions across the United States (Gutiérrez 1995; Bardacke 2013). Since at least 1994, when the UFW led a campaign against Proposition 187 in California, it has advocated for comprehensive and just immigration reform. Even so, the UFW and agricultural workers in general have had to struggle against a powerful agricultural industry that has ballooned in size. Scholar activists in the Central Valley have faced direct threats and interference from the industries and economic interests they research, as industrial agribusiness have attempted to muddy or even falsify scholarly results (D.

J. O’Connell and Peters 2021; D. O’Connell 2011). In reflections on the region delivered to his students, scholar activist Isao Fujimoto describes the juxtaposition between powerful business interests and struggling workers in the fertile Central Valley:

“The Central Valley is very special. It is the richest agricultural region in the history of the world! The public image of the Central Valley is that the wealth is in agricultural productivity. But I would say the wealth is really in all the people that are here. Tremendously diverse... There are about 3,000 counties in the country. If you ranked them according to agricultural productivity the top ten usually have almost all the San Joaquin Valley counties. Number 1, 2, 3 for the last fifty years has been Fresno Tulare and Kern County... The poorest cities in California are also there. That’s called a contradiction, to have poverty and wealth in one place. This is why it’s very important to really start examining these kinds of questions.” (D. J. O’Connell and Peters 2021, 223)

Though the agriculture economy has survived, and in fact thrived, because of the labor of immigrant communities and the undocumented, this did not prevent attacks and discrimination against the actual workers. Despite a continuously hostile political environment, political mobilization and resistance in Kern County would surge again in the late 20th and 21st century.

Modern Local Resistance in Kern: May Day Resistance

Scholars have emphasized the politicization and mobilization of Latinos in the aftermath of California's Proposition 187, which sought to prohibit undocumented immigrants from using any state services (Jacobson 2008; Street, Jones-Correa, and Zepeda-Millán 2017). Although the proposition initially passed, it was later struck down by the California State Supreme Court. Most important, though, were the lasting effects that can still be witnessed in California today. As a result of this hostile anti-immigrant initiative, Latino voter turnout and Latino naturalization rates, which can itself be seen as a political act, increased dramatically (Adrian D. Pantoja, Ricardo Ramirez, and Gary. M. Segura 2001). Even more significantly, we have seen Latinos take action both on the streets and at the ballot box in response to legislative threats.

It was the national political threats to immigrant communities that began rising in the 21st century that began to spark an even more powerful movement, and one in which young people played a critical role. The Nonetheless, when the *Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 (H.R. 4437)*, more commonly known as the "Sensenbrenner Bill," was introduced, the threat intensified and catalyzed one of the largest Latino mobilizations in U.S. History, the 2006 immigrant rights marches. The bill would have increased border enforcement (as well as internal enforcement), changed being undocumented in the United States from being a civil offense to a felony, and also criminalized anybody who assisted

undocumented persons in the United States. Protesters organized marches across the country, including in Kern County.

Though there had been marches in Kern's surrounding areas before, for example in Delano, California, for farmworkers rights, there had yet to be a comparably massive Latino mobilization in Bakersfield. In response to proposition 187 in 1994, a group of students in Bakersfield helped lead walkouts to express their opposition to the proposition, a preview of what was to come in response to the Sensenbrenner Bill. In 2006, though, the protests in Bakersfield were much more significant, the culmination of local and national pressures, and intergenerational organizing efforts.

Bakersfield College Professor Jesus "Jess" Gilberto Nieto played a role in helping organize the 2006 marches in Bakersfield. A leader on and off campus, Nieto had been recruited to teach at Bakersfield College as a result of student's demands for a Chicano studies program in the early 1970s. Nieto established one of the most robust Chicano Studies programs across the state and the Chicano Cultural Center at Bakersfield College (Mata 2021). In 1990, for example, an indignant Professor Nieto alerted reporters when, after a fight had broken out between two students at a local high school, the campus police officer called the border patrol to report one of the students, who was subsequently deported (Gaspar 2017). Because of his efforts, the story received significant press attention. Nieto even created his own nonprofit organization, Heritage of America, which was dedicated to education and culture and held citizenship classes for the community.

In order to understand more about the 2006 marches I interviewed Dr. Gonzalo Santos, a sociology professor at CSU Bakersfield and former student activist in Mexico during the *Movimiento Estudiantil* and subsequent *Tlatelolco* massacre. He recalled that in the weeks leading up to the first march in Bakersfield, Nieto had organized and hosted a screening of the newly released movie *Walkout* at the Bakersfield Fox Theater. The film documented a key moment in the Chicano movement: the 1960's East LA walkouts during which students protested unequal and discriminatory treatment in their schools. At the time, compared to the Los Angeles protests that March 2006, when high schoolers walked out and blocked the 405 and the 10 freeways, Bakersfield was comparably quiet; however, witnessing these events unfold across the nation and inspired by students in the 1960s walkouts, students in Kern and Bakersfield were eager to participate in a protest against the Sensenbrenner Bill.

Youth were so eager, in fact, that walkouts began before any organizing happened! Spontaneously, groups of youth at several high schools in Bakersfield began walking out of classes in mid-March, jumping fences or simply walking out of the front doors of their schools. Demonstrating their energy and commitment to the cause immigrant youth emerged as a key political force in Kern. These protests would grow as the weeks went on, until on March 30, 2006, somewhere between 3,800 to 4000 students walked out of their classrooms in protest in Bakersfield. The word spread fast, as students from high schools all across Bakersfield and Kern County met up at the downtown Liberty Bell. Some students marched as much as 8-10 miles,

waving Mexican and American flags as they called for the defeat of the Sensenbrenner Bill and a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. Reporters noted that students had used text messages, phone calls, emails, and Myspace (a popular social media website in the mid-2000s) to disseminate information and organize (Ernie Lewis 2009). The students were also persistent; an email sent out after the march encouraged students to walk out every single day until the bill was defeated.

Seeing passions grow and the burgeoning movement, the mobilization turned to a more cooperative endeavor with adult allies. Nieto, and other leaders organized a community meeting at a Catholic church packed with community leaders and high school students from all across Kern and Bakersfield College. Having witnessed the high schoolers take action and coordinate among themselves, they recognized the need to speed up plans for a larger organized march: “Truly, it happened because the kids were no longer staying put in their schools! We had to say, ‘Kids, stay in schools. You are jumping the gun! We have to plan something big’” said Santos. Not wanting to restrict youth’s efforts, but also recognizing that more organizing would better demonstrate their collective power, the newly founded Coalition for Immigrant Rights kicked into high gear. Santos recalls that this coalition was under a lot of national pressure. In early March, large-scale marches had already occurred in major cities in Los Angeles and Chicago. Things were moving fast since the first marches of late February. As organizers across the nation connected with one another, April 10

was set as the date for large-scale immigration protests, which the coalition would join.

There were two people crucial to this demonstration, according to Santos: Nieto and none other than UFW co-founder Dolores Huerta. Despite the sense of momentum, the coalition (and its leaders) did not always see eye to eye. For example, after determining the date of the march, there were two camps within the coalition with differing ideas on where it should take place. The UFW and Dolores Huerta wanted to march on the East Side, in the predominately Latino and Black neighborhoods of Bakersfield, to rally the immigrant communities and communities of color. In contrast, Jess Nieto and Gonzalo Santos argued that the coalition needed to take over the space and symbols of power of the white community in Bakersfield, specifically downtown Bakersfield, and the predominately white and affluent Westchester neighborhood. “Nobody had ever marched in downtown,” Santos emphasized. Ultimately when it came time to decide where the march would take place, it was youth from mixed status families who would make the decision in the coalition. The youth in attendance, eager to march and leaning toward a more central location, sided with marching downtown.

Another point of contention for this first march was whether the coalition should urge workers and students to stay home or whether the protest should have been held at a later time to accommodate those who chose to work or attend school. According to Santos, Huerta was opposed to the idea of a walkout or boycott, stating that farmworkers needed to go to work and that children needed to go to school,

suggesting that the coalition hold a candlelight vigil in the evening instead. The coalition heatedly debated amongst themselves for several weeks. Santos noted it was difficult to try and argue with someone with such community influence and power as Huerta: “She was very determined and committed to her point of view.” After going back and forth, the coalition decided to compromise and simply call the April 10 march “an all-day event” so that attendees could come whenever they wanted. Hoping to make the march family friendly, the coalition decided that it would begin at Jastro Park Circle and proceed to the downtown Liberty Bell and back. With the details finalized, Huerta, union leaders, and even a few religious leaders held a press conference to announce the date.

On the morning of April 10, 2006, approximately 15,000 individuals gathered, dressed in white t-shirts and proudly waving both Mexican and American flags. Santos, who gave an impassioned welcomed speech to attendees, noted that the day also began with attendees and organizers singing and dancing to the tune of *Las Mañanitas* to Dolores Huerta, as she celebrated her birthday organizing and marching with the community. Though the march began in the morning, it became so crowded that the line of marchers snaked all the way downtown. “The march stretched so long that as the first group made their way back to the park, there were still people barely leaving the park!” Dr. Santos exclaimed.



Community members gather on April 10th rallying against the Sensenbrenner Bill.

Photo provided by Gonzalo Santos

Speaking to a reporter from *NPR*, Huerta emphasized the historic day on which a united coalition in Kern came together for immigrant rights: “You know, they’re going to say, well, these are all undocumented people marching. No. Everybody here is united. We have the religious, the churches, we have labor unions, we have business, we have students, we have civic organizations. We have women’s organizations. We’re all together to ask for a just legalization bill in the U.S.

Congress” (Barco 2006). Illustrating a collective consciousness and a link between perceptions of self interest and racial group interests, marchers exhibited a sense of “linked fate” that has been documented by scholars, particularly Latinos when there is group discrimination associated with immigration (Dawson 1994; Zepeda Milan 2017; García Bedolla 2005).



Photo Credit: Nicholas Belardes, April 10, 2006.

Immigrant families and youth from mixed-status families were at the forefront of this movement, organizing their peers to support the march. As illustrated in the photo however, though the march was predominately Latino, though Sikh community members and leaders also attended the march to demonstrate their support for the immigrant community in Kern. Faith leaders, union leaders and local organizations demonstrated their solidarity, along with a few elected Democratic officials like state assemblywoman Nicole Parra and her father, Kern supervisor Pete Parra.

As students walked out of local high schools and made their way to downtown Bakersfield, Santos laughingly recalled that Kern County district attorney Ed Jangles was chasing around junior high kids around downtown Bakersfield: “Those kids didn’t give a dam! They were proud to be there marching with Mexican flags.” The sight of Mexican American flags quickly became a debated topic among local TV and radio shows. Local NBC affiliate KGET-17 invited Nieto to debate the decision to wave these (as opposed to American) flags and defend the walkouts, inviting local Republican activist Jim Lopez to take the opposing side (Ernie Lewis 2009). The march in April however was only a preview of what was to come next.

May Day Marches

With the success of the April 10 march and more protests emerging across the nation, organizers began to plan their next move. Nationwide, a clear call emerged for a national day of boycott and mobilization on May 2. Organizers were asking community members not to go to: 1) school; 2) work; and 3) or any commercial

establishments, even gas stations. By withholding labor and their commercial presence, organizers hoped to demonstrate their collective power, show Congress just how crucial immigrants were to the United States, and push them to provide a path to citizenship for the millions of undocumented immigrants across the United States. This national “Day without Immigrants” was set for May 1, engineered as part of the immigrants’ rights movement to reclaim May Day and to militantly engage in civil disobedience (Zepeda Milan 2017; Pantoja, Menjívar, and Magaña 2008; Terriquez and Lin 2019). Locally, the Kern coalition initially debated the third ask of community members to not patronize businesses. It was a very robust debate, but after local immigrant businesses voluntarily began shutting their doors or donating to the cause on May 1, the decision to take this action as well was clear. Correctly anticipating a much larger turnout for the May 1 march than the previous one, the coalition decided to move the location to the nearby, and much larger, Beach Park.

Santos attempted to request a park permit through the city for the event. However, he was quickly rejected by staffers, who claimed that they could not grant a permit for more than 200 people. Calling their bluff, Santos then approached the city manager and stated: “If we don’t have people in the park, then I guess they’ll just have to take over the streets nearby!” Following this, the city manager immediately called the parks and recreation department and ordered them to issue the permit. Recognizing the closed and adverse political opportunity structure, Santos was able to push for demands as the numbers for mobilization had been unprecedented in Bakersfield.

The marchers had overcome powerful localized threats in order to stage their protest. For example, the Kern County district attorney had threatened to prosecute truancy to the fullest extent of the law. Local teachers, principals, and administrators threatened that students would face punishment for walking out or being absent on May 1. Despite this, students walked straight out of the front gates, front offices, or even jumped school fences when administrators attempted to close off exits. As a young sixth-grader at the time, I myself missed school and watched the walkouts from home with my mother and brothers. When the next day, my teacher Ms. Clark asked me why I was absent, I replied, “I was sick...sick of the government.” And with that, I was suspended from school for several days for my “participation” in the march. (Some of my fellow classmates who missed school were suspended as well.)

The 2006 May Day in Bakersfield began with a rally in the morning and was followed by a protest in the afternoon outside of local Republican congressman (and chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee) Bill Thomas’s office. Thousands of students walked out of classrooms, farmworkers walked off the job, and several businesses shut down their operations in solidarity in Kern. Immigrant families marched together, making their way to the park throughout the day. In total, approximately 35,000 people, (mostly immigrant families) would turn out for this historic day in Bakersfield.

Quickly filling up the park, attendees chanted in sync “*Si Se Puede*” (“Yes we can”) and “*Hoy marchamos, mañana votamos*” (“Today we march, tomorrow we vote”), as they called for a path to citizenship and an end to the criminalization of

immigrants. In the evening, there were so many attendees gathered that the protest outside of Congressman Thomas's office became a public safety concern for the coalition. Even though the march and rally in the morning had the most attendees, there were still thousands of people as the evening approached. It was the largest march in Bakersfield history up to that point. Smiling, Santos stated, "Nobody had ever marched in Bakersfield at that sort of scale before, not the women's movement, not the labor movement, or anything else. Bakersfield was this bastion of white power, and we took it. And ever since then, people have been ready to march downtown without fear." The march set a precedent in Bakersfield and inspired immigrant organizers for years to come.



May Day march 2006 in Kern County, Photo provided by Gonzalo Santos

In addition to the sheer size, these marches were exceptional in that youth from mixed-status families were at the forefront, energizing and mobilizing their elders and other family members to participate, explaining to them how the Sensenbrenner Bill would directly impact them and people they cared about. Organizers in the Kern coalition shared their stories about what a path to citizenship would mean for them: the ability to study, to work, and to live free without fear in their communities. When youth organizers faced pushback, they refused to back

down. Santos, an immigrant himself, recalled that the march opened his eyes to the latent power of immigrant activism, especially from the first generation: “The immigrant community responded forcefully, showing up from all across the county...and that’s when I realized we [immigrants] wanted to march, but the leaders did not want us to. U.S-born leaders did not have the same viewpoint as immigrants did.” Ultimately, the Sensenbrenner Bill failed, which could be counted as a success. However, the movement also gave rise to a conservative backlash nationwide, which Chris Zepeda Milan notes may have led to the failure of any sort of comprehensive immigration reform bill (Zepeda Milan 2017). Nonetheless, the May march illustrates how even within a narrow opportunity structure and in an exclusionary context, immigrant communities and youth from mixed-status families were able to come together and mobilize against threat.

After the seeds of resistance had been planted in 2006, there was another moment in which a path to citizenship looked possible. In 2013, a bipartisan bill that created a thirteen-year pathway to citizenship passed the Senate, giving rise to a sense of optimism. However, as the bill made its way to the House, the GOP majority blocked it. With a rise of the Tea Party, house Republicans grew nervous about primary challenges should they not take a hardline stance on immigration (Skocpol and Williamson 2012). Local Kern Republican congressman (and Bill Thomas protégé) Kevin McCarthy explicitly opposed a pathway to citizenship. Seeking to overcome these roadblocks, the immigrant community organized in 2013 to support

this bill, wearing white t-shirts that read, “The Path to citizenship passes through Bakersfield.”

Though Republican leadership was absent in the 2006 marches, this changed in 2013 during marches leading up to May Day. Notably, organizers were joined by none other than the Mayor Bakersfield Harvey Hall, a white Republican mayor and owner of local Hall Ambulances Services (the sole provider of ambulance service in the County of Kern). Putting country and good policy before partisan politics, Mayor Hall informed organizers that he would be happy to march alongside them. He even provided ambulances for the marches as well in case any were needed due to dehydration or illness. Many of the same organizers who had marched in 2006 organized the 2013 efforts. Seeing a Republican have the courage to stand up for immigration reform was a welcome surprise. As Nieto put it, “I am sure that he probably surprised many of his Republican brethren, but I truly believe he spoke from the heart without a concern for his political future” (Gaspar 2013). At a time where the Tea Party movement was placing pressure on McCarthy on the right, Mayor Hall advocated from a more moderate position and pleaded with McCarthy and other legislators to pass comprehensive immigration reform. Unfortunately, stonewalled by McCarthy and other Republicans, the bill ultimately failed to move forward. Once again, and similar to 2006, organizers felt as though they had won the local battle—bringing the mayor over to their side— but lost the war, as the hope of immigration reform for millions of families disappeared.

The Intersectional Immigrant May Day Resistance Movement of 2017

In 2017, following the election of Donald Trump, who took hardline stances on immigration reform, I joined other organizers—including two of the original 2006 May Day organizers Dr. Santos and Dolores Huerta—to form the May Day Resistance committee. We discussed how to proceed with a march that would not only highlight the need for comprehensive immigration reform but would also be intersectional, highlighting various community issues in Bakersfield and Kern. The committee organized a list of demands, which we distributed through flyers, posters, and media press releases:



The flyers and posters also paid tribute to the original 2006 marches by using the iconic photo captured by Nicholas Belardes, who would also join us at the 2017 march to read a poem.



As highlighted in the list of demands above, organizers recognized a need to go beyond immigrant rights to present a united front that was intersectional, multi-issue, and multi-faith. Attempting to bring together local immigrant rights organizations and social justice based organizations, the committee debated some of the same issues around the 2006 marches. Should we encourage students to walk out of schools and businesses to close? What if students face retaliation, as they did in then? Will businesses actually be willing to shutter their doors? While we were discussing these issues, one local high school student, Phoenix Halling, led the effort to organize his peers at Highland High School and published an opinion editorial on why he was walking out:

“In this day and age, now is not the time for political apathy. We can no longer rely on anyone else but ourselves to protect our right and liberties. We

can no longer stand idly by as our friends and family face deportation, as our immigrant brothers and sisters face criminalization and brutality by a supposedly just system of law, as our most vulnerable face the possibility of losing their health coverage, as the rights of women, voters, workers, religious minorities, and the LGBTQI community are under attack... Though we hail from various backgrounds, cultures, religious faiths or the lack thereof, though we may express varying political and world views, despite our differences, we will walk together as one.” (Halling 2017)

When he attempted to organize his peers, Phoenix encountered pushback and intimidation from administrators. He had asked several fellow students to hand out flyers, which blew up on Snapchat and social media. During his second-period class, however, Phoenix was called in by the dean and vice principal, who informed him that he was not allowed to disseminate flyers during school hours or on school property (even though it was within his legal rights to do so). These administrators also hinted at disciplinary action and that they were monitoring him on social media. Without flinching, we organized in response to this and updated flyers to inform students of their legal rights. Phoenix continued to disseminate flyers, and the committee continued to organize via social media as well. Additionally, Phoenix’s sister, a student at a nearby Chipman Jr. High School, also faced retaliation. One of her teachers threatened to take away all of her flyers because they stated support for the LGBTQ community, which this teacher did not support.

Kern County Walkout

To protest against threats to our civil rights and liberties, we ask you to join us in walking out of schools and businesses at 9:00 am, and join us at Mill Creek Park at 10:00 am for a day of resistance that will include a May Day rally and march.

We support: Right to Public Education, Workers Rights, Voting Rights, Women's Rights, LGBTQ Rights, Religious Tolerance and Equality, Minority Rights, Right to Quality and Affordable Healthcare, a Fair and Balanced Justice System.

Please follow us on:

Facebook: Kern County Walkout for Civil Rights

Twitter: @KernWalkout2017

Know Your Rights!

- *The school cannot punish you for missing school to participate in political protest more harshly than it punishes students for missing school for any other purpose*
- *Section 48907 of the California Education Code gives a special guarantee that students have a right to express their political opinions.*
- *The school cannot lock the doors because it is a fire and safety hazard. If the school administration threatens to lock students in your school to prevent walkouts, students should immediately notify their parents and the district superintendent's office.*

****For more information visit our Facebook and Twitter to find the full document from the ACLU on your rights as a student****

Flyers created and distributed in the weeks leading up to the 2017 May Day march.

In mid-February 2017, local organizers around Kern county had attempted to organize another “Day without Immigrants” similar to the 2006 movement. Marches were held on April 16 in Shafter and Arvin, but there was no event held in Bakersfield. School districts saw a notable increase in absences on that day, but not many businesses closed their doors. One of these businesses that had refused to shut down operations was Vallarta supermarkets, a Latino-owned grocery chain that

predominately served the Latino communities (Woods 2017). As the grocery chain defended its decision to not close their doors, organizers called them out on social media and pushed communities to boycott them out for not supporting the communities that kept them in business. While handing out flyers and speaking to leaders in the community, I personally met with local Vallarta managers, who agreed to close in observance of May Day. They also posted our flyers and their own, which stated why they were closing, in both English and Spanish: “We stand with our community and employees supporting immigrant rights.”



Other immigrant and allied businesses also voluntarily agreed not to do business that day. Unlike previous May Day marches, however, there were some notable abstentions from elected officials, and the numbers did not rival the thousands of students who had walked out in 2006.

In the weeks leading up to the May Day Resistance march, some organizers wondered whether it would be better to avoid talking about Trump for fear of counter- protesters showing up and engaging in violence. As Santos remembered: “You had some [people] who said we shouldn’t talk about Trump... On May Day? Hell yeah we need to talk about Trump! Mother’s Day, maybe not so much.”



May Day Resistance Rally, May 1, 2017.

On the day of the rally, approximately 1,000-1,500 individuals attended. Heeding lessons learned from previous May Day marches, we aimed to make the event family-friendly by inviting local artists and having activities for children. The march marked another moment in the struggle for social justice in Kern and would later be followed by other movements (e.g., women's and Keeping Families Together marches, Black Lives Matter protests).



The Front Page of the Bakersfield Californian, May 2, 2017.

As noted by Hopkins (2010), the rhetoric and policies championed by conservative leaders around immigration may have grave ramifications for Latinx families living in the Central Valley, increasing local levels of hostility. Researchers looking into the activism of Latinx youth must take into account the role of racial threats and power dynamics. Within this hostile context and dominant conservative ideology, Kern presents a very narrow (and almost nonexistent) political opportunity structure for youth from mixed-status families to effect change.

Mains (2000) emphasizes that “borders are not only created by the construction of fences, walls, and floodlights, but also through discourses that mark immigrant bodies and the places with which they are associated as separate, marginal and different” (Mains 2000, 151). Arguing that the political rhetoric and discourse of anti-immigrant sentiment regards immigrants’ bodies as “discardable” and “replaceable,” Mains’ work further emphasizes the need to study the experiences of youth from mixed-status families living in inhospitable political climates. Though numerous studies have looked at political socialization and mobilization in large urban locations like Los Angeles (Zepeda Milan 2017; P. J. Wong and Tseng 2008), San Diego (Getrich 2008b), and the Bay Area (Bloemraad and Trost 2008; Bloemraad, Sarabia, and Fillingim 2016b), less attention has been paid attention to conservative localized contexts in which mobilization is not as expected. As illustrated so far, we must expand our horizons when it comes to studying immigrant families.

In direct contrast to other areas of California, local elected officials in the Central Valley are eager to work with ICE Agencies, meet with President Trump, and defy any pro-immigrant legislation that is passed. Counties in the Central Valley and have also resisted sanctuary policies and unequally enforced state laws meant to protect immigrant communities (Aleaziz 2018; Gorn 2018; Luis Hernandez 2018). Despite this, historic and more recent May Day mobilizations demonstrate a group consciousness that has emerged in Kern among the immigrant community in response to threat. Studies have demonstrated that this sense of “linked fate” among Latinos can help us understand how individuals can overcome barriers to participation and engage in activism, particularly when there is a perception of group discrimination related to immigration (Zepeda Milan 2017; García Bedolla 2005).

Conclusion:

As we have seen in this history of protest in Kern county, whenever a group has pushed back against the status quo they have faced extreme backlash. Whether it was farmworkers attempting to organize for better wages, youth of color in the 1960s attempting to share a space in a community dance hall, or nonprofit organizations seeking to increase the number of counselors on school campuses, other movements, institutions, and the government have punished these efforts to make the environment more equitable and inclusive.

Apart from the various examples I have discussed in this chapter, present-day news reports illustrate the vulnerability of other groups in Kern. For example, during the 2021 Pride Month, a group of young conservative students at Centennial High School brought Trump flags to school to intimidate and harass LGBTQ students, who were called homophobic and transphobic slurs (Delgado 2021). Furthermore, one student even stole a pride flag, proceeded to place it in a school urinal, and then urinated on it, posting photos of his acts on social media, which quickly went viral. In a public statement reminiscent of Donald Trump's "very fine people on both sides" comment, the Kern High School District issued the following statement:

"The Kern High School District and Centennial High School recognize that students have varying viewpoints and opinions. One of the goals of the educational process is to teach students how to communicate respectfully with each other. Last week, students were informed of the expectations for peaceful expression on campus. School administration investigated reports of misconduct associated with the on-campus student exchanges in order to determine appropriate corrective action. Corrective action has been taken with the appropriate students. The District is prohibited from disclosing disciplinary outcomes for students."

The school district had a history of reactionary politics. In the years prior to this incident, Kern High School's board of trustees made local headlines when one local pastor and member, Chad Vegas, voted against non-discrimination policies for

transgender students and even encouraged parents to pull their kids out of the school district and enroll them at Bakersfield Christian High School instead.

With new localized threats emerging every week, youth from mixed-status families living in Kern County face a political context unique from anything else in the state of California. In this context hostile to immigrant communities and presenting an extremely narrow (or even closed) political opportunity structure, how do youth strategize, let alone survive on a daily basis? In my next chapter, I will illustrate how youth from mixed-status families navigate a series of demands in order to resist, adapt, and strategize under these conditions. Additionally, I will explore how the political socialization literature fails to fully encapsulate the experiences and politicization of youth in Kern.

Chapter IV: Exclusion and Hostility: Surviving and Strategizing in Kern County

Introduction:

“One time, we got pulled over and my mom didn't speak like English, and so I was trying to help her, trying to translate. And he [the officer] said, “Shut up, you stupid little Mexican girl, you don't know nothing!”... We might do an [immigrant support] event soon with sheriff's presence nearby and *I'm terrified*. I've got support from folks telling me like, “You gotta go tell your story, or “it would really help if you tell your story.” I'm just like, that's scary... I don't want to tell my story. What if they target me? Because I'm shedding a light on bad things that are happening.” –Katarina, 20 years old

Katarina's story exemplifies some of the many challenges that young immigrants face in Kern County, including high levels of anti-immigrant hostility and the fear and distrust of governmental institutions. But it also exemplifies the courage and resilience of Katarina and others as they continue trying to organize to express their views, engage in political debates, and promote the issues, policies, and goals they care about. For youth like Katarina, growing up within a mixed-status family prepared them for a challenging reality to an extent, though the increasing hostility toward immigrants during the Trump administration would increase their anxiety and fears.

What I hope to illustrate in this chapter is how this localized hostile political context is part of a political opportunity structure that shapes the participation,

strategies, goals, and organizing tactics that youth from mixed-status families adopt. Forced to contend with an exclusionary anti-immigrant context, youth from mixed-status families face a much narrower (or even closed) political opportunity structure. Additionally, this chapter will also illustrate how contrary to what political socialization literature may posit, some youth from mixed-status families may respond to this hostile environment and limited political opportunity structure by deciding to empower themselves. Despite the hostile context, youth feel mobilized to take action on their families' behalf because of their identity and lived experiences. Building upon existing literature that emphasizes the role of localized political contexts in facilitating the inclusion or exclusion of immigrant communities (Burciaga and Martinez 2017; Portes and Rumbaut 2001), I argue that despite a narrow political opportunity structure or exclusionary context, youth from mixed status families can, often with help of youth organizing groups, overcome barriers to participation.

As Katarina finished speaking, youth in the focus group nodded their heads in agreement. We were all sitting around the kitchen table as a small dog barked outside. For these youth in mixed-status families, participation was always risky, especially whenever law enforcement was nearby. In 2015, *The Guardian* published a series of reports and videos illustrating how Kern County's police force was the deadliest in the nation, with more people killed by police per capita than any other county in the United States (Swaine et al. 2015). With a county sheriff who was eager to collaborate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and who took

staunchly anti-immigrant positions, it wasn't hard to see why the *Los Angeles Times* nicknamed Sheriff Donny Youngblood the "Joe Arpaio" of California (Linthicum 2015). Aside from their own personal fears of being targeted for their activism, this fear of law enforcement and immigration enforcement extended to their entire family. As 22-year-old Lupe explained, there was always an overwhelming feeling of anxiety when her mother left for work in the fields. Looking down as if to hide her tears, she stated, "I constantly worry whether she is going to make it home or not." Reflecting on a tragic day for the immigrant community a few youth recalled what had happened just a few months earlier in Delano, CA; once the epicenter of the United Farm Workers (UFW) farmworker labor movement.

On March 13, 2018, undocumented farmworkers Santos Hilario Garcia and Marcelina Garcia Perfecto were on their way to another day of work in the fields after dropping off one of their daughters at school. Suddenly approached by an unmarked vehicle with flashing lights, the couple initially pulled over before attempting to flee. Unfortunately, the Garcia's' lives ended in a tragic car accident as they fled the ICE agents. The victims left behind six children in their passing. ICE agents claimed that Hilario "matched the description" of someone they were looking for, admitting he was not their original target. ICE agents told law enforcement officials that they had pulled over their vehicle and did not actively pursue the couple with their emergency lights or sirens on. When surveillance video emerged illustrating that the ICE vehicles *did* in fact have emergency lights and sirens on while pursuing the vehicle, advocates were hopeful that these ICE agents would be charged with providing false

information to police officers. However, Kern County District Attorney Lisa Green refused to press charges (Hall 2018). This incident only further contributed to increased anxiety and fear for the immigrant community in Kern, and in particular in youth from mixed-status families.

As the nineteen-year-old Ricky said, “That accident really instilled fear in the community.” For Ricky’s family and other immigrants, the increase of ICE Raids, in conjunction with the regime of an anti-immigrant sheriff eager to work with ICE, meant stress levels and anxiety were at an all-time high in the spring of 2018. Witnessing their local sheriff appear on television with President Trump at the border and in Washington, D.C. youth further confirmed what they had already felt growing up: a lack of trust in government and institutions, along with an overwhelming feeling that law enforcement could not be trusted. Given this context, youth in mixed-status families began to interrogate this culture of surveillance, ethnic profiling, and institutional distrust in Kern. They not only asked the question Katarina had posed, “*What if they target me?*,” but also a bigger one: “*What if they target my family?*” Yet despite their legal and social exclusion within this unaccommodating localized context, some of the youth my colleagues and I spoke with found ways to adapt their strategies and organizing efforts within Kern.

Surviving and Strategizing

Youth from mixed-status families must adapt to this hostile context in order to overcome barriers to participation and the dominant political forces directed against

their political participation. Previous literature illustrates that vulnerable individuals such as those from mixed-status families are less likely to be politically engaged because of the high risks associated with participation (Menjívar, Abrego, and Schmalzbauer 2016; S. K. Ramakrishnan and Viramontes 2010). Additionally, low levels of trust are associated with non-participation, and Latinx individuals of Mexican descent have grown increasingly cynical about American government as they are exposed to instances of racism and discrimination (Putnam 2001; Michelson 2003). Youth participants from Kern, however, discovered ways to navigate and negotiate risk both in their activism and within their everyday lives.

Nonetheless, contending with an environment that has historically sought to exclude the participation of marginalized communities is a major challenge. From the interviews and focus groups we conducted from 2018-2021, we can see how three major arenas for political learning and socialization have shaped youth from mixed-status families in Kern County: schools, families and peers, and political culture and institutions. Schools and educational institutions are often thought of as a traditional site of political socialization, with civics education playing a significant role in the political socialization of youth (Niemi and Junn 1998; Galston 2001; Humphries, Muller, and Schiller 2013a; Callahan, Muller, and Schiller 2010). However, participants in this study often illustrated that schools were sites of suppression in which administrators and teachers would directly oppose political organizing or remain passive during such discussions.

Youth illustrated several instances in which rather than encouraging participation, educational institutions in Kern actively opposed and suppressed youth's efforts to organize or elevate certain issues. Similarly, parents and peers, who may also play a role in increasing civic engagement and participation, displayed varied levels of apprehensiveness or apathy. In some cases, parents were very anxious about their children's participation, particularly in families where youth participants were undocumented themselves. Though not intentionally or directly discouraging youth from participating, parents' apprehensiveness usually resulted more from the hostile political context and fear of immigration authorities than from their opposition to their child's beliefs, actions, or goals. As a result, some youth strategized and decided to take calculated risks that would allow them to participate but also shield them and their families. Finally, young people in Kern County are shaped by their local political culture and institutions. My conversations in interviews and focus groups revealed that the distrust and fear of law enforcement and immigration authorities was prevalent in Kern County, especially given the anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy proposals supported by local elected officials. These three arenas of political socialization do not exist in isolation but have many areas of overlap. In the sections that follow, I draw out some of the potent examples of how the young people I engaged with navigated the challenges of unsupportive educational institutions, a lack of a sense of belonging, and a hostile county law enforcement. Despite these barriers to participation, youth from mixed-status families were able to overcome this to advocate, organize, and strategize in Kern.

Schools as Sites of Suppression and Opportunity

Rather than acting as a positive influence that oriented youth to politics, educational institutions in Kern have failed or declined to motivate engagement. In contrast to Fresno, which is more politically neutral, Latinx youth from mixed-status families in Kern often experienced their school contexts as suppressing any engagement efforts. Even so, some sought out and developed their own pathways for political engagement. A potent example is “Adolfo” and his experience trying to work on gun violence. Growing up in Kern County, Adolfo was used to seeing Confederate and “Don’t Tread on Me” flags associated with the Tea Party movement waving off of pickup trucks and flying in front of the homes of certain white residents. The political culture and attitudes toward firearms in Kern were summed up by a bumper sticker I spotted on multiple occasions: “Pro-life, pro-God, pro-guns.” In this conservative context, guns were often viewed as a solution to rather than a cause of gun violence. In 2016, for example, the Kern High School District board of trustees voted in a special session to allow teachers, staff members, and even non-staff members to carry guns on campus with a Concealed Carry Weapon (CCW) permit and approval from the superintendent (Pierce 2016). At least 23 people had applied and received a permit to carry a weapon on campus until state legislation reversed this policy a year later (Pierce 2017).

In Kern, where the sheriff has issued more CCW licenses than any other county in the state (R. Cook 2011), few individuals dared challenging the status quo, including local elected officials. One could reasonably expect local Republicans to

oppose any and all gun regulation given the intertwined power of the National Rifle Association (NRA) and the Republican Party (Lacombe 2021). The PAC arm of the NRA, the National Rifle Association Political Victory Fund, ranks and endorses candidates based upon their Second Amendment stances, ranking most Republicans favorably and most Democrats unfavorably. What might come as a surprise, then, is that Democratic state assembly member Rudy Salas (who represents a large portion of Kern) received an A- rating and endorsement from the NRA Political Victory fund in 2020, as indicated by the mailer it sent to their supporters below:

Dear NRA Member:

Tuesday, November 3, is General Election Day in California. Your **NRA-PVF** has endorsed **Assembly Member Rudy Salas** for **Re-Election** in **Assembly District 32**.



Rudy Salas
"A-" Rated & NRA Endorsed

Rudy Salas has a proven record of fighting to protect our Second Amendment rights and needs your vote to win!

Make sure you cast your vote on or before **November 3** to re-elect **Rudy Salas**. Please encourage your family, friends and fellow gun owners to do the same.

Source: <https://www.nrapvf.org/emails/2020/california/general/please-vote-rudy-salas-on-november-3/>.

With even Democratic officials toeing the NRA line, youth decided to take action. In the aftermath of the shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, youth across the nation mobilized at unprecedented levels in 2018. Adolfo, now a high school senior in Kern, was ready to mobilize his peers to join the

fight against gun violence in schools. He began planning a walkout in support of the “March for our Lives” effort, with a plan to coincide this walkout with fellow schools across the country. As soon as word got out, however, teachers and administrators immediately attempted to shut these efforts down. At first, Adolfo remained calm, brushing off any discouragement or pushback he received, until he was eventually confronted by the school principal. “The principal just cut it off. [He] was like, ‘No one’s walking out of class,’” Adolfo said. “So instead [the principal said], ‘I’m going to organize a vigil for the victims. It’s going to be after school, and no one’s going to bring up Parkland, or Trump, or guns, or anything.’” The principal also implied that anyone who walked out or didn’t follow these rules would face severe consequences, like not being able to participate in graduation.

Adolfo was furious. Not only was he upset that the principal had co-opted and threatened his demonstration, but he was also frustrated with the blatant de-politicization of the event. Knowing there would be fewer students who would be able to attend a rally after school, and that there would be no opportunity for youth to actually speak to the issue of gun violence, Adolfo felt that all of his organizing, planning, and efforts had gone to waste. Begrudgingly, he attended the administration-controlled vigil, angered that he and other students had been threatened with the prospect of not attending graduation. Adolfo vented about the event: “That’s not what the whole point is. it was to do something to motivate people to take action and call [Congressmen] Valadao to do something. We wanted to keep passing out his number, and we were all going to call his office and demand him to

make a public statement. But for him to water it all down like that...” Adolfo clenched his fists as he recounted the story to me.

Notably, Adolfo informed me that this wasn’t the first time he had encountered pushback from the high school administration. His junior year, when students were required to organize an event about a topic of their choosing, he and fellow classmates had an idea to raise funds to destigmatize HIV and bring more awareness to LGBTQ issues through a dunk tank activity. Kern County, though, was still very conservative. In 2008, three-quarters of Kern County residents voted “Yes” on Proposition 8, which would eliminate the right for same sex couples to marry. Fearing that this dunk tank effort could be perceived as politically controversial, the administration cancelled the booth, claiming that students needed to have insurance and fulfill other bureaucratic requirements. At other high schools, youth faced similar pushback, as their flyers would be taken down by administrators and teachers who opposed their efforts to organize around the issue of gun violence.

Other students attempted to engage in these types of controversial issues through student clubs or school organizations. McFarland and Thomas (2006) illustrate that selective extracurricular clubs and organizations like the student council, service clubs, and performing arts clubs are crucial sites of socialization that can help inculcate youth with civic skills, knowledge, and the motivation to sustain future participation. Within this localized conservative climate, however, student political activity was rare and at times highly discouraged by the principal or teachers, especially when it ran counter to the mainstream or majority politics of the

community. Several youth claimed that school personnel openly opposed student participation in protests relating to Trump's election, gun violence, or immigrant rights.

Hector clearly experienced this suppression in his high school in Bakersfield. When asked if school personnel ever encouraged him to get involved in the community, he explained to me, "They tell us, 'Oh get involved' and stuff, but once you start asking certain questions, they tell you not to ask those questions. For example, there's a *MEChA* [*Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanx de Aztlán*] in my school, and the district said *specifically* that *MEChA* couldn't be political." *MEChA*, whose roots can be traced back to the Civil Rights and Chicano movements of the 1960s, is an organization dedicated to the self-determination and liberation of Chicano/as. Chapters originated within higher education institutions but also made their way to high schools across the nation. Having learned some of this history on his own, Hector was initially excited to join this club, hopeful that he would learn more about the origins, mission, and present-day efforts of *MEChA* to fight for the liberation of Chicanos like him. However, a disappointed Hector complained that his high school *MEChA* was essentially a glorified study club. "So it was 'We want you to be in *MEChA*, but we can't be political as *MEChA* intended'...It was basically AVID. but for brown kids," he said with a sad laugh. AVID, or Achievement Via Individual Determination, is a college readiness program implemented in schools across the nation. Hector's own comments that AVID was not necessarily a space for "brown

kids” like him also spoke to the racial tensions and marginalization experienced by other youth in Kern, even in their schools.

Similar issues of censorship and demobilizing efforts arose in my conversations with Elena, an 18-year-old from a neighboring high school. As the Trump administration vowed to increase immigration enforcement, Elena related that students in her Mexican Cultural Club wanted to discuss immigration issues because so many people were affected by the recent deportation of local residents. As soon as the conversation was brought up, however, the club advisor immediately shut it down. As a DACA recipient, Elena felt that this conversation and space was very important to her, which only made the teacher’s response even more disheartening: “We tried talking about [it], and I remember the teacher said, ‘We’re not going to get into things like that.’” Instead the club advisor quickly attempted to change the subject and discuss what they could do to celebrate cultural food or traditional *Folklorico* dance at the next pep rally. It is important to recognize that in these various instances, school authorities are engaging in both direct and indirect forms of repression. In the case of Adolfo and Hector, they shut down efforts outright, but they also deployed a more nuanced strategy to de-politicize student spaces and channel student demands into symbolic modes of cultural representation, as in the case of Elena.

Meanwhile, youth were increasingly inundated with anti-immigrant rhetoric, which was no longer confined to conservative AM talk radio but often consumed the television airwaves and social media platforms. For example, Jorge, 18, was bothered

by a local high school student's tweet, which stated: "Lazy Mexicans. They rely on social welfare." For Julieta, anti-immigrant sentiment even reared in the course of a national educational contest, which theoretically should have been a safe space for her: "The first time I ever felt anti-immigrant sentiment was actually in my own school because the first time I went to D.C., I was at a competition... civic education. It's called *We the People*. It's like debate. It was the national competition, and our vice principal, she said she didn't like 'illegals.' She said, 'I don't like illegals, but I'll still teach them when they come to my school.'" According to Julieta, this administrator stated this on her way to meet Congressman Kevin McCarthy, and she stated that supported him because of the fact that she doesn't like immigrants. As a DACA recipient, Julieta didn't know how to respond other than to stay silent. "So, then, I automatically associated McCarthy with he doesn't like immigrants.' And I know he doesn't. I know that obviously Sheriff Youngblood doesn't like immigrants either," she said.

In another instance of political repression at schools, youth also faced significant resistance when they attempted to engage in nonpartisan voter registration efforts. While the state of California education code allows for nonpartisan voter registration groups on high school campuses, school administrators sometimes blocked youth-led voter registration drives or education workshops—even when they were led by current students or alumni. Rather than encouraging these efforts to register or pre-register (for those who were between the ages of 16-17), students, teachers, and administrators erected barriers or simply outright refused to allow these

efforts to take place. In one of our focus groups, 20-year-old Javier vented his frustrations to the group, “When I was trying to do voter registration, they didn't allow me to go inside. First, they said that I needed like a two-week notification and then I needed the teacher's permission, and then I needed the principal's permission...” On it went, with Javier being sent around in circles with no responses to follow-up emails or phone calls. In another instance, a social studies teacher made negative comments about immigrants during a youth-led voter registration drive, referring to them as “illegals.” These bureaucratic barriers and hostility illustrated another instance of indirect repression for any student attempting to conduct nonpartisan voter registration.

Dissatisfied with their school district’s response and guided by young organizers, undeterred youth appealed to the school board in Delano, proposing a resolution that would allow nonpartisan voter registration efforts during school hours. After months of organizing, the resolution passed, allowing students to conduct nonpartisan registration at three high schools within the Delano Joint Union High School district. Unfortunately, however, no such resolution was passed within the Kern High School district, which contains the majority (18) of high schools in Kern County.

The school authorities’ responses are significant because they not only demonstrate various forms of direct repression (e.g., threats, co-optation) but also capture more nuanced methods of indirect repression that hamper student’s

politicization by creating bureaucratic barriers and not allowing students to discuss politics within student clubs or spaces.

Little Sense of Belonging

My interviews also captured a conflicted sense of belonging among youth from mixed- status families. In a county where structural racism has historically marginalized minority and immigrant residents, youth struggled with the pressure of navigating multiple cultures. In cities like Bakersfield, as Rios notes, “[j]oblessness, poverty, policing, and educational disparities were inextricably linked to the daily experiences of working class residents in the decades since the 1960s. City officials continued to cut back city services including housing, education, and infrastructural services while law enforcement officials directed efforts to criminalize working class Black and Brown communities” (2018, 50). These racial disparities and tensions continue to this day, as Latinx youth from mixed-status families described an unwelcoming environment and little sense of belonging depending on which spaces or neighborhoods they occupied. As discussed in earlier chapters, the political socialization literature predicts that these youth are likely to exhibit low levels of participation and political apathy as a result of their socioeconomic status, their undocumented parents, and the limited engagement of traditional vertical socializing agents such as parents and schools (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Yet as the forthcoming examples demonstrate, some young people from immigrant backgrounds are able to defy expectations, and in fact their mixed status can be a mobilizing identity.

The eastside of Bakersfield is home to a large percentage of working class Black and Brown community members. Just north of Bakersfield in an unincorporated area of Kern County sits the community of Oildale, long recognized for a history of racial attacks and hate crimes (Evans 1992). As recently as the 1960s, a sign on the bridge connecting Oildale and Bakersfield read, “N*gger, Don't Let the Sun Set on You in Oildale," indicating that this was a “sundown town” in which, according to the unwritten law, African Americans and people of color were not allowed to be out after sunset. Whites compose 85 percent of the population in Oildale, and 20 percent of its population are below the poverty line. Farther west of Bakersfield is Rosedale, which like Oildale is largely White (83 percent) but in contrast to Oildale has the highest household income rate in Kern. A recent viral video illustrates how a young Latina was harassed in Rosedale for having a Black Lives Matter flag on her car. In the video a white man, Brenton Rockey, cut off the young woman on the highway and, as the young woman recorded, rolled down his window to yell, “All Lives Matter, put this f*cking on YouTube. Don't be driving around Bakersfield with that sh*t on your car. If you don't f*cking like it, All Lives Matter b*tch” (Adams 2021). Other violent confrontations between Trump supporters and Rosedale youth have also gone viral (Brewster, Bennett, and Kim 2020). It is not surprising, then, that several youth spoke about these tensions during our conversations.

As 21-year-old Janessa put it, “Let's say it's like the Rosedale area. Well, I'm a Latina, so you go to the store they look at you like you're weird. That's not where

you belong or something. Then you go to let's say *Vallarta* [a Latino supermarket]. It feels more humble 'cause I guess that's our Latino community." Other youth expressed feelings of being watched or judged and of various other instances of racial microaggressions in predominately white areas of the county, specifically mentioning both the Rosedale and Oildale sections of Bakersfield and Kern. For example, 22-year-old Cassandra, who is light-skinned with blond hair, explained how even being "white passing" was not enough to escape racial hostility in Kern. When asked if Kern was welcoming to immigrants, she shook her head and laughed: "It's not even what I see. It's what I have experienced." Cassandra explained that folks might sometimes initially see her as a white person: "But once they hear me speak, they know like 'Oh she's not white.' And then I get those like double-takes from people." She shook her head as if to reject those moments of judgement. "But I'm not going to not change my accent or like talk in a certain way just to please anybody. I know I have an accent. I don't care." Cassandra further elaborated on racism she had encountered:

"This one time I was in Oildale at AutoZone with my mom because she was getting a new battery. The AutoZone worker was asking for my info, phone number, name, etc. And I have a Hispanic name, and so I already started spelling it before he even asked, and then this white guy behind me goes '_____? That's a cartel last name!' I was like ... [makes a shocked face]. After that, I just kind of looked like him like 'what?' I just tried to ignore it."

Such comments caused some youth to attempt to hide their identity. Even in Delano, California, where Latinx and API immigrant communities make up a large portion of the population, youth from mixed-status families dealt with this type of insecurity. A lifelong resident of Delano, Noemi felt as though she had to hide parts of her family's identity. "Especially being a minority, it can really discourage people in situations. I remember when I was smaller, I wouldn't speak Spanish to my mom a lot because I'm ashamed to say it, but I was embarrassed of speaking Spanish," she lamented.

Though anti-immigrant rhetoric was not necessarily a new phenomenon in Kern County, many youth and local organizations noted that they had not seen so many people emboldened before the Trump administration. For example, *O La Raza*, a local non-profit organization dedicated to providing legal services to immigrants and other low socioeconomic communities in Kern, found these posters taped up near their offices in downtown Bakersfield offices throughout 2018-2019. Such signs indicate the general level of hostility youth and others faced in their everyday lives.



A screenshot shared from O.L.A. RAZA's Facebook page: [Source](#).

Parent/Family & Peer Apprehensiveness

Outside of school and community life, youth encountered varied amounts of encouragement and apprehensiveness from parents and peers. After the tragic accident that ended the lives of the farmworkers and parents Santos and Marcelina Garcia, youth in Delano mobilized to march in solidarity with immigrants. Being undocumented and coming from an undocumented family as well, Adolfo was ready to participate, despite the fact that his parents had told him never to bring attention to himself or his family growing up. Thinking back over his hesitation to attend, he laughed and said, “I remember not wanting to tell them, so I lied. I’m like, ‘Oh, I’m just going to the library.’ And they found out eventually.” Adolfo would go on to become very active in his local community, speaking at city council meetings, attending marches and demonstrations, and even speaking to media on several occasions. Every time his parents caught wind of this, however, they urged him to stop. “*Acuerdate lo que paso a Jose Bello*,” they would warn him. *Remember what happened to Jose Bello.*

Jose Bello, a local college student, farmworker, and community activist from Bakersfield, allegedly faced retaliation for his outspokenness. In May of 2019, Jose publicly recited his poem “Dear America” in front of the Kern County Board of Supervisors. The poem directly criticized ICE, the Trump administration, family separations, and mass incarceration:

Dear America,

Our administration has failed.
They passed laws against our people,
Took away our rights and our freedom,
and still expect to be hailed? *Chaless!*

Dear America,

You and your administration cause fear,
fear through Separation.
Instead of building trust with our people, do y'all prefer this racial tension?

Oppressed.

I live my life in frustration,
Private Prisons, political funding, mass incarceration.
You make the connections.
I speak for the victims that pay for this scam,
Vietnamese, Jamaican, African, Cambodian, Mexican, Salvadorian and on and on.

Together we stand.
We demand our respect. We want our dignity back!
Our roots run deep in this country.
Now that's a true fact.

Dear Americans,

You might be asking yourself, "What's the whole point of repeating these facts?"
Well I am here to let you know, we want to feel safe, whether we're Brown, Asian or Black.
We don't want your jobs. We don't want your money. Were here to work hard, pay taxes and study!

The fight has begun.
"We will never be apart chiquito," is what I promised my son.
Y'all can try to justify your actions. Try to make excuses.
The bottom line here is that at the end, the people always triumph and the government loses.

Dear America,

Do not consider this a threat.
Our intentions are to continue making this country great.
It's time to begin standing up for what's right.
Criminalizing children, separating families, our national security, does this make it all right?

No, it doesn't, and it won't.
The youth has to stand up. We have to unite with our peers.

Let's begin educating our children. Speak wisdom into their ears.
Because at the end of the day,
I am you and you are me.
Together we are!

(“South Kern Sol | Jose Bello: Dear America” 2019)

Less than 36 hours later, in what seemed like clear retaliation for reciting his poem, ICE agents arrested him at his home. With bail set at \$50,000, Jose spent months incarcerated in the Mesa Verde Immigrant Detention center, which incarcerates hundreds of undocumented individuals in Bakersfield, CA. It wasn't until two NFL players, Washington Redskins cornerback Josh Norman and New Orleans Saints linebacker Demario Davis, posted his bond as part of a social justice program that Jose was freed. The ACLU has now taken his case, suing the federal government on his behalf for the trauma he faced at the hands of ICE. According to the lawsuit filed by the ACLU, an ICE officer told Bello, “We know who you are and what you're all about” (Entralgo 2019). Bello's arrest sparked fears in the hearts of many youth I spoke to, as they were concerned that if they spoke up at demonstrations, public meetings, or even through writing, they or their own families would be targeted by immigration enforcement.

Despite his parent's warnings, however, Adolfo rationalized that he was merely exercising free speech. “*Nadien le importa esa mierda.* (No one cares about that sh*t),” his parents replied. Despite his family's apprehensiveness, Adolfo and other mixed-status youth still felt an urgency to take action, though their experience navigating the risk of deportation led them to take precautions. Learning new skills around immigrant rights through youth organizing groups and educational workshops,

several youth were familiar with “emergency preparedness” plans for immigrant families. In the event that someone would be deported, such a plan ensured that youth under the age of 18 would be taken in by a trusted relative or friend, that youth would be able to access family funds if needed, and they would be able to contact a lawyer.

Familial Worries

Politically active youth faced pushback from parents worried about their children’s safety in this hostile political context; in other cases, parents sought to deny the stark reality of their situation. Elena, who had become active with a local immigrant rights group, tried to bring up the fact that her family did not have an “emergency plan” ready in case one of them was deported. Immediately, however, Elena’s mother shut that conversation down: “No, girls, we’re good. we’re fine.” Despite these assurances, Elena could see that her mother could no longer hide stress of her situation. As she explained, “Like, I can see it. She looks worried. Her eyes are teary, and it’s scary... I get sad and scared about it myself, just even going to a protest. I’m like no, I have to go, I *have* to do this. I have to keep bringing it up, because it’s the truth. I’d rather be safe than sorry.” Like Adolfo’s, Elena’s parents were opposed to her involvement, particularly at protests, for fear that it could endanger her and possibly themselves.

Other members of the family could also discourage political activism. Janessa’s face noticeably dropped when she discussed how other family members criticized her involvement:

“They would always tell me, like, you’re not going to make it this far, you’re not going to be able to graduate college. You don’t have what it takes to be an attorney because you’re DACA so you CAN’T be an attorney, this and that. Then they would tell me, ‘I don’t even know why you’re participating in this organization, you’re not going to get a better position.’ I’m like, it’s not about getting a better position! It’s about helping those people and getting involved. Making a difference in the community. I could care less if I have a small position, as long as I’m helping the community and I’m organizing. I feel like that’s my part. That’s what I wanted.”

With parents who were not eligible to participate in traditional forms of political participation like voting political donations—and who discouraged participation in protests and other forms of non-traditional participation—youth from mixed-status families weren’t necessarily hindered. Rather, they began to find motivation through their family’s experiences and identity. Despite their determination, however, a major recurring theme in almost every interview and focus group was an embedded fear of law enforcement.

Fear of Law Enforcement:

For many youth and other people of color in Kern, their earliest and most frequent interactions with the "government" has involved law enforcement at their schools. The Kern High School District (KHSD) even maintains its own police department, which has come under scrutiny in recent years for administrators using a

confidential database to allegedly spy on “student athletes’ residences, staff driving records, a worker’s claim of an on-the-job injury, and even a special education student” (Californian staff 2016). Additionally, the Kern High School District is one of the epicenters of the school-to-prison pipeline. According to a report from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, the KHSD had the highest suspension and expulsion rates in the state, and in 2014 the district was sued for disproportionately suspending and expelling young students of color (Gehlert 2018). The criminalization, racialization, disciplining, and increased surveillance of students has had a particularly negative affect on immigrant students of color, who can get swept up in the school-to-prison-to-deportation pipeline (Verma, Maloney, and Austin 2017; V. M. Rios and Vigil 2017). It is not surprising, then, that interactions with school law enforcement informed youth distrust and fears of government.

Whether it was city police, the county sheriff’s office, or ICE, contact with law enforcement agencies was to be avoided at almost all cost. Particularly at the height of ICE raids during the Trump administration, Latinx youth explicitly spoke about the ever-present fear of ICE and vigilance they and/or their families maintained. Constantly looking out for unmarked vehicles and wary any time a uniform was spotted was exhausting. The daughter of immigrant farmworkers, 22-year-old Lupe shared how she and her family remained on alert for any warnings: “We hear things like, ‘Oh, don’t go to *Vallarta* [a supermarket] today because ICE is around there.’ . . . It has greatly affected my family because you never know when it is going to happen to you.” Moreover, Lupe is well aware that even traveling to and

from work poses risks for her mother: “I constantly worry whether she is going to make it home or not.”

Several other youth mentioned that their family members minimized trips outside or running errands in order to reduce their risk of deportation. These precautionary survival tactics ranged from never driving after certain hours to having those children or family members with documentation run household errands. Victor, 21, said his mother “is afraid of everything going on, so she just hides at home, and doesn’t really drive. She’s very paranoid about getting caught or deported.” And as-19-year old Hector explained, youth sometimes had to look out for undocumented people beyond their immediate family members: “I have an aunt who I am very close with, who was also like a mom to me and she’s undocumented, something she’s constantly worried about. She doesn’t go out and drive after like 6 o’clock.” Worried about police check points, Hector explained how other friends and family members of his would do the same thing. “Whenever there’s checkpoints I text them, ‘Oh they’re here and here.’ So yeah, it’s something that we hear about and we’re conscious about, constantly trying to avoid.” Though Hector felt empowered learning about immigrant rights, he still had to struggle with a sense of powerlessness if something did happen. He sighed, “It scares me, knowing for example my tia could go get detained and me not having much power besides getting the word out on social media or protesting... It’s scary.”

Recognizing that local law enforcement agencies and politicians like the local sheriff were eager to collaborate with ICE and embrace anti-immigrant rhetoric,

youth often had nobody to turn to whom they could trust if they experienced harm. Eighteen-year-old Elena's experience illustrates this distressing situation. While walking home from school one day, Elena was attacked and robbed of her belongings, including her bag and her phone. Running home in tears after this assault, Elena immediately told her mother what had happened. For hours, the family debated whether to call the police to report the incident. Ultimately, Elena and her family decided it was not worth the risk due to their family's mixed status, knowing the local sheriff had previously collaborated with ICE. Extremely distraught, Elena wondered how things might've been different had she not been from a mixed-status family. Eyes watering, she explained to me:

“It's the fear...if calling them to help us is only going to backfire on us, you know? I went home crying, because it was literally down the street, and we were like, do we call the police? Do we not? You know like if it had been a kidnapping, if it had been a rape, who do you call? Out of fear from everything. It shouldn't be like that, we shouldn't fear our own safety net you know?... My government man. Freakin' [Sheriff] Youngblood, *fuck* him, dude, like our whole system is a mess. I feel like it's going to be really rare if there's going to be an officer or anybody in the system that will really sympathize with us you know? I don't know how to say it, but they're all against immigration and everybody's conservative out here. Everybody's Republican. It's ugly, and things are tough.”

Elena's story illustrates how youth from mixed-status families can experience violence and oppression as a result of their multiply marginalized intersecting identities. Moreover, when youth organizers turned to politicians for help, they would seldom offer any concrete help. After graduating from high school, Elena has not remained silent as a result of her experiences. She actively participates with a local youth-led immigrant rights group. However, her parents continue to caution against or discourage participation, recognizing the anti-immigrant sentiment in the region that could make their children's activities dangerous.

Responses to Repression: Resignation vs Resiliency

"I think there are certain privileges you don't really have...When I was a kid, I used to think, why don't we go on family vacations all the time like other kids in my class? You grow up thinking things like that, and as you grow up, you realize that it's because of their status. My grandmother recently passed away, and my own mom couldn't visit her...That just broke my heart and got me thinking about this situation." – 22-Year-old Lupe from Kern County

Like many other youth in mixed-status families, Lupe has had to struggle with multiple responsibilities, as well as with financial and emotional challenges as a result of her family's mixed status. For Lupe, growing up in a mixed-status family shaped many decisions she made throughout her life, from deciding on her college major to choosing to cast a ballot when her own parents could not. Despite the conservative climate and anti-immigrant rhetoric of a place like Kern, many youth like Lupe remained resilient in the face of repression.

Whereas traditional political socializing agents failed to actively orient youth to participation, community-based organizations and youth organizing groups could act as a catalyst for youth participation. Youth that may have otherwise sat on the sidelines became empowered not only to organize but also to actively recruit and mentor their peers to engage in their communities. Moreover, some youth even highlighted the need to move beyond these organizations to strategize new tactics and organize freely without bureaucratic barriers. Finally, some youth from mixed-status families did find themselves taking calculated risks and adapting to their localized context when making decisions within activist spaces. One might assume that youth coming from a mixed-status family would, like their parents, keep their heads down in order to survive and avoid participation. However, youth highlighted how their family's status often drove them to overcome barriers to participation.

Sitting outside a bench outside the Sciences building at Bakersfield College, I met with Alexis during a break between classes. Studying to become a veterinarian, Alexis appreciated that she was learning more about herself and political issues than she had in high school. "That's what I like about some of the professors here; they are more outspoken than the ones in high school, where they don't advise us to do anything," she said. As a DACA recipient, she had always grown up knowing that her status was never secure, but DACA had nonetheless given her enough of a sense of security to share her story with others. She still feared for her parents, however, and with good reason. In one instance, her father, a local hotel worker, was tipped off by

his employers that ICE was getting ready to conduct a raid at the hotel, informing them that it was better to leave. Not surprisingly, many employees quit that same day.

Growing up within a mixed-status family brought about feelings of both sadness and joy for Alexis. For example, when her younger sister, a U.S. citizen, wanted to get a job or go out of town for college, Alexis wanted to be happy for her but was left feeling with a sense of sadness for all the opportunities she never had due to her own status. Though Alexis longed to participate in protests and demonstrations for immigration, her own status always held her back: “I do want to go out and do all these things, but I also get nervous because I don’t want to draw too much attention to myself. I don’t want to be targeted as someone who is undocumented.”

Even so, Alexis remained dedicated to her dream of becoming a veterinarian. Working three different jobs at different care facilities in Kern while remaining a full-time student, things were stressful enough without having to worry about the threat of deportation. Pausing during our discussion, Alexis broke down in tears as she reflected on increasing ICE raids in Kern. “We live with that fear every day. We hear about it on the news, about how they are doing all these raids...It’s that scare that someday my parents won’t be here anymore,” she sobbed. At the same time, Alexis reaffirmed that she didn’t want to remain in the shadows, and she came out as undocumented to friends and coworkers both in person and via social media. Sniffing as she wiped away her tears, she continued, “ It feels nice [coming out as undocumented] because it makes me feel less alone. I always wondered if I was the only one, and it turned out that I wasn’t. Just no one spoke about it.” Other youth

transformed their undocumented identity or their families' mixed status from a source of fear into a source of mobilization.

In the aftermath of the deaths of the Garcias in Delano, for example, youth rallied together and called upon local city council members to declare that city a sanctuary city for migrants. This request fell upon deaf ears, however, with council members arguing that doing so put the city at risk of losing federal funding, as the Trump administration had threatened. Instead, youth organizers rallied around one of their own, Bryan Osorio, asking for him to run for city council. Youth played an active role in the campaign, from phone banking to knocking on doors and sharing posts on social media, helping Bryan to become the youngest city council member in Delano history at 22 years old. After this victory, youth continued to advocate for Delano to become a sanctuary city, eventually succeeding in 2019. The son of Mexican immigrants, Osorio subsequently launched a campaign for state senate, eschewing corporate contributions and running a grassroots campaign in what could possibly be a new way forward for Valley Democrats.

We see another clear example of youth activism from Adolfo, who organized a vigil with other youth on behalf of Jakelin Caal Maquin, a young girl who died while in custody of U.S. Customs and Border officials. Reading that Jakelin and her father had been denied water for hours, Adolfo visibly teared up. His own experience at the vigil and of being detained at the border as a young child gave this event a personal meaning for him: "I gave a speech and I just started crying, because I remembered that happened to me too. I remember asking for water and crying,

making a fit. They had a little stand that I knocked over, because it was like three months I think since I hadn't seen my mom. And so I knocked it over, and the border patrol agents were like, okay, since you did this, you're not getting water.” Frustrated and angered, Adolfo knew he had to keep organizing, advocating and fighting for immigrant families like his. Choking up a bit as he struggled to collect himself, Adolfo sighed, “And remembering that... it went full circle.”

Youth Empowerment via Community-Based Organizations

Whereas families and schools failed to actively orient youth from mixed-status families towards politics, the youth we met with became empowered and politicized with the help of their peers in grassroots organizing groups. Youth were involved in a variety of organizations focusing on social issues including immigration, education, parks and sidewalks, healthcare, and more. These groups gave participants the skills needed to engage in grassroots organizing and nonpartisan voter engagement efforts. Whereas the typical high school curriculum tended to ignore local politics, their participation in youth organizing groups gave them hands-on experience with issues that affected their local communities.

Additionally, these spaces and civic associations gave youth the opportunity to network with other youth and engage in peer-to-peer learning. Several youth organizing groups provided key trainings on how to utilize social media to organize, how to talk to the media if approached for an interview, and how to interact with other stakeholders. These trainings were not only helpful in developing youth's

capacity to communicate and articulate ideas to their peers but also empowered youth to contact local authority figures, including elected officials. Through these trainings, youth were able to amplify their voices, learning how to speak in front of large crowds, discuss issues with school administrators or public officials, talk to voters on the phone, recruit peers to events and activities, or publicize information on social media. As 22-year-old Tatiana explained, her youth organizing group empowered her in a way that educational institutions never did: “We’re not just sitting around in a classroom listening to a teacher lecture for six months straight, not doing anything about an issue. We’re actually finding out what the issues are and developing campaigns that we can take to the people in charge that can make something happen. We want to actually make a difference in the community.” Youth organizations gave youth a space in which to gain confidence. As 20-year-old Katarina described her transformation: “They all made us feel welcome and made us feel secure about ourselves. To just be our own person. To get out of our shell.” In preparation for voter registration efforts, for example, youth engaged in role-playing exercises in order to train their peers to speak to voters during the election season. With their combination of psychological and emotional support, concrete skill building, and affirmation of youth as agents of change illuminates, community-based organizations and youth organizing groups successfully developed a critical consciousness and critical civic praxis within youth, acting as a bridge to participation when other institutions and traditional socializing agents have not (Terriquez et al. 2020; Terriquez 2017; Ginwright and Cammarota 2007; Terriquez 2015b; Watts and Flanagan 2007).

Moving and Operating Outside of CBOs

Though many youth remained active in community-based organizations and youth organizing groups, a select group of youth operated outside of community-based organizations. After organizing with a local immigrant rights group around both local and statewide issues, a group of about ten youth decided there was a need for a fundamental shift in organizing tactics. After a long battle advocating for AB32, a bill which would phase out the use of private prisons and immigrant detention centers, these youth decided it was time to focus more on the localized context in Kern. Recognizing that their strategies, goals, and values conflicted with the traditional constraints of a community-based organization, they wanted to be free to organize for liberation.

Adopting an abolitionist platform, youth organized under the umbrella of “Kern Youth Abolitionists,” or KYA for short. Given that most 501c3 organizations operate within a nonprofit industrial complex that may inhibit or slow down action and in which fundraising, metrics, and maintaining operations may take priority over pursuing progressive or radical goals (Eliasoph 2011), these youth wanted to be free to organize without constraints. As one interviewee confessed, “A lot of the statewide issues are very time consuming or time restraining, especially having a statewide policy of organizing or having a statewide agreement. But when it comes to Kern County, we have some issues that need immediate attention and we just can't be waiting for nonprofit approval or stuff like that.” Perhaps because this individual had previously belonged to a chapter of a statewide immigrant rights organization, she

recognized the need to retain some sense of local autonomy: “We know our region more than an org. in San Francisco or an org. in L.A.” Elaborating further, she added that the political context in these large urban areas greatly differed from that in Kern:

“We can't just go talk to any local officials because they won't listen to us or they won't even have the time for us, you know? So I know that's not an option here. [Congressman Kevin] McCarthy's not going to meet up with me when I was advocating for advanced parole for DACA recipients. I was actually lobbying in D.C. for DACA recipients, and McCarthy straight up said he didn't have time. So I know if I made the trip to D.C., and he didn't have time for me, he's not going to have time for me here in Kern County either.”

Acknowledging that immigrant rights activists in Los Angeles or the Bay Area might have friendlier elected officials where reaching out to them might have been a worthwhile effort, this simply wasn't an option in Kern. In contrast to some elected officials in Fresno who were sympathetic to youth organizing around immigration (and would later even win a majority on city council), the narrow political opportunity structure in Kern offered virtually no outspoken allies within local government.

The Mesa Verde Campaign: Strategizing to Survive

The KYA campaign against the Mesa Verde Immigrant Detention Center highlighted youth efforts to adapt to local circumstances in their activism. Here, KYA decided that new tactics, strategies, and a sense of urgency was needed, illustrating how

localized contexts can shape the strategies adopted by youth and immigrant organizing groups (Burciaga and Martinez 2017). Their local work focused on helping detainees in the Mesa Verde Detention Center (and ultimately advocating for its abolition). One of its most urgent campaigns involved efforts to stop the expansion of Mesa Verde in McFarland, California.

Its cross-country team having been the subject of Disney's *McFarland USA* movie, McFarland, a predominately Latinx town whose population is estimated to be half undocumented (Jordan 2020), received yet more national attention as a result of this heated prison conflict. At the core of the debate was the GEO Corp, a multi-billion dollar corporation that sought to convert two state prisons into private detention centers in McFarland. Though Governor Newsom had recently signed AB32, which would phase out private detention facilities, into law, it would not take effect until January of the following year. In response, ICE signed a contract in December to convert the prisons to detention centers, thus skirting or at least delaying AB32. As the decision would initially fall to the McFarland city planning commission in February, youth like 17-year-old Stephani began organizing immediately, collecting over 1,000 cards from residents opposing the conversion. Stephani's mother was a farmworker who had worked in McFarland for years and was suddenly faced with the possibility of a private detention center being located just minutes away from the fields in which she labored (Jordan 2020). While many youth from mixed-status families worked alongside some local community-based organizations

like Faith in the Valley, KYA engaged in more militant strategies in the days leading up to the planning commission's decision.

Free from the constraints of nonprofit groups, KYA could organize at a moment's notice and deploy disruptive tactics against the GEO Corp. One clear example of this occurred when one of the group's members received intel that GEO Corp staff would be having a dinner meeting with McFarland business owners at a restaurant in Bakersfield on February 10, just ten days ahead of the planning commission's vote. Within minutes, members made the decision to organize and disrupt the dinner. Initiating a rapid response, youth gathered and displayed a banner that read, "Abolish prisons and detention centers." In a video capturing the incident, youth walked into the restaurant and surrounded the table. Illustrating just how intertwined GEO's efforts were with the local Republican political machine, among the attendees were the warden of Mesa Verde Detention Center, local Republican kingmaker Cathy Abernathy, her vice president of Western Pacific research Matthew Martin, and Alberto Llamas, a long-time local Republican party activist. Regardless, youth charged ahead without fear.

Looking at the panicked faces in the room, one female organizer addressed them, "Hello everyone... We heard about your meeting and we just wanted to remind you that your plans to expand the prison in McFarland will not happen, and we will always be one step ahead of y'all. We are always going to be here." Nervously smiling, attendees remained silent as other KYA organizers began chanting, "Hey! ho ho! GEO has got to go!"



An image of the action provided by a KYA organizer.

Eventually, the protesters were escorted out by restaurant staff and threatened that the police would be called. Regardless, youth remained devoted to their strategy and tactics, wanting to stop the Mesa Verde expansion at all costs, even if it meant risking arrest. They also felt it was crucial to listen to community members in McFarland most impacted, and thus apart from its direct action, KYA assisted with organizing efforts to recruit people to protest at the planning commission meeting. Their work paid off, as over 300 individuals showed up to the planning commission meeting to oppose the expansion, while across the street approximately 30 GEO employees and counter protesters showed up with signs that read “Save our jobs”

(Jordan 2020). Though the turnout had been solid and the cooperation a success, the experience was a stark reminder of why KYA had decided to branch off in the first place. Verbalizing their frustration, one KYA member stated, “It was just so hard to work with non-profits. It's so hard to work with them because they have these agendas, and they have these restrictions they have to meet. Versus an org. like us that is free and can just do whatever we need to do at all times.” Even so, organizers recognized that there were times to act alone and times in which collaboration with other organizing groups could be possible; in fact, such flexibility was one of their greatest strengths. After hours of chanting, protests, and public comment, the McFarland planning commission deadlocked in a 2-2 vote, resulting in a monumental victory for mixed-status families and organizers opposing the expansion. For a moment, it seemed that change within Kern could be possible, but GEO Corp immediately appealed the decision to the McFarland City Council.

At the subsequent city council meeting, and with COVID-19 limiting public participation, GEO sought to push a decision through as soon as possible, arguing that the expansion would contribute direly needed funds to McFarland and create new high-paying jobs. To further incentivize the council to support the expansion, a GEO vice president pledged that if the council unanimously voted in support, GEO would provide a \$1,000 scholarship to every single McFarland High School senior (E. Sanchez 2020). Disgusted at the thought of sacrificing the safety of her immigrant community in exchange for scholarships, one youth who had previously received a scholarship responded, “I would gladly give that money back to protect our families.

The majority of the population is Hispanic. That means each one of us most likely knows someone who is undocumented. We will all be affected”(E. Sanchez 2020). To make matters worse for youth organizers, the previous mayor of McFarland had resigned the day after the planning commission meeting, only to be replaced by a former GEO employee whom city council members had appointed. Illustrating once again how a powerful conservative localized context could stifle opportunities, the McFarland city council voted unanimously to approve GEO’s permits.

Legal organizations would argue that the decision was rushed and there were not an adequate number of meetings held to approve the permit. Court battles ensued between GEO, the state of California, and civil rights organizations that opposed the expansion of immigrant prisons (Morgen 2020b). Eventually however, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of GEO, thus allowing the expansion to proceed despite the deadlocked vote of the planning commission and protests from community members (Morgen 2020b). At the same time, COVID-19 restrictions would make political participation even more difficult, forcing youth organizers from KYA to adapt in order to support undocumented families.

COVID & Cars

As COVID 19 brought about lockdowns, social distancing, and outbreaks in several prisons and detention centers across the state, youth organizers adapted their own strategies and efforts to support those most impacted. Detainees in Mesa Verde were initially denied testing for COVID, PPE, and mitigation measures that could

have prevented spread within the facility. At one point, more than half of all detainees tested positive for COVID-19 in 2020, eventually filing and winning a class-action lawsuit that required GEO to provide mitigation measures and prevented 250 immigrants from being re-detained (Morgen 2022).

During the initial lockdowns of COVID-19 in April 2020, I joined community organizers from KYA seeking to protest outside of Mesa Verde safely. Decorating their vehicles with signs, organizers arranged for a caravan of cars to circle the adjacent streets of the detention center as we honked our horns. Meanwhile, other youth gathered in front of the detention center while social distancing, calling for the immediate release of detainees. Fully masked to both protect their identities and mitigate the spread of COVID, protesters chanted, gave testimony, and urged staff to provide PPE and protect detainees. When during this action youth approached the doors of the facility, a piercing screech of an alarm rang from inside. GEO staff had rung the alarm, signifying a facility-wide lockdown. The alarm was all too familiar to me, as I heard it just a few months before when I visited a detainee, Carlos. Carlos had explained to me how this torturous alarm would ring multiple times throughout the day and night, disrupting the sleep of detainees and keeping them on edge.

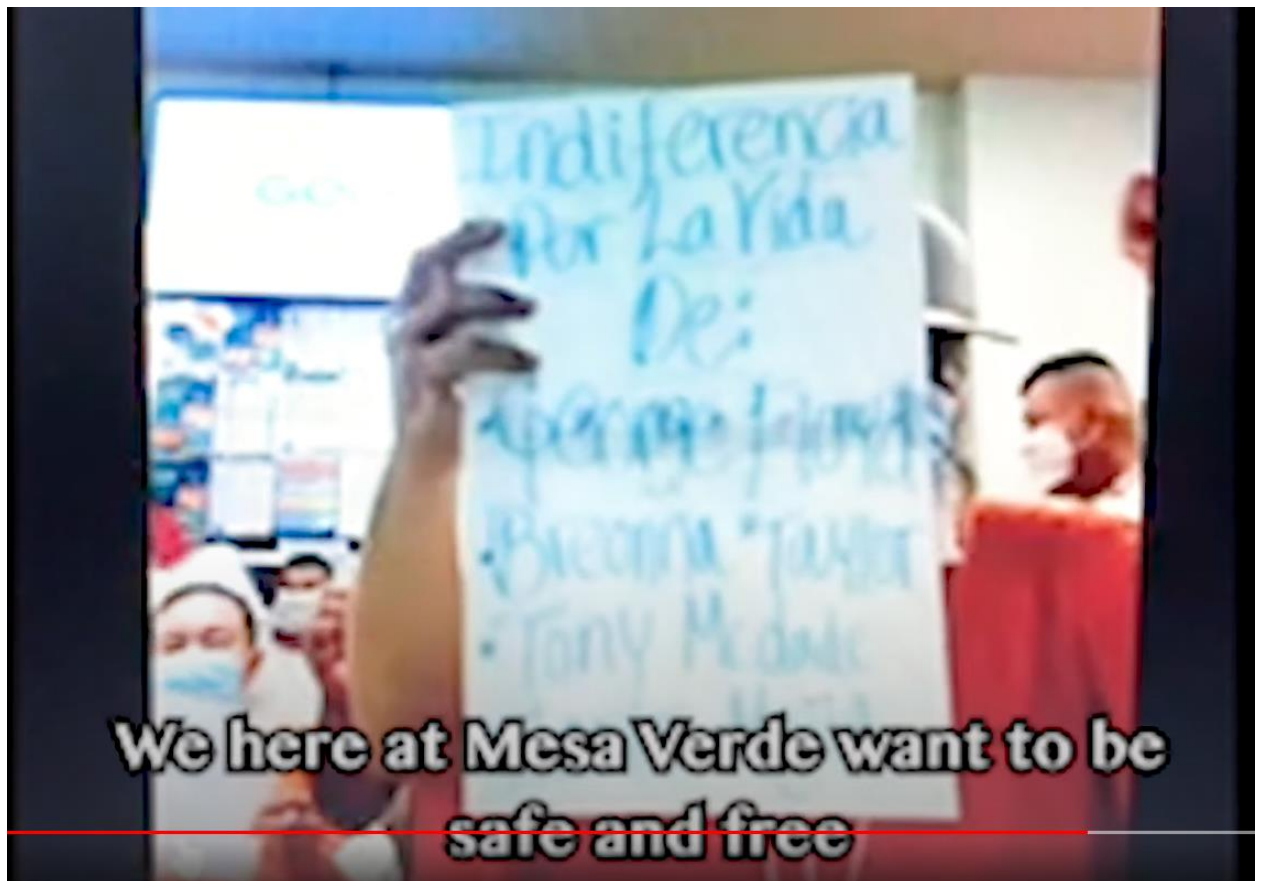
Another challenge that arose during this time was the fact that we were no longer allowed to visit detainees inside of Mesa Verde, receiving limited communication as to how they were being treated. Nonetheless, even as these restrictive measures constrained the strategies, tactics, and communication available to youth organizers, they adapted by protesting as safely and effectively as they

could. Amplifying calls for release on social media, youth attempted to organize outside of the physical barriers that restricted and limited interactions with detainees. At the same time, detainees themselves organized efforts inside the detention center, launching a hunger strike with over 100 participants demanding: 1. No new transfers inside of Mesa Verde; 2. COVID-19 testing 3. Face masks 4. Hand sanitizer and soap inside the facility 5. Medical attention 6. Talks with the Mesa Verde warden and California Governor Newsom (Morgen 2020a).



An image captured during the initial hunger strike and sit-in of the Mesa Verde facility.

In the midst of the racial justice protests emerging across the United States, detainees even managed to record and share a video taken within the detention center, expressing solidarity with Black Lives Matter and calling for an end to discrimination against people of color and immigrants (Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity 2020). In public statements, ICE alleged that these protests were being somehow coerced and influenced by outside forces and denied that a hunger strike took place.



A screenshot of the video, as a Mesa Verde detainee holds a piece of paper with the names of victims of police brutality including George Floyd and Breonna Taylor.

KYA organizers amplified these calls of solidarity through social media and created several targeted campaigns to release those detainees who might be most vulnerable to COVID- 19. One such detainee was *Abuelita* (grandmother) Sofia, an elderly undocumented farmworker who was detained by ICE in 2019 on her way to work and had been in Mesa Verde for over a year. Boosting their call to action with the #FreeAbuelita and #Ourabuelita hashtags, organizers created social media posts urging individuals to call ICE to demand her release. They used framing and interpretive processes to create a collective shared identity and sense of “linked fate” among followers (Snow 2005; McAdam 1999; Dawson 1994; Zepeda Milan 2017; Vargas, Sanchez, and Valdez 2017). Highlighting how her age and underlying health conditions made Sofia even more vulnerable to COVID-19, organizers were able to successfully advocate for her release while she awaited her asylum hearing. Within the coming weeks, more detainees would have the opportunity to be released, and youth organizers continued to strategize within COVID- 19 constraints.

How to transport released detainees posed another problem. Still months ahead of a COVID-19 vaccine becoming widely available, and with several outbreaks at Mesa Verde, there were concerns about how to safely move them from Mesa Verde. All hands on deck, I volunteered to pick up and transport a detainee who was being released to a hotel room. During this episode, I experienced firsthand the hostility and barriers faced by organizers in Kern. When I arrived at the ICE processing facility in downtown Bakersfield, staffers sent me back to my car, claiming I could not have my phone in the facility. Letting them know which detainee

I was there to pick up, I was put in a waiting room and simply told, “They’ll be out soon.” In what felt like an attempt to get me to leave without the released detainee, I sat there waiting for over an hour and a half and received no updates when I asked about the delay.

Finally, seeming annoyed by my questions and urgency, the officer in the waiting room informed me that I could wait in my car and they would call me once they were ready to release the detainee. Frustrated and wanting to check in with organizers to make sure I had the right name and details, I rushed to my car. After restarting my phone that had overheated thanks to the Valley’s extremely hot temperatures during the summer, I sat and waited. When I called one of the immigrant youth who was coordinating these efforts, she informed me that they had released the detainee over half an hour ago without telling me! Panicking, I bolted out of my car in search of them, fearful that local law enforcement would re-arrest this individual. Thankfully, I found him just a block away, smiling that under his mask. “Are you ____?” I asked? “Si,” he replied. Apologizing that he didn’t have a phone to contact me, I assured him that he had done nothing wrong and explained how ICE agents had kept me waiting and failed to communicate with me about his release. Nodding, he did not look surprised at all. Noting his grumbling stomach, I asked what he wanted to eat for his first meal outside of Mesa Verde in years. Initially reluctant to choose something because of his lack of money, I assured him that he didn’t need to worry. “*Vamos por unos tacos entonces (Let’s get tacos),*” he then said.

As we shared a meal before linking up with a fellow organizer who would help transport him for the rest of his journey to his family up north, he told me stories about his time in Mesa Verde. He noted that one of his blockmates was Choung Woong Ahn, a 74-year-old South Korean immigrant who had committed suicide just weeks ago prior. Despite three requests from his lawyers asking for his release—and a long list of underlying conditions such as lung cancer, diabetes, hypertension and a history of heart attacks—all of these requests had been rejected (Castillo 2020). Growing emotional, he said, “They didn’t care about any of us. He was such a nice man, caring, and welcoming to others...” Not wanting to bring about any further trauma, we spoke about his plans when he reunited with his family. A former farmworker, he was eager to get back to work and help his family financially as soon as possible while he awaited his day in court with an immigration judge. As he asked me about my own goals, I explained to him my own family’s lived experience and my research. “*Eres un joven latino con un gran Corazon (You are a young Latino with a big heart)*,” he said. When I asked him if his large ankle monitor was uncomfortable, he chuckled, noting that it was far more comfortable than anything he experienced in Mesa Verde. Before leaving for the next leg of his trip with a fellow organizer, he thanked me for the food and blessed me.

As I reflected on this experience, I recognized how both the conservative context and the impact of COVID-19 had shaped organizing and relief strategies in Kern County. As many nonprofit organizations (including immigrant-serving organizations and youth organizing groups) shifted their work to be entirely virtual as

a result of the pandemic, they had fewer volunteers available to rapidly help detainees who were being released. Instead, it was up to groups like KYA that were willing to brave the potential risks of COVID-19 to help released detainees. I myself admittedly briefly hesitated to volunteer at first, worried that I might catch COVID-19 and spread it to a vulnerable family member. Having had moved back in with my family during this time, my mother also felt torn about my involvement in these efforts: “*Cuidate mijo por favor*” (Take care of yourself son, please),” she said. Yet as a young healthy individual with the privilege of having a vehicle and a private room should I fall ill, I also felt an obligation to help those individuals who simply sought to return to their families. In fact, it was thinking about my own mixed-status family, as well as the youth I had interviewed and worked alongside, that reassured me of my decision to help in any capacity that I could. Though localized contexts had constrained the ability to organize in many ways, the examples above illustrate how it also pushed organizers to reimagine new strategies. The urgency of a pandemic like COVID-19, intertwined with the hostile context and absence of local elite allies, created conditions that almost necessitated the emergence of groups like KYA. Willing to operate outside of the traditional constraints of CBOs, these organizers demonstrated how localized contexts can deeply shape the engagement and strategies of youth from mixed-status families.

At times KYA’s abolitionist messaging and framework led to conflict with other nonprofit organizations who were less comfortable explicitly endorsing an abolitionist message than on urging “reform.” These disagreements between people

working in a more reformist vein and those willing to adopt more militant strategies with direct action (Goodwin and Jasper 2014) are common in social movements. Drawing inspiration from Black abolitionist movements and readings, the Kern Youth Abolitionists felt as though they no longer had time to negotiate with nonprofit agendas or goals. As one member asserted, “The only way to get change is not being in a meeting for x many times a week. It's, go to the street and you get stuff done.”

Motivations of Mixed Status: Overcoming Barriers to Participation

Sitting around the kitchen table, Ricky explained why he continued to organize despite all the hostility he had encountered and all the challenges that came his way. His motivation stemmed from coming from a mixed-status family and recognizing the opportunities he had because his parents had immigrated. He emphasized, “It just makes you think about it more, you know? You think about your future and your family first because you don't know what's going to happen. Like, oh my God, I've got to think about it. I've got to do it for them, you know?” That same feeling came over him the first time he cast his ballot. “Well, that's how I feel when I voted. Like, I've got to do it for them. If I don't do it, like who's going to do it, you know?” Natalia, 18 years old, agreed: “ It definitely motivates me to like definitely learn about which candidate I'm going to vote for, which props I'm going to vote for.” Ricky's story demonstrates how youth from mixed-status families can exhibit a group consciousness, a prominent notion in the political science literature on ethnic and minority groups (Vargas, Sanchez, and Valdez 2017; G. R. Sanchez and Vargas 2016).

This consciousness came with a sense of responsibility. Having parents who lived through the early 1990s and proposition 187, several youth recognized that voting for the wrong candidate or proposition could have adverse effects. Coming from a mixed-status family, Julieta explained how ICE raids had become a numbing part of her life, and how even joyous family life events like the arrival of a baby brother turned into anxiety-filled nightmares. What should've been a joyous moment for her family as she awaited a new baby brother turned into an anxiety filled decision of despair. "When my brother was going to be born, my mom didn't even want to go to the hospital because there were ICE raids that week. And so, she almost had the baby at home. And I was so scared thinking, 'Oh my God. The baby is going to be born at home and ICE is going to take us away after that.' So, that's the fear that I grew up with, and it didn't really wear off. I just became more aware of my rights and just preparing myself for the worst thing, I guess."

After participating in several protests and joining a local immigrant rights group in her area, Julieta felt empowered to share her own story as an immigrant. "But that never stopped my family from being scared," she added. With a sense of urgency and determination, Julieta added, "But I just kept on thinking that this is something I have to do, and if there's people out there that are in the same state as me and they're still doing it, I can't just sit by the sidelines and not do anything about it." Julieta began to overcome her fears when she realized there was strength in numbers:

"I did used to be really scared for myself and my family. But because I realized that there's a lot of people like me that are not scared, and they're so

brave and they're so bold and they're making things happen. When I realized that it was because of them that DACA even exists, when I realized that it was because of organizers who got rid of Proposition 187 or other anti-immigrant legislation...When I realized it was them and not politicians, that's when I stopped trusting politicians. And I realized that people power was better. And because there's so many of us, that gives me a sense of not only empowerment but also safety because there's so many of us. And that's when I stopped being scared.”

Other interviewees brought up their agency as U.S. citizens, DACA recipients, or even just as undocumented people unafraid of speaking up on behalf of their families. Generally, and perhaps because of this growing sense of agency, youth seemed more mobilized than ever to vote in the 2018 and 2020 elections. In one focus group I conducted, many participants nodded their heads in agreement when one young woman shared her plans to vote in the 2018 election for the first time: “It really motivates me. It's like, I have this opportunity to vote and lift my voice when my parents and my sister don't have that opportunity.” Angelica, 24, echoed this sentiment: “A lot of people in my family don't have that voice and don't have that right, and I shouldn't take for granted the fact that I do have a voice and I do have that right. My family and friends have influenced me to want to vote in the sense that they don't have a voice. Because I need to make sure that I am standing up for what I think is right or what I think should be done.” Notably, one youth shared how his own family helped him overcome feelings of apathy and caused him to recognize his own

privilege. When 19-year-old Hector, who was considering not voting because the candidates weren't progressive enough for his taste, explained how speaking to his aunt gave him a reality check: "When I talked to her about politics and how I'm discouraged, she checked me instantly by just saying, 'I wish I could vote.'"

Very few youth in my study were eligible to adjust their status, but for 23-year-old Gabriel, witnessing the Trump administration's attacks on his community was enough of a reason to apply. "This administration has definitely pushed me to say, 'Hey, you know what? *Tambien*, you need to get your things together so that you can go vote next time,'" he said. Witnessing widespread fear in his community after repeated ICE raids, Gabriel recognized that nothing was off the table for this new administration, including family separation. Places that were once thought of as "untouchable" by ICE agents became opportunities for immigration authorities to flex their power and strike fear into communities. For example, in July of 2019, ICE agents arrested an individual inside of a Delano courthouse, with some attorneys protesting that actions like this could discourage immigrant individuals, witnesses, and victims of crime from participating in the justice system rather than appearing and risk being arrested for their status (Morgan 2019).

As the first one in her family born in the United States, 16-year-old Noemi felt similarly to Gabriel: "Part of my involvement was because of my parents, because of their immigration status and everything that was going on." She paused and then asserted, "I wanted to be the voice for them." Frustrated with low youth participation, Noemi organized alongside her peers to register and pre-register students at her

school. One day, her school counselor walked by and bragged that he didn't vote because it didn't matter. Furious that he had said this while other students whom she was trying to register were nearby, Noemi vented, "I was just like, 'What? Really?'" He was maybe mid-30s, no, no, late 30s. I was just confused. Him being an adult, an older adult and not knowing why to vote, I was shocked. Honestly, no, it didn't discourage me. It gave me more reason to educate people on why they should vote."

Still, the decision to participate or organize in their communities often involved considerations of when to speak up, particularly for those youth who were undocumented themselves. Just as Alexandria had to weigh whether her actions would have consequences for her mother's chances of returning to the United States, 18-year-old Elena cautioned that "[n]ot only am I putting light on myself, I am putting light opening them to look into my family. I feel like that's a fear I have. That does make me hesitant about a lot of things. I know my limits on where I'll protest because I'm not as confident and fearless as some of my acquaintances." Even so, Elena later explained that her experiences with a local youth organizing group had a profound impact on her. "It motivates me now. I realized I'm not the only undocumented at school. It's not something talked about, you know? When I introduce myself, that's the first thing I say. My name is Elena and I'm undocumented. I take pride in it."

When I asked her how her experiences with this youth organization had developed her confidence, she replied, "With training, it opened a whole bunch of doors for me. It's a whole new world. I look at things very differently now." Again, in

the absence of strong traditional socializing agents like parents and schools, community-based organizations and youth organizing groups often served as a catalyst for youth from mixed-status families to overcome barriers to participation.

Seeing their ability to vote and organize not just as their personal duty but as an act on behalf of their family or their entire community, many interviewees described how being from a mixed-status family meant they could not take things for granted. While acknowledging the mental, financial, and emotional challenges their families faced, youth shared how these very same experiences motivated them to take action and participate in their communities. Whether this was by actively organizing with youth organizations or engaging in more subtle efforts like informing family members about checkpoints, youth's lived experiences informed their decision making within this hostile context.

For those that had the privilege of U.S. citizenship, the right to vote was never to be taken for granted. Victor explained how his family's mixed status drove him to the polls for the first time: "I want the best for them. I don't want to see society slowly creeping into what it is becoming, with us having to hide way too much." Jorge, who had grown up in Bakersfield and seen this hostile context his whole life, discussed how his participation at the polls was for a larger community, "not only my family members but I guess all undocumented individuals, seeing as how a lot of [people] in our county are immigrants and people of color. For me, it has encouraged me to participate more."

Even so, voting was not necessarily always a purely empowering experience, as there were often few immigrant-friendly options on their ballots. Hector, 19, had grown increasingly critical of Sheriff Youngblood's anti-immigrant policies and yet found no inspiration among the alternatives. "Yeah, when it came to the sheriff's race, I left it blank. I knew Fleeman [Youngblood's opponent] was just as bad," he explained. However, Hector did vote against any candidate who had anti-immigrant views in other state and national races. For Cassandra, her undocumented mother was at the top of her mind as she cast her ballot in 2016, voting against Trump and his immigration policies. Smiling, she said, "I mean, I'm not saying I agree with all the Democratic views on everything, but obviously they have a better plan to fix immigration than Republicans." She paused, her smile beginning to fade: "...well I don't want to say that, because I know that Obama deported more people than previous presidents, but..." Stuck between what felt like an infamous "lesser of two evils" decision, Cassandra discussed how she researched whoever had the most progressive policies on immigration and voted for that candidate. For both Cassandra and Hector, there was a feeling of disappointment in their choices for local offices, as many self-proclaimed moderate "Blue Dog" Democrats did not inspire them.

Kathy's first voting experience resembled that of many youth. Growing up as the first one in her family born in the United States, Kathy, 24, recognized the privileges and opportunities she was granted, opportunities her older sister did not have. Kathy's older sister had been granted DACA but knew this was only a temporary program that could be repealed at any moment. Recognizing that her

sister's temporary legal status could hinge on a fateful Tuesday in November, Kathy took to the polls to cast her ballot for the first time. After doing so, she kept her ballot receipt and that small white "I voted" sticker with an American flag handed out by poll workers. Later that day, Kathy handed her sticker to her older sister and gave her a warm embrace. "I voted," she told her, smiling. "I voted for us."

Notably, youth from mixed-status families felt emboldened to not only encourage voting and participating among their own peers and families but also beyond their immediate networks. For example, 18-year-old Josue echoed the words of the late John Lewis, saying, "If not us, then who? If not now, then when?" Josue continued: "If I don't do it, no one else is going to do it." For youth in the Central Valley, it was important to engage young people they didn't know personally, stepping out of their comfort zone to knock on doors, give public presentations, and table at community events.

Youth gained the confidence to take action because they were given the tools, safe spaces, and encouragement to do so through their involvement in youth organizing groups.

Their participation empowered them to step into their communities with a conviction that their collective voices could persuade others and shape their communities in positive ways. "I feel they really empowered our voices so much. We just leap at the chances we get," Josue said proudly. Rolando, 19, would give himself pep talks before certain events, reminding himself why he did work in his community, which included registering voters and challenging local elected officials by asking them

direct questions in public forums, though he himself could not vote: “I would just repeat in the back of my head this is for my people, this is not for me. Because whoever’s elected next is going to represent us. I started being selfless and stopped thinking about myself, and thought about what it meant for the people I’m representing.” Rolando had been able to qualify for the DACA program, as he had not met eligibility guidelines. For years, he saw the agricultural fields as the only place for him, since they had the only employers who didn’t ask for any sort of documentation. In spite of all the challenges that surrounded him as a result of being undocumented, his own identity and being part of a mixed-status family galvanized his participation in politics. His reflections are worth quoting at length:

“At first, I was a little hesitant because I didn’t want people knowing my status. Only a handful of people knew that I was undocumented, and I did start working with undocumented folks and organizers. At first, I was scared for anyone to find out. My mom had long implemented it in my head, ‘Don’t tell people because they’re going to find out and you never know if they might report you.’ I had that fear of being deported. But now, when I think about it, it’s the most encouraging thing possible because *I’m doing it for them*. Sometimes it feels like I’m doing it for myself, but at the end of the day, I’m doing it for them. For us to get equality in every other aspect. We pay taxes and we work, and we give back to the community. And it’s just dumb that this little piece of paper tells us that we are somehow different. But you know what? It’s my motivation now.”

As Rolando illustrates, youth from mixed-status families are more politically engaged than social scientists might expect, and growing up within a mixed-status family can galvanize rather than deter participation. Additionally, these examples emphasize how *horizontal* forms of socialization such as peer-to-peer engagement can motivate political action among immigrant youth even when *vertical* forms of political socialization and traditional socializing agents fail to do so within conservative political contexts (Terriquez et al. 2020). Despite being undocumented himself and thus unable to participate in traditional forms of participation, Rolando's desire and motivation to engage others was rooted in the belief that all youth had the power to make their communities a better place.

Some research suggests that solidarity arising from a sense of linked fate among Latinx individuals may be a temporary phenomenon that only arises when Latinos are marginalized by economic and immigrant experiences (G. R. Sanchez and Masuoka 2010). In contrast, my data collected in this dissertation point to a more prolonged sense of engagement among youth that extended beyond immigration issues. Kathy, for example, organized her peers around health care and several other campaign efforts. Witnessing her sister and parents struggle because of their status, Kathy felt an obligation to repay her family for the sacrifices they had made. "I just do everything that I do for them," she said. "They brought me to have better opportunities, and I want them to have the same." As she explained, everybody wants to give their parents a better life, but "[w]hen you come from an undocumented family, I feel like that statement goes *ten times more* than what you actually mean to

say, because we don't have the resources or the opportunities to do what you wanna do.” Reflecting on this added pressure to succeed as a daughter of immigrants, Kathy noted her own mother’s struggles to survive and adapt to life in the Valley. Though her mother had an associate’s degree and worked as a social worker in Mexico, this experience could not help her, an undocumented immigrant with foreign education credentials, attain upward mobility in the Valley. Instead, her mother found work in the agricultural packing houses. Witnessing both of her parents working long hours, Kathy reiterated her source of motivation to keep on advocating despite the hostility she encountered: “I just want them to stop suffering... because every day they have to get up to work and they're getting older.” Demonstrating a strong sense of linked fate among mixed-status families, youth exhibited strong levels of engagement as a result of, not in spite of, their mixed status (Dawson 1994; Zepeda Milan 2017; Vargas, Sanchez, and Valdez 2017).

Youth also became empowered through the work they did. Janessa, 21, never imagined herself picking up a megaphone at a rally or knocking on a stranger’s door, but she became a notable youth leader in a campaign to expand health care access for undocumented youth. She recalled getting hands-on training from a peer, Kathy, three years her senior. “Kathy taught me a lot,” she said. “My first day [on a campaign], I thought I was just going to walk around with her and she was going to do the knocking and everything.” After observing Kathy speak to a few residents, recalled Janessa, “Kathy was like—your turn, go out and do it. I’m glad she was the one to tell

me, ‘go out and try it yourself.’” She soon found herself taking the lead and training other youth to communicate with local residents about their campaign. Janessa explained that she had become empowered through her participation with this local youth organizing group: “I never thought that I could make a difference in the community, but ever since I did the #health4all campaign...I don’t know, it was just this warm feeling helping those people, giving them information that they might have not received otherwise.”

Using the skills, education, and training they received from their peers and grassroots organizations, youth found the strength to overcome, or at least manage, their fears. For youth from mixed-status families, education and knowing their rights was a source of empowerment. As Janessa put it, “I mean, I do have some concern but I’m not scared anymore. Now that I know my rights and I’ve been telling my parents about their rights, I feel we can deal with it.” Given the widespread fear of ICE and law enforcement in her community, Janessa now felt that she could intervene if she saw someone being stopped or questioned by ICE agents. “I know that it would probably end up with my arrest or something, but I wouldn’t want to see somebody go through something that I should have helped with.” Organizations also shared resources and workshops on how to interact with media, organizing strategies, how to speak at public meetings, along with education on voting and participation.

For Janessa, being undocumented once held her back, as she was looking over her shoulder everywhere she went. “I didn’t even know back then that undocumented immigrants had rights back then,” she said. After learning about her own rights as an

immigrant, however, Janessa's identity and mixed status family became a source of motivation. Though she had been systematically excluded from voting and other forms of traditional political participation her entire life, this only pushed her to participate in other ways. Nodding, she declared, "So ever since other folks educated me about that, I just got empowered. Like whoa, I can make a difference even though I'm not able to vote or do other stuff. I can participate and go to protests, go to rallies and raise my voice for those people that were living in the shadows as I once was." Similarly, Noemi, who had once felt ashamed of speaking Spanish, took pride in her family's roots and was transformed by her participation in a youth organizing group. Smiling, she said, "All the educational meetings...would make me feel like pumped up and happy that I'm doing this because honestly, I never thought I would be doing this. I'm so grateful that I am. I'm so happy that I am."

For scholars of social movements, one of the keys to mobilization is the "activation, creation, and transformation of collective identities" (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 55). My results bear this out, as youth who once may have hid in the shadows to avoid attention were now reclaiming their individual or family's mixed-status identity in order to mobilize community members and peers around them.

Conclusion

As researchers continue to study questions around political behavior, political socialization, and mobilization within immigrant families, they must reconcile competing arguments from different perspectives. Whether on the role of community-based organizations and voluntary associations or the impact of civic education,

scholars have put forth compelling arguments arguing both for and against these factors fostering participation and politicization. Though the extent to which parents, peers, schools, and organizations have an impact is contested, there still appears to be a consensus that these socializing agents can indeed provide some insight into how political behavior is learned and negotiated among youth. Paying attention to different contexts—e.g., legal status, political climate, or social setting—can also help illuminate why some individuals choose to get involved and how political actors are constrained by their environments and obligations to their families. Rather than assuming the absolute agency of every individual and an equal playing field in which everyone is free to join voluntary associations and obtain social capital, scholars must remain cognizant of the unequal distribution of resources and constraints that may make it more challenging for groups to obtain social capital. Within the context of Kern, it is clear that traditional top-down and vertical socializing agents have played a limited role in the socialization of youth. Instead, community-based organizations have helped youth from mixed-status families overcome barriers to participation within a conservative political context and allowed for more peer-to-peer horizontal socialization efforts (Terriquez et al. 2020).

Though political process theory provides excellent insights as to why movements emerge during “windows of opportunity,” this paradigm fails to fully capture how varying localized contexts may also affect not only the incorporation of immigrants but also their political participation, engagement, and the strategic tactics that immigrant rights movements adopt (Burciaga and Martinez 2017). The narrow

political opportunity structure in Kern County exhibits an absence of local elite allies, limited social movement infrastructure, and an active conservative climate that seeks to exclude undocumented communities, illustrating how the prospects for achieving success within movements can truly be context dependent (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; J. Meyer 2006; D. S. Meyer 2004).

This chapter contributes to the growing body of literature around political socialization, civic engagement, mixed-status families, and social movements. In addition, it highlights how individuals from mixed-status families face different types of resistance and oppression due to their intersecting identities. In the following two chapters, I will explore how a more moderate context of reception and political opportunity structure in Fresno has allowed for youth from mixed-status families to successfully obtain victories that they have not been able to in Kern (and other areas of the Central Valley).

Despite the ongoing passion and commitment to the cause that youth participants expressed during their interviews, several dreamed about the day when they could stop organizing. As we finished our interview, Hector said, “I hope I don't have to keep on doing this. I hope there isn't a need for me to be doing this anymore.” Following up, I questioned him, “A need to do what? Organize?” Hector responded:

“Yeah. I hope by then there's change in the sense that I don't have to—we don't have to— go out there and have to face possibly being arrested or possibly being hit by anti-protesters. I want to live in a world where we're in a

community that isn't as shitty. Where we don't have to fear persecution simply because of who we are...We shouldn't have to be afraid.”

Chapter V: Setting the Context: A Tale of Two Fresnos

I grew up in Fresno but I attend Clovis Unified. My family has faced challenges when it comes to money. At first, I wouldn't really mind not having as many clothes because I never noticed it, it was just part of my life. But when I started going to school in Clovis and you see a lot of kids with really nice clothes and really nice backpacks and their parents are picking them up from school in nice cars, while your grandpa has to walk to pick you up from school and walk you home... Those are some challenges where I immediately I knew that I wasn't up to par with other kids. In first grade, I realized that they were more well off than I was. And in turn I felt even more looked down upon by my peers and by teachers as well. – Alan, 17

Growing up in Fresno County, Alan was not alone in experiencing these feelings. As the son of refugees who had migrated to the Central Valley, Alan knew what it felt like to navigate two different worlds in a mixed-status family. Simultaneously, he began to observe that Fresno often seemed like two completely different worlds. In cities like Clovis and on Fresno's north and east sides, whiter affluent neighborhoods are the norm. Country clubs and golf courses are "accessible" to those willing to pay to enter, and even Woodward Public Park charges an additional fee to enter the Japanese Garden within the park. In contrast, the cracked and neglected streets of West and South Fresno tell a different story, with a large concentration of RV and mobile home parks rather than country clubs. Public areas like Roeding Park in South Fresno offer far less green space or trails than Woodward.

Black and Brown residents contend with conditions in a community that has been under invested in, under-resourced, and long plagued by high rates of poverty, asthma, and poor health outcomes. Estimates from the National Center for Health Statistics and the National Association of Public Health Statistics illustrate just how drastic the quality of life is affected by these disparities. Life expectancy in the three most affluent areas of North Fresno is 85 years old. The life expectancy in South Fresno? Just 77 years, an eight-year difference (Sheehan 2018). Though you will not see a Trader Joe's unless you travel to North Fresno, liquor stores are abundant in South Fresno. As one travels farther away from the county's center near Clovis to other working class communities like Parlier, Selma, and Sanger, "the tale of two Fresnos" becomes apparent.

How did such inequality come to exist in this county that today numbers almost 1 million people? How have community members resisted and organized to create a more equitable and just community? The history and context of Fresno County tells a story rooted in the practice of redlining and the racist policies that have led to many of the inequities that can still be witnessed today. Though Fresno County has often been lumped in with the rest of the "conservative" Central Valley, the political context has changed drastically throughout the years, as its voters have supported the Democratic nominee for President since 2008 and local politics has seen a drastic shift at the city level.

These shifting changes throughout time have led to a more moderate political opportunity structure for youth to navigate. In this chapter, I will discuss and explore

the local history of Fresno County that has created the present-day structure and conditions that youth from mixed-status families face. Outlining the history of exclusionary policies, suppression of student activism in the 1960s, and support of local law enforcement's collaboration and relationship with ICE, both the broad economic inequalities and this history of intentionally exclusionary policies have created overlapping challenges for immigrant communities. In order to understand this inequality in Fresno and the Central Valley more broadly, however, we must understand that these disparities did not occur accidentally. Rather these systems are functioning exactly as they were originally intended to function: to create disparities and inequality between affluent and marginalized groups of people.

As a result, these structures of inequality have shaped the strategies available to marginalized communities and youth from mixed-status families, and created additional barriers to participation. Historical redlining, and corruption within local government housing has contributed to the metaphorical and literal lines of division between communities in Fresno, creating cycles of poverty and a social ladder with broken steps. On the issue of immigration local immigrant communities have experienced crosswinds from local, state, and national forces with different positions on immigration and immigrants' rights. At the same time, historical resistance to these policies, as well as organizing against exclusionary institutions and groups have led to a present day shift within local politics, particularly at the city level. I hope to set the stage for present and future struggles for justice in Fresno County.

Disparity by Design: Redlining and Other Racist Policies

Throughout U.S. history, systemically racist policies enabled local leaders to enact racially segregated housing. Communities of color have historically been subjected to redlining practices, in which people of color were denied mortgages and were “redlined” to specific, low-income neighborhoods deemed “undesirable” (Rothstein 2017). Fresno was no exception, and in fact illustrates how these historic policies have continued to shape the way that everyday individuals experience such stark contrasts. These policies along with white collar crime and corruption within local government in Fresno illustrates a lasting legacy of discrimination against non-Anglo/European immigrant groups.

Fresno, the central valley’s largest city and county, is also the poorest major city in the state of California. Today, Fresno’s westside is composed largely of Black and Brown community members as a result of historic redlining practices. Historically, however, the beginning of racial segregation in Fresno actually begins with the Chinese. As early as the 1850s, Chinese migrants moved to Fresno to search for gold (Chacon 1988). The Chinese were then forced out and segregated by Anglos, and they continued to face violence and discriminatory laws preventing them from purchasing property, voting, or testifying against white individuals (Chacon 1988, 373). This racism and violence would continue to permeate every facet of life for Chinese residents, as Anglo residents united in their refusal to sell, rent, or lease any land to them in Anglo neighborhoods. The Central Pacific railroad also agreed to refuse to sell any land to the east of its tracks, and as a result, the Chinese were only

allowed to move west of Fresno and had to form their own Chinatown in order to survive. The same railroad tracks that these Chinese laborers tirelessly helped build thus became the very boundary line that marked their exclusion.

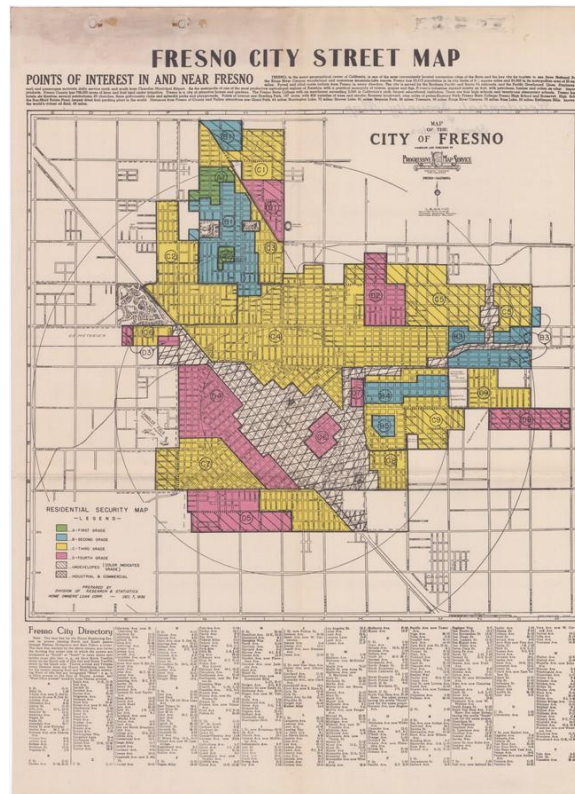
The Chinese were relegated largely to farm labor but worked in any occupation that they could find in order to survive. Having been excluded from acquiring property and jobs in most of Fresno, West Fresno's new Chinatown "protected immigrants by offering them a degree of justice and order in a state where legal institutions generally failed to serve them" (Chacon 1988, 377). Over the years, Chinese residents in Fresno would continue to be threatened and harassed by both community members and community leaders, with the Fresno city council declaring Chinatown a "public menace" in 1883 for its crime and prostitution. In the years that followed, this "red-light district" would welcome immigrants from Mexico, Japan, Russia, and all around the world to Fresno, and the former "Chinatown" came to be known as "*el barrio chino*" and "Mexican Town."

Residents had to contend with both the structural political and legal violence of white residents and law enforcement as well as with violent groups operating outside of the law, namely the Ku Klux Klan. Oftentimes, this violence would overlap, as recounted in one scholar's history of the county: "During a raid on the Ku Klux Klan headquarters in Inglewood, federal agents seized a membership list that named six (or seven depending on the source) Fresno police officers who were members of the Fresno Ku Klux Klan klavern. They also found leading members from Fresno such as J.M. Eulless, a Fresno businessperson and real estate broker, on

the membership list” (Mendez 2020). This history of violence, as well as the segregation of communities into racial enclaves, still affect Fresno today.

In the 1930s, following the New Deal, the formation of the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) agency led to even more redlining and discrimination in housing. Assessing real estate and the credit worthiness of individuals, the HOLC perpetuated systematic racism by relegating communities of color, including migrants from Mexico and Latin America, to shaded areas of cities labeled undesirable and by preventing them from buying homes in white neighborhoods through the use of racially restricted covenants (Coates 2014). In fact, “less than 2% of the \$120 billion in real estate they [the HOLC] financed between the 1930s and the 1968 passing of the Fair Housing Act was available to non-white families” (Saiz 2015). This systematic racism and violence toward communities of color were not mistakes but rather intentional. As people of color were intentionally denied mortgages all across the United States, racial disparities would persist for years to come. The Central Valley, and more specifically Fresno, was no exception.

Below is the HOLC’s carefully crafted, color-coded map of Fresno that essentially embedded inequality, poverty, and discrimination into the county with each stroke of a pen. White neighborhoods were shaded in green and “undesirable” neighborhoods with people of color were shaded red.



A map used by the HOLC to redline and segregate communities of color in Fresno. T-RACES, University of Maryland (Saiz 2015; Thebault 2018)

Politicians and members of the public have long described areas like Fresno with the “two cities” framework. In an interview, former Fresno mayor Alan Autry claimed there was a “socio economic wall” along Shaw Avenue, a street that many today call the dividing line between the affluent and the poor (Simmons 2006). This dividing line originated in maps like these.

These demarcations directly affected quality of life. In 2012, a report conducted by the California Environmental Protection Agency and a team of researchers stated that individuals living in West Fresno lived with higher health risks

than anywhere else in California, and the life expectancy gap between the highest and lowest life expectancy zip codes in Fresno varied by as much as a 21 years (Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies San Joaquin Valley 2012).

These trends were not unique to Fresno, however, as the report also found higher rates of asthma in children and premature deaths, with those in the lowest income zip codes of the Central Valley being almost twice that of the most affluent zip codes. Levels of pollution in the historically redlined West Fresno were three times higher than the more affluent Woodward park area, and there was a similar disparity in terms of pesticide applications, with West Fresno in the 93rd percentile and Woodward Park in the 23rd percentile (Grossi 2013). Though a more recent report puts the life expectancy differential between the most affluent and poorest neighborhoods in Fresno at a more modest eight years, this gap still illustrates the long-lasting effects of redlining and policies designed to segregate and displace communities of color.

As noted by Rothstein (2017), these racially discriminatory policies did not end years ago: “One of the more troubling has been the regulatory tolerance of banks’ “reverse redlining”—excessive marketing of exploitative loans in African American communities. This was an important cause of the 2008 financial collapse because these loans, called subprime mortgages, were bound to go into default. When they did, lower-middle-class African American neighborhoods were devastated, and their residents, with their homes foreclosed, were forced back into lower-income areas” (109). The toleration and (arguably) encouragement of these practices have continued

to lead to devastating outcomes for low-income communities of color all across the United States and within the Central Valley.

Though the practice of redlining would fade with the passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968, policymakers simply looked to other tools and means of suppressing communities of color. Blatant exclusionary laws were replaced with illegal backdoor deals and white collar crime used to maintain de facto residential segregation in Fresno. As noted by the Federal Bureau of Investigations website, “In 1996, Operation REZONE targeted several prominent Fresno and Clovis county politicians who were willing to take bribes for favorable action on pending rezoning proposal (“FBI Sacramento History” n.d.). This investigation revealed that for decades, developers had been able to bypass local zoning and environmental laws by bribing Fresno city and county politicians, sometimes using literal money bags (Arax 1995). Moreover, the investigation also revealed that a group of builders handpicked and recruited candidates to run through both legal and illegal means. When these facts came to light, the Fresno County district attorney Ed Hunt (who also received contributions from builders) refused to prosecute any of these crimes, citing a lack of individuals willing to step forward (Arax 1995). As a result, corrupt developers could continue to bribe officials and grow the more affluent north side, and the disparities between those areas and West Fresno only continued to grow (Simmons 2006; Dr. Tony Iton 2018).

When the local *Fresno Bee* newspaper asked residents to share their opinions around this issue in 2018, a group of readers described the neighborhoods south of

Shaw with words such as “diverse, crime, poverty, neglected, dirty” while describing Clovis and North Fresno with “white flight, affluent, disconnected, conservative, suburban” (Calix 2018a). Various efforts to close the gap had failed. Approximately ten years ago, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development had given the city of Fresno millions of dollars to help revitalize West Fresno. Instead, the city used this money to fund police and code enforcement, according to Council Member Miguel Arias (Tobias 2020). As the *Fresno Bee* acknowledged in an editorial, “That West Fresno is worse off than the rest of the city is indisputable. On a range of metrics — from economic well-being to physical health to the environment—West Fresnans are poorer and sicker than residents elsewhere in the city, and West Fresnans live in one of California’s most polluted neighborhoods, surrounded by industry, freeways and rail lines” (The Fresno Bee Editorial board 2021). The editorial board called upon Fresno mayor Jerry Dyer to issue a formal apology to communities of color in Fresno and work toward improving these historically redlined neighborhoods. No such apology has been issued.

Taken together this long standing discrimination in housing has contributed to generational cycles of poverty and neglect which act as a barrier to participation for youth from mixed status families. Literature has long posited that those with lower income tend to participate in politics at lower rates when compared to those who are wealthier (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Additionally, under these conditions, youth from mixed status family face much more limited biographical availability than their peers. “ Biographical availability can be

defined as the absence of personal constraints that may increase the costs and risks of movement participation, such as full-time employment, marriage, and family responsibilities.” (McAdam 1986, 70). Illustrating another barrier to participation, this limited biographical availability of both parents and youth from mixed status families does not typically create adequate conditions for political socialization. This will be discussed in our next chapter as youth describe their parents typically more concerned with surviving these longstanding economic conditions, rather than engaging in politics. Simultaneously however, these conditions that youth from mixed status families have experienced, also act as a source of motivation for youth to change the structures and legacy of Fresno. As I will explore more in our next chapter, COVID 19 has only further fueled both these conditions of inequality, and the urgency for youth to advocate for change.

Immigrant and Farmworker Communities Struggling against Suppression: From the 1930s to the 2020s

In the following section, I explore the historical context of Fresno that has led to present day conditions structures that youth must contend with. I begin by exploring the deportation campaigns of Mexican American farmworkers, and subsequent farmworker movements of the 30s and 60s which called for dignity and justice for farmworkers and their families. Notably the conflict between the growers and workers striking would be replicated at Fresno State College as youth from mixed status families (and farm working families) led the charge to support the movement and engage in activism and protest. Similar to their parents, these youth also faced

repression and violence at the hands of opposition and law enforcement while making claims. The parallel political opportunity structures between these youth and their parents in Fresno illustrate a pattern of constraints and local opposition from counterforces and law enforcement. During both the farmworker and Chicano movements immigrant youth faced institutional and societal opposition, yet still fueled by their anger and desire to mobilize, led actions to support the farmworker boycott. Ultimately participation within politics has created a shift in the Fresno city council, providing for a more open political opportunity structure for youth from mixed status families to organize successfully for campaigns, a point I will return to in the next chapter.

From the Fields to Fresno State College

In the years leading up to the Great Depression of the 1930s, over a million immigrants immigrated to the United States, many of them seeking work in agriculture. During the Great Depression, however, white workers began to see immigrants as scapegoats, blaming them for limited jobs and the lack of economic opportunities (Guerin-Gonzales 1994). Agricultural workers, many of them immigrants, were faced with a society that did not value them as equals. Along with these attitudes came a massive deportation campaign that resulted in the expulsion of both citizen and noncitizen Mexican Americans. As Guerin Gonzalez writes,

Growers, aided by state power, struggled to perpetuate an essentialized, normative image of who was American, based on racial and gender ideologies

of white male individualism. Rather than a story of exclusion from access to economic security—a story that includes a call for social justice through inclusion—the history of Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans, as well as other immigrant groups in the United States, is one of violent conflict over the cultural, social, and political meanings of the American Dream.

(1994, 138)

Farmworkers in Fresno and across the San Joaquin Valley not only had to struggle to survive in a society and industry that often saw them as disposable but also had to come to terms with the fact that law enforcement was not on their side. When farmworkers in Fresno attempted to strike in the 1930s, growers and law enforcement worked hand-in-hand to arrest and violently attack hundreds of them. As Bronfenbrenner recounts, “Any strikers who did attempt to defend themselves were arrested by the police for ‘rioting.’ The attack continued throughout the day, with strikers and their families being run out of their camps with fire hoses and tear gas” (Bronfenbrenner 1990, 81). In their struggle against employers, law enforcement, and local institutions, these Valley farmworker immigrants would set the stage for the 1960’s farmworker movement, which operated within a more open political opportunity structure. As scholars note, the period of the 1960s farmworker movement saw a more successful societal response with sustained support and a more cooperative political context (Jenkins and Perrow 1977). Though this later farmworker movement in the Valley faced similar opposition from growers and law enforcement, a growing Chicano movement had emerged, and these struggles for

justice would eventually make their way from the fields of Fresno to the halls of Fresno State College (FSC).

Though the Chicano movement was active in California throughout the 1960s and evolved into a national movement, it is important to understand how the localized contexts of reception affected Chicano students' experiences in this movement, particularly in the Central Valley. For example, as Patrick Fontes illustrates, there was a stark contrast between students in the struggle in San Francisco and students at Fresno State College:

For one, while Chicanos at other universities such as San Francisco State also challenged a power structure founded on an Anglo-American standard, FSC Chicanos not only contended with structural racism that bound together conservative college and rural cultures, but fought against—in a few cases, literally—a white student body who were the offspring and products of that agricultural, conservative power foundation. At Fresno State, in classrooms, in the free speech area, the sons and daughters of growers at the center of the grape boycott who demonized the UFW sat beside, verbally confronted, and, a few times, physically attacked the sons and daughters who marched alongside Chávez—Chicanos fought back. (Fontes 2021, 237)

Fontes's rich description here illustrates the tale of two Fresnoes in conflict with one another, highlighting the inequalities and power structures that permeated all aspects of life in Fresno. As the growers combatted farmworkers in the fields utilizing

violence and suppression alongside law enforcement, so too did their children in college against the children of farmworkers, attempting to secure power and suppress dissent any way they could. At the same time this passage demonstrates the resiliency that Chicano youth had to muster in order to fight back against power structures and racism that had long excluded them from participation.

Quite literally on the front lines of both the Chicano movement and the farmworker movement, the Central Valley has long been the epicenter for social struggle, with its young people—and more specifically young people of color—at the vanguard in the battle for social justice, dignity, and equality. These students, many of whom had grown up working in the fields with their parents, participated in strikes, boycotts, and even been arrested for their participation in the farmworker movement. Upon entering Fresno State College, Latinx students from all across the Central Valley felt a disconnect, describing it as a “foreign land” where they did not see themselves represented in the institution (Fontes 2021).

In fact, feeling unrepresented even in their own college newspaper, Chicano students at Fresno State college created their own, *La Pluma Morena* (the brown pen). As Patrick Fontes writes “In all, the particular struggles in the fields and on campus were seen as a larger fight for Mexicans in the Valley to rise out of poverty and gain the respect and economic, educational and political voices and opportunities afforded to whites.”(240). Despite being faced with a political, economic, and social structure that was vehemently opposed to their participation — a very ‘closed’ political opportunity structure – students and community members continued to

elevate their grievances from the halls of the college to the president of the United States.

In 1968, President Richard Nixon made a stop on his presidential campaign tour at Fresno State College, where he was greeted by hundreds of Republican supporters and farmers, as well as student protesters. During this time, the farmworker movement urged individuals to boycott grapes and stand in solidarity with farmworkers' demands, to which a defiant Nixon responded, "I will continue to eat California grapes and drink grape products" (Fontes 2021, 244). The debate over whether to boycott created conflict at Fresno State College, where both the academic and student senate attempted to pass resolutions condemning such an action and supporting the grape growers instead of the farmworkers movement. Mainly white professors and students in the Agriculture Department led the support for these campaigns against the pro-farmworker Chicano students, leading to increased tensions that would only be further exacerbated in the months and years to come.

Under the governorship of Ronald Reagan and the Nixon presidency, organizing students and faculty members at Fresno State college were operating within a conservative context and leadership structure that opposed their interests. Fresno City College would become a battleground in which fights over the farmworker movement, the school's administration, and the war in Vietnam played out. In opposition to the college president Karl Faulk and his policies, Chicano students not only successfully passed a resolution denouncing his administration but also staged a campus-wide boycott of classes, a hunger strike, and sit-in protests in

administration buildings as well (Seib 1979). Where there was student activism however, there was also student suppression. Additionally, Faulk had his own allies among faculty and students, particularly in the Agriculture and Physical education departments, who clashed violently with students in the Arts and social sciences. On May 6, 1970, following the killing of four students and the wounding of nine others at Kent state, these tensions came to a boiling point as fists began to fly between Chicano students and anti-protesters, agricultural students, and so-called “protective squads” of student athletes organized by the head of the Physical Education department Cecil Coleman (Seib 1979, 93).

Following these events, the campus announced that eight Ethnic Studies faculty members would not be rehired; at the time, these faculty members represented 60 percent of the faculty of color on campus. Clashes between students continued, and the police arrested, surveilled, and accused students and faculty of having ties to communism in a McCarthyist red scare fashion (Fontes 2021). For example, following the Nixon protest previously mentioned, the Fresno chief of police Henry Morton published a report on Mexican American student activists and sent it to every local media outlet. In this report, Morton obtained and published confidential information from the financial aid office without a warrant as he “examined whether the students received any type of student aid; researched their political activities; and even checked if their family members participated in UFW protests throughout the Valley” (Fontes 2021, 246). Morton’s corruption was well known, but citizens either felt powerless to challenge him or shrugged that this was

the norm in a place like Fresno. As one retired federal agent described it, “A rotten police force... the citizens didn’t mind. Their indifference was practically suffocating” (Mendez 2020).

This legacy of organizing and repression at Fresno State College foreshadows a contemporary institutional context that has continued to suppress student activism and political engagement. As youth continue to organize for justice and immigration educational institutions youth are described their educational experiences as deeply “anti-political” or only supportive of apolitical community engagement such as volunteering. I will return to this point in the next chapter as I describe how these traditional socializing agents largely failed to socialize youth to politics, and at times played a role in suppressing political discussion.

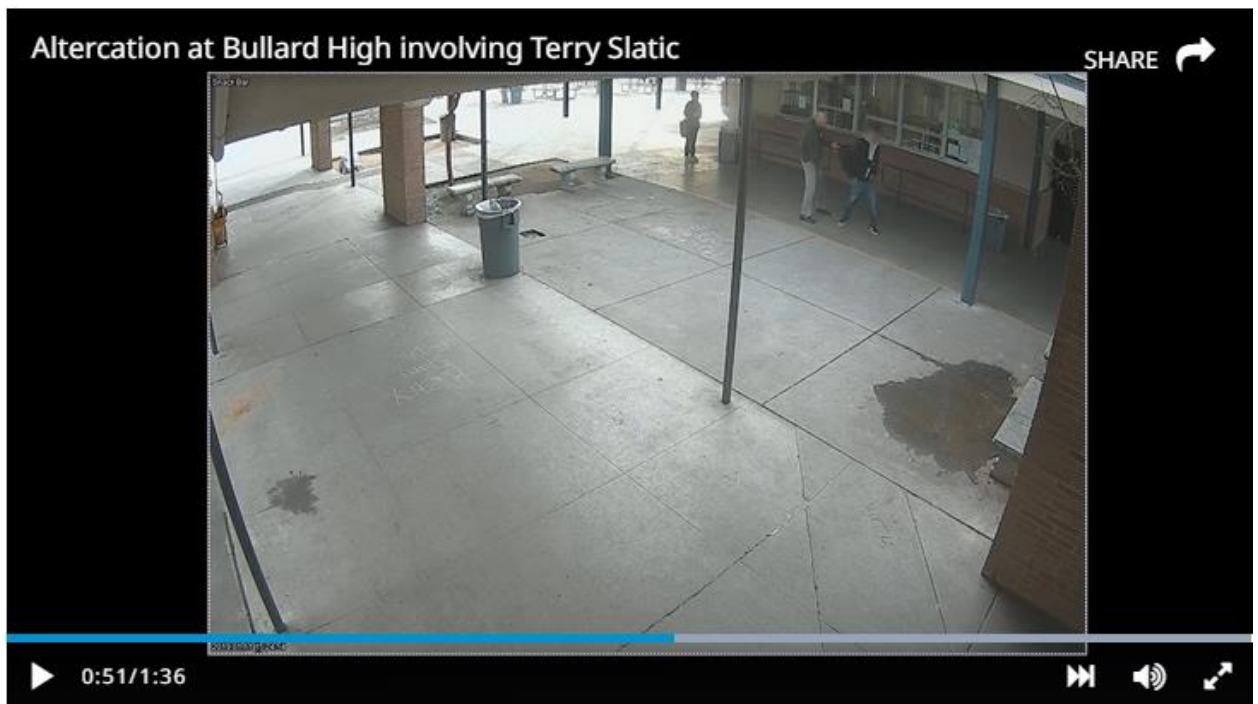
Suppression in Schools

Though schools can play an active role in helping facilitate participation and can act as a positive socializing agent for youth, the educational context in Fresno appears to offer more detrimental effects. Research highlights how schools and courses can be much more consequential for political participation among Latino first- and second-generation students than for white third-plus-generation adolescents (Humphries, Muller, and Schiller 2013a). The consequences for youth from mixed status families then are dire if educational institutions fail to properly scaffold participation and engagement. Within Fresno, students have come face to face with an educational landscape which features challenges of overt racism within schools, and

right wing rhetoric against LGBTQ communities and comprehensive even sex education curriculum. Though youth have been successful in some of their campaigns within the Fresno Unified School board, (as we will explore in our next chapter), challenges against racism within schools have continued to plague the district, ultimately erupting in current student protests.

Students living in Fresno County have also had to contend with racial discrimination from their peers in incidents that have captured national headlines. In 2019, a video clip of a white female student from Bullard High school in the Fresno Unified school district went viral. Dressed in full blackface with laughter in the background, the girl looks at the camera and states “Who said I can’t say n*****?” (La Ganga 2019). Bullard High School, located north of Shaw in a very affluent neighborhood of Fresno, became a center of controversy for weeks. Though the superintendent and board of trustees (and even the girl’s parents) condemned the incident, one school board trustee decided to take matters into his own hands and defend the two cheerleaders in the incident. Unannounced, Trustee Terry Slatic showed up to the school’s cheer team practice to defend them and the decision that they would be allowed to remain on the team, claiming that they were victims of “bullying” (Calix 2019a). He threatened that he could shut down the entire cheer team and the cheer camp trip if any of the members brought up the blackface incident. As tearful cheerleaders spoke out against Slatic at the next board meeting, one cheer team member went so far as to attempt to file a restraining order against him from the trauma she experienced (Calix 2019b). Citing a “thank you letter” from one of the

girls involved in the blackface incident and from her parents, Trustee Slatc defended his actions. Perhaps this was not surprising behavior from Slatc, who just months earlier was involved in a physical altercation with a student at Bullard High in which he can be seen grabbing the student's backpack. (Below is a screenshot.) The Fresno County District Attorney declined to file any charges (Appleton 2019).



Security camera footage captured a physical altercation between a Bullard High School student and district trustee Terry Slatc at the school snack bar Friday afternoon. BY FRESNO UNIFIED

In the neighboring district of Clovis Unified, students encountered racism inside and outside of their schools, from their social media feeds to bathroom stall graffiti. In contrast to the more diverse and lower socioeconomic-class student body at Fresno Unified, Clovis Unified has a larger, predominately white student body. In the same way that the railroad tracks and Shaw Avenue marked the divide between

the “have and have-nots,” Highway 41 divides the cities of Fresno and Clovis. In 2016, several bathroom stalls at Clovis High school were vandalized with the message “Go Back 2 Africa,” followed by a racial expletive (Mackenzie Mays 2016). Though the school district made efforts to reach every African American student (about 3 percent of the district’s population) to see if they were feeling safe at school, students faced further racist messaging in the following months. Within a year, Clovis Unified was once again in the headlines as screenshotted Snap Chat messages between several students were shared on social media (Ashleigh Panoo 2017). The messages involved comments about “racing slaves” against one another and “[j]etting over to Africa to smuggle a new one [slave]”. The 16-year-old Clovis Unified student who exposed the screenshots online was met with death threats toward her and her family. When asked why she shared them on social media rather than reporting them to administration the student stated, “I knew if I took it straight to the district they wouldn’t do anything. They would sweep it under the rug. I knew it would have more of an impact this way and force them to do something” (Calix 2017).

This was not the first time that Clovis Unified had been accused of sweeping things under the rug or being exclusionary. Leading up to this incident, Clovis Unified School district had faced a lawsuit for promoting abstinence-only sexual education sources. According to reports and a press release from the ACLU, the textbooks in Clovis did not mention condoms or HIV/AIDs and promoted abstinence until marriage. As the report noted: “Additional materials compare a woman who is not a virgin to a dirty shoe and suggest that men are unable to stop themselves once

they become sexually aroused” (Mackenzie Mays 2017; American Civil Liberties Union 2012). Such miseducation is especially concerning because in the heart of the Central Valley, STD rates and teenage pregnancy are among the highest in the state, particularly in rural areas (American Civil Liberties Union 2012). LGBTQ students have also faced pushback and discriminatory rhetoric from the elected officials intended to protect them.

When the California Healthy Youth Act, which would require districts to adopt a sex education curriculum that was unbiased, medically accurate, and included LGBTQ issues, went into effect in 2016, Clovis Unified trustee Brooke Ashjian responded that “[m]y biggest fear in teaching this—which we’re going to do it because it’s the law—[is that] you have kids who are extremely moldable at this stage, and if you start telling them that LGBT is OK and that it’s a way of life, well maybe you just swayed the kid to go that way” (Mackenzie Mays 2017). To students living in Fresno County and attending public schools, this sort of rhetoric has become the norm. In another case, Central Unified school district in West Fresno also captured headlines when Richard Atkins, a school board trustee, resigned from his position after posting on social media, “If you don’t love the country you live in, then go back to the country you or your ancestors came from.” This attitude reflects the embedded right-wing politics in Fresno’s local institutions, including its sports teams.

At a Memorial Day baseball game for the Fresno Grizzlies, a minor league baseball team, the audio of President Ronald Reagan’s 1981’s inaugural address played over a video montage of Arlington National Cemetery, a draped casket, and

other patriotic/military symbols. As the video continued, there was audio of President Reagan admonishing those “who practice terrorism,” with images of Antifa protesters appearing on screen. As Reagan spoke of “the enemies of freedom” and “potential adversaries,” the video cut to images of Fidel Castro, Kim Jong un, and Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (Chris Cioffi 2019). Following this incident, the Grizzlies baseball team lost several corporate sponsors. Several city council members traveled to D.C. to give a personal apology to the congresswoman, but the incident highlighted the sort of rhetoric and polarization that could be expected in Fresno, which can simultaneously be seen as a microcosm of the Central Valley and of contentious American politics at large. Recognizing the need to create safer spaces for immigrant and marginalized students within Fresno Unified, students would organize around a ‘safe place’ resolution. In Chapter VI, I will illustrate how this context shaped the organizing and strategies employed by youth from mixed status families as they campaigned for this resolution.

The Revolving Door, the “Brown Wave”, and Mayoral Race in Fresno

A Shade of Violet in a Valley of Red?

A national report conducted by Bada et al. (2010) emphasizes the crucial role that sociopolitical context plays for Latino’s civic engagement. The authors argue that “the context that immigrants face in their local communities helps shape the way and the extent to which they become active participants in public life” (5). Through a comparative approach of nine cities across the

United States, the authors illustrate the stark contrast between cities where there are many hometown associations and infrastructure (Los Angeles) and those where there are very few (Fresno). They highlight how local governments deeply affect immigrant integration efforts and point out that large cities tend to be more tolerant towards Latino immigrants in comparison to smaller urban areas (Bada et al. 2010). Through their comparison primarily focuses on larger cities, the report did analyze the Fresno as well and is worth quoting at length for its rich description of that local context:

Despite its sizeable Latino population and its status as a birthplace for Latino politics in California, Fresno faces perhaps more barriers to enhanced immigrant civic engagement and political participation than other California cities...like other immigrants nationwide in “survival mode,” Fresno’s migrant population, consisting of large numbers of seasonal farm workers and undocumented persons, may not place political participation and civic engagement on the list of immediate priorities. For its part, local government is routinely faulted with taking insufficient steps to integrate immigrants, for allowing policy to be guided by agricultural interests, and for taking ambiguous stances on federal immigration enforcement actions. (Bada et al. 2010, 57)

Despite the historical dominance of conservative politics in the Central Valley Region, Fresno has emerged as a battleground when it comes to politics. Though the neighboring counties of Kern, Tulare, and Kings may seem like deep red counties in

comparison, Fresno County remains unique in its voting trends for presidential, gubernatorial, and local elections. Beginning in 2008, Fresno County has consistently voted for the Democratic candidate in every presidential election through 2020 (Sheehan 2020). However, no Democratic candidate for governor has won in Fresno County over the last 30 years. In terms of its congressional and state representatives, the county is split, with Republicans and Democrats exchanging seats throughout the years (Sheehan 2020).

Though there is an organized Democratic apparatus in Fresno, the politicians exhibit different shades of “blue”—that is, some are more conservative than others. Similar to what we saw in Chapter III on Kern County, several Democratic elected officials have taken jobs with the oil industry after resigning or leaving office. For years, Democrat Henry T. Perea represented the region as a state assembly member. A leader of the so called “moderate” caucus of Democrats in the California legislature, Perea was known for his ability to kill or gut environmental legislation by aligning with Republicans (Melanie Mason 2015). Before completing his term in the state assembly, Henry T. Perea decided to resign in order to work for a pharmaceutical trade association, and then later became a lobbyist for the Western States Petroleum Association (Lauren Rosenhall 2017). His father Henry R. Perea previously served on the Fresno city council and Fresno County board of supervisors, and his sister Analisa Perea is currently vying to continue the family dynasty as a candidate for Fresno’s city council (and current community college district trustee).

At the local level, moderate or “blue dog” democrats like Sal Quintero and Paul Caprioglio have consistently voted alongside their Republican colleagues.

Though local races in California are officially nonpartisan. Stemming from an initiative of the progressives in the 1900s that sought to weaken political parties, candidates have no partisan ballot designation. Nonetheless, party politics have often embedded themselves in the chambers of city halls and county boards (Gerston 2012; Gerston and Christensen 2016). Though most city councils and boards of supervisors in the Central Valley are dominated by Republicans, Fresno has more recently become a consistent political battleground, with both the city and county emerging as patches of Democratic blue in a valley of Republican red. Fresno may serve as a microcosm and case study for the battles to come in the years ahead as the Valley’s politics continued to be shaped by new voters entering the fray.

The Fresno city council election of 2018 brought into power a “Brown wave,” a majority Latino and Democratic council for the first time in over a decade (Joe Matthews 2020). Youth activism in support of these candidate’s campaigns as well as the parallel support of labor helped fuel these victories securing both a Latino and Democratic majority bloc on the city council (Calix 2018b). Made up of both moderates and more liberal members, this group of council members (all first-generation Americans and first-generation college graduates) were dubbed “the cartel” by critics in this town long run by Republicans, and the majority of the council has often found themselves at odds with the Republican mayor Jerry Dyer. Nonetheless this pointed to a window of opportunity as youth from mixed status

families now had the potential to cultivate elite allies, something that scholars note as crucial towards movement building and shaping public policy (McAdam 1999; D. S. Meyer 2004). Just two years after this “brown wave,” Fresno voters had the chance to elect the next mayor. The top candidates: the Republican former police chief Jerry Dyer, and the Democratic opponent, prosecutor Andrew Janz, who had previously (unsuccessfully) challenged Congressman Devin Nunes for his seat.

Dyer enjoyed a name recognition that has allowed him to weather damning scandals and allegations throughout the years. When he was a 26-year-old police officer in Fresno, Dyer was alleged to have had sex with a 16-year-old minor, something that he has been careful neither to admit to nor refute. As Dyer put it, “All I can tell you is that the relationships that I have had outside of my marriage, when I was a young man, have been dealt with. God's forgiven me. My wife's forgiven me. This department's forgiven me and looked into a lot of things in my past.” (Andrew Beale 2019). Other scandals would in normal circumstances deliver a fatal blow to any chance of a political career: a fellow police officer dead in front of his house (officially ruled a suicide), racist and sexually suggestive comments to subordinates, his second-in-command sentenced to a four-year federal prison sentence for drug trafficking (Andrew Beale 2019). And yet he has remained a viable and even successful candidate. Running a campaign with the slogan “One Fresno,” Dyer promised to unite the city of Fresno on the campaign trail. Critics, by contrast, have painted him as one of Fresno’s most divisive figures.



One of Dyer's downtown billboards vandalized during the 2020 election with the words "murder" and "rapist."

Yet despite Dyer's history, Fresno voters elected him to become their mayor in 2020, with Dyer beating his next closest challenger, Janz, by a whopping 10 percentage points. Often spotted at local churches and community events, Dyer constantly credits his journey as a born-again Christian for changing his outlook on life as he moved through the ranks of the Fresno Police Department to become chief (Andrew Beale 2019). A powerful figure within local politics, Dyer's opposition to youth campaigns such as Measure P will be explored in the next chapter. With a newfound more supportive 'brown wave' of city council members, this created a shift

of a new localized context in Fresno one that would contain a more moderate opportunity structure for youth to strategize. As mayor, Dyer has had to work alongside the Democratic city council in a deeply divided political context. This contestation of politics and ideology has also worked its way up the ballot.

For example, in the most recent recall election of California governor Gavin Newsom, for example, both Fresno and Merced county were within 1 percent of the attempt winning or failing in their respective counties (Maria L. La Ganga and Anita Chabria 2021). Whether Fresno is seen as the vanguard of a shifting Democratic electorate or a stubbornly “purple” area in which no Democrat or Republican has a clear advantage will all depend on mobilization of the electorate, and more specifically of youth who are coming of age and will be eligible to participate. Regardless, this critical juncture within Fresno’s political development points to a division of elites within Fresno County, and a cultivation of elite allies at the city council level. This window of opportunity illustrates an expanded political opportunity structure (McAdam 1999) within Fresno, one that has allowed youth to attain victories in campaigns that seem insurmountable in a narrower political opportunity structure like Kern.

Law Enforcement and Immigration

Like other counties in the Central Valley, the immigrant community in Fresno has had to contend with an anti-immigrant climate and hostile context from their local sheriff and elected officials. As millions mobilized nationwide in 2006 to protest the

Sensenbrenner Bill, which would have criminalized their communities, so too did Fresno County youth, thousands of whom walked out of schools and work to march in the pouring rain on March 26 (Zepeda Milan 2017; Mike Rhodes 2006).

That same year, Fresno voters elected sheriff Margaret Mims, a Democrat, as the Fresno County Sheriff-Coroner. Sheriff Mims's time as a Democrat would be short-lived, as she then re-registered as a no party-preference voter before ultimately re-registering as a Republican (Alliance staff 2022). Over the next sixteen years, Sheriff Mims was a staunch supporter of hardline restrictionist immigration policies, eager to collaborate with ICE agents to deport undocumented immigrants in Fresno County. An ardent ally of President Trump, Mims claimed that her model of having ICE agents operate in the county jail could serve as a “model for the nation...What we are doing mirrors what he [Trump] is now saying he wants to do. Focus on the criminal element when it comes to people who are here illegally. And that is exactly what we are doing,” she stated in an interview with Kern Valley Public Radio (“Fresno County Sheriff: Allowing ICE Agents In The Jail Could Be A Model For The Nation” 2016). Allowing ICE agents in jail allowed them to transfer detainees to private immigration detention centers and pressure them to initiate deportation proceedings or endure the long wait for a court date while incarcerated in a private immigrant prison.

Immigration activists critical of this policy advocated to the state legislature to put an end to these practices by passing SB54, more commonly known as the California “sanctuary” law. Though the bill is quite extensive, provision 7284.6. of

SB54 sums up its key components nicely. California law enforcement agencies, the provision states, shall not:

(1) Use agency or department moneys or personnel to investigate, interrogate, detain, detect, or arrest persons for immigration enforcement purposes, including any of the following: (A) Inquiring into an individual's immigration status. (B) Detaining an individual on the basis of a hold request. (C) Providing information regarding a person's release date or responding to requests for notification by providing release dates or other information unless that information is available to the public... (D) Providing personal information, as defined in Section 1798.3 of the Civil Code, about an individual, including, but not limited to, the individual's home address or work address unless that information is available to the public... (G) Performing the functions of an immigration officer, whether pursuant to Section 1357(g) of Title 8 of the United States Code or any other law, regulation, or policy, whether formal or informal. (Kevin De Leon 2017)

Even with these provisions, the bill technically does not fully prevent any California law enforcement agency from cooperating with ICE, and ICE as a federal agency can still conduct raids, sweeps, and arrests of undocumented immigrants in California. As noted by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the implementation and execution of SB54 remains extremely messy: "Justice by geography has long been a feature in a diverse state where counties differ in how they deal with everything from drug crimes to the death penalty. Now, sanctuary is getting the California treatment,

despite the law that went into effect this year—and to the chagrin of immigrants and their advocates” (Aleaziz 2018). Under current law, ICE is allowed to request information about an immigrant inmate’s release date, but county jails are only allowed to respond if the inmate has been convicted of a serious crime. However, there is a major loophole. Counties are able to release these information requests to ICE so long as they make the information public. As a result, a county with a conservative sheriff can respond affirmatively to as high as 90 percent of ICE requests, while a more liberal county like San Francisco has declined every single one of the over 400 requests that ICE has made (Aleaziz 2018). This demonstrates how the effects of SB54 varied drastically according to local political context.

Sheriff Mims was also one of the most critical and vocal opponents of the legislation, calling sanctuary laws a disgrace. Appearing multiple times alongside former President Trump at press conferences, Sheriff Mims echoed his rhetoric citing MS 13 gang members committing horrendous crimes and airing her frustrations against California’s sanctuary policy (Kerry Klein 2019). Sheriff Mims claimed she followed the law and enforced SB54 while disagreeing with its provisions, while immigration activists claim she actually attempted to skirt the law by finding loopholes wherever possible. For example, when Ramiro Alvarez, an undocumented individual, had completed his sentence and was supposed to be released from the county jail, he was instead placed in a “release vestibule,” a room with a locked door on both sides. As Alvarez was obtaining his wallet from a correctional officer, two federal ICE agents were buzzed inside the room to detain him and, he alleges, they

forced him to sign a self-deportation order (Amaro 2018). Still, Sheriff Mims denied that this was technically a transfer to ICE agents and asserted that her office did not keep track of how many arrests Ice agents made in the release vestibule area. The author of the SB54 bill sharply rebuked Mims, stating, “If that in fact is happening, that is a very clear attempt to undermine the law” (Amaro 2018). The immigrant community in Fresno was at the epicenter of this conflict over immigration, with the state of California attempting to shield immigrants from such policies that aimed to increase deportations under the Trump administration.

Areas once thought of as being safe for the immigrant community were no longer spaces of sanctuary, metaphorically or operationally. ICE agents had no qualms about conducting arrests inside and outside of Fresno Superior Courthouse and several other courthouses (Caraccio 2018), nor did the sheriff’s office about letting ICE agents conduct arrests in this fashion. This tactic sparked fear in the immigrant community, with local attorneys and immigrant rights activists worrying that these arrests would make undocumented individuals less likely to participate in the courts and infringed upon due process. One local public defender believed that these actions by ICE were an act of retaliation in response to California passing the state sanctuary law (Caraccio 2018). Though Sheriff Mims (who plans to retire at the end of her current term) and other local elected officials applauded President Trump’s hard- line immigration policies and championed the building of a wall at the U.S./Mexico border, she is also distinct from Sheriff Youngblood in one significant way.

When undocumented immigrants are victims of a crime, they have the opportunity to petition for a specialized U Visa. This visa is available to individuals if they cooperate with law enforcement to help find their perpetrators. Shielding them from deportation and providing a path to citizenship these U Visas can be life changing and life saving for undocumented immigrants who qualify for them. As mentioned in Chapter III, out of the 160 U Visa requests that Sheriff Youngblood received between 2012-2014, he signed only four and has remained defiantly opposed to approving these visas (Linthicum 2015). Sheriff Mims on the other hand, has largely approved of these U Visas and has openly stated that undocumented victims shouldn't be scared to report crimes even under the Trump administration (Velez 2018). Though Sheriff Mims is supportive of more hard line immigration policies, this is an important distinction to draw between the localized context in Kern, and the context in Fresno. Whereas Mims sees no issue with approving U Visas for undocumented immigrants, Sheriff Youngblood retains a more exclusionary policy that seeks to prevent undocumented immigrants from having a path to citizenship, even if they are fully cooperating with law enforcement. At the city level, we can observe even more contrast between the Majority Republican and Caucasian Bakersfield City Council and the majority Latino and Democratic city council in Fresno which took a historic step in the other direction.

At the time the president of the city council, councilmember Luis Chavez and a majority of his fellow members exhibited their support of Fresno's immigrant community. In 2017, youth activists and grassroots organizations in Fresno sought to

create immigrant defense funds to provide legal representation to undocumented immigrants facing deportation proceedings. At the time, several cities like Sacramento had voted to support and fund these immigrant defense funds, though the city of Fresno had declined to do so. Just a couple of years later, the brown wave that took over the city council led efforts to not only invest \$200,000 in an immigrant defense fund (which had been supported by donations and philanthropic efforts) but also to fund a full-time immigrant liaison position and establish the city's first immigrants affairs committee (Amaro n.d.). Then-council president Luis Chavez celebrated this historic victory, stating that "This is the first step for the city of Fresno to turn the page. In the past, the immigrant community has felt that it is not part of the community" (Amaro n.d.). In addition, council members actively advocated for immigration reform at the federal level. In January of 2021, several Fresno leaders, including Chavez, attended a press conference calling on President Biden to undo Trump's immigration policies, protect DACA, and pass comprehensive immigration reform with a path to citizenship (Lei Lani 2021). A stark contrast to the hardline immigration policies of espoused by Sheriff Mims and in other areas of the Central Valley, the city council of Fresno embraced resistance and turned over a new leaf in terms of supporting immigrant rights, illustrating a more moderate political opportunity structure for youth to organize in.

Conclusion: The Dual Meaning behind the Tale of Two Fresnos

In many ways, the tale of two Fresnos extends beyond the geographical markers that divide the wealthy and the poor. It also encompasses a divided

government whose local, county, and federal elected officials are often at odds with one another, particularly over immigration policy, and a very complex, contentious, and polarized political electorate. Indeed, Fresno will continue to be a crucial battleground between Republicans and Democrats for years to come. Whether Fresno has emerged as a patch of blue in a valley of red or whether the entire landscape is an intense violet that has no clear trend of ideological support is up for debate. Only time will tell whether this continuously shifting electorate will follow a more liberal voting trend or remain a bastion of conservative politics.

A hostile and anti-political educational context that has been slow to respond to racism within schools, it appears that students have reached a boiling point. Just weeks ago hundreds of students walked out of Fresno high schools to protest racist and violent images that had been circulated on social media, specifically at Bullard High School (Thornton 2022). Not surprisingly Trustee Slatic in response to student demands to hold students who created the images accountable stated that “Demanding the district take action before the investigation concludes is “silly,”...which is also the word he used to describe the photo in question.” (Thornton 2022). Trustee Slatic was also the only “no vote” declaring Fresno Unified as an Anti-Racist institution back in 2020. As Black and Brown youth marched in solidarity with one another future research should also pay attention to how these movements emerged within this educational context.

The history of redlining and exclusionary policies has long sought to marginalize immigrant communities and communities of color in Fresno. At the same

time, groups have attempted to organize in spite of these conditions, paving the way for modern day organizers to advocate for change. It is within this context that youth from mixed-status families and the immigrant community have had to contend with mixed messaging and conflicted policies put forward by local, state, and federal governments. Indeed, Fresno has not always welcomed their political participation, but as I argue in our next chapter, youth have forged ahead. Race, immigration, sexual orientation, and class have all been at the forefront of young people's educational, community, and political experiences in Fresno. In the next chapter, I will explore how youth in Fresno have operated within this context and ultimately worked to secure victories for their community.

Chapter VI: The Future is Fresno

“You experience your immediate reality. You know that the park next door sucks, and that your school sucks, and that your parents are working too many hours. That all the funding is going towards the police. Having people recognize that those are a part of a political structure. Having people recognize that they all integrate into one another... I think that they [the community organization] do a good job of making you realize, oh, this is all related to politics, but it goes as far as the funding will allow. The challenge is never direct to power. It's always implied. ‘Yeah, maybe we'll get you out of office next time if you don't support this.’ But the wealth that's backing those people that we're challenging is way stronger than any kind of canvassing we can do. The truth of Fresno being a city that's incredibly driven by massive amounts of wealth and massive amounts of wealth inequality is something we talk about, but we never push the analysis further.” – Horacio, 19 years old.

Even though Horacio had only just graduated high school, he spoke about the status quo and tilted political playing field he witnessed in Fresno with a level of analysis and vocabulary that could make someone wonder if they were sitting in a graduate seminar. “I graduated high school with a 2.4 GPA” he shared. “A 2.4?” I asked. “Yeah, I know the stuff. I just don’t feel compelled to prove it, you know?” he laughed. Though put into GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) programs along with AP/honors courses throughout his academic career, Horacio felt disconnected and disillusioned from what he described as an “anti-political” educational experience

throughout his journey. Nonetheless, it was clear that he had witnessed a tale of two Fresno's growing up, and now as a young adult was grappling with the challenging political opportunity structure that faced him. From a working-class, mixed-status family, Horacio experienced inequality in both his educational and community experience. With a note of anger in his voice, he described his grandmother working grueling nightshifts in what he called “abhorrent” conditions at Foster Farms, a company that was severely fined and widely criticized for failing to protect its workers throughout several COVID-19 outbreaks during the pandemic (Alexandra Hall 2021). Despite his experiences and frustrations, however, Horacio carried with him a deep sense of engagement and commitment to the place he called home. Motivated by witnessing his family members struggle in Fresno, and his own lived experiences, he mobilized for change as part of several local campaigns. Once mentored by others, Horacio had now become a mentee and inspiration for other youth. As he put it:

“There is incredible value in having someone to talk to, and having them be a guide for you. I can only hope to be half the man that my mentors are because I place immense trust and respect in them, and I think that model is something you can believe in. Connecting with mentors that guide others in a very genuine way is invaluable. I think if there’s anything that’s going to change the world, it’s mentorship. That’s why I’m still here, that’s why I still do this.”

In contrast to traditional socializing agents such as families, schools, and peer groups, Horacio credits much of his empowerment to community-based organizations

and youth organizing groups. He has been able to gain a sense of empowerment even though he recognizes the difficult context and barriers he is up against. As illustrated in the previous chapter, Fresno is a unique case within the broader Central Valley. With a majority Latinx and majority Democratic city council that has stood in contrast to more hostile local rhetoric on immigration, the county presents a distinct localized context that shapes the political participation and civic engagement of youth from mixed-status families. Rather than a systemically exclusionary context, Fresno is less exclusionary than Kern, exhibiting a passive acceptance of the immigrant community. With this more moderate political opportunity structure, youth have been able to secure several different campaign victories.

From funding local parks to changing a local high school mascot and advocating for more equitable funding and sanctuary policies in schools, youth from mixed-status families have not only participated but in many cases led these efforts and campaigns. Community-based organizations and youth organizing groups play a central role in facilitating engagement, but even more important is how they actively encourage and empower youth to be their own agents of change. In other words, they are not solely focused on volunteerism or community service. In the preceding chapter, I illustrated Fresno's localized context and political opportunity structure has shaped the engagement of youth from mixed-status families. In this chapter I examine campaign victories in Fresno County that have thus far not been replicated in other areas of the Central Valley. We will begin by examining the educational context in which youth have advocated for sanctuary policies, equitable funding, and restorative

justice. I will then explore youth engagement and participation outside of schools, specifically around Measure P, a sales tax initiative aimed at increasing the number of local parks and cultural and recreational activities in Fresno. Here, youth mobilized in spite of heavy opposition. Finally, I will conclude by discussing the role of these community-based organizations in helping youth from mixed- status families overcome barriers to participation, while acknowledging the challenges facing youth as well as the constraints of Fresno's localized context.

Education: Getting “Political” in an Anti-political Institution

One commonly reoccurring theme in my interviewees with youth was the sense that their schools were distinctly anti-political or engaged issues within a very limited scope of the local or broader political issues facing Fresno community members, particularly immigrants. A graduate of the Fresno Unified School district, 19-year-old Laura distinctly recalled this feeling as she reflected on a nursing service class she took as a student. She explained, “They actually had us in the community working with elderly folks and providing care...But they never really discussed why it was hard for these people to get health care, and didn't really explain the barriers they had, or had to overcome, to receive care.” She remembers those conversations being shut down by instructors as soon as they began. Coming from a mixed status family Laura recognized that her own family members documented status had placed a significant barrier in terms of obtaining and accessing health care. Though California has made efforts to expand medical coverage, undocumented individuals remain among the largest uninsured groups (Ibarra 2022). Feeling ignored and

silenced whenever she brought up politics around healthcare, Laura's frustrations were representative of what other youth shared as well. Even the typically required civics and American government classes in high school and college left students frustrated at their anti-political stance.

As Horacio put it, "I think they were vague, never really too inclusive or in depth...It's just like, 'Oh, everything bad that happens is due to incompetency rather than the nature of the political system.' Students were always pissed off, disgruntled, or distrusting. They just could never vocalize it." With a sense of poise but anger in his voice, he spoke more directly to the structural issues plaguing the school, as teachers refused to dive deeper into how structures prevented people from participating or were designed in a way to produce outcomes: "It fucking sucks. In the simplest way. You have outdated materials that are falling part. You have teachers you start to feel a connection to just being underpaid and seeing the misery reflected in them. You see that poverty in your teacher's face. You see that anguish amongst a lot of them, that stress is real and they begin expressing it...But it's [the response] always vague, it's always general. It's never 'Yeah, let's mobilize for political action.'"

Instead, students spoke about how any sort of encouragement or opportunity for extra-curricular participation was generally tied to academic achievement rather than pushing for community change. Taking a pause, Horacio sighed heavily, "Go do this so you can get your points. Go do this so you can get your credits or build up a resume." Students explained how school itself wasn't an environment that was

conducive towards students raising their voices or protesting. If students were to attempt to organize a protest, the school administration would tend to dissuade students from joining by implementing certain punitive measures such as threatening to exclude students from graduation, prom and other high school events.

Though Horacio expected his community college experience to be different, he found it just as lacking in terms of engaging and equipping students to become agents of change within their own communities. Reflecting on his time within Fresno Unified and now at Fresno City College, he reflected, “It’s a very anti-political campus in a ‘neutral way.’ The faculty is very much like, ‘No this is not the place for that.’...I think it’s just a general anti-political strain that exists throughout every educational institution that exists here [in Fresno].” Despite experiencing this type of discouraging or demobilizing political context within their educational institutions however, we find that many youth have mobilized within Fresno Unified to advocate for change – including many from immigrant and mixed status families. We can consider some of the ways that this has occurred.

Safe Place & Sanctuary for Undocumented Students

In early 2017, a high-schooler named Cassandra and her peers came together to discuss immigration, specifically their heightened fears that the undocumented community would be targeted in their community and in schools during the Trump administration. The founder of her high school’s MEChA club, Cassandra noted how cities and school districts across California were declaring themselves as

“Sanctuaries” for undocumented residents and students. “Can we do that here in Fresno?” one student asked. At the time, no school district in the Central Valley had declared themselves a sanctuary or passed a resolution to this effect.

In the years leading up to this immigration discussion, one community-based organization, Californians for Justice (CFJ), had been pushing for a Relationship Centered Schools (RCS) campaign. Beginning in 2015, student leaders sought to combat racism in schools and foster student success in the district, including advocated for safe spaces (Terriquez et al. 2021). Now in the midst of increased deportations and anti-immigrant rhetoric in the region, students like Cassandra were able to further build on this campaign and extend it in a new direction in order to encompass the needs of mixed status families. Now in the midst of increased deportations and anti-immigrant rhetoric in the region, students decided it was time to take further action. Organizing a student petition and calling on school board members to pass a resolution affirming Fresno schools as sanctuary schools, Cassandra reflected on why this move was important to her: “As the daughter of immigrants and a first-generation student, I wanted to share my piece regarding the psychological weight of living under the constant threat of deportation, witnessing children in cages, and the role this plays in one's schooling.” Importantly, Cassandra’s involvement and leadership in this campaign reveals that youth from mixed status families are more politically engaged than one might expect, and can in fact overcome barriers to participation.

Partnering with youth from CFJ and Youth Leadership Institute (YLI), Cassandra and her peers began organizing on a larger scale, outside of her school and through the public media. Penning an opinion editorial piece in the local newspaper, the *Fresno Bee*, a high school senior, Mayahuel, discussed how during a class, one of their classmates made what they considered a humorous joke: “Let’s round up all the illegals and deport them.” The child of immigrants, to Mayahuel, this was no laughing matter. Mayahuel wrote in her op ed:

“When statements such as ‘go back to Mexico’ or ‘illegal’ are being thrown around by our peers, we need to be able to come to the adults on campus for support. Without this [sanctuary] resolution, schools will send a message that not all students should feel safe and welcomed. This is why I will continue to educate and unite my peers to spread the message that our schools should be safe places where teachers are here for us no matter your immigration status, your religion or the color of your skin” (Mayahuel 2017).

This was the first Op Ed piece that appeared in the *Bee*, highlighting a student from a mixed status family stepping up as a leader in their school and community. The words written in Mayahuel’s piece stemmed not only from her experience in the classroom, but their lived experience belonging to a mixed status family as well. Sharing her own struggles to focus in school over the last few months as the result of increased anxiety over immigration enforcement, Mayahuel reflected “I am tired of feeling isolated and upset because some of my classmates are unsympathetic to those who are affected...I wonder what kind of world we are trying to create when we

allow kids to be taunted or when school safety and support becomes a political debate.” (Mayahuel Garcia 2017). Mobilized to take action and raise her voice Mayahuel’s piece illustrates that rather than acting as a deterrent, being part of a mixed status family can also act as a mobilizing identity (Bedolla and Michelson 2012). Like Cassandra, Mayahuel’s own lived experiences being raised in a mixed status family brought about a sense of linked fate that was essential in building solidarity among students to fight back against this anti-immigrant educational climate that was experienced (Vargas, Sanchez, and Valdez 2017; Dawson 1994; Zepeda Milan 2017).

Demonstrating their support for a resolution that their schools affirm themselves as sanctuaries and protect undocumented students, youth continued to advocate in whatever spaces they could. Talking to their peers in high schools, sharing their message, collecting signatures on petitions and preparing their statements to give during public comment period. Finally the day had arrived, on March 08th 2017, Cassandra and her fellow students packed the board room chambers with adult allies and community members as the board prepared to vote on the “Safe Place” resolution. Some wore shirts or held up signs that demanded safe schools now and sanctuary for all, and , thinking about all the work they had put in, these youth still anticipated the potential for a loss. At the school board meeting twenty-three students and community members spoke in favor of the resolution.

After she listened to her peers, it was finally Cassandra’s turn to step up to the podium. Speaking about her own experiences growing up in a mixed-status family

and as a student in Fresno Unified, she highlighted her constant fear and community trauma. When the bell rang, signifying that her three minutes were up, she frantically gathered her note cards and returned to her seat in the packed audience chambers: “As I stepped back from the podium, I was stopped, asked my name, and congratulated on my speech by trustee Brooke Ashjian.” In a surprise to Cassandra and other youth, who were not sure how their message would be received, school board members thanked students, parents, and community members for their advocacy, and the resolution passed unanimously. Even the board President Ashjian, a staunch supporter of President Trump who was well known for his controversial statements, and had previously expressed concerns around losing federal funding, voted in favor of the resolution.

Cassandra was shocked by this outcome, even though she and her peers had put a tremendous amount of work into the campaign, there had been no certainty about what the outcome would be. “We collected over 800 signatures from students in support of this resolution,” she said smiling. Thinking about their parents, family members, and fellow students who were undocumented, youth broke out into applause when the passed motion was read to the audience. For youth from mixed-status families, this was a monumental victory secured in spite of the local context and leaders who did not support their efforts. Fresno Unified had become the first school district in the Central Valley to pass a resolution declaring district schools as safe havens for undocumented students (Terriquez et al. 2021). Years later when

Cassandra reflected on that experience she saw it not only as a crucial contribution to the community, but a personal turning point as well:

“Although in retrospect, the declaration seems like more of a no-brainer than it did when we were relentlessly heckling students at lunch for their signatures, it did mark a critical turning point in my life. I didn’t know it at the time, but this would be the first of many public comments I ever made. It would influence me to pursue a career in community organizing [and] a college degree...”

In the months that followed passage of the Safe Space resolution, student leaders involved with several key community based organizations including MECHA, Californians for Justice, and Youth Leadership Institute, continued work on supporting Fresno’s immigrant youth and families, as well as other issues within schools. This included further meetings with school board members and even the district superintendent to increase support for relationship centered schools, and future campaigns.

LCFF & Equitable Funding

A second key example of youth organizing in Fresno that drew participation and leadership from many immigrant youth involved the issue of school funding. Under the leadership of California Governor Jerry Brown, K-12 funding underwent a fundamental shift in the early 2010s. The Local Control Funding Formula (more commonly known as LCFF) would now allow school districts with large numbers of

“high needs students” (English-language learners, foster youth, and low socioeconomic students) to qualify for additional funding and grants. In theory, this would bolster supports to those high needs students who were identified as needing local support. Though money spent is supposed to be tied to a “Local Control Accountability Plan” (LCAP), a name suggesting local control and accountability, in fact this new system gave school districts a wide range of authority and local control to spend these dollars.

By law, school districts are supposed to solicit feedback from community members and stakeholders into how it allocates its funding. In the context of the Central Valley’s conservative ethos, the ideology of “tough on crime” and belief in using intensive policing and criminal sanctions can directly influence use of school funding. It is not uncommon for school districts in the Valley to have police officers on campus or their very own district police office. Scholars and community organizations have highlighted the detrimental effects of zero tolerance and punitive policies that disproportionately impact students of color and place them in the “school-to-prison pipeline” (Gehlert 2018; Verma, Maloney, and Austin 2017; V. M. Rios 2011). The more likely that a student is suspended or expelled from a school, the more likely they are to end up in prison, unemployed, or work in low-paying jobs (Gehlert 2018). Despite this reality, within a more conservative context, support for more punitive policies remains the norm. Fresno Unified came under fire, however, for its problematic spending of \$440,000 LCFF dollars to hire more district school resource officers and expand their use of ShotSpotter technology, a bullet-tracking

system used by Fresno police. The ACLU filed a complaint against Fresno Unified, and the California Department of Education next demanded that it revise its spending plan (Mays 2017a).

Attempting to disrupt this school-to-prison pipeline and punitive policies, youth organizers from a local community organization, Fresno Barrios Unidos, came together to advocate for more restorative justice policies and inclusion of student and community voice within the LCAP process. One of these students advocating for change was Antonio, a graduate of the Fresno school district who became involved with a youth organizing group, Barrios Unidos. Growing up in an immigrant family, Antonio's parents had come to Fresno in the early 1990s from Guanajuato and Michoacán, Mexico. Discussion of politics and social issues never really happened in his household. "They [my parents] were just focused on working you know?" he said. When Antonio began organizing with Barrios Unidos at the age of seventeen and became more involved in the community, his parents questioned how he was spending his time, believing that he should be focused on going to Fresno City College or finding a job instead.

Though his parents never encouraged him to get involved with the community, Antonio found motivation being a part of his mixed status family and through seeing the challenges of his parent's immigrant experience. His parents had also taught him to lead with love. Speaking with a deep appreciation, Antonio explained, "My mom is one of the most loving people ever. She's always checking in on people, she has a big heart for everyone...My dad, although he never really

showed me his love towards me directly, he did show it in the form of hard work. So he never told me that he loved me, but I knew that he did just because the stuff that he did for me.” Reflecting on a culture of machismo that he grew up with, Antonio committed himself to disrupting the cycle of toxic masculinity while at the same time demonstrating his love for his parents through his actions. His parents, siblings and experiences growing up in a mixed status family became sources of motivation and support for him to engage in the campaign against the school to prison pipeline. Eager to show his love in the form of hard work and action, Antonio recognized that he could become an agent of change within his community.

Antonio, who had witnessed his fellow students of color suspended and expelled for what he believed to be minor infractions, and his fellow youth organizers from Barrios Unidos attended multiple school board meetings to advocate for an end to punitive school discipline. Seeking to reduce school suspensions and expulsions, they advocated for additional investment in restorative justice practice instead, with a focus on repairing harm from unwanted behaviors rather than punitive policies. At its core restorative justice practices “engages those who are harmed, wrongdoers and their affected communities in search of solutions that promote repair, reconciliation, and the rebuilding of relationships” (Gardner 2016, 2; Gehlert 2018). Building upon the relationship centered schools campaign that other organizations had long been waging, youth recognized their potential for success. Fresno youth were able to secure a \$68,000 commitment from the school district to implement a district-wide plan for relationship centered schools in 2017 (Terriquez et al. 2021). Continuing this

momentum, youth successfully established student advisory committees in the LCAP planning process to ensure that students would have a voice as to where district dollars would be going. In pushing to ensure that marginalized students would be represented in these committees, students also tried to ensure that that a majority of the student representatives would be composed of students most impacted by these inequities. Later on that year, several youth would even speak at the state capitol championing the LCFF process as a success in Fresno as well as advocating for further oversight and reforms.

Months after becoming involved with Barrios Unidos, Antonio was encouraged to apply for an opening within the organization and was hired. For him, it was a life-changing opportunity, and Antonio credited his mentors and adult allies for embracing him: “It was a weird experience because I was working in an office space with really dope people, but other than working in the fields I had no work experience...They were able to meet me where I was at as a young person and guide me along the way.” Now 22, Antonio has since worked with a variety of community-based organizations and mentors other underrepresented youth in Fresno. With pride in his voice, he reflected upon how Barrios Unidos provided that initial organizing spark and gave him the tools and inspiration to advocate for change in his community: “Just like the name...Fresno *Barrios Unidos*—that's not like a ‘normal name’ of a group in White America, you know what I mean? Just reclaiming the narrative really empowered me to be able to be able to do it [this work] for myself.”

Though these victories were encouraging, youth organizers also faced several setbacks along the way within Fresno schools. For example, a campaign to eliminate police officers from Fresno Schools failed despite youth's efforts. Other campaigns were directly impacted by COVID, as youth had to adapt to local conditions and shift to organizing virtually and online. Nonetheless, they continued to make progress. Youth led the call to change the mascot at Fresno High. The "Warriors" mascot had for years used an offensive Native American image. Collecting signatures on petitions online and speaking up virtually at local school board meetings, Valley Natives for Change, an organizing group composed of youth and adult allies were successful in getting the board to remove the native imagery and replacing it with another, less offensive mascot (while retaining the warriors name) (Terriquez et al. 2021). As we will see on our next example, youth also played a role in advocating outside of schools and more broadly in their communities when it came to access to safe spaces and parks.

Measure P: Parks for All

Research has consistently demonstrated that having access to green spaces and parks has been associated with better physical and mental health and overall wellbeing. In one study that surveyed over 80,000 California households found that greater levels of surrounding greenness and access to parks significantly predicted decreased odds of psychological distress in teens and elderly adults (Wang et al. 2019). During my research, I examined most of Fresno's city parks and found several commonalities particularly in South Fresno: uneven dirt, holes in soccer fields,

transportation issues, lack of recreational activities, and dead grass. These were issues that youth expressed frustration with as they spoke to adult allies and organizations. Determined to make a change in their community, youth began surveying their peers and community members to see if their sentiments were shared, and the responses were overwhelmingly in alignment (Brianna Calix 2018). After hosting a community forum and inviting elected officials to hear their concerns, youth began to organize around a #Parks4all campaign asking local leaders to make needed investments in the community. Ultimately, after youth and organizers grew frustrated with the city's lack of initiative, they took matters into their own hands. They launched a ballot initiative that would become Measure P: a 3/8 percent sales tax that would raise about \$38 million annually over 30 years. These funds would go toward new park facilities, maintenance, arts and culture programs, and youth/senior recreation facilities and activities. In order to qualify this initiative for the ballot, however, youth leaders had to organize and collect signatures.

One of these youth leaders, Laura, remembered the challenges involved to get the measure on the ballot, particularly in a community where many other families were also mixed --status. "That was one of the hardest things I've ever done, especially when it came to people who were super all for it but then find out they weren't 18 or a citizen and then having to tell them, 'I'm sorry, you can't sign.'" she said with a look of disappointment. Growing up in a mixed-status family'—both of her parents and grandparents were born in Mexico—Laura was aware that undocumented people couldn't sign this petition or register to vote, no matter how

long they had lived and worked in the community or how much they had contributed to it in other ways. Often frustrated that her own family and community lacked representation in politics, this became a central motivating force. Recognizing the privilege she had in being able to sign as a U.S. citizen and amplify this issue, she reminded those ineligible that they could still have eligible family members sign and register to vote as well. Dedicating her weekends to canvassing and collecting signatures from community members, Laura recalls feeling empowered in working with her peers to address unequal access to resources.

Another student who had been an active leader in the school funding movement and with Barrios Unidos, Antonio, felt a similar motivation and empowerment as he spoke at city council meetings about the need for better parks in his neighborhood. Working with Boys and Men of Color (*BMOC*), a youth leadership program part of the Building Healthy Communities initiative in Fresno, he articulated what re-imagining public safety and parks could look like in his community. As the campaign grew, so did Antonio's confidence and the forcefulness of his message to his peers: "For me, it comes down to the way the city is spending their money. We spend too much money on the police department and we spend very little money on other alternatives to public safety, and for me, not having a park nearby is part of public safety. We need to find alternate ways of public safety instead of over policing our neighborhood."

These strongly committed youth faced a wave of opposition from local leaders. Before pursuing the ballot initiative, they attempted to meet with local city leaders

and officials to persuade them to invest in underfunded parks. In both public meetings and in the one- on- one meetings that youth were able to schedule with officials, the young people felt as if they were being ignored, patronized, and just outright dismissed by local officials. As one focus group participant stated,

“Interacting with stakeholders in the Central Valley, they are very condescending. They're very patronizing. They're, like, ‘Thank you for sharing your story’...but they are never willing to commit to something or commit to supporting our work. They will say, ‘Yeah, like, I totally understand and, like, I agree with you and they hear you,’ but at the end of the day, they're not willing, and I think that's what we are just really getting tired of. Like, man we're tired of them just wanting us to be storytellers.” -Jade

This feeling of being dismissed was only further exacerbated when local leaders not only refused to support youth’s efforts but began to publicly oppose them. In 2015, Fresno BHC sought to buy advertisements on city buses that highlighted the disparity in park acreage between North and South Fresno, using information taken directly from the city’s general plan. [See image 1]

Image 1:



However, according to BHC president Sandra Celedon, just as a city worker was ready to wrap them up, a supervisor halted the campaign to inform city residents about the dramatic disparities in park spaces available for recreation, exercise, and family and community gatherings (Sheehan 2015; Brianna Calix 2018). The advertisement was ultimately rejected by the city and not allowed to run on buses, with officials citing a policy banning political advocacy. Feeling outraged that their message was being suppressed, youth continued to advocate at city council meetings. Though youth and other advocacy groups successfully secured a pledge of \$6 million from the city council, a the motion by councilmember Esmeralda Soria for the city to pledge an additional \$1 million was defeated. Later, with some turnover on the city council and a new mayor in office, advocates remained hopeful for a more extensive initiative that would transform Fresno's park infrastructure and services. The question was how to get it on the ballot.

Recognizing the local political context and that at least three conservative city council members would be unwilling to support the tax proposal, organizers decided

to undertake the daunting task of collecting 35,000 signatures themselves to qualify the initiative for the ballot. Pounding the pavement with determination and grit, youth leaders successfully collected enough signatures, breaking into cheers when the council formally approved the initiative on the ballot in an August meeting. Still, would Fresno city voters vote to pass such a sales tax? With the mayor, police chief, and other elected officials all opposing the campaign, the path to victory became even more muddled once special interest groups began attempting to squash the campaign. Youth efforts for Measure P had to contend with Fresno's conservative political context, which was also co-extensive with its media ecosystem.

Media and Massive Money Plays

It's important to note that as attacks on the Parks for All campaign emerged, President Trump was ramping up his attacks on so-called "fake news" outlets. In an area of California where independent newspapers struggled to stay open, such attacks could be especially damaging, and the few news organizations that continued to operate faced threats from a local Trump loyalist, Congressman Devin Nunes. Running a two-minute campaign ad with no supporting evidence, Nunes accused the local newspaper, the *Fresno Bee*, of "working closely with radical left-wing groups to promote numerous fake news stories about me" (Siders and Murray 2018). Continuing to attack the *Bee* as "fake news," Nunes even paid to distribute a 40-page magazine mailer to his constituents accusing the *Bee* of being a "propaganda machine" ("A Look Inside The 40-Page Nunes Mailer Targeting The Fresno Bee" 2018). Nunes also established his own partisan website and podcast and would later

resign from Congress to head President Trump's new social media company (Swasey 2021). Driving through the Central Valley today, and you can still spot large signs and posters that say "Say No to Socialism, Listen to the Devin Nunes Podcast" adorned with his face.



The front and back cover of the mailer depicting a "sinking ship" of the *Fresno Bee*, with bees "drinking Kool-Aid" atop a yacht, a reference to the newspapers' coverage of a scandal involving a winery partially owned by Nunes that was being sued amid allegations of cocaine use and sex work aboard the vessel.

In areas of the Central Valley like Fresno where attacks on local media have harmed their credibility and economic conditions have caused them to cease

operating, who fills the void? Well, aside from Devin Nunes, the answer is local elites and corporations, as is the case with Local CEO and president of Granville Homes, Darius Assemi who launched the new GV Wire media outlet. A pistachio farmer, Darius Assemi founded GV Wire in 2017, a digital news site which also features a regular podcast titled “Unfiltered.” The podcast is typically hosted by Assemi himself, along with two local conservative elected officials, self-proclaimed “blue dog” Democrat and city council member Mike Karbassi and Republican county supervisor Steve Brandau, who has openly called COVID 19 the “Chinese coronavirus,” and labeled local community-based organizations advocating for low-income community members as “poverty pimps” (Smith 2017; KFSN 2019). Another digital news outlet, the *San Joaquin Valley Sun*, has come under scrutiny because the executive editor Alex Tavlian worked as a political consultant for Mayor Jerry Dyer’s campaign and had also previously worked for several Republican candidates while covering them as a journalist (“Can You Cover The News Fairly While Also Working On Jerry Dyer’s Campaign? This Journalist Says Yes” 2019). Despite the ethical questions and numerous conflicts of interest within both of these media outlets, the region’s general scarcity of news organizations allows these sites to dominate local feeds alongside the *Fresno Bee*. This embedded conservative structural power in the media made Measure P even more of an uphill battle for youth organizers as these interests were both eager and capable of creating their own headlines.

In addition to owning GV wire, Assemi and his brothers donated heavily to the “Fresnans for a Safer Community, No on P” committee. Through donations from

Granville Farms and Lincoln Grantor Farms (both owned by Assemi), as well as from other local businesses owned by his brothers, the Assemis donated over \$123,000 to the “No on P” campaign (Warszawski 2021). Apart from Assemi, former Mayor Lee Brand led the charge against Measure P alongside the police chief (and future mayor) Jerry Dyer and the police and fire unions. Claiming that they were not against parks, the opposition campaign argued that they were against more taxation and that because “public safety” should take priority over parks, the city needed to invest in more police officers and firefighters (Brianna Calix 2018). Ultimately, voters headed to the polls in November and Measure P failed, securing a majority of votes (52 percent) but not the required two-thirds majority to pass (County of Fresno 2018).

For youth who had dedicated years to this campaign, the inability to get the $\frac{2}{3}$ share of votes needed was a devastating blow to say the least. Despite the loss, youth celebrated a symbolic victory, as a majority of voters in Fresno had agreed that parks were an issue that needed to be addressed, and a majority of voters were willing to pass a new tax in order to fund them. Youth like Cassandra, Antonio, and others had to navigate this disappointment and began to question whether their work was “all worth it.” After the election, however, Building Healthy Communities sent a letter to the mayor asking for the sales tax to be implemented regardless, arguing that the initiative did not in fact require a two-thirds majority but a simple majority since it was citizen-led. Eventually BHC filed a lawsuit, and the case made its way all the way to the California’s 5th District Court of Appeals, which overturned a lower court’s decision and ultimately ruled in favor of BHC and youth leaders and required

enactment of the measure (Miller 2021). Ironically, the subsequent Mayor, Jerry Dyer, who had been one of the leading opponents of Measure P, then claimed to be ‘happy’ that the tax was in place. Since then, though, the allocation of Measure P funds has now become a political battle among Dyer and advocates.

As a result of re-imagining what public safety and well-being could look like with youth voice being taken into account for the creation of the initiative, Measure P had been very specific as to where money would go. These funds were to be used for park maintenance, new parks and recreational facilities, arts and culture programs, trails and the San Joaquin River Parkway, youth and senior recreation, after-school programs and job training (Miller 2021). However, Assemi and others who had led the campaign against measure P were now attempting to shape public narrative around where the Measure P tax dollars should go. On the same day that the Fresno city council voted to adopt a budget, GV Wire (where Assemi acts as publisher) released a “poll” claiming that Fresno voters wanted part or all of the tax proceeds allocated to “protect the community” (Warszawski 2021). Thus, the battle over Measure P is sure to continue, and youth are prepared to continue advocating for #Parks4all.

How is it that these youth were able to transform their community through the ballot box and community organizing in the face of still opposition? And how were youth from mixed-status families able to see themselves as agents of change in their community? To understand this transformational change, we must turn our attention to community-based organizations and youth organizing groups within Fresno.

Community-Based Empowerment for Mixed-Status Youth

Filling a Void of Civic Education

Growing up in Southwest Fresno, 19-year-old Estrella had never really thought of being engaged in political work, as most people in her orbit, including her parents, worked in agricultural fields. After twenty years of working in the fields and another twenty working in the packing houses, Estrella's mother had painful arthritis. With no option to retire, however, she had to continue working, cleaning hotel rooms. Moreover, her entire family suffers from asthma, something she attributes to years of exposure to pesticides and bad air quality. At one point, Estrella's sister was hospitalized for an entire week due to her asthma. Taking a pause, she sighed "Yeah... it sucks."

Living within a mixed-status family, Estrella described the daily fear of wondering whether her parents would return home from work and how even family vacations or the decision to buy a house was directly affected by her family's mixed status. Though her father had never had any run-ins with the law, she felt anxiety every time her father saw a police car at a stoplight, heartbroken at seeing the nervousness and fear in his face. When Estrella's sister wanted to go on a family vacation, the discussions were quickly shut down by her parents, who said that they couldn't travel that far because there was an ICE checkpoint and ICE activity nearby. Her eyes watering, Estrella confessed, "They never bought a house for that reason, you know? 'What if one day we get deported and they take us? Who's gonna pay off

the debt and the house?’” Estrella tried to remain positive, attempting to reassure her parents about their ever-present fear of deportation.

As a U.S. citizen, Estrella didn’t recognize the transformative power of political participation until after she graduated high school. When asked if any teachers or staff members ever encouraged her to register to vote or vote in high school, with a look of confusion she replied, “Honestly no. Nobody ever really talked about that.” Out of fear for their own safety, her parents had actively discouraged her from talking to anyone about immigration. She recalled the advice her parents had given her at a young age that would be reiterated time and time again: “‘When they ask you if you’re from here or if your family is from here, always just say yes. Don’t let anybody know.’ My dad even says don’t get into politics with anybody, just be like, ‘Oh, I don’t know I don’t watch the news,’ just so you don’t bring attention to that.” Aside from sports, Estrella described her involvement in high school activities as limited.

Instead she found her political awakening came in the summer of 2018, when she devoted herself to registering, educating, and mobilizing hundreds of other low-income youth of color for the midterm election. Attending several conferences and workshops with local community-based organizations and youth organizing groups, Estrella gained an education that had been missing from her schools. She learned about the history of organizing and the fields where her parents had worked for so long. For example, despite living in the Central Valley, Estrella had never learned about Cesar Chavez until she attended a workshop on the history of the farmworker

movement in the Valley: “At school, I remember we would get the day off, but I always wondered why does he get a day? I didn’t know what he did or who he was.” It was through this education and participation with community-based organizations that Estrella realized she had the potential to shape her community alongside her peers. As a result, in the summer of 2018 she decided to devoted herself to registering, educating and mobilizing hundreds of other low income youth of color for the midterm election.

Estrella’s story is also similar to 18 year old Sergio’s experiences, who reflected on his own ability vote as an extension of voting for his family. Having casted his ballot for the first time in 2016, he stated “I felt like my voice was not just for me, but for others too.” Discussing the challenges of growing up in a mixed status family, Sergio’s siblings had also been motivated through their identity. One of Sergio’s sisters had the goal of becoming a lawyer to defend undocumented families. Long feeling as though his own family was defenseless against deportation and vulnerable to being separated he discussed how proud he was of his sister for setting that goal “It’s inspiring because not a lot of people want to defend people like us. A lot of people call us ‘aliens’ but we’re not, it’s not right. “ This same frustration and motivation experienced by Sergio and his siblings also extended beyond to other youth from mixed status families. It was one of the main reasons that youth and adult allies organized a campaign to ensure that undocumented families facing deportation would have legal representation.

Organizing for Immigrant Defense

As a result of the Trump administration's rhetoric and increased immigration enforcement, fears became heightened among Latinx mixed status families.

According to a survey conducted by Fresno State's Institute for Leadership and Public Policy, 68 percent of Latinos surveyed in the Central Valley expressed deep that someone they know could be deported, a 21% increase in comparison to the 47 percent of Latinos nationally expressing similar concern in a Pew Research Center survey (George 2017). With heightened fears across the nation, several cities and counties across California began to create and contribute to immigrant legal defense funds for immigrants facing deportation proceedings. Notably, individuals in immigration proceedings are not guaranteed the right to legal representation, which can result in a vast majority facing the courtroom without a lawyer, including unaccompanied minors. In more liberal areas of the state, support for immigrant legal defense funds was not as controversial. For example, The county board of supervisors in Los Angeles for example quickly moved in 2017 to allocate 3 million dollars to the LA justice fund (Berestein Rojas 2017). For youth organizers in Fresno the question was, would it be possible to replicate this in the Central Valley? No city or county in the Valley had previously allocated funding for a defense fund, nor had it formally placed on an agenda.

Leading the coalition calling for the city of Fresno to invest in a legal defense fund for immigrant families facing deportation proceedings was Faith in the Valley, a faith based community based organization. Organizing a rally preceding a Fresno

budgetary hearing, approximately 40 people rallied together, giving speeches, holding signs and urging councilmembers to support their investment. Recognizing how their own families would be impacted by such a measure, several youth from mixed status families held signs that read “families first” and one youth created his own that read *Fresno Apoya Los Derechos de Imigrantes!* meaning “Fresno support the rights of immigrants!” Despite these pleas for help, organizers recognized that the Mayor Lee Brand had already expressed disapproval and that receiving money from the city council would be an uphill battle. In June of 2017, the city ultimately rejected the proposal by a 4-2 vote. Notably, Luis Chavez a self-proclaimed blue dog democrat on the council abstained, stating that “I couldn’t support tax funds for drug traffickers, gang members or violent offenses. If it had been written with specific guidelines, I would’ve been open to supporting it.”(Sheenan 2017). Chavez’s rhetoric perpetuated the long standing narrative of “good vs. bad” immigrants with an underlying message of deservingness and undeservingness which contributes to a harmful dichotomy and incarceration apparatus (Escobar 2016). Though the effort failed organizers recognized that it was crucial to keep fighting for legal defense for mixed status families vulnerable to deportation.

Despite this rejection from the council, organizers decided to proceed with establishing the fund. Relying on private donors and money provided by the Latino Community Foundation, the Sierra Health Foundation, organizers were able to secure 30,000 dollars in seed funding months later (Mays 2017b). Even so, organizers recognized that they would need additional funds in order to sustain the fund and

meet the demands of increased deportations in the area. Without the right political opportunity structure and cultivation of allies any more attempts would be futile (McAdam 1999; D. S. Meyer 2004; D. S. Meyer and Minkoff 2004).

Following the initial seed funding, there was a network of organizations that were overseeing the legal defense fund, bringing in referrals, donations, and bringing in lawyers to assist individuals and families facing deportation. Yesenia, a one-time immigrant youth organizer turned adult advocate and ally, explained to me that in Fresno this partnership was crucial as very few lawyers had experience in the area when it came to deportation defense. As this partnership grew, so did the demand for services.

As mentioned in the previous chapter the political landscape and composition of Fresno's city council would change significantly in 2018 with the "brown wave" of elected officials establishing a Latinx and Democratic majority. At the same time, this shift would lead to a more open and moderate political opportunity structure for youth organizers and advocates to make their pleas once more to the council and ask them to invest in the immigrant defense fund. Electing first generation candidates to the council was a first sight for someone like Yessenia. As she put it, "When you look at the people who have historically taken office in Fresno, it's typically folks who come from generational wealth and privilege. Having a full time city council makes a difference." Explaining that it was sometimes hard to recruit candidates from working class backgrounds to run for office in general, there was new found optimism in the campaign for a legal defense fund with this new majority on the city council. Even

more significantly was that youth began to elevate their voices within this campaign, especially youth who were most directly impacted by deportation.

Almost 9 minutes, what felt like an eternity, was the length of a video that 15 year old Sandra Hernandez captured as ICE agents approached her father Hugo's car as he was on his way to drop his children off at school. Though her father and brother told the approaching agent that their father was pleading the 5th the ICE agent told them "That doesn't matter, I don't care." Sandra and her brother in tears watching their father be forcefully removed from the car and arrested, her brother called their mom: "*Ama...Lo arrestaron a papa* (Mom, they've just arrested Dad)." As ICE agents approached Sandra and her brother she asked what was going to happen, as ICE agents claimed their father was resisting arrest. "Because you pulled him over for no reason, you're treating him like he's a criminal and he's not a criminal!" she replied. The ICE officer then also proceeds to cover Sandra's phone camera with his hand. "How do you know that?" the ICE agent said "How do I know that??? He's my dad!" Sandra responded, still in tears (S. Hernandez 2019). Despite their father attempting to plead the 5th, ICE agents arrested him and forced them in their van. As her brother continued to talk to their mother, ICE agents instructed Sandra to stop recording and turn her phone off, also threatening that if their mother did not come soon, they would call child protective services to take them away. Once their mother arrived, and began talking to the immigration officers, once again ICE agents pointed out Sandra's phone. "Tell your daughter to stop recording" the ICE agent said threatening. Defiantly Sandra replied "I have a right to record." Immediately a fellow

officer simply states “Okay, gracias” and they walk away to their patrol car, taking Sandra’s father, where he would then be held in the Mesa Verde immigrant detention center.

Recalling that day in an interview Sandra did her best to speak through her tears, “All I was thinking at that time was ‘I wanted my dad back. I wanted him to get in the car and for us to go to school like any other day.’” (Velez 2019). Sandra missed an entire week of school following the incident, her brother also missing school as well. “I can’t keep on pretending that I’m really strong and that nothing’s happening, and that my dad didn’t get snatched away from me out of nowhere.” (Velez 2019). Channeling their emotions into action, Sandra and her brother decided to attend a meeting with Faith in the Valley as they planned to organize a march in support of immigrant families in Fresno.

When an adult ally asked the youth leaders gathered for the meeting “What is the world as we want it to look like? Why did we choose to be here today?” Sandra was quick to respond. “Immigrants shouldn’t be hiding in fear. They should be able to have the same opportunities that every other citizen has.” (Velez 2019). Bringing along several of her peers from schools who also came from mixed status families youth began to organize what a march and rally could look like. Within a month Sandra and her peers organized dozens of people to march and rally in support of her father and other immigrants who had been targeted. United under the name Youth 4 Change (Young Organizers United for Change), Sandra and her peers organized

alongside Faith in the Valley to not only plan this march but to also work towards providing funds for detained individuals who were facing immigration charges.

Megaphone in hand Sandra chanted “No hate, no fear, Immigrants are welcome here! No Hate, no fear, refugees are welcome here!” Surrounded by signs that read “United as one” and “keep families together” youth led the march and shared their testimony at the rally. After being released on bond, Sandra’s father Hugo was also present at the march along with his pro-bono lawyer who reiterated that was not an enforcement priority or a threat to the community (ABC 30 Action News 2019). Once again exhibiting that youth from mixed status families can be motivated and politically engaged despite a failure of traditional socializing agents, Sandra and her peers embodied civic engagement and resiliency throughout their shared experiences. At the same time this also illustrates how centering the role of emotion and emotion work can help us understand how some youth are spurred to action (Goodwin and Jasper 2004; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001; D. Gould 2004). Sharing her own emotions and motivation for being involved in organizing the march and being involved, Sandra’s friend Angela illustrated how thinking of her own family’s mixed status propelled her to get involved: “I always thought Fresno was a safe place, but I was wrong because it happened to her dad, and I’m afraid it’s going to happen to my dad at any second. Every time I go, like outside, I can’t, I’m afraid. I’m afraid that one day my dad is going to go missing.” She stated.

Stories like Sandra’s and other families in the community led to revitalized efforts in support of the legal defense fund. With a more moderate political

opportunity structure and larger efforts to cultivate elite allies, organizers wondered whether Fresno could become the first city in the Central Valley to allocate funds to an immigrant defense fund. Since being rejected by the council the first time in 2017, the legal fund had been able to raise 125,000 dollars through philanthropic and private donations (Amaro 2021b). Armed with examples of successful cases that the defense fund had already been working on throughout the years which illustrated the positive impact that they had, the coalition submitted a proposal to the Fresno city council. Fore fronting the stories of youth like Sandra, and other mixed status families, organizers asked the Fresno City Council to invest \$200,000 in a legal defense fund for undocumented immigrants in Fresno, and another \$100,000 for a liaison to an immigrant affairs committee that was previously unfunded. Emphasizing that “The COVID-19 pandemic has only heightened the financial hardship of many immigrant families in the region, further exacerbating the justice gap” youth advocates and community based organizations were hopeful that the new composition of the council would be more empathetic to the cause (Amaro 2021a). Similar to the sanctuary schools campaign and previous efforts to advocate for investment in the defense fund, youth from mixed status families like Sandra gave public comment and shared their lived experiences during public comment at city council meetings and budget hearings. Youth organizers emphasized that these public comments and strategies should be led by youth who are most impacted by these issues.

Making history 4 years after their initial rejection, organizers rejoiced when the city council voted to contribute 200,000 dollars in city funds to the legal defense

fund and an additional 100,000 dollars to establish a full-time liaison for the newly created immigrants affairs committee (Amaro 2021b). With only 2 council members voting in opposition, Council President Luis Chavez also stated that the funding would not be vetoed as this was pre-negotiated with Mayor Dyer. In fact, Chavez also stated he would seek to increase the amount of funding for an additional 200,000 in the future, during midyear budget negotiations (Amaro 2021b). The first and only city in the Central Valley to support an immigrant defense fund, this contribution illustrates how a moderate context of reception allowed for such a victory that thus far has not been replicated anywhere else within the Central Valley region. The city of Fresno had shifted from passively (or reluctantly) accepting immigrants to pro-actively investing in their futures.

At the same time that Fresno's moderate context of reception allowed for such a victory, I have to also acknowledge the constraints that came with this moderate context. After being approved, frustrations grew among youth and community based organizations who believed that the funding was not being fully utilized as originally intended or envisioned. I spoke to a city staffer on the condition of anonymity to learn more about this. Rather than the money going directly to the legal defense fund that had been established and partnered with local defense attorneys the funding was connected to a separate private attorney that was not previously involved with the legal defense fund whatsoever. This was just the tip of the iceberg however.

The scope of the funding had been broadened so much that funds would be available not solely for immigration defense, but that the 200,000 would also be

available for DACA applications for adjustment of status petitions. Many community based organizations had already worked and provided services in this area, and organizers and youth were frustrated. As one youth put it “ For to be honest, it was really heartbreaking to see that we had this opportunity...And that I don't think it was really honored in the way in which the Community had.” The city council staffer I spoke to agreed. “ I don’t think he (Council President Chavez) really championed it to the fullest extent that he could have”. Explaining further, this staffer acknowledge the fact that the council had to work with a conservative mayor and several council members who themselves were engaging in perpetuating rhetoric around good vs. bad immigrants.

Though council president Luis Chavez championed the 200,000 dollar investment in 2021 and attempted to take credit for this victory, as mentioned earlier, Chavez was abstained from the original proposal in 2017 claiming he did not want this funding to go to criminals. Admitting that this sort of language and narrative was harmful to the community at large, this staffer expressed disappointment that the funding was broadened, but also alluded to the fact that perhaps this was a concession that was made in order for the mayor and moderate Democrats on the council to push it through. When asked if a more specific proposal that would solely focus on immigrant defense could have passed, they admitted “I don't necessarily know that it would not have gotten vetoed in the end, there were a lot of dynamics at play.” Tensions arose between youth who argued that the city should be contributing more than 200,000 and individuals seeking to compromise with council members to pass at

least 200,000 to mark a significant victory. At the same time that this moderate context of reception allowed for hundreds of thousands of dollars to be put forth towards assisting immigrants, it was the same moderate context that constrained the use of these funds and their ultimate purpose being broadened.

Therefore the campaign and strategies utilized by youth from mixed status families depict how localized political contexts can deeply affect how youth mobilize for action (Burciaga and Martinez 2017). This moderate localized context of reception can simultaneously expand and constrain windows of opportunity for youth to engage with (McAdam 1999; Zepeda Milan 2017; Goodwin and Jasper 2014). Even so, Fresno's investment in the immigrant community marked a critical juncture, representing the first time a city contributed to immigration defense and funding in the Central Valley. In my conversation with the Fresno City staffer, they expressed optimism that the new council majority was looking to build trust and invest even more in protecting immigrant communities. For example after a Lorenzo Perez a local food vendor was tragically killed (and several others had been assaulted and robbed) in Fresno two city council members sponsored a pilot program to provide 20 mobile food vendors with cameras and data storage to increase their safety (J. Walker 2022). At the same time, acknowledging conservative pushback, this staffer recalled that several media organizations would ask questions with strong anti-immigrant undertones. "They would ask questions like "Well why help these businesses, why not *other* businesses? And 'are they are they legalized to work?' they never said the word "illegals" but the undertones were definitely there" they stated.

Concluding their thoughts in our interview, this staffer expressed the belief that Fresno and neighboring cities would continue to follow suit as long as individuals stayed engaged in the political process. “ As frustrating as it could be sometimes it's really good to remember where we've where we've come from and these last few years. I know that is paving the way for the tone and the commitment that are that our city is going to continue making to are undocumented community.”

The stories presented above with a broader story of youth from mixed status families that I spoke to. In a region where schools, parents, and peers often fail to orient youth to politics, community- based organizations can act as a catalyst. Because of the structural economic conditions, undocumented parents are often more focused on surviving. This leaves little time to discuss politics or model participatory behavior with their children, especially in a system which excludes them from most traditional forms of participation like registering and voting. Even so, youth can overcome these barriers to participation, and importantly find motivation through their mixed status identity. Whether it is through their personal experience of being targeted or witnessing peers or community members being subjected to deportations or threats, youth from mixed status families can become catalysts for change in their community, especially when supported by community based organizations. However, as I discuss below, it is important to note that the *type* of community-based organization—and specifically the way that they nurture youth advocacy—deeply impacts the nature and success of this transformative work.

Authentic Youth Voice in the Valley vs. Volunteerism

Certain organizations, while well-meaning, do not put youth agency at the forefront of their priorities. Working with a nonprofit organization prior to joining her current youth organizing group, Jade, shared that she felt as though she was being used for her story to perpetuate a narrative she did not agree with and that was hurtful. “[The group] was a teen pregnancy and ‘support’ organization for teen mothers, and they had me saying, ‘Yeah, we need—we need, like, black and brown girls not to have babies. Yeah, we need—we need prevention for them, right? We need them not to birth children.’”

At the time a young mother, Jade didn’t question the organization and was simply grateful when it supported her in whatever way it could. As time went on, however, she realized that their way of speaking about teen pregnancy prevention did not feel right to her. “They had me talking about it not in a way that was progressive or that would even help. It was more like shaming. And then I realized, like, oh, wait, but that’s... that was me. They had me say things like, you know, had I not had my son, I would have done this. And I was, like, wait, I didn’t want to say that. And it was hurtful.”

After she would finish presenting her story at events, Jade would be approached by staff members and organizational leaders, who applauded her for doing such a great job. Frowning, she recalled how the praise made her uneasy: “...on the inside, I was like, I don’t like this. But I felt like I didn’t have the option to say

no.” Rather than asking Jade what her perspectives were on the challenges involved in teen pregnancy and parenting, or inviting her to express her own viewpoint, this organization instead promoted their own messaging, robbing Jade of a sense of agency over her own story. Conscious of her own experiences growing up in a mixed status family, Jade felt a sense of shame and did not feel as though she could embrace this aspect of her identity either, well aware of the derogatory term “anchor babies” that had been popularized by right wing politicians. Research demonstrates that latinx youth experience “anchor baby” rhetoric when navigating their families mixed status, and this narrative is often utilized by elected officials to express anti Latinx racism (Rodriguez 2019).

During the push for an immigrant defense fund Jade also sought to counter the good vs. bad immigrant narrative being perpetuated by city leaders by sharing her own story. As a student Jade had faced bullying and had gotten into a physical altercation with her bully, leading her to be on probation, explaining what that can look like for an undocumented individual, and the fear and stigma associated with this. Explaining that her path to citizenship in the future could be complicated by criminalization and the school to prison pipeline that disproportionately affects students of color and undocumented students, her story emphasized that every individual deserved legal defense, regardless of whatever choices they may have made in the past. As a result of her experiences with the teen mom organization, Jade decided that she no longer wanted to be a part of this, instead joining other

organizations that would empower her, allow her to share her story on her own terms, and incorporate all aspects of her identity into her advocacy work.

Another youth leader that I interviewed, Laura, shared how different it was to become part of an organization that considered community issues and how to address problems. Prior to joining Fresno's Barrios Unidos, Laura had been in a Health Career Opportunities program at her college, hoping to learn more about the health care system while she academically prepared to become a doctor someday. Though she was glad that the program focused on first-generation and underrepresented students, Laura felt a sense of emptiness in the work that she was doing. As she explained, "It was like, go volunteer at a nursing home, or [be] a scribe (notetaker) or volunteer at a hospital, and obviously, healthcare is an issue here in the Central Valley." However, she expanded on her frustrations with the fact that leaders never talked about *why* healthcare was an issue in their community or the structural and root causes of why so many individuals lacked health care in the region: "We didn't discuss any voting or community issues in that org. So I was always struggling with that, and no one was able to answer those questions until I got here [to Barrios Unidos]. I had just cared about volunteer opportunities and building up my resume and that was not where I wanted to be." Laura's story highlights the key difference between youth organizing groups and community-based organizations that seek to empower youth and those based solely on volunteer opportunities—absent any political discussion or education.

When she first joined the health career program at her college, Laura felt like she was making a difference mentoring other students. However, she started to feel disconnected, as though the members were there to pad their resumes rather than to engage with their community. . “At the end of the day I realized that they were more so looking for someone to support them when it came to let's say writing an essay, rather than opening their eyes to like social justice.” Instead Laura eventually found a home within other community-based organizations and youth organizing groups, which not only engaged in conversations around healthcare, parks, and education but also actively encouraged youth to become agents of change both inside and outside of their communities.

Though Laura and Jade’s stories are each uniquely shaped by their own experiences, they share a few overlapping factors. Both of these youth leaders were shaped and mobilized by their own identities, including their families extended experiences. For Jade, it was already recognizing the politicization and shaming of teenage pregnancies and a negative narrative of women from immigrant families birthing children. For Laura it was recognizing that her own families undocumented and mixed status meant that access to health insurance and care was never guaranteed and this precarity would be something that would follow them no matter what. For both of these young women, their previous community based organizations were lacking in their support for civic engagement and empowerment of each youth respectively. For Laura, questions of politics and root causes of health care disparities

were shut down, while Jade had no agency or influence over her own narrative and story as a teen mother.

Neither of these youth leaders were being cultivated as leaders in their own right, and were instead expected to follow guidance without question, denying them their own agency. Ultimately both of these stories also illustrate that organizations must both seek and value youth voice throughout every stage. Additionally, Laura's story also highlights the need for community based organizations and youth organizing groups avoid the perils of solely focusing on volunteerism without engaging with genuine discussions about root causes and purpose of every action. These youth leaders chose to leave their previous organizations because of this. Instead they found a home within a community based organization that valued their own agency, and empowered them to ask questions, engage in discussions, and ultimately act as agents of change within their community.

Other youth I met shared similar experiences with transformative community-based organizations. As part of the *Sons and Brothers* initiative, youth from the Central Valley had the opportunity to visit the state capitol and discuss issues in their community with state legislators. Never having traveled outside of Fresno county, Antonio described his first visit to Sacramento as “empowering”: “I was at the state capitol, which I had seen in text books and stuff but I had never really visualized myself in there. For me to be there, talking to all these elected officials, that's where I was like, ‘Oh shit, we could really get stuff done if you organize and you bring people with you.’” Though Antonio admitted he felt like “shrinking” the first time he met

with a legislator, he got over his nervousness with the help of his peers and adult allies and mentors.

Finding his voice and confidence he chuckled describing it as if it was like going on a first date : “After that event, it made me realize that I do have a voice and I was going to say whatever I had to say regardless of who I'm speaking to. When I got back Fresno after that event I knew that it wasn't going to stop there. My mentor kept telling me, ‘It's not gonna stop here,’ you know what I mean?” Despite the support and civic education that these organizations offered, however, the local context of Fresno continued to constrain the strategies and campaigns that youth engaged in, especially with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Learning to Adapt: Conflict and Strategizing Beyond the Dais

After the 2016 and 2018 elections, youth from mixed-status families in Fresno found themselves receiving mixed messages between a city council that increasingly began to look more like them, ethnically, and taking pro-immigrant stances while from the other end, they had a sheriff who continued to appear on television with former President Trump and call for an end to sanctuary policies. As evidenced by the passing of a sanctuary resolution within the Fresno Unified School District and the willingness of the city council to invest funds directly into defending the immigrant community, youth were able to secure some concrete wins for their families and community members. At the same time, youth continued to distrust city leaders, whom they felt had flip-flopped on their commitment to Measure P, and they

continued to face pushback and a hostile context from conservative local leaders and institutions. Moreover, despite the more hospitable climate, youth also found themselves on the losing side of various political campaigns as well. Organizations thus questioned how best to organize around the issues facing their communities and what strategies would be most effective.

Whether they had DACA, were a U.S. citizen, or were undocumented, and afraid, youth organizers felt empowered knowing that they were fully equipped with knowledge of their rights—while recognizing that not all immigrant youth had the same protections, opportunities, or knowledge. Moreover, youth leaders emphasized building a multi-generational alliance of advocates for immigration-related work, empowering their elders and parents—a testament to the power of the “trickle up” socialization model in which young people can socialize and mobilize their elders to take action (Terriquez and Kwon 2014). During a virtual focus group bringing together youth organizers from around the Central Valley, one youth from Fresno, Alicia, articulated a new vision for multigenerational organizing around immigration:

Whether it's policy advocacy, whatever scope it is, I think really finding ways to work with the older community, like the moms, the dads of DACA recipients, because I think oftentimes it's very led by, like, the newer generation. We get to, like, have these... just these places and privilege to be able to say, like, oh, we're undocumented. We're unafraid, and then our parents, their struggles and what they had to go through. And I think that should really be highlighted by their own words and not somebody saying,

like, oh, 'I come from a family of immigrants.' But they hold a lot of privilege and they don't recognize that.

At the same time, however, working with elders also led to some conflicts and debate. Youth organizers sometimes found themselves at odds with one another and with adult allies around how to honor or acknowledge certain historical movements and figures. For example, when Cesar Chavez Day came up for discussion, Jade pushed back against honoring Chavez. In contrast to Estrella, who did not know about Cesar Chavez, Jade also wanted to ensure that a complete story of the farmworker movement was told, including the fact that Cesar Chavez had historically called undocumented strikebreakers "wetbacks" and took a hard line on immigration, even forming a UFW "border patrol" (Bobadilla, 2014). As Jade put it "We had to look back at the history of them [the farmworker movement], of the undocumented movement in the valley, to be able to better the way we do our work moving forward, because I think it has hurt a lot of people." Though tensions arose in that meeting, it also illustrated a deeper divide in which youth from mixed-status families often had a different strategy and vision for what immigration actions and policies could look like, both locally and nationwide.

As our focus group continued, Alicia, who had migrated to Fresno with her mother at a very young age, expanded on this disconnect when it came to immigration advocacy and organizing. Growing up without any sort of legal protections, she remembered what life was like before DACA and how DACA was the result of young people leading direct actions. Looking back, however, Alicia

believed that organizers had received “peanuts” in comparison to what they were demanding, and that the DACA debate also contributed to a larger criminalization narrative around immigration and reinforced a binary of who was “deserving” or “undeserving” of citizenship. Alicia and other youth wanted to continue to push for direct action campaigns that advocated for shutting down immigrant detention centers. These goals and tactics were often at odds with what elders thought should be prioritized: an immigration reform bill. Sharing with the rest of the group, Alicia described this tension in greater detail:

“We were getting a lot of pushback from a lot of elders that had been doing immigration work. Their answer was, ‘No, we need an immigration reform bill.’ You know, we need to save the people that we can, you know? We can't get everybody on the boat, so let's get, you know, “quote unquote, like - like undocumented youth,’ right?”

However, Alicia recognized that “undocumented youth” did not extend to all undocumented young people, and really was only focused on those who had been fortunate enough to both qualify and pay for DACA status. At the same time, even there were not only debates over policy focus; youth tactics were also questioned by elders. Outside of their involvement in nonprofit organizations, youth and community members formed the “ICE Out of Fresno” coalition in 2017, with the goal of uplifting immigrant rights and pushing for an end to the Fresno sheriff’s collaboration with ICE. Adopting more direct action approaches, the coalition led several protests and sit-ins, including in Sheriff Mim’s office. When Sheriff Mims was set to receive a

“Hero of Liberty” from the California Tea Party Caucus in Fresno, the coalition mobilized, protesting outside and engaging in some heated arguments with counter-protesters and Tea Party attendees (Zamora 2018). Alicia and other organizers wanted to continue to protest, and even considered whether they should protest outside the sheriff’s home, something that elders in the movement strongly discouraged. Alicia’s reflections to our group about why youth felt so passionately about the protest are worth quoting at length here:

“That kind of leads me to the point of trusting and strategy, right? Right, here in the Central Valley building out these, immigrant youth organizing groups, and the struggle that it's been like with the sheriff and the attention that we were actually receiving while protesting. She [Sheriff Mims] was feeling threatened, you know? Us doing sit-ins, organizing, going inside the jail, all of us, right, and the attention that that really brought. But going beyond that, it was really about the fear that immigrant communities feel every single day. And for these people in power to feel just the tiniest glimpse of that—to feel just a hint of fear—I think for us... in those moments...that's powerful.”

Explaining a bit of a generational divide, Alicia felt that young people organizing within the immigrant movement today were more intersectional in their approaches, building more solidarity with marginalized groups than in the past. Highlighting the work with queer organizers, black organizers and others in Fresno, her comments aligned with research which argues that when organizers can recognize and activate multiply marginalized identities throughout movements *intersectional*

mobilization can occur (Terriquez 2015a). At the same time, Alicia's leadership within the movement highlighted that women and girls were also at the forefront, unlike previous movements such as the UFW and Chicano movement where males were the majority of leadership positions (Milkman and Terriquez 2012).

Alicia's own path to engagement was inspired by her family's mixed status, as she herself had grown undocumented her whole life. When her family has been victims of a crime, she, her sister, and her mother applied for U visas, to which only she and her sister had been approved. As mentioned in the previous chapter, being approved for a U visa, is something that would have been far less likely in Kern County, however Sheriff Mims and a more moderate context of reception in Fresno provided Alicia and her sister with a path to obtain these visas. After obtaining this form of legal status, sustaining her engagement and motivation was not only fighting for her mother but for other mixed status families she had come to work with in her time as an organizer. As a young girl, she remembers attending a rally in support of Pedro Ramirez, the Fresno state student body president who came out as undocumented in 2010, in a story that would capture national attention. She recalls seeing counter protesters, the college republicans show up with a coffin, as if to symbolize a death threat towards Pedro and other undocumented immigrants in the community. Motivated by the conditions around her, Alicia became involved in organizing her peers throughout the years and wasn't afraid to engage in more militant tactics.

This disagreement about strategies and tactics between older movement veterans and some youth organizers from mixed status families also illustrates how localized contexts and lived experiences can shape the repertoires of protest. These repertoires can be widely influenced by society's and organizers' sense of justice and knowledge of what sort of repression they will face (Tilly 1978; Tilly and Wood 2015; Goodwin and Jasper 2014). More importantly, strategies can endure because they are successful and deeply meaningful to individuals.

In this case, Alicia and her peers recognized that they needed to engage in deep strategizing. At one point, their own organizing was infiltrated by their opposition. Planning an action at the local Fresno county jail, organizers sought to lock hands in chains hoping to shut down the jail and then present their demands. Planning for weeks, they reviewed details, and were eager to push forward. To their shock, when their action began, Fresno SWAT officers quickly moved in to arrest the 4 individuals participating, obviously having been tipped off. But how? Organizers had been careful not to share information about the action, and only the immediate organizing group had this information. Debriefing in the coming weeks, it was clear where the leak had come from. Leading up to this action, one organizer in the group had began dating a young man they had met. This man had previously expressed that he worked for law enforcement for just two days before quitting and never returning, stating that he felt like he was betraying his latinx community by working within such an apparatus. Quickly gaining trust and confidence within the group, he would tag along with the organizer he was dating at meetings as they discussed their plans. The

day after the failed action took place, the gentleman immediately “ghosted” his partner and everyone in the group. To organizers, it was clear that this individual had been some sort of law enforcement informant who had tipped off authorities to their plans.

This brought about feelings of immediate shame, guilt and fear within the group as several other organizers would express concerns that they were being watched, surveilled and followed by law enforcement. Leading to a sense of distrust and fear among the group, this hampered future organizing for a brief period as individuals sought to protect themselves and their families from being targeted by immigration authorities. Even with such repression and surveillance, Alicia felt that Fresno needed different approaches to organizing.

As she had previously organized for the legal defense fund within the city of Fresno, she applauded the victory of securing funds for the immigrant community. At the same time she expressed disappointment with the emphasis on “respectability” politics. During this campaign there was an emphasis on working with elected officials and the perception that elected officials had on young people and what proper strategy looked like: Public comments, one on one meetings, petitions and more traditional forms of engagement. As the Trump administration ramped up deportation efforts or the impact of COVID 19 began to impact mixed status families and marginalized communities, there was a sense of urgency which demanded more direct repertoires of contention and strategies. In certain cases like this, Alicia and

some other youth felt the need to operate outside of community-based organizations to drive home their point.

Bureaucracy & Competition

Youth felt a similar urgency during the pandemic. Though nonprofit organizations moved quickly to address the needs of community members throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, youth organizers in the Central Valley wanted to ensure an even more rapid response. As government officials at the federal level debated sending out stimulus checks, and California's "Golden State stimulus" program was months away, youth from mixed-status households already anticipated that their families would be excluded. Deciding to take matters into their own hands, youth leaders and organizers formed the Central Valley Mutual Aid Fund Collective. Jade, whose negative experience with a nonprofit organization we described earlier, discussed why she wanted to start this collective:

"Once I realized the kind of politics of organizing and just, like, people's bullshit, I thought this isn't something I want to play anymore. I want to own my own work. Like, I don't have to be tied to a nonprofit. Originally, I thought that if I wanted to do work, if I wanted to make changes, that I had to be tied to a nonprofit org, and that's not the case. There are many people doing amazing work who aren't a 501(c)(3), and it's just a tax status as I've learned. Sometimes nonprofits carry many hurtful ways of doing things, and in creating the Central Valley Mutual Aid Network, I thought about that. I

thought about my experiences with nonprofits, I thought about the work that I've done, and I was, like, you know what? I don't want to perpetrate this again in the Central Valley Mutual Aid Collective. And it's something that I'm still learning how to not do.”

Considering the bureaucracy involved, dealing with funders, reporting requirements, and a plethora of other variables involved with nonprofit organizations, youth like Jade posited that their work could be done more quickly, and more effectively, through a grassroots collective effort. Emphasizing “solidarity” rather than “charity,” the group moved quickly to raise and distribute thousands of dollars to undocumented individuals, refugees, and marginalized community members throughout the Central Valley who had been impacted by the pandemic. Focusing on those community members who had been intentionally excluded by government programs, youth drew on their own lived experiences and identities to prioritize applicants whose families were in deportation proceedings or who had a family member in detention, families affected by incarceration, queer and trans individuals, disabled folks, foster youth, and people who did not receive other stimulus checks or COVID-19 relief.

At the same time, Jade, Alicia, and others who were involved in the Central Valley mutual aid efforts also felt it was crucial that mixed status families not just be prioritized in terms of relief, but were prioritized in decision making as well. Beyond Jade and Alicia other organizers who founded the collective also came from mixed status families and were mobilized to take action to provide relief where national and

state governments had failed to. When it came time to review applications it was decided that only 4 individuals would review the applications, all from mixed status families and all impacted and rooted in the issues they were trying to address. One focus group participant explained why these youth felt that they needed to go beyond the nonprofit industrial complex and be independent of funders to serve their communities:

It's really about liberty in strategy. There are a lot of constraints and limits when it comes to nonprofits in the Valley. Especially in a region where we have 2-3 main funders that make all the decisions about where resources go. There are big needs and requests. There's also this other element of some young people not wanting to participate in this nonprofit industrial complex, and the need to do that. It comes from the need for our communities to do this. We had to learn how to say "no" to funders, to stay rooted in our values. We wanted to say "no" to sharing stories of trauma to our communities, to say "no" to asking for additional documents from folks who were already fearful in an anti-immigrant climate.

Free from reporting requirements often required by funders and bureaucracy, youth organizers could move quickly to provide immediate relief to mixed status families and marginalized communities in the Central Valley. At the same time, operating outside of a nonprofit 501c3 apparatus meant that any funds donated to the collective would not be tax deductible, creating a different sort of challenge at the inception of the fund. Despite this, the collective today has been able to secure a fiscal sponsor and has been able to distribute over 2 million dollars to mixed status

family households, farmworkers, and other marginalized groups in the Central Valley. A testament to the fact that Mixed Status identity can act as a mobilizing force rather than a deterrent, the mutual aid collective also highlights how localized political contexts can deeply shape the strategies, goals and engagement of youth.

This example also leads us to another challenge described by youth organizers, particularly for those who had become deeply engrained in or hired at their youth organizations and thus had firsthand experience of nonprofit funding and the nonprofit industrial complex (Eliasoph 2011). Shying away from these more established organizations, youth recognized the benefits of collaborating with smaller groups. However, enriching as these experiences were, the social movement infrastructure in the Central Valley is not as extensive as in the Bay Area or Southern California, which can create competition and dissuade collaboration. Discussing the challenges of doing this type of organizing work within the Valley, one youth commented, “I think that sometimes people can see each other as competition because they are competing for funding, and we know that funding is scarce here in the Central Valley, right? When they [funders] limit who they fund, that also causes division within groups not wanting to work with one another because of the scarcity of funding.” While some groups with larger budgets had the privilege to do the work they loved and get paid for it, others operated on the heart and dedication of volunteers or employees committed to putting in extra hours outside of their regular jobs.

Other challenges discussed by youth centered around transportation and organizing in such a large county and region. For example, 18-year-old Sarah talked about how “not knowing where the resources lie” is difficult, and how smaller cities and unincorporated communities are often not represented in spaces due to their distance from central locations and a lack of organizations in those areas. To support her point, she described going away to an educational camp program in the summer, where she met with youth organizers and youth from mixed-status families all across the state: “When I went to that camp, I learned about immigration policies. I learned about how others were advocating for health care for all. And this just got me really interested in the work they did, and it made me want to network with them.” However, when she returned home, Sarah felt as though there was no way to continue working with those youth from other areas: “It was just, like, okay, that's it. Like, there wasn't really a source to talk to them about or there wasn't anything to go off of or way I could meet with them.” Though it had been an empowering experience for Sarah, it was also short-lived, as she returned to the Valley to contend with its lack of physical and social movement infrastructure.

Fighting the “Brain Drain”

Perhaps it’s the same feelings that Sarah felt that often drive youth to seek a life outside of Fresno or the Central Valley region more generally. The lack of jobs, as well as the challenging context for undocumented immigrants and mixed-status families, left some of these youth wondering whether it was worth weathering the “heated” climate both literally (summertime temperatures can exceed 100 degrees)

and figuratively (constant political battles). In this vein, youth discussed the region's brain drain, in which some individuals leave the Valley at the first opportunity and never look back. Some youth even confessed that their teachers or adult allies had told them that they needed to leave the Valley in order to reach their full potential, whether that was to pursue higher education or seek a job elsewhere. For youth like Horacio, Laura, Sarah, and others who had become deeply engrained in their communities, comments like this, however well intentioned, often came across as hurtful or discouraging.

In a focus group with other youth across the Central Valley, Sarah shared her experiences of living in the Valley with the group: "I think there is also this... belief from a certain percentage of the population where they're, like, 'You just need to be successful and you need to leave, right?' Like you need to leave, you need to go somewhere, like, you can't stay here; you know?" While not denying that opportunities existed outside of the Central Valley and the place that youth call home, participants in this focus group pushed back against this idea. Not only did it assume that youth somehow had the resources and financial capital to be able to move outside of the Valley, but it also failed to take into account that many of these youth played vital roles within their mixed-status families, whether it was translating documents, informing family members about their rights, or directly advocating for change within their community to pass policies to aid them.

Though these examples illustrate the superiority of Community Based Organizations to volunteer based programs, they also illustrate that CBOs can also be

limiting and with their own forms of constraints. The competition among nonprofit organizations for funding in a region that is already historically underfunded can create tensions and can stifle cooperation among groups that may otherwise share similar goals. Operating within the bureaucracy, organization structures, reporting, approvals and the challenges of attempting to stay true to a nonprofit organization's mission can also create additional challenges. Therefore in times of urgency or when adopting new strategies that may not align with a CBO, youth may seek to operate outside of the constraints of these organizations to more freely organize.

In an attempt to reimagine what Fresno and the Central Valley could look like, these youth made the decision to stay and work toward making their communities a better place without leaving. Participating and working to change local institutions, these youth from mixed status families claimed and shaped their own narratives around immigration, justice, public safety, and community could look like. Despite the challenges, youth acknowledged the transformative change that had occurred as part of their journeys. In concluding his interview, Horacio took a pause to think about what really drove him to continue doing the work he did, even when he felt like giving up:

“The sense of community is something you can't exchange. That is, I think the essence of humanity is belonging to communities, belonging to society, belonging to a group of people. I think it gives me a tremendous sense of purpose to feel like, I'm doing something for people, not just for myself. Not just for whatever meritocracy or whatever capitalist driven gains can be had,

or whatever incentive exists. No, the incentive itself is to do this for other people. It gave me a tremendous sense of community to actually live. God, man...it's such a sappy way to put it, but it gave me purpose."

Reflecting on how empowered he had become alongside his peers, he smiled with a sense of pride. No longer feeling as though he was powerless or completely apathetic about the conditions around him, Horacio's journey mirrored that of other youth from mixed-status families who had gotten involved with a local youth organizing group.

Conclusion: The Future is Fresno

In addition to the campaigns and victories I have discussed, youth and community members were also successful in securing funding for pro-immigrant initiatives. Convincing the Fresno City Council to invest \$200,000 in a legal defense fund for undocumented immigrants in Fresno, and another \$100,000 for a liaison to an immigrant affairs committee that was previously unfunded, the city of Fresno had shifted from passively (or reluctantly) accepting immigrants to pro-actively investing in their futures. Combatting the "brain drain" in the Valley, youth from mixed-status families felt a duty to stay and fight for their families and community members in whatever way that they could.

Engaging in both traditional and nontraditional forms of participation, Fresno's youth leaders operate in a more moderate and rapidly changing political context than Kern County. As evidenced by both the "safe place" resolution and

reform efforts in schools, along with victories secured at the city council level, youth in Fresno have proven that they can successfully operate within and outside of systems and institutions. In emphasizing voting, civic engagement, participation in board meetings, and conversations with elected officials, youth have seized opportunities to engage with and pursue change through institutions. At the same time, however, youth have expanded their efforts, engaging in community work and urgent relief outside of the traditional constraints that nonprofit organizations and community-based organizations face. This was evident in the successful Central Valley Mutual aid efforts which brought relief to hundreds of families.

Tensions still exist within a generational divide of veteran organizers and youth who fight for more progressive and ambitious goals. At the same time, a multi-pronged approach to organizing has allowed for victories in the Central Valley that have not been successfully replicated elsewhere, especially in more exclusionary contexts like Kern. Youth leaders highlight that adult allies and community based organizations must remain genuine in their empowerment of youth voice, and giving youth a seat at decision making tables. As Alicia put it “Adults need to either step into a mentorship role, or step to the side. Don't block our growth, our ideas or what they're trying to accomplish. Instead, adult allies need to support us and defend youth at all costs.”

The political context in Fresno has also changed drastically over the years. When observing the city council in particular and the area's presidential voting results, Fresno is no longer a dark shade of red on the electoral map but an

increasingly contested battleground across all levels of government. However, this does not mean that fierce opposition does not exist around organizing efforts, only that the political opportunity structure in Fresno now allows for genuine windows of opportunity for youth from mixed-status families to effect change. In contrast to Kern County, where the political environment and opportunity structure is not nearly as open, youth strategize with more direct-action methods as a first—rather than last—resort, while at the same time attempting to navigate their own calculated risks.

Fresno serves as a case study for what will continue to be the forefront of conflicts over immigration, race, and education. Whether the rest of the Central Valley will follow in Fresno's footsteps remains to be seen. If the most recent attempted recall election of Governor Newsom serves as any indication, it is likely that Fresno, and even its neighbor to the north, Merced County, will become more contested political battlegrounds. Will a "brown wave" follow in Fresno County Board of supervisors? Under the newly adopted electoral map that supervisors chose, this will be an uphill battle. The supervisorial map was drawn by none other than Alex Tavlian, the Republican strategist, consultant, and owner of the *San Joaquin Valley Sun* blunting any optimistic hopes of a more inclusive board towards immigrant families (Clark 2021). Moreover, soaring rent increases, immigration, health care, policing, and parks are all sure to stir future debates. Youth from mixed-status families are prepared to continue engaging in this work, as they find motivation through their own lived experiences. They are deeply committed to the belief that

wherever those decisions may fall, we can continue to look towards Fresno as a bellwether of change. The future is Fresno.

Chapter VII: Reimagining Vulnerability and the Future of the Central Valley

When I originally began writing my dissertation, one recurring theme that began emerging was vulnerability. In the second chapter of this dissertation, I discussed the vulnerability of mixed-status families in relation to food and housing insecurity and to their interactions with government authorities, all of which can affect health outcomes (Menjívar and Gómez Cervantes 2016; Pedraza and Osorio 2017; Perreira and Pedroza 2019). I further explored this theme in subsequent chapters with regard to political participation, as interviewees discussed how their decisions were shaped by the conditions and their own identities as youth from mixed-status families.

My dissertation concerns the psychological, cultural, and political realities of mixed-status youth. When originally conceiving of the title, “Voices from the Valley of Vulnerability,” I was reflecting upon the “vulnerability” of mixed-status families, who were under attack both from the Trump administration and from local politicians who had long advocated for hardline immigration policies even prior to Trump, and how they were living in a local context that has long excluded or passively ignored them.

As I continued my research and analysis over the years, however, I have come to realize that seeing them through the lens of vulnerability can obscure the work and victories that these youth have accomplished in their respective communities. Though I do not seek to diminish the daily threat of deportation, I think back on youth

organizers disrupting meetings between local political machine kingmakers and the GEO Corporation in Kern. I am reminded of youth who organized in Fresno to pass a sanctuary resolution for undocumented students. I am reminded of Alicia as she described the motivation behind protesting the local sheriff's anti-immigrant actions: "It was really about the fear that immigrant communities feel every, single, day. And for these people in power to feel just the tiniest glimpse of that—to feel just a hint of fear, I think for us back then in those moments... That's powerful."

Indeed, it is powerful, and her observation leads us to a crucial point: it is not just youth from mixed-status families who are uncomfortable with being vulnerable. In reality, vulnerability extends to those elected officials and policy makers who have long stood in opposition to immigrant communities in the Central Valley. In an ever-changing region that is becoming increasingly diverse, and where young voters play a larger role in every subsequent election, the entire power structure and long-embedded institutions that are reluctant to change are also becoming more and more vulnerable.

This final chapter returns to the main arguments presented in Chapter I, taking into consideration the two case studies of Kern and Fresno. What factors, it asks, may drive youth to participate when dominant political forces seem to be directed against them? How do different localized political contexts shape the political participation, strategies, and civic engagement of youth from mixed-status families? This chapter concludes with a discussion of the study's implications and limitations, urging

scholars to continue to build on our understanding of political participation, political socialization, and mixed-status families.

A Failure of Traditional Socializing Agents

This research contributes to a rich literature on political socialization by investigating socializing agents and patterns of political socialization within mixed-status families. Challenging preconceptual notions of parents and schools as traditional socializing agents that prepare youth to engage in politics, mixed-status youth described how both of these institutions often failed to orient them to politics for different reasons. Schools were often described as anti-political or as actively suppressing student voice and participation, from the de-politicization of MeCHA clubs to shutting down any discussion of deportation and immigration in classrooms to blocking nonpartisan voter registration efforts, youth had to contend with educational institutions that did not actively promote political participation. Historically, even higher education institutions like Fresno State College have been proxy battlegrounds for social and civil rights struggles, notably when youth from mixed status-families and farmworkers came to blows with members of the predominately white Agricultural department in the 1960s. Organizations like the Ku Klux Klan also continued to terrorize students for years to come both on and off campus.

This cross-case comparison illustrates the suppressive and passive tendencies of educational institutions in Fresno and Kern. Both counties have their own unique

histories of redlining, exclusionary policies, and Klan activism, and each faces ongoing challenges in addressing issues of race and inclusion in schools, especially in the realm of political socialization for youth from mixed-status families.

If schools in these contexts failed to cultivate political participation, what role did parents play? Youth described how parents were often unengaged when it came to politics, more preoccupied with simply surviving and providing for their family members. Perhaps this is not surprising given that parents who are undocumented are unable to engage in traditional forms of politics such as registering, voting, and donating to political campaigns. In several instances, some parents attempted to discourage their children's participation out of fear for their child's and family's safety. However, whereas these traditional agents failed to instill or empower youth from mixed-status families to become engaged in their communities, community-based organizations and youth organizing groups did play a vital role. At the same time, for the most part youth were empowered by their families mixed status, rather than deterred by it.

CBOs as a Bridge to Participation

Often acting as a catalyzing agent, community-based organizations in the Central Valley successfully oriented youth to politics where other traditional socializing agents had proved ineffective. Despite the exclusionary and passive attitudes toward immigration illustrated in Kern and Fresno, youth were able to overcome these barriers to participation with the help of CBOs and youth organizing

groups. Through workshops, training, mentorship, and support, these organizations empowered youth to become agents of change in their community. Furthermore, as data illustrates, these organizations were intentional in creating and supporting youth-led initiatives supported by adults rather than adult-led initiatives that tokenized youth voice.

Unlike some student clubs or organizations that focused solely on a volunteerism approach absent any political discussion, these CBOs welcomed questions from curious youth. Whether discussing issues facing youth in schools or in their broader communities, these organizations emphasized the power of youth to shape the conditions around them. In some cases, youth were exposed to a history of organizing and social movements in the region that had never been taught to them by educational institutions or their parents. The authentic commitment to youth voice and leadership within organizations drew them to join these groups, and in some cases to work for them later on. This insight offers lessons for CBOs and youth-serving organizations seeking to increase civic engagement among youth from mixed-status families and help them overcome barriers to participation. It also challenges the assumption that all CBOs and voluntary associations provide participants with the same political and social capital to transform their communities.

Strategizing within the Constraints and Opportunities of Localized Contexts

Finally, these findings also contribute to the growing literature of mobilization and localized contexts. The data presented in the preceding chapters illustrates that

the strategic choices and organizing tactics used by youth from mixed-status families are all shaped dramatically by their localized contexts. Local governments, elected officials, and even the national political climate combined to create conditions and political opportunity structures that were narrow in Kern and slightly wider in the more moderate Fresno.

For example, though youth in Fresno were successful in campaigning for a sanctuary resolution within their local school district, conditions in Kern did not allow for such a victory. Similarly, though youth from mixed-status families and community advocates successfully convinced Fresno to contribute to an immigrant defense fund and establish a liaison position, no city in all of Kern County took such an action. In contrast, when the GEO Corporation sought to expand in the city of McFarland after being denied by the planning commission, the city council ruled in their favor on appeal in a nearly unanimous vote and despite protests from youth and community members. Both of these case studies illustrate how youth from mixed-status families had to contend with the dynamics of these localized contexts and adapt their strategies accordingly (Burciaga and Martinez 2017; Gleeson 2008; D. S. Meyer 2004). The local partisanship and ideological attitudes around immigration presented barriers in Kern, where youth had very little hope of galvanizing elected officials to support their campaigns. In Fresno, however, as the city council shifted over time, local conditions allowed for immigration-related campaigns to come to fruition.

An extension of this framework of localized contexts, another key insight of these findings concerns how youth navigate the strategic decision to move outside of

community-based organizations. Some youth decided to move beyond the scope of CBOs—and their paperwork, bureaucracy, and funders’ priorities—in order to adopt new campaign strategies and to respond more swiftly to conditions around them. The Central Valley Mutual Aid collective, for example, mobilized rapidly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to provide relief to mixed-status families and marginalized community members, who often remained ineligible for federal support or programs. In Kern, the Kern Youth Abolitionists also felt a need to organize and engage in more militant organizing against the conditions around them as they sought to stop the Mesa Verde expansion efforts in McFarland.

Problematizing the assumption that youth from mixed-status families are poised for low levels of civic engagement due to their families’ mixed status, findings illustrate that this can actually be a source of empowerment and motivation for mobilization. Whether it was engaging electorally and casting a ballot when parents and siblings could not or engaging in other forms of participation, youth found a sense of motivation in their families’ lived experiences. Being in a mixed-status family within an exclusionary or moderate context also provided youth with a set of resources for youth that, if properly nurtured, could result in empowerment and increased participation.

Limitations, Recommendations, and Future Research

Contributing to our understandings of immigration, mixed-status families, political socialization, and participation, this study analyzed two different case studies

to explore how youth from mixed-status families navigated their political participation. The findings presented in this research can also be applied to other communities in the Central Valley, as well as to localized contexts in which mixed-status families are subjected to hostile or moderate immigration contexts. The case studies provide an in-depth look at how organizers and advocates from across the state and country can make claims in communities that have historically had unequal power relations and inequitable distribution of resources.

There is still much to learn about the participation of youth from mixed status-families. This dissertation expands but also complicates our understandings of political socialization, political participation, and the localized contexts that youth face. At the same time, it demonstrates how youth and their immigrant families have responded to these conditions and identifies the structures and institutions that can orient—or fail to orient—youth to politics.

This dissertation's findings challenge the notion that youth from mixed-status families are poised for low levels of engagement. Future research could continue to explore how localized hostile contexts can shape the participation of youth from mixed-status families, particularly in other regions of the United States where families may be experiencing anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric from multiple levels of government. Local elected leaders should note the policies and initiatives—some of which have been outlined here—that made youth from mixed-status families feel safer in their communities, for example promoting and enacting sanctuary

policies in schools and establishing immigrant defense funds for individuals in legal proceedings.

Furthermore, in order to promote sustainable civic engagement, community-based organizations should emphasize elevating youth voice when creating and carrying out campaigns. Going beyond volunteerism, organizations should discuss root causes, histories, and present-day conflicts over issues health care, education, or immigration. Individuals and funders should not only invest in youth organizing groups and community-based organizations but consider supporting those that operate outside of the nonprofit industrial complex. Investing in health, mutual aid, and wellness programs in the Central Valley can help support immigrant families who have been excluded from COVID-19 relief efforts and many federal and state programs over the years. As the potential for intergenerational organizing and community building grows, CBOs and organizing groups may consider extending organizational support to families, parents, and young people who are not eligible for DACA and who need additional resources to thrive and survive. Moreover, as local educational institutions have largely failed to orient youth to politics, it is crucial that state and local leaders take steps to support a more robust civics education, with an emphasis on erecting a proper educational scaffolding for children of immigrants.

Though I concede that this research may not be entirely generalizable as a qualitative cross-case study comparison, questions of localized contexts, participation, and mobilization may extend beyond the Central Valley. This particular study required the use of qualitative methods in order to uncover depth and breadth of

the case studies presented, future research could develop paradigms that cover a greater number of cases and, to the extent possible, deploy quantitative methods to support or challenge findings presented in this study. As mentioned earlier, it may be challenging to convince undocumented immigrants to participate in any sort of survey in politically repressive areas, but building relationships with local community-based organizations and engaging in community-engaged research may allow researchers to bridge this gap and build a foundation of trust with community members (Dobbs et al. 2021; Reyna et al. 2021; Foster and Glass 2017). Future research is also needed in order to untangle how other intersectional identities further contribute to shaping political participation within these localized contexts, including how gender, race, and class can empower or suppress political participation.

For example several interviewees discussed a hostile climate towards lgbtq students and community throughout the Valley. Adolfo who wanted to destigmatize and raise awareness around HIV was quickly shut down by school administrators. Other students expressed concerns around the harassment of LGBTQ students at Centennial high school. For youth from mixed status families who also belong to several communities and intersecting identities, further research may analyze how these overlapping multiply marginalizing identities may propel intersectional mobilization within this localized context (Terriquez 2015a). Additionally as exhibited by Jade's experience with one local nonprofit, gender can greatly the role of Latina immigrants and Latinas from mixed status families, as their bodies are policed, politicized and made to fit within a certain narrative by societal forces (Escobar

2016). At the same time Jade's leadership, (along with several other female youth leaders) also illustrates that women and girls are highly visible and continue to take on leadership roles within the immigrant rights movement (Milkman and Terriquez 2012). Notably the Central Valley is home to diverse immigrant communities including a large Hmong and Punjabi population in various regions. Though not racialized to the same extent as Latinx immigrants, they too have begun to exhibit political power throughout the Valley and strategies may be shaped by the local context. In the future, I hope to expand on this research by exploring other campaigns, intersections, and solidarity building within the Central Valley.

At the same time, the findings from this dissertation will also inform my own decision-making as a leader and advocate in the Central Valley. As this region will continue to be a site of conflict around race and immigration, youth from mixed-status families will continue to act as the vanguard on the front lines of organizing and strategizing. Through my work, I hope to have illuminated how our systems of participation can be better understood when we listen to the experiences of marginalized, disenfranchised communities and how they can have a greater voice in the political process. This dissertation attempts to center and amplify the voices of youth and communities that have been traditionally ignored by politicians and initiative-centered campaigns in this region that has been often overlooked by scholars. Their stories, journeys, and continued resiliency allow us to reimagine vulnerability in the Central Valley and the future to come.

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