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## Latin American Migrants in the Las Vegas Valley: Civic Engagement and Political Participation

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**UNLV**  
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA LAS VEGAS

Institute for Latin American Studies



REPORT 4

**LATIN AMERICAN MIGRANTS IN THE LAS VEGAS VALLEY:** *Civic Engagement and Political Participation*

Series on **LATINO IMMIGRANT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**



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[www.wilsoncenter.org/migrantparticipation](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/migrantparticipation)

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Cover image: A Mexican and a U.S. flag are waved in front of a replica of the Statue of Liberty at the New York New York Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas during the "Day without Immigrants" rally on May 1, 2006. (Photo by Ethan Miller/Getty Images)

**LATIN AMERICAN MIGRANTS  
IN THE LAS VEGAS VALLEY:**  
*Civic Engagement and Political Participation*

A Final Project Report Prepared for  
The Mexico Institute  
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

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*July 2008*



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## PREFACE

This report is part of a series on Latin American immigrant civic and political participation that looks at eight cities around the United States: Charlotte, NC; Chicago, IL; Fresno, CA; Las Vegas, NV; Los Angeles, CA; Omaha, NE; Tucson, AZ and Washington, DC. This series, funded by a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, is part of an initiative, based at the Woodrow Wilson Center, on Latin American immigrant civic and political participation, led by Xóchitl Bada of the University of Illinois at Chicago, Jonathan Fox of the University of California, Santa Cruz, and Andrew Selee at the Woodrow Wilson Center's Mexico Institute. Robert Donnelly is the coordinator of the project, and Kate Brick served as coordinator previously. The reports on each city describe the opportu-

nities and barriers that Latino immigrants face in participating as civic and political actors in cities around the United States. This collection explores recent trends in Latino immigrant integration in the aftermath of the 2006 immigrant civic mobilizations, highlighting both similarities and differences across diverse cities and sectors.

The author of this report, John Tuman, would like to express his thanks to Xóchitl Bada and Jonathan Fox for their comments on the background paper and on the final report. In addition, Tuman would like to thank the following individuals who provided assistance with different parts of the project: Andrew Selee, Sylvia Lazos, Robert Donnelly, Eileen Truax, Leah Florence, Dawn Gearhart, and Marcelino Santiago.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Funded by a grant from the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (with support from the MacArthur Foundation), this project is part of a broader national study that examines Latin American migrants in selected cities in the United States. The goal of the project is to explore patterns of civic engagement and political participation among Latin American migrants and Latinos in the Las Vegas, Nevada, metropolitan area. A secondary, but not less important, goal is to understand the factors that contribute to or inhibit the ability of individuals from Latin America to acquire U.S. citizenship. The issues addressed by this study are highly salient in Nevada and the United States, but they also have relevance to researchers and policy analysts who seek to understand the relationship between civic engagement and different forms of political participation in both a local and a binational context.

John Tuman, Director of the Institute for Latin American Studies, and Associate Professor of Political Science at University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), served as the director of the Las Vegas study. Professor Tuman coordinated his activities with Dr. Xóchitl Bada, a coprincipal investigator for the national study. Research for the project was carried out in three phases. In

the first phase, background research was conducted on the changing demographic structure of Clark County, immigration flows, characteristics of the local labor market, and the involvement of Latinos and Latin American immigrants in interest groups and civic associations. Research from this phase was incorporated into a background paper.

The centerpiece of the project, roundtable discussions, took place during the second phase of the project. The roundtables were held with leaders from migrant associations, immigration rights groups, political parties, religious organizations, and other civic groups. Approximately forty individuals attended. Convened in the fall of 2007 at UNLV, the roundtables generated lively discussions about the binational activities of migrant associations, the contributions of Latino and migrant labor to Nevada's economy, the barriers to and opportunities for Latino political participation, and the challenges facing immigrants who wish to become naturalized citizens.

For the third and final phase of the project, a cross section of leaders of various civic and political organizations was selected for follow-up interviews. Additional data analysis was completed during this phase of the project.

The major findings of the study are:

- Migrant associations from Mexico, Guatemala, and selected Latin American countries are engaged in a variety of civic projects, both in their country of origin and in the Las Vegas metropolitan area. Although systematic data on the effects of these projects are not available, the fragmentary evidence suggests that the activities of these associations are having a positive impact abroad and in the local community.
- Migrant associations have helped some migrants to participate in elections in those countries where absentee voting is permitted. In addition, migrant associations mobilized individuals to participate in immigration protests in Las Vegas in 2006 and, to a lesser extent, in 2007.
- Migrants from Latin America and Latinos are highly involved in some economic interest groups such as unions, but membership levels tend to vary and are concentrated in certain sectors of the local economy, most visibly in hospitality and commercial and residential construction.
- Although the Latino population of Clark County has grown appreciably since 1990, Latino voter registration and voter turnout rates have continued to lag. There are indications that Latino registration and turnout may have increased in the 2008 presidential caucus, but this has not yet been verified by official data.
- Contextual factors, including the standard of living enjoyed by immigrants and the availability of adequate immigration legal services, may play a key role in shaping interest in acquiring U.S. citizenship.

## INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the past twenty years, the Las Vegas metropolitan area has experienced a significant social change. In particular, the demographic composition and structure of the local population has become considerably more diverse. Individuals have migrated to Las Vegas from many states and foreign countries, but migration flows from Mexico and other Latin American countries have clearly played a leading role in reshaping the region's population since the early 1990s.

Although policy makers and civic leaders have come to recognize the importance of migration from Latin America to Las Vegas, the research on immigrants has been, to date, somewhat limited in its focus. The economic contribution made by Latin American migrants<sup>1</sup> to the economy of Clark County and the state of Nevada has been well documented by scholarly research and by commissioned policy studies (e.g., PLAN 2007, Tables 8-10).<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, in other areas, there has been little systematic research on the activities of recent migrants or the policy challenges confronting their local communities.<sup>3</sup> For example, we know little about Latin American civic associations in the Las Vegas metropolitan area and their degree of integration into other interest groups. Likewise, there is little information regarding civic

engagement and political participation among immigrants from Latin America.

In this study, we attempt to make a modest contribution to our understanding of Latin American immigration in Las Vegas by addressing some of the gaps found in the recent policy and research literature. The study is divided into three main parts. Providing background on the social and economic context of Latinos and Latin American immigrants, the first part of the report summarizes recent demographic changes in Clark County,<sup>4</sup> with a focus on growth in the Latino population and migration flows from selected Latin American countries. The first part of the report also provides an analysis of the growth of migrant civic associations, their degree of integration with other interest groups such as unions, and recent patterns of political engagement among Latinos and immigrants from Latin America. The second part of the report discusses key aspects of the study design that followed the background research, including information on the roundtable discussions and interviews that were held with civic and political leaders. The second part of the report also presents additional data and the main findings and policy lessons of the study. Finally, in the Appendix, a detailed summary of each roundtable discussion is provided.

## PART I: BACKGROUND

### Demographic and Migration Trends

The U.S. Census Bureau reported that in the year 2000, 302,143 Latinos resided in Clark County, which represented approximately 22 percent of the county's total population. By the year 2005, the most recent year for which complete data were available, the Latino population had increased to 443,249, or 26 percent of the county's population (U.S. Census Bureau 2007a, b). The total number of Latinos in Clark County grew by 47 percent between 2000 and 2005—the fastest growth rate for any group in the county or the state. The geographic concentration of Latinos in Clark County is largest in North Las Vegas—which has some areas that are 85 percent Latino—and in the eastern parts of Las Vegas, particularly in the vicinity where U.S. Highway 95 and Interstate 15 intersect (see Rothman 2003, 189).<sup>5</sup> The growth trajectory of the Latino population in Clark County is largely consistent with the overall trend among Latinos in the state of Nevada.<sup>6</sup>

Growth in the Latino population has reshaped the composition of Clark County School District (CCSD), the largest school district in Nevada and the fifth largest in the country. Data provided by the Nevada State Department of Education indicate that in 2005, Latino students accounted for 36 per-

cent of all students in the district, an increase of 9 percent over the level in 1999 (calculated from data in Nevada State Department of Education 2000, Tables 3-4; 2006, Tables 3-4). Perhaps more important, at the present time Latinos are the largest minority group in the school district.

As many analysts have noted, a large share of the Latino population in Clark County is comprised of recent migrants and immigrants from Latin America. Forty-four percent of Latinos in Clark County were reported as “foreign born” in 2005 census figures provided by the American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau 2007d)—but only 23 percent of the foreign-born Latino population in the county were naturalized U.S. citizens in 2005.<sup>7</sup> The five largest groups in the foreign-born Latino population (in the year 2005) were from Mexico, El Salvador, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Guatemala. There are significant numbers of recent migrants from other Central American countries (e.g., Nicaragua, Honduras), as well as from Argentina and Colombia (U.S. Census Bureau 2007b). The majority of migrants from Latin America in Clark County have arrived since 1990.

Patterns of migration from selected countries in Latin America to Las Vegas have

been shaped by a number of factors, but economic influences clearly have had the greatest effect on recent migration flows. In many home countries of migrants, such as Mexico, Argentina, El Salvador, and Guatemala, recent economic performance has been lackluster. As a result, the number of jobs created in the formal sector<sup>8</sup> in these economies has not kept pace with the growth in the workforce (particularly for young workers), creating moderate to high levels of unemployment and underemployment (Tuman 2000a). Claims that economic liberalization and regional economic integration would lead to higher real wages throughout Latin America have proven to be unfounded. Indeed, despite high levels of foreign direct investment and increasing exports to the United States, annual growth in real average wages in manufacturing has been flat (or even negative) for the past twenty years in many Latin American countries (see, for example, Tuman 2000b, Table 7; Tuman 2003, Table 6.4; ECLAC 2005, Tables 29, 50). In Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, and some of the other Central American countries, a lack of access to arable land, poverty, competition from cheap agricultural imports, and political strife have also induced many in the countryside to choose out-migration as an economic survival strategy.

The reason that people from Latin America choose Las Vegas as a destination city is relatively obvious. The economy of the Las Vegas valley offers job opportunities that are attractive to many migrants. Although their skill sets and backgrounds vary, it is estimated that many recent Latin American migrants in Las Vegas are young and have relatively low levels of education attainment. Such individuals are well matched to the requirements for entry-level jobs that are abundant in high-growth sectors of the local economy, including ser-

vices, construction, and wholesale/retail trade. It is thus unsurprising that in 2005, migrants from Latin America represented 55 percent of the workforce in the construction industry, 21 percent of the combined wholesale and retail trade workforce, and 9 percent of the overall private service workforce, in Clark County.<sup>9</sup> Although more refined data on the hospitality sector are not available, anecdotal reports suggest that there is a large concentration of the Latino migrant community in certain occupations, including room cleaning and food service (Rothman 2003; see also Pratt 2002). The relatively high rate of unionization<sup>10</sup> in certain sectors has had a beneficial effect on the living standards of migrants. Indeed, the strategic decision of the leadership of the Culinary Union Local 226 to embrace Latin American workers in the hospitality sector has helped many of these workers to obtain better wages, access to health care, and other important services.

### **CIVIC ASSOCIATIONS AND INTEREST GROUPS**

As the Latino population in Clark County has grown, there has been an increase in the number of civic associations and interest groups that have formed in order to address issues in the Latino and migrant communities.<sup>11</sup> In general, groups in the community tend to fall into one of three categories. The first type, which includes groups and associations that focus on economic interests and issues, has members from a cross section of the Latino population and engages in a variety of different activities ranging from issue advocacy to civic projects.

One of the oldest and most prominent economic interest groups is the Latino Chamber of Commerce (LCC). Created in the 1970s, the LCC has its roots in a political coalition that was formed to challenge inequalities in

the provision of social services, including education and welfare benefits, to Latinos in Clark County.<sup>12</sup> Initially, Cuban Americans assumed prominent positions in the leadership of the LCC, but over time, business owners from a variety of different backgrounds have joined their ranks. At the present time, the LCC has an estimated membership of thirteen hundred<sup>13</sup> and provides financial support for variety of civic projects, including a workforce training center and internships for Latino students. It has also advocated for the awarding of more government contracts to minority-owned business, while strongly supporting the need for immigration reform.<sup>14</sup> Significantly, the LCC has also made attempts to build bridges to civic associations that represent migrants from Latin America. Whether such efforts have helped to facilitate the integration of migrants in the broader Latino community remains unclear, however.

The Culinary Union Local 226 is an equally important interest group in the local economy.<sup>15</sup> First organized in 1936, the union has experienced a dramatic increase in membership since the mid-1980s. At the present time, the union estimates that it has approximately sixty thousand members, of which about half are Latino. Although reliable figures on the number of migrant union members are not available, many analysts have suggested that a significant share of the Latino membership is composed of recent migrants from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and other Central American countries. Beyond its traditional activities of representing workers' economic interests through collective bargaining and workforce training,<sup>16</sup> the Culinary Union has also come to play a significant role in the policy area of immigration reform. For example, since 2001, the union has teamed with several other civic organizations to support The Citizenship Project, a non-

profit organization that provides free services to immigrants who are applying to become U.S. citizens. Given the increasing administrative costs and complex paperwork associated with citizenship applications, the work done by The Citizenship Project has proven to be extremely useful in helping some migrants transition to citizenship.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the union has consistently raised the issue of immigration reform with political candidates visiting Las Vegas. Likewise, in 2006, the Culinary Union helped to organize the May 1 immigration protest and rally on the Las Vegas "strip."

Latinos and migrants from Latin America are also active in other unions in southern Nevada. Concentrated in the skilled trades of commercial construction,<sup>18</sup> the Laborer's Union has a large number of Latinos and migrant workers in Las Vegas. Union officials estimate that of the fifty-six hundred current members, approximately 65 to 70 percent are Latino, with the vast majority being recent migrants primarily from Mexico, and, to a lesser extent, from Guatemala and El Salvador; forty percent of the union's leadership is Latino.<sup>19</sup> Although the Laborer's Union is not active in the area of immigration politics, it does provide workers with apprenticeship and training programs that help to upgrade skill levels, with attendant consequences for earnings potential.<sup>20</sup> Latinos are also well represented in other segments of the construction trades. During the latter part of the 1990s, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers launched a major organizing campaign with the Southern Nevada Building and Construction Trades Council to unionize roofers, cement masons, carpenters, and day laborers in residential and light commercial construction. At its peak, the campaign had forty organizers (including organizers who were fluent in Spanish), and it worked actively with migrant workers from Latin America on

a form of social movement unionism that saw protests, prayer vigils, civil disobedience, and corporate campaigns (Palladino 2007, 214-15). The results of the effort were impressive: the campaign unionized some three thousand new members (a 14 percent increase), many of whom were Latino and Latin American migrants (*ibid.*, 215, 217). Due partly to these efforts, organized labor continues to have an important presence among Latino workers in the residential construction industry. Likewise, officials in the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) union (Local 711) noted that many union members are Latinos, although the officials could not provide any estimate of the percentage. Despite the presence of Latinos in its membership base, the local affiliate of the UFCW has not been active in the local immigration debate; indeed, a union official stated, “I’m not sure what our position is on immigration. You should probably check the website of the International.”<sup>21</sup>

In addition to economic interest groups, there are a number of civic associations that represent migrants from selected countries in Latin America. To varying degrees, these associations support public works projects in the “home” country while sponsoring events locally in order to promote cultural cohesion among group members. By most accounts, membership in these groups has stimulated civic participation among migrants from Latin America. Because there is no state or local registry of migrant civic associations, it is difficult to estimate with a high degree of confidence the number of such associations found in the Las Vegas metropolitan area. Based upon information obtained from registries in Mexico and from other sources, it would appear that the largest number of associations are from Mexico, and, as in other parts of the United States, each association tends to be organized around

migrants from a particular state in Mexico. At present, there are at least nine Mexican associations in Las Vegas that represent migrants from Michoacán, Colima, Hidalgo, Guadalajara, Jalisco, Puebla, Durango, Chihuahua, and Zacatecas (Los Dos Méxicos 2007). Part II of this report provides more details on the civic projects that these groups have undertaken in Mexico and the United States.

Migrants from selected Central American countries have also formed civic associations. Created in 2002, El Comité de Unidad Guatemalteco (COMUGUA—Guatemalan Unity Committee) is the major civic association representing Guatemalans who reside in the Las Vegas valley. Like many Mexican hometown associations, COMUGUA has sponsored festivals, helped migrants obtain important services from the Guatemalan government, and sent funds back to Guatemala to support humanitarian projects (Tuman and Gearhart, forthcoming). As Thomas Wright and Jesse Moody observe, efforts in the Salvadoran community to sustain civic associations have proven to be difficult. One recent association, the Fundación Salvadoreña, has sought to assist members with voter registration and other services, but it apparently has a low level of visibility in the local community (Wright and Moody 2005, 259).

Finally, there are a variety of different faith-based and nonprofit organizations that have started to serve Latin American migrants in the Las Vegas metropolitan area. For example, the Catholic Charities of Southern Nevada currently provides a range of services to migrants and refugees, including job placement, English language training, and assistance with immigration issues. In recent years, however, migrants from Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador have also started attending Evangelical churches such as Iglesia Bautista Monte Horeb, Iglesia Bautista

El Refugio, and Iglesia Amistad Cristiana Evangélica. At least one of these churches—the latter—has also become active in coordinating services in Spanish and in the indigenous languages spoken by some migrants from Mexico. In addition, some nonprofit organizations, such as the Immigration Clinic administered by the UNLV Law School, have started providing assistance to individuals who are interested in applying for naturalization.<sup>22</sup>

## **POLITICS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

### **Conventional Political Participation.**

Despite the large increase in the Latino population of Nevada and Clark County, voter registration and turnout among Latinos has lagged and not kept pace with the group's population growth. Some estimates suggest that Latinos represent at least 13 percent of the state's electorate, yet only 55 percent of the eligible Latino population (83,000 out of an estimated 151,000) is registered to vote in Nevada (U.S. Census Bureau 2007d, Table 4-A; Hagar 2007).

The level of voter registration and turnout among Latinos in Clark County is slightly lower than the estimated level in the state. The data on Latino voter registration for the 2008 presidential caucuses remain provisional due to deletions of inactive voters from registration lists (see Part II). As a result, the most reliable data come from 2007. Figures provided by the Clark County Election Department<sup>23</sup> suggest that in 2007, there were 75,122 Hispanic voters registered, which represents an estimated 45 percent of the Latino population in the county that is eligible to vote.<sup>24</sup> In the November 2006 election, Latino turnout in Clark County, as measured by the number voting as share of

the Latino population eligible to vote, was only 17 percent, while turnout as a share of all registered Latino voters was 39 percent.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, neither state nor county electoral data are refined enough to allow one to know what share of the Latino vote in Nevada or in Clark County is from naturalized citizens from Latin America.

The number of Latinos from Las Vegas and Clark County elected to positions in federal, state, county, or municipal government is not reflective of the group's weight in the electorate or in the population more generally. Improvements, while slow, are nonetheless visible. The 2006 election was significant in that it marked the second time a candidate of Latino background (Catherine Cortez-Masto) was elected attorney general, a statewide constitutional office.<sup>26</sup> The picture in the state legislature was more modest. Following the 2006 state elections, there was a net gain of only one seat for a Latino elected to the Nevada State Assembly, bringing the total number of Latinos in the assembly to two (both representatives are members of the Democratic Party). The number of Latino state senators remained unchanged at one (also a member of the Democratic Party). All three Latinos serving in the state legislature are from districts located in Clark County, and at least one representative—Rubén Kihuen, a naturalized citizen originally from Guadalajara, Mexico—has strong roots in the Mexican migrant community of Las Vegas. Latino representatives in the state legislature have been in a unique position to voice their concerns in Nevada's immigration debate, but it remains unclear if their presence in state politics has helped to facilitate interest in citizenship and voting among recent migrants from Latin America.<sup>27</sup>

Mindful of the need to elect more Latinos to office, civic leaders from a variety of differ-



ent associations have worked with local party organizations to identify more individuals of Latino background to run for office (see Bowers 2006, 38). These efforts have resulted in an increase in the number of Latino candidates running for office as both Democrats and Republicans since the year 2000. Nevertheless, the divisions that exist in the community have hampered efforts to elect more Latinos to office. Recent survey data suggest that the immigration question may create more cohesiveness among Latinos in Clark County and the state, with the effect of boosting turnout and increasing the number of Latinos elected to office.<sup>28</sup>

In 2007, leaders in the local Democratic and Republican Party organizations stated that they were making efforts to reach out to Latino voters—including migrants who have become naturalized citizens—in the 2008 presidential caucuses in Nevada. The Democratic Party hoped to contact Latinos by advertising at local soccer games and cultural events. The Culinary Union and the state AFL-CIO also indicated that they would have union members educate other members of their family about how the caucus works; this may prove to be important for migrants who come from countries that have no tradition of caucusing (Pratt 2007). Meanwhile, the leadership of the state Republican Party suggested that it would make similar efforts to integrate Latinos into the political process. In August of 2008, maybe as a last minute-strategy to support Barack Obama's candidacy among the Latino community, the Nevada Democratic Party decided to hire Emilia Pablo Montaña, a naturalized citizen born in Oaxaca as Press Secretary. Prior to this position, Emilia worked as a reporter and news producer for the 6pm News at Univision Las Vegas.

Thus far, we have explored recent patterns of electoral turnout and candidate emergence among Latinos and migrants in elections in Nevada and Clark County. It is important to note, however, that migrants from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Peru are also given the opportunity to cast absentee ballots in their home country while they are residing in the United States. In some cases, absentee voting is compulsory. For example, migrants from Peru residing in Las Vegas (and other U.S. cities) have been threatened with a US\$60 fine for not voting in national elections in Peru.<sup>29</sup> Regardless of the rules governing absentee voting, it has been suggested that absentee turnout has made a difference in recent elections in Latin America.<sup>30</sup> In 2006, some Mexicans residing in the Las Vegas metropolitan area were contacted by national party organizations in Mexico (e.g., the Partido Acción Nacional [PAN], and the Partido de la Revolución Democrática, [PRD]) prior to the vote. Significantly, several hometown associations in Las Vegas organized in order to provide coordinated assistance and information to Mexican nationals about the requirements for electoral registration and absentee voting (Pratt 2005). Data provided by the Federal Electoral Institute (Instituto Federal Electoral [IFE]) suggest that in 2006, a total of 581 Mexicans residing in Clark County attempted to register in order to receive an absentee ballot. Unfortunately, the IFE data do not provide a further breakdown of the results of the voting from Clark County (IFE 2007).

Even when migrants are barred from casting absentee ballots from the United States, they may still be drawn into electoral campaigns from their country of origin. This pattern is evident among Guatemalans residing in Las Vegas. As a Guatemalan migrant who works in

the hospitality industry in Las Vegas observed recently:

*The Guatemalans living in Las Vegas are in tune with what is happening back in their homeland...for every Guatemalan in Las Vegas, you can multiply that times four to eight voters he or she can influence back in Guatemala. The power of the remittances to influence how family members should vote cannot be underestimated (cited in Tuman and Gearhart, forthcoming).*

Given the potential significance of labor remittances, politicians in Guatemala have stepped up efforts to reach Guatemalan expatriates living in Las Vegas and other cities in the United States. In 2007, for example, a number of candidates in the Guatemalan presidential race contacted migrant groups in Las Vegas and other cities in order to let civic leaders know where each candidate stood on proposed immigration plans in the United States. Likewise, Otto Perez Molina, a former general who ran for president unsuccessfully as a candidate of the Patriot Party, visited Las Vegas in 2007 in the hopes of garnering support for his campaign in Guatemala.<sup>31</sup>

### Unconventional Political Participation.

As many analysts have noted, a large number of Latinos and Latin American immigrants mobilized and engaged in protests in Las Vegas and in other metropolitan areas in 2006. The main issue motivating the protests was immigration reform. Paralleling the activism of the late 1960s, Latino students in the Clark County School District were among the first to initiate political action. On March 31, 2006—César Chávez Day—an estimated twenty-eight hundred middle and high school students from

nineteen schools in the district walked out of their classrooms and convened for a protest at the county courthouse (Lazos 2006, 2007). Subsequently, in April, UNLV students from Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MECHA), Student Organization of Latinos (SOL), and Women's Studies coordinated activities with high school students for additional protests along with a well-formulated set of political demands; some thirty-five hundred attended, including workers, students, and parents (Lazos 2006).<sup>32</sup>

As movement activism gained momentum in other major metropolitan areas, including Chicago and Los Angeles, key stakeholders in Las Vegas became involved in organizing an immigration march and protest on May 1. Significantly, however, there was little coordination or planning among various group leaders and members prior to the protest; some Mexican hometown associations and civic leaders used a variety of media (cell phones, e-mail, etc.) to try to encourage a wide boycott and protest, while the Culinary Union attempted to limit the economic impact of any planned action (Pratt 2006). Leaders of the union, who estimate that about half of its membership is Latino, negotiated with casino owners to allow a protest along the key part of the Las Vegas "strip" (i.e., on Las Vegas Boulevard, between Sahara and Flamingo Boulevards) during the evening of May 1, 2006. The union's proposal was controversial, however, because it required members who had day-shift assignments to report for work while allowing everyone to attend the evening march without employer reprisals. Some radio show hosts and members of Mexican hometown associations characterized the union's position as an unnecessary compromise, and urged union members and workers to boycott work altogether on May 1.<sup>33</sup> In response, fifteen Latino supermarkets

shut down, and some workers did not report to work. Estimates of the total size of the union-sponsored rally vary, with media reports putting the figure at forty-five thousand, and scholarly reports estimating attendance at sixty-three thousand (Lazos 2006, 2007). Although we lack good data on the structure and composition of the May 1 protest, some evidence suggests that participants included recent migrants as well as migrants who had lived here many years and Latinos who were born in the United States.

One of the instructive lessons of the 2006 protests in Las Vegas has to do with the role of migrant civic associations in promoting unconventional political participation. Although economic interest groups such as the Culinary Union were active in organizing the largest protests on May 1, migrant civic associations—including several Mexican hometown associations and members of COMUGUA—also played an important role in disseminating information and providing resources to the participants in several protests (Tuman and Gearhart, forthcoming). The involvement of migrant associations in the movement represented a departure from their traditional activities. As noted, migrant associations in Las Vegas have traditionally supported public works projects in their country of origin, helped migrants to obtain local services, and organized events with a view to maintaining cultural cohesion among individuals in the community. Recognizing the potential influence of labor remittances sent by migrants in the United States, political candidates running for office in Mexico and Guatemala have, at times, coordinated campaign stops in Las Vegas with migrant groups. Mexican hometown associations have also helped migrants in Las Vegas with the process of absentee voting in Mexican elections. Beyond such activities,

it has been rare—until recently—for migrant associations to become explicitly involved in local politics in Nevada or in national politics in the United States. Viewed from this angle, then, the activities of various migrant organizations in the protests was novel and suggestive of a potential linkage between civic participation and political engagement; whether such linkages lead members of migrant organizations to seek U.S. citizenship and voting remains an open question. Part II of the report investigates this issue in more detail.

### **POLICY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

Although the recent migrants and immigrants from Latin American who reside in the Las Vegas valley come from a variety of different countries and backgrounds, many face a number of common challenges. Despite the paucity of survey data on attitudes among the local migrant population, evidence gleaned from the media and advocacy organization reports points to the salience of at least three issues.

Similar to other cities that have large concentrations of migrants from Latin America, there has been concern about improving the security of the various migrant communities found in the Las Vegas metropolitan area. Many migrants are suspicious of the local police force and, as a consequence, they frequently fail to report crimes that have been committed against them. One particular problem has been so-called payday robberies. Lacking sufficient documentation to open bank accounts in the United States, many migrants use check cashing services when they receive wage payments from employers. After having cashed their paychecks, some migrants have been robbed in very close proximity to the check cashing stores. Although associations representing Latino police officers have tried to assure

migrants that reporting such crimes to the Las Vegas metropolitan police force will not lead to immigration enforcement, it is estimated that many payday robberies are not reported. In this context, civic leaders have called attention to the need to improve relations between migrant communities and the local police.<sup>34</sup>

Advocacy organizations that represent migrant workers have also called attention to the need to improve and enforce basic labor standards for migrant workers in Las Vegas and other areas of the United States. As is well known, employers have frequently taken advantage of the precarious legal position of migrant workers who are not represented by unions. The violations of basic labor laws and standards vary, but they have included requiring migrants to work overtime without pay, garnishing wages for employer-related costs (in plain violation of the law), failing to pay wages, and failing to provide adequate safety equipment and training for work that is frequently hazardous.<sup>35</sup>

In addition, although it has been estimated that in 2005, Latin American migrant workers paid some \$1.6 billion in state and local taxes in Nevada and \$2.6 billion in federal taxes (PLAN 2007), the rules governing many social programs exclude migrants from coverage. For example, Latin American migrants (and their children) in Nevada are prohibited from receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families

(TANF), state-subsidized health insurance for children, food stamps, federal housing assistance, and Social Security. For many migrants, addressing these inequities remains central to any discussion of immigration reform in the United States.

Finally, and perhaps most important, migrants have called upon policy makers in Washington to move quickly on implementing reforms to U.S. immigration policies. Some migrants have voiced concern over the recent increase in administrative fees associated with the application for U.S. citizenship. Likewise, there is widespread concern that recent federal efforts to enforce immigration laws (e.g., Social Security number enforcement) will result in a new round of deportations in the local community. In addition, the anti-immigration backlash, which has gained momentum in many municipalities throughout the United States in recent months, has reached cities close to Las Vegas, including Pahrump, Nevada. Echoing demands made in the 2006 immigration protests, there is interest in a comprehensive immigration reform plan that would legalize the working status of Latin American migrants in the United States, provide them with coverage under all applicable federal and state labor laws and safety regulations, and provide a mechanism for securing U.S. citizenship.

## PART II:

### Discerning Emerging Trends in Civic Engagement, Political Participation, and Paths Toward Citizenship

Having discussed the background research on the context and setting of Latin American immigration in Las Vegas, we turn now to an analysis of the findings that emerged from the second phase of the project (roundtable discussions and follow-up interviews that were conducted with community and civic leaders). One of the principal objectives of this phase of the project was to assess the degree of civic engagement among Latin American migrants in the Las Vegas metropolitan area. The roundtables and follow-up interviews were also intended to generate more information about patterns of conventional and unconventional political participation among Latinos, to analyze the barriers to attaining citizenship, and to understand how immigrants view their contributions to the local and state economy. This section begins with a description of the roundtable discussions and the follow-up interviews that were conducted, followed by a summary of the major findings and lessons that emerged from the study; a summary of the roundtable discussions is provided in the Appendix of the report.

#### OVERVIEW: CONSIDERATIONS IN DESIGNING THE ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS AND INTERVIEWS

As one step in developing a better understanding of civic engagement, political participation, and policy challenges, the project team decided to organize a meeting of civic leaders and other stakeholders in the community. In 2007, for several months prior to meeting, John Tuman, local coordinator of the project, worked with Xóchitl Bada, a coprincipal investigator, to develop a list of invitees. In developing the list, Tuman also sought the advice of faculty at UNLV and individuals from local service organizations who have had experience working in the policy areas of immigration and Latino political participation. The project team approved a tentative list of participants in August 2007, and invitations were sent shortly thereafter. A background paper was provided to conference participants.

Held on September 21, 2007, the roundtable discussions included participants from government, local party organizations, organized labor, business, religious organizations, the media, migrant associations, immigration rights' organizations, and the university com-

munity. Simultaneous interpretation (from English to Spanish, and Spanish to English) facilitated the flow of discussion among participants. Summarized in the Appendix, the roundtable discussions generated lively and at times spirited discussions about a variety of issues and problems that are facing Latinos and migrants from Latin America.

After the conclusion of the roundtable discussions, individuals were selected for follow-up interviews. The individuals selected for analysis included a cross-section of leaders from migrant associations, the labor movement, immigrant rights' organizations, political groups and state party organizations, and the media. The information yielded by these interviews, when combined with findings of the roundtable discussion, gives rise to a number of tentative conclusions related to: (a) patterns of civic engagement among migrant associations, (b) recent trends in political participation among Latinos, and (c) the barriers to naturalization.

### **CIVIC PARTICIPATION: ENGAGEMENT ABROAD, ENGAGEMENT IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY**

The findings of the study suggest that migrant associations in the Las Vegas metropolitan area are engaged in a variety of binational projects. However, there is some variation in the frequency, size, and scope of each association's binational initiatives. Among the Mexican hometown associations, the Michoacán federation, which has approximately two thousand members and represents twelve local clubs, would appear to have the most well organized and sustained program of financial support for humanitarian projects in the state of Michoacán.<sup>36</sup> In early 2008, the Michoacán associations in the United States were collec-

tively supporting some fifty programs in that state.<sup>37</sup> Significantly, some representatives from the local federation in Las Vegas have been involved in municipal-level negotiations in Michoacán concerning how funds will be allocated.<sup>38</sup> Other Mexican hometown associations (e.g., the Chihuahua and Guadalajara federations) have provided financial support for programs abroad as well. For example, a leader from the Chihuahua federation noted:

*From November 8 to 11 [2007], the Chihuahua association participated as community liaison with the Las Vegas Fair held at Freedom Park. The proceeds earned by the association from the event were donated in their entirety to Emmanuel Children's Home in Juárez, Mexico, a self-sustained orphanage and free-of-charge childcare facility.<sup>39</sup>*

COMUGUA has also raised funds to buy poor children in Guatemala reading glasses and provides financial support to some municipalities that have a high prevalence of poverty.<sup>40</sup>

Although it is beyond the scope of this project to assess the effects of financial donations made by migrant associations in the United States, it is worth noting that some clearly believe that such programs are helping people in Mexico. As one leader from the Guadalajara association commented, the poverty alleviation achieved by individual and collective remittances from the United States "is preventing a civil war from breaking out in Mexico!"<sup>41</sup> Likewise, a leader of the Michoacán federation suggested that the financial support provided by the clubs in the United States is mitigating the effects of social exclusion and poverty in Mexico.

Fragmentary evidence from the study suggests that Latin American migrant associations are engaged in civic projects in the local

community as well. Some groups work in a variety of domains at the local level, while others have had a narrower focus. For example, the Michoacán federation—which holds meetings every eight days—found that some individuals were having difficulty obtaining services with only one form of official identification, the consular-issued identification card. Financial institutions, clinics, stores, and other service providers may require a second form of official identification. To address this problem, the federation has been working with individuals to obtain birth certificates and other documents for a second form of identification.<sup>42</sup> The Michoacán federation also sponsors English and citizenship classes, organizes Día de los Muertos celebrations, and participates in international food festivals and other cultural activities.<sup>43</sup>

The Chihuahua federation is active in a number of areas. The association has participated in local cultural events (e.g., Winchester Cultural Center’s “Life in Death Festival”), organizes workshops on immigration and naturalization, coordinates some activities with local faith-based associations (e.g., Christ the King), and provides counseling services to couples and families that are having emotional difficulties. Through a cooperative arrangement with the Mexican consulate, the Chihuahua federation is also working on organizing a meeting of all hometown associations to discuss immigration and other pressing issues, including “the real estate crisis, domestic violence, youth pregnancy, gangs, school truancy, and so on. We hope to launch this campaign soon, mostly utilizing spots on Spanish media.”<sup>44</sup>

The Hidalgo federation, by contrast, has concentrated its recent efforts on providing advice and assistance to workers in the home construction industry who have been displaced as a result of the severe crisis in the housing

industry in Las Vegas.<sup>45</sup> The Guadalajara association appears to have a more limited focus as well.

## POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NEVADA

As noted in Part I of this report and in the summary of the roundtable discussions, a large number of Latinos and migrants from Latin America participated in the immigration protests in Las Vegas in 2006. Members in the Mexican and Guatemalan migrant associations also participated in the 2006 and 2007 immigration protests, although leaders of the migrant associations had major disagreements with the Culinary Union Local 226 over political strategy. One question that emerged from the background research and from the roundtable discussions was whether political activism in the immigration protests would translate into conventional participation in 2008 and, if so, which organizations might play a role in increasing voter registration and electoral turnout among Latinos.<sup>46</sup>

Analysis of the follow-up interviews and subsequent research revealed that a major drive was underway to boost voter registration and turnout for the 2008 caucuses and federal presidential election. Local party organizations, nonpartisan groups, and the labor movement were a key part of this initiative. In the follow-up interviews, an official with the Nevada Democratic Party noted, “we did do a fair amount of advertising in order to reach out to Hispanics” before the 2008 caucus. The official elaborated:

*We created two different posters in Spanish that sought to inform Hispanics on the caucus. They were distributed to various Hispanic businesses and meeting places. Also, we ran Spanish-language radio ads to*



*further reach out to the community through [that] medium. We also did multiple literature drops to Hispanic neighborhoods, giving them information on mock caucuses, temporary chair trainings and the caucus itself... Another opportunity we had was to sponsor our... own local soccer team, Los Democratas, in order to reach out to Hispanics through the very popular sport. In its initial season, the team was captained by Assemblyman Ruben Kihuen, one of two Hispanic Assemblymen for Nevada in the legislature. The soccer games allowed us to register Hispanics to vote and gave us the opportunity to discuss the caucus with them.*<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada (PLAN) distributed information on the 2008 presidential caucus in neighborhoods that had a high concentration of Latino households.<sup>48</sup> The group Hispanics in Politics held several breakfast meetings with small groups of Latino voters, “conducted a radio interview once a week on ‘Miguel in the Morning’ and AM 1340 in the afternoon, and ran an advertisement weekly in *El Mundo* supporting Latino voter turnout.”<sup>49</sup> In addition, the local Spanish-language television stations, including Univisión and Telemundo, “were very active in covering the caucus process.”<sup>50</sup>

The efforts of economic interest groups and political organizations to increase Latino voter registration and participation were partly tailored to reach Latin American immigrants who had recently become U.S. citizens. For example, staff in the Culinary Union Local 226 “encouraged [Latino] members to become citizens and to register to vote.”<sup>51</sup> The union also held numerous bilingual training sessions in order to educate their members about how the caucus process works. Similarly, since May 2007, PLAN has had staff at the federal

courthouse in Las Vegas to assist people who have just become citizens to register to vote.<sup>52</sup> PLAN uses the address information provided on registration forms to send additional mailings about the caucus and voting more generally to recently naturalized citizens from Latin America.

The evidence also suggests that some Mexican hometown associations have been highly involved with other groups to help mobilize the Latino vote in the 2008 presidential caucuses (and in the general election). For example, the Michoacán federation reported working extensively with the Nevada Democratic Party, with State Representative Ruben Kihuen, and with staff in U.S. Senator Harry Reid’s office on a Latino voter registration drive.<sup>53</sup> Likewise, the Guadalajara association has sought to form a large voting bloc among members who are eligible to vote. Members of the Guadalajara association have also undertaken a letter-writing campaign to elected officials in the United States and Mexico, urging them to move forward on immigration reform. A similar pattern was evident in the activities of the Chihuahua federation. One leader stated, “The Chihuahua association instructed our members who are eligible to vote and encouraged them to do so, making them aware [that] this particular election is historical in its context as Nevada’s future participation in the primary and caucus process.”<sup>54</sup> Leaders of the Chihuahua federation also distributed flyers, in Spanish, about

*a nonpartisan “caucus workshop” sponsored by AFSCME Local 4041... on Friday, January 18th, from 11 am to 1 pm. Two one-hour workshops were held with an excellent attendance. The... Chihuahua association was involved both in coordinating and securing meeting space as well as getting the*



*word out among other associations, Christ the King Hispanic Group, and the Mexican consulate facilities.<sup>55</sup>*

Levels of contact and cooperation between migrant associations and other interest and political groups were not, however, uniform in the period preceding the 2008 caucus. Although the Culinary Union and PLAN coordinated some activities on voter registration to reach recently naturalized Latinos, neither group worked directly with any of the Mexican hometown associations or with groups that represent migrants from other Latin American countries.<sup>56</sup> When queried about this, an official from the Culinary Union suggested that in the aftermath of the 2006 immigration protests, which saw strong divisions between the Culinary Union and some of the Latin American migrant associations, the union did not view the hometown associations as strategic partners.<sup>57</sup> An immigrant rights' organizer that works with some Mexican hometown associations said that people she works with remain distrustful of the union.<sup>58</sup> Officials from Hispanics in Politics also noted that they did not work directly with hometown associations, but this appeared to reflect a lack of knowledge about how to contact these organizations.<sup>59</sup>

Several individuals commented that efforts to increase Latino voter registration and participation were effective.<sup>60</sup> As one civic leader noted, the results of the caucuses were:

*Incredible, broke whatever records there were to break. Additionally, we were able to bring many new voters into the process likely to turn out in November. In my opinion, we did right by the people... The talk on the radio has been very positive. People got involved in strong number... I believe people appreciated our efforts to get out the vote in*

*the Latino community. Many people wanted to get involved, but didn't know how. We are helping with this. Our biggest goal was to show people that they could support whatever candidate they chose, no matter what anyone would say or do to influence them.<sup>61</sup>*

Positive assessments aside, the available data do not yet suggest any clear conclusions about the effects of the recent drive to increase Latino voter registration and turnout in Las Vegas for the Nevada caucuses. The official voter registration data suggest that between June 2007 and February 2008 there was a small net decline in the number of active registered Latino voters in Clark County, from 75,122 to 74,990;<sup>62</sup> the number registered in early 2008 represented an estimated 45 percent of the Latino population in Clark County that is eligible to vote.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, these figures may not represent the real level of Latino voter registration. Officials in the Clark County Elections Department noted that in December 2007, approximately seventy-four thousand voters who had not voted in two consecutive federal elections, or whose address could not be verified, were moved from active to inactive registration status; some Latino voters were affected by this action. In addition, the Democratic Party registered approximately thirty thousand new voters on the day of the Nevada caucus. As of February 2008, officials had only processed about one-half of these new registration forms. After these new registration applications are completed, the total number of active Latino voters will probably be higher than the figures from mid-2007.<sup>64</sup>

What do the data suggest about Latino turnout in the Nevada caucuses? Unfortunately, at the present time, there are no official data on the number of Latinos who participated in the Democratic and Republican Party caucuses.

Officials in the state party organizations indicated that they were using estimates of Latino turnout based on exit poll data for the entire state from CNN<sup>65</sup> and other news organizations. Utilizing the exit poll data, the following tendencies can be discerned: Latino turnout in Nevada was approximately 15 and 8 percent, respectively, of total turnout in the Democratic and Republican caucuses throughout the state; the combined Latino turnout in Nevada in the 2008 caucuses, as a share of those Latinos in the state who are eligible to vote, was 14 percent, while turnout as a share of those Latinos registered in Nevada was 25 percent. Compared to the 2004 caucuses—which saw only 1 percent of the state’s eligible voters participating<sup>66</sup>—the Latino turnout in Nevada during the 2008 caucuses almost certainly increased over turnout levels of 2004. Still, these findings are tentative and should be interpreted with caution. First, although Clark County turnout accounts for a large share of the state’s total vote, the lack of detailed county-level data<sup>67</sup> limits our ability to analyze with more precision the effects of efforts to increase Latino turnout in the Las Vegas metropolitan area. Second, the data are not sufficiently refined to allow one to estimate how much of the Latino vote is comprised of recently naturalized U.S. citizens (I elaborate more on this point in the conclusion of this report).

### **THE BARRIERS TO AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR NATURALIZATION**

Although a number of policy issues were highlighted in the background research for this study (see Part I), the follow-up research revealed that naturalization remains a highly

salient issue to members of the local community. The findings of this project are potentially revealing about the barriers that Latin American migrants face as they seek to become naturalized citizens. A combination of rising application fees, changes to the English proficiency exam, and other administrative problems are well known barriers that many immigrants face, regardless of whether they are located in the Las Vegas metropolitan area or in other cities. Nevertheless, as suggested in the roundtable discussions, there are other background factors that impede, or facilitate, the naturalization process. Of these background conditions, three are noteworthy.

First, given the complexities of immigration law and regulations, it is extremely important for applicants to have access to qualified legal staff to review their file prior to the beginning of the naturalization process. In the Las Vegas metropolitan area, there is a lack of legal service providers (who are proficient in Spanish) to provide this kind of assistance to low- and moderate-income individuals from Latin America. Second, when immigrants from Latin America obtain jobs that provide economic security and mobility, they tend to have stronger ties to the community and greater interest in U.S. citizenship. In the local labor market, the existence of economic interest groups such as the Culinary Union has been key to helping immigrants find jobs that provide economic security.<sup>68</sup> Finally, there is some evidence that as members of migrant associations experience a sense of efficacy through their participation in local service projects, they develop greater interest in becoming permanent members of the local community.<sup>69</sup>

## CONCLUSION:

### Suggestions for Further Research

This study has offered a brief overview of the contemporary situation of Latin American migrants who reside in the Las Vegas metropolitan area. The findings suggest that there has been a large increase in the Latino population of Clark County and Las Vegas, with much of the recent growth due to immigration from Latin America. The analysis also suggests that migration from Latin America stems from economic problems throughout the region, including low levels of economic growth in some countries, lack of access to land, a concentration of young people in the labor market, and lack of job creation in the formal sector of the economy. In this economic context, there are strong pressures for out-migration from selected countries to the United States. At the same time, the relative abundance of low-skilled jobs in construction, hospitality, and other service sectors in Las Vegas has made the metropolitan area attractive to many recent migrants from Mexico, Central America, and other countries in Latin America. Although migrants are a diverse group, they face a common set of challenges after they arrive in the United States, regardless of whether they reside in Las Vegas or in other medium-to-large-size cities.

One implication of the findings has to do with the orientation of civic participation among recent migrants and the associations that represent them. As noted, migrant civic associations in Las Vegas tend to be concentrated among people from Mexico and Guatemala. To the extent that these associations support public works projects and other charitable causes in the country of origin of group members, their activities might reasonably be viewed as partly oriented toward Latin America. Nevertheless, some group activities—such as support of local festivals, coordination of services (e.g., adult literacy), and other projects—would appear to be associated with local civic participation. What remains unclear, however, is whether such local civic participation facilitates the social integration of migrants and encourages them to seek citizenship in the United States.

A broader implication of the study concerns the relationship between membership in a migrant civic association and political participation. Although this project has advanced our understanding of civic and political engagement among Latin American migrants in the Las Vegas metropolitan area, there are a number of issues that need to be investigated further in future research.

Researchers should attempt to provide a more thorough examination of the *effects* of various local civic projects on the quality of life and living standards of Latin American immigrants. The anecdotal evidence gathered for this study suggests that these programs—which range from literacy classes to counseling services—are having a positive effect on the local community, but in the absence of systematic data on performance and benchmarks, one cannot make a more definitive assessment at this time.

There is evidence that migrant associations have helped individuals with absentee voting in their country of origin and have also coordinated meetings in the United States with electoral campaigns based in Mexico and Guatemala. In addition, selected groups played a role in mobilizing migrants to participate in the 2006 immigration protests in Las Vegas. Beyond these activities, we still have little understanding of what role—if any—these groups play in facilitating electoral participation in U.S. elections among migrants who have become naturalized citizens. Certainly, future research would benefit from a more thorough investigation of the linkages among civic membership and conventional political participation in the United States.

Provisionally, it remains unclear whether recently naturalized Latinos are engaging in conventional forms of political participation

such as voting. As noted, the data on Latino voting patterns in Clark County often fails to distinguish between those individuals who were naturalized and those who were born in the United States. Similarly, we lack adequate data on the extent to which naturalized citizens from Latin America maintain their membership in migrant associations after becoming citizens, and, if so, if the continuation of membership in such associations is correlated with ongoing political participation in Nevada. To address this question, the scope of the inquiry should be expanded to include more in-depth research and interviews with members of migrants associations.

Finally, more research needs to be completed in order to understand the pathways to naturalization and U.S. citizenship. If immigrants maintain their membership in hometown associations after having spent many years in Las Vegas, does this membership make it less or more likely that they will apply for naturalization? Do the citizenship classes organized by migrant associations facilitate interest in citizenship? Or do other factors, such as membership in a labor union or economic security, make it more likely that migrants will seek citizenship? At present, these questions remain unresolved in the study of Latin American migrants in Las Vegas.

## APPENDIX A:

### Agenda

#### LATIN AMERICAN MIGRANTS: CIVIC AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

Friday September 21, 2007

Mexico Institute, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars  
Institute for Latin American Studies, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

4505 South Maryland Parkway  
Wright Hall, Room C-235

9:00–9:10 **Introduction and Welcoming Comments**

Andrew Selee, Mexico Institute, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars  
John Tuman, UNLV, Institute for Latin American Studies

9:10–10:30 **Roundtable 1: Latin American Migrants and the Local Economy**

*Facilitator:* Timothy Pratt, *Las Vegas Sun*  
Fernando Romero, Hispanics in Politics  
Raquel Aldana, UNLV Law School  
Eddie Escobedo, Publisher, *El Mundo*  
Eddie Ramírez, Laborers Employers Cooperation  
and Education Trust of Southern Nevada

10:30–10:40 **Coffee break**

10:40–noon **Roundtable 2:**

**Today we march, tomorrow we vote: Civic and Political Participation**

*Facilitator:* Sylvia Lazos, UNLV Law School

Moises Denis, Nevada Legislature Assembly

Pilar Weiss, Culinary Union local 229

Reveriano Orozco Sánchez, Michoacán State Congress Representative

Christina Martinez, Sen. Reid's Office

Irma Aguirre, Coordinator of Outreach for Hispanic

Voters, Republican Party, Southern Nevada

Noon–1PM **Lunch**

1–2:20 **Roundtable 3: Opportunities and Challenges to Naturalization**

*Facilitator:* John Tuman, UNLV, Institute for Latin American Studies

David Thronson, UNLV Law School/Citizenship Project

Irerí Rivas, Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada

Pam Egan, Culinary Union/Citizenship Project

Jasmine Coca, Catholic Charities Immigration Services

Pastor Almanza, *Iglesia Amistad Cristiana Evangélica*

2:20–3:00 **Coffee break**

3:00–4:30 **Roundtable 4: Nationality/ethnic-based Civic Groups and their Projects**

*Facilitator:* Xóchitl Bada, University of Notre Dame–Wilson Center

María Espinosa, *Inmigrantes Trabajando Saldremos Adelante* (ITSA)

Evelyn Flores, 2006 student marches organizer

Israel Fuentes, Guatemalan Unity Committee

Alma Guillén, *Federación de Clubes Michoacanos Unidos de Nevada*

Ciria Pérez, Hispanic Group at the Christ the King Catholic Community

Silvano Ramos López, *Federación de Clubes Hidalguenses*

4:30–4:40 **Coffee break**

4:40–5:00 **Final wrap-up session**

Andrew Selee, Mexico Institute–Wilson Center

Xóchitl Bada, University of Notre Dame–Wilson Center

John Tuman, UNLV–Institute for Latin American Studies

5:00PM **Adjourn**

**Additional invited guests:**

Anita Revilla, UNLV Women's Studies

AJ McClure, Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada

## APPENDIX B:

### Summary of the Roundtable Discussions

The meeting began with brief presentations by John Tuman and by Andrew Selee, Director of the Mexico Institute, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Tuman noted that migration from Latin America is one of the most important issues in the local economy and in Nevada politics. Selee followed with a general overview of the history, purpose, and aim of the project, and thanked the MacArthur Foundation for financial support of the study.

#### ROUNDTABLE 1: LATIN AMERICAN MIGRANTS AND THE LOCAL ECONOMY

The first roundtable focused on the contributions of Latin American migrants to the local economy. Tim Pratt, a reporter for the *Las Vegas Sun*, served as the facilitator for the panel. Participants included Raquel Aldana, Associate Professor of Law at UNLV; Fernando Romero, Director of Hispanics in Politics; and Eddie Escobedo, publisher and founder of *El Mundo*, the oldest Latino-owned weekly newspaper distributed in Southern Nevada.

Romero noted that studies show that Latinos spend \$40 billion annually in the state economy. Migrant labor also promotes economic

dynamism, helps keep prices low, and constitutes an important segment of the domestic consumer market. Nevertheless, due to economic insecurity and racism, Latin American migrants are being blamed for unemployment and job displacement. He doubts that migrants are causing job displacement, because many jobs that are being eliminated have been outsourced to India and China; moreover, many U.S. workers frequently refuse to apply for the low-paying service jobs that Mexicans work in. In Romero's view, there are parallels between the current reaction against immigration and the treatment of Mexicans during the Great Depression, when some 3.5 million Mexicans and Mexican Americans (who could not prove citizenship) were deported from the United States. Romero concluded by emphasizing the importance of countering the anti-immigration rhetoric that is prevalent in the media. Aldana made a number of observations about the connections between the economics and politics of immigration. She noted that data and analysis are extremely important for evaluating immigration policy choices; however, the data on the effects of immigration are often manipulated by various "think tanks" to give an inaccurate picture. Still, business lead-

ers in a range of sectors—most visibly, in agriculture and hospitality—clearly understand the importance of migrant labor. Aldana also argued that the terms of the debate need to be unified to look at the structures that influence immigration: What role do U.S. farm subsidies play in displacing Mexican peasant farmers and causing out-migration from Mexico? Do U.S. employers create incentives for migration; that is, if employers were willing to pay higher wages, would this induce more U.S. citizens to work (and reduce migration flows)? What research design should be used to evaluate the relative costs and benefits of migrant labor? In other words, what is the best design to study labor displacement?

Aldana acknowledged that there are legitimate concerns about the economic impact of unregulated migration flows, including whether migration from Mexico leads to competition (and possible displacement, via high supply of labor) of African American workers and other low-income workers in the U.S. economy. In her view, there is no evidence of such a displacement effect in Nevada, although a study by the Pew Hispanic Center did find that some displacement has occurred in Arizona.

Escobedo countered a number of myths about immigration. He suggested that it is not true that “undocumented” migrant workers from Latin America have brought social or health problems, that they are obtaining welfare or social services illegally, or that they receive more in social services than they are paying in income and other consumption taxes. Despite paying payroll taxes, many migrants are not eligible to receive, and do not receive, government benefits (e.g., Social Security, Medicare, worker’s compensation, unemployment insurance); undocumented workers also contribute enormously to the consumer market and to economic growth. Escobedo also suggested that

elected officials who failed to support immigration reform would face political consequences in the next elections. He predicted that the lack of progress on immigration reform, combined with the increased levels of discrimination faced by Latinos, will spur more Mexicans to become naturalized citizens in order to vote. By his estimates, of the approximately one thousand legal permanent residents who recently became naturalized citizens in Nevada (in 2007), many were Mexican.

## ROUNDTABLE 2: CIVIC AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Professor Sylvia Lazos (UNLV Law School) served as the facilitator of the second panel. She was joined by Moises Denis, a Democratic representative in the Nevada State Assembly; Reveriano Orozco Sánchez, a representative in the Michoacán State Congress; Pilar Weiss, Political Director of Culinary Union Local 226; Irma Aguirre, a representative of the Nevada Republican Party; and Christina Martinez, a representative from U.S. Senator Harry Reid’s office.

In her prefatory remarks, Lazos posed several questions for discussion: How is the Latino community developing in the area of political participation? What has been achieved since the 2006 marches? Where does the community go from here?

Weiss suggested that there is a popular misconception that civic and political engagement is largely absent from the political culture of Las Vegas. In fact, the Culinary Union in Las Vegas has been engaged in civic and political action since the 1950s. She stated that it is also important to recognize that as the union’s membership base has become more diverse over time, the participants in various movements has changed. Weiss estimates that



45 percent of the total membership (of sixty thousand) is Latino. In recent years, women of color, including young Latina women, have been at the forefront of local activism, as illustrated by their role in labor conflicts and in the 2006 marches. For example, Gioconda Kline, the union's current president, is from Nicaragua originally. Kline was a key leader in the six-year strike—which was successful—at the Frontier Hotel. The Frontier strike not only demonstrated the importance of women of color in leadership positions, but also the solidarity of a diverse union membership (which varies by race/ethnicity, national origin, gender, and age). In Weiss's view, members drive the activism in Las Vegas—as reflected in the union's participation in the 2006 immigration protests. She believes that activism in the local labor movement is also helping to stimulate broader political activism, not only around immigration but also around other economic issues as well.

Denis observed that one of the key challenges for the community is increasing the level of electoral turnout among Latinos. He noted that a large share of those Latinos who are eligible to vote do not participate in elections. This may improve, however. The election of a second Latino representative to the state legislature is a sign of the increasing importance of Latinos in the electorate. Political activism among Latinos is also present despite the low electoral turnout levels. Beyond political participation, it is important for Latinos to become more involved in civic organizations. Despite the impression left by the media, which suggests that Latinos are apathetic, civic participation among Latinos and Latin American migrants is definitely present in the Las Vegas valley. As the first Hispanic elected to the school board, Denis noted that although Latino parents want to actively participate in their children's educa-

tion, language barriers frequently prevent them from doing so. Denis concluded by stating that the potential for divisions in the Latino community should not be ignored. Frequently groups of differing national origin do not support candidates or groups from other parts of Latin America. Nevertheless, Latinos may be able to coalesce around a number of common issues in the 2008 elections.

As representative in the state legislature of Michoacán, and a member of a migrant civic federation in Las Vegas, Orozco Sánchez spoke about the origins and development of Mexican migrant associations in Las Vegas and the United States. Participating actively in the social life of both Mexico and the United States, these associations have existed for over a decade, and recently they have responded to the increasingly hostile political climate regarding immigration. In Las Vegas, there are a number of civic associations that are organized by individuals from various Mexican states, including clubs from Michoacán, Nayarit, Puebla, Jalisco, and Chihuahua, to name a few. Having a plural character, these groups seek to protect the rights and interests of migrants in the United States, while also promoting public works programs in their state of origin in Mexico. The Michoacán federation locally has integrated a number of clubs; there are similar federations in California, Texas, Illinois, Indiana, Nebraska, Alaska, and Utah. Mexican hometown associations have negotiated a number of agreements with municipal authorities in Mexico to support social programs. Through a partnership program (e.g., the 3 X 1 program) with the Mexican government that involves matching funds, the Michoacán federations have provided millions dollars of support for public works and humanitarian projects throughout Michoacán over the past five years. Beyond their support for humanitarian

causes, the group has been active in stimulating political participation among migrants. For the first time in Mexico's history, authorities have simplified the process of absentee voting for those living abroad; in this context, the federation has assisted Mexican citizens working in the United States with the process of voter registration and absentee voting in Mexico's federal and state elections. In the 2006 immigration protests, the federations were active in Las Vegas, Los Angeles, and other metropolitan areas.

Aguirre discussed efforts of the Nevada Republican Party to boost electoral turnout among Hispanic voters. In her view, turnout levels are too low. To remedy this, it is important to identify qualified leaders from the Hispanic community to run for office. Hispanic voters also need to become more knowledgeable of the political process. It is necessary to educate non-Hispanic leaders about the needs of the community. But voting is a key part of making leaders accountable; if turnout remain low, politicians who are running for office have little incentive to listen to members of the community.

As one of Senator Reid's representatives in southern Nevada, Martinez has had many opportunities to observe civic and political participation in the Latino community. Hispanics in Politics and federations and clubs that represent migrants from Latin America are all very active. Yet many Latino constituents do not know about the existence of these various civic and political organizations; thus Martinez frequently advises people to become more informed so that they can participate more fully in their community. Like others, Martinez has observed that many legal permanent residents (from Mexico and other Latin American countries) do not become citizens, and consequently, they do not vote. She list-

ed several barriers to naturalization. For some individuals, achieving proficiency in English remains a problem. The format for the citizenship test is in the process of being changed, and this may cause delays. Health problems create barriers to studying for some individuals; the government is granting fewer health-related waivers. In other cases, people apply without the aid of an attorney, and then subsequently have difficulty with various procedures; this causes delays that may last for years while forcing applicants to pay additional administrative fees. Some individuals who obtained legal permanent residency in the 1970s are now obliged to reapply, although many are not familiar with this new statutory requirement.

Martinez suggested that Senator Reid and others in Washington took note of the 2006 marches. Yet the marches responded to a perceived crisis—the threat by some in Congress to make it a felony for entering the United States illegally—and once this threat was no longer present, activism diminished. What is needed is a more sustained movement. Latino youth, who were so crucial in organizing the 2006 protests, need to be included in the discussions in Washington. Martinez added that for the first time, in 2007, Democrats had decided to invite Latino youth to Capitol Hill to discuss issues that are relevant to them; she expressed hope that this program would stimulate civic engagement.

In follow-up comments made by members of the audience, several participants made a number of observations about the factors that influence participation among Latinos and Latin American immigrants in the United States. Pastor Almanza suggested that some Latin Americans come from countries where electoral participation is very low. Ciria Pérez noted that Latino immigrants did not believe in their governments when they lived in Latin

America. As a result, is now very hard for them to trust the U.S. government when it claims that it wants to promote a culture of civic participation. Other participants suggested that political messages should be made simpler and more appropriate for people with low literacy levels and/or low levels of education, categories into which many Latinos fall.

### **ROUNDTABLE 3: OPPORTUNITIES FOR AND CHALLENGES TO NATURALIZATION**

The third roundtable featured a number of service providers who currently assist individuals with citizenship applications and other immigration law issues. John Tuman, Director of the Institute for Latin American Studies and Associate Professor of Political Science, UNLV, served as the facilitator on the panel. The presenters were: Ileri Rivas, Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada (PLAN); Pam Egan, Culinary Union and The Citizenship Project; Jasmine Coca, Catholic Charities Immigration Services; Pastor J. Almanza, Iglesia Amistad Cristiana Evangélica; David Thronson, UNLV Law School and The Citizenship Project.

Tuman began by observing that there are a number of barriers to naturalization, including the increasing administrative fees for immigration applications, changes in the English exam, and the fact that prior misdemeanor offenses (under state law) are sometimes treated as grounds for a removal proceeding. He asked members of the panel, or audience, to comment on these issues.

According to Rivas, given the potential political significance of higher rates of naturalization among Latinos, it is important to understand why Latinos who are eligible to become citizens are not going through the naturalization process. Certainly, in Nevada—

which, along with eleven other states, is a competitive “swing” state—higher rates of naturalization might translate into higher rates of Latino voting, with the potential to alter the outcome of the 2008 election. Yet many barriers need to be overcome. Rivas agreed that increased administrative fees and changes in the citizenship exam are problems; additional barriers are the bureaucratic complexity of the process—including more forms (that are not always easily accessible)—and the fact that many applicants do not know their full rights under the law. The obstacles to obtaining citizenship may make some people feel that it is not worth it to naturalize, although there are some indications that interest remains high (as measured by the number of applications that have been downloaded from the immigration service). PLAN has sought to educate people about their rights and provide timely information, including information about recent legislative efforts to deny Social Security benefits to newly naturalized immigrants.

Discussing her experience with the Culinary Union, Nevada Partners, and The Citizenship Project, Egan pointed to some of the opportunities in Las Vegas that lead immigrants to seek naturalization. She emphasized the importance of contextual issues—beyond the administrative fees and the exam—that include the economic security or marginalization of migrant workers. Viewing opportunities for naturalization from an economic perspective, she noted that the Culinary Union has been able to provide many immigrant workers with well-paying jobs, important fringe benefits, job security, and job training. Once their economic security has been realized, immigrants feel that they are stakeholders in the community, leading to more interest in citizenship. Relocation of The Citizenship Project to the offices of the Culinary Union’s training institute has proven

to be useful because these offices are in an area of the city that is more accessible to Latinos; the result has been an increase in The Citizenship Project's caseload, particularly among those Latino union members who are economically secure. Still, for other immigrant workers and their families who are employed outside the unionized hospitality sector, economic marginality and social exclusion constitute ongoing barriers to naturalization. In this connection, she pointed to the high levels of high school drop out rates for Latino students, which might end up marginalizing a generation of people, creating barriers to naturalization.

Coca noted that she and her colleagues at Catholic Charities Immigration Services represent many clients in "removal proceedings" before administrative courts. In her experience, it is imperative for applicants to be screened properly prior to filing a citizenship application. All too often, individuals apply without consulting an attorney or a professional advocate; in some cases, these individuals have a criminal conviction in their background and, depending on the date and severity of the crime, this triggers a deportation procedure. Among the clients she has seen in Las Vegas, approximately 60 to 70 percent have had some kind of criminal conviction—although some of these are only misdemeanor offenses under state law that are defined as "moral turpitude" in the immigration law.

Thronson provided additional information about the provision of immigration and naturalization assistance services in the local community. He concurred that the process of naturalization is very complex, and that the context is important too. Many social and economic factors influence the readiness of individuals to begin the process of naturalization—it is not simply a question of anticipating questions on the exam or language readi-

ness. Thronson stated that some of the biggest challenges are helping people prepare for the application process and providing access to qualified advocates who can help screen and assess potential applications. For example, of the approximately twenty legal aid attorneys that provide assistance at The Citizenship Project and the UNLV Immigration Law Clinic, only one is proficient in Spanish. Given the size of the immigrant community here, the number of legal service providers is woefully inadequate. In addition, in contrast to other metropolitan areas (e.g., New York), where the immigration caseload involves applications from people who have "overstayed" on their visas, the immigration caseload in Las Vegas tends to have a large concentration of people who crossed the border without a visa. The current law tends to treat those individuals more harshly in comparison to people who overstayed their visas. Thronson concluded by observing that inadequate investment in the public agencies that process applications also constitutes a serious barrier, leading to administrative delays and a large backlog of cases.

Finally, Pastor Almanza related the perspective of Latin American immigrants as they confront the process of naturalization. The obstacles to naturalization are not only administrative and legal—of having "documentation"; the barriers also include the problems of negotiating the different culture, taste, lifestyle, and society in the United States. Many migrants see the enormous opportunities that exist in the United States, a country that is expanding economically, culturally, and technologically. Still, naturalization requires a significant psychological adjustment that involves negotiating two different cultures. Humanizing the naturalization process is extremely important.

#### ROUNDTABLE 4: NATIONALITY/ETHNIC-BASED CIVIC GROUPS AND THEIR PROJECTS

Xóchitl Bada, University of Illinois at Chicago and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, served as the facilitator of the final roundtable of the meeting. The presenters included Silvano Ramos López, Federación de Clubes Hidalguenses; Ciria Pérez, Legislative Council Bureau, State Legislature of Nevada; María Espinosa, Inmigrantes Trabajando Saldremos Adelante (ITSA); Alma Guillén, Federación de Clubes Michoacanos Unidos de Nevada; Israel Fuentes, El Comité de Unidad Guatemalteco (COMUGUA); and Evelyn Flores, an organizer of the 2006 student marches.

In her introduction, Bada noted that during Roundtable 2, Orozco Sánchez had elaborated upon the types of activities that Mexican hometown associations have undertaken in their home states in Mexico. For discussion, she suggested that the panelists might talk about the projects of these associations within the Las Vegas area. Bada also wondered whether civic participation in Mexican projects has led members of migrant associations to seek out civic and political participation in their community in Las Vegas. For example, does having the opportunity to vote in federal or state elections in Mexico stimulate their interest in political participation in Las Vegas? Alternatively, does civic or political engagement in Mexican projects lead migrants to remain less integrated in the civic life of Las Vegas? What has happened since the 2006 marches?

Ramos López represents members of the Hidalgo community in Las Vegas. Formed in March 2006, the Hidalgo federation groups together a number of local clubs. Recognizing the problems that migrants from Hidalgo encounter in Las Vegas, the group seeks to help

individuals integrate socially and economically, in particular people from the Otomi community of Hidalgo, which has a distinct culture and a prevalence of members who do not speak Spanish as their first language. The leadership of the federation has tried to focus on the problems within the community by providing information and education and by working with representatives from each club. For example, the federation has organized educational activities about the law in order to prevent people from having problems with authorities. They have also tried to provide education to members so that they can participate in the political life of Nevada.

Ramos López emphasized that conditions in the local construction industry—where many people from his state work—are very poor at the present time. Unemployment has increased. Many migrant workers in the construction industry are accepting employment at the minimum wage, and there is discrimination in some companies, because there is not enough work for everyone. Given current conditions, workers cannot afford to be “choosy” about working conditions. Volunteers from the federation have tried to provide assistance to people adversely affected in the industry, and have worked with representatives from each club to provide information and help. Echoing some of the themes in Ramos López’s talk, Guillén added that the Michoacán federation has supported a variety of civic causes locally (e.g., helping individuals obtain health services). As one of the larger federations, the group is highly visible in the local community.

Pérez spoke about the efforts of Christ the King to address the concerns of Hispanics within the local Catholic diocese. Historically, the church did not offer services in Spanish anywhere in Las Vegas. To address this issue, a group of Hispanic Catholics organized, and

eventually were successful in persuading the church to offer services in Spanish to a congregation located in the southwest part of the valley. This has helped to integrate Hispanics there, for whom faith is so important, into the family of the Church. They have also done ministerial work with groups from Chihuahua. In her view, the Catholic Church in the Las Vegas valley places more value on diversity as a result of their efforts.

Espinosa's group, ITSA, which formed very recently, has been extremely active in promoting change and dialogue in the immigration debate. Members of the group participated in the 2006 protests. The group has also been highly involved in providing education to the community about the contribution of Latin American migrants to the local economy, and about the different stances of politicians on immigration issues. In order to press officials to support a just immigration reform, ITSA has organized letter-writing campaigns to elected representatives.

Fuentes provided insight on the civic activities of the Guatemalan community in Las Vegas. Formed in 2002, COMUGUA is the major civic association that represents Guatemalans in the local area. Small business owners are particularly active in the leadership of the organization. COMUGUA sponsors cultural programs, helps migrants obtain important services from the Guatemalan consulate, and is active in the immigration debate. *La Hora Chapina*, COMUGUA's weekly AM radio program, promotes Guatemalan music and culture and provides information to the

community. Shifting his attention to the current debate about immigration, Fuentes noted that COMUGUA participated in the immigration protests of 2006. He also talked about the need to see migrants as human beings and drew attention to the enormous impact that deportation proceedings have when parents and children are separated.

Finally, Flores shared her experiences as a community and immigration rights' organizer. A former student at UNLV, Flores and her colleagues were highly active in mobilizing members of the community in the 2006 immigration protests. Her group worked initially with students in MECHA and Women's Studies, and high school students and their parents on a protest at Freedom Park. Subsequently, this coalition developed ties to Mexican hometown associations and participated in the May 1 protest. Although Flores's group (and others) had strategic disagreements with the Culinary Union, the May 1 protest was, in her view, an exciting event that demonstrated the potential political weight of Latinos in southern Nevada. Indeed, she saw the protest as a way of reclaiming the "space" of the Las Vegas strip and forcing the city to acknowledge migrant workers. In the aftermath, the group created the United Coalition for Immigration Rights (UCIR). UCIR has been active in providing information about the economic contributions of Latin American migrant workers, in helping to educate people about immigration law, and in helping people with voter registration. UCIR hopes to develop stronger ties to Latinos who are elected to office.



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## NOTES

- 1 At the time of their departure from Latin America, many individuals may view themselves as *international migrants* and hope to return to their country of origin after earning enough money in the United States. After arriving in Las Vegas, however, some migrants change their minds and seek to become *immigrants* (even though some may lack the proper documentation for legal immigration). As such, the community in Las Vegas is composed of people who intend to stay in the United States permanently and people who would like to return to Latin America. Both groups are clearly involved in migrant civic associations. In addition, there is a subgroup of Latin Americans in Las Vegas that intends to stay permanently but that considers both the United States and their country of origin their permanent homes. For these reasons, when discussing the factors that give rise to out-migration from Latin America, I use the term migrant; when I discuss communities (and civic associations) of Mexicans, Guatemalans, and others from Latin America in Las Vegas, I tend to use both migrants and immigrants to capture the diversity in the local community.
- 2 Regarding the scholarly research on the economic contributions of Latin American migrants, see Riddell and Schwer (2003).
- 3 Of notable exception are the excellent studies of the Mexican, Salvadoran, and Chilean communities of Las Vegas presented in Wright and Simich (2005).
- 4 Most of the population in Clark County is concentrated in the Las Vegas metropolitan area, which includes Las Vegas, North Las Vegas, Henderson, and Boulder City. Because these four cities are highly integrated into one metropolitan area (where services are shared, and people work), I employ data for Clark County as opposed to data only for Las Vegas/Paradise. It should be noted, however, that there is little difference between the growth rates among Latinos documented by the census data for Clark County and for Las Vegas.
- 5 For example, in the central and northeastern parts of Las Vegas and North Las Vegas, there has been a large increase in the number of businesses that market to the Latino community; see *Las Vegas Business Press* (2006).
- 6 The Census Bureau data indicate that in 2000, approximately 394,000 Latinos resided in Nevada, which represented 19.7 percent of the state's total population. In 2005, this number had increased to 564,000, 24 percent of Nevada's population. Between 2000 and 2005, the number of Latinos increased by 43 percent (U.S. Census Bureau 2007c, d).
- 7 Calculated from data in the American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, for the year 2005 (U.S. Census Bureau 2007e). To calculate this estimate, I took the sum of the total male and female Hispanic population in Clark County that is foreign born, and the sum

of foreign-born Hispanics reported as naturalized U.S. citizens.

- 8 The term “formal sector” refers to work that is counted and measured in government employment surveys and in reporting for government social security contributions and national income accounts.
- 9 Calculated from migrant workforce data (by sector) in PLAN (2007, Table 6), and labor force data for Clark County from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (2007c). Anecdotal reports suggest that the migrant share of the workforce in some subsectors of the construction industry (e.g., new home construction) is higher than the overall figure of 55 percent, but this claim could not be verified because data for the number of migrants in each subsector of construction were not available.
- 10 Fantasia and Voss (2004, 209, n. 57) estimate that in 2000, private sector unionization in Las Vegas was 14.8 percent, while the rate in the United States in the same year was only 8.6 percent. As noted below, unionization rates in certain sectors are considerably higher.
- 11 Although the primary focus of this section is on interest groups and civic associations, it is important to recognize how the growth of the Spanish-language media—ranging from television programming offered by Telemundo and Univisión, to publications such as *El Mundo* and *El Tiempo*—has contributed to the civic life of the community and the debate about immigration. Reporting on Latino issues in the English-language media has had a similarly positive effect.
- 12 It does not appear that social movements in the Latino community during the 1970s were coordinated with other movements that were also challenging the lack of provision of welfare and social services in Las Vegas. For details on the activism of African American women (and others) during the 1970s, see Orleck (2005).
- 13 In the absence of reliable economic census data on the number of Latino-owned businesses in Clark County, it is difficult to estimate the coverage rate of the LCC (as measured by the number of LCC affiliates as a percent of all Latino-owned businesses).
- 14 For background, see Latino Chamber of Commerce (2007). Some information for this section was also provided in previous communications from members.
- 15 Similar to many other unions in the United States, the national leadership of the Culinary Union (HERE) decided to address declining membership nationally by merging with another national union, UNITE, in 2004. UNITE also has a significant number of Latino members. I use the name “Culinary Union” (not “Culinary Workers Union”) because that is how people in Las Vegas refer to it.
- 16 The Laborer’s Union, which has a significant number of Latino members, has also made significant contributions to worker training and improvement of wages; information from an interview with a leader of this union (Interview 22, 2008).
- 17 There are no systematic recent data on the number of Latin Americans residing in Las Vegas who have applied for citizenship (with or without the assistance of The Citizenship Project or other organizations). Older data for Mexican “Legal Permanent Residents” in Clark County suggest the following: from 1985 to 1999, there were 20,433 Mexican Legal Permanent Residents in Clark County; of this number, only 5,160 had become naturalized citizens (25.2 percent naturalized; U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2007a). More recently, in 2005, a total of 1,684 persons in Las Vegas from Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru became naturalized citizens (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2007a). These data are for Las Vegas and only represent figures in the top twenty countries by birthplace of the applicant; moreover, because we lack data on the number of new *and* preexisting Legal Permanent Residents in Las Vegas for the year 2005, it is not possible to calculate the naturalization rate. (The Department of Homeland Security’s data for Legal Permanent Residents in 2005 refer

- only to *new* residents; see U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2007b).
- 18 Palladino (2007, 214) notes that approximately 40 percent of the commercial and high-rise construction sector in Las Vegas is unionized.
  - 19 Interview 22, 2008.
  - 20 In 2007, the Laborer's Union had been in talks with the Confederation of Mexican Workers (Confederación de Trabajadores de México) to establish a binational health and safety training program; however, this initiative stalled for reasons that union officials did not want to disclose (*ibid.*).
  - 21 Interview 23, 2008. Contact with staff in Teamsters Local 631 did not yield any specific data on Latino membership in the union.
  - 22 The UNLV clinic receives referrals from a variety of different sources, including the local office of Senator Harry Reid.
  - 23 Unpublished data generated from a database report provided by Steve Pak, Election Administration, Clark County Election Department, June 11, 2007. Pak reported that his office does not have estimates of the share of Latinos who are eligible to vote.
  - 24 Data for the denominator for this estimate (number of Latinos eligible to vote in Clark County) are taken from estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau and the State Demographer of Nevada. The most recent U.S. census data (U.S. Census Bureau 2007e), for the year 2005, report estimates of the number of Hispanics age eighteen and over born in the United States, and the number of foreign-born Hispanic naturalized citizens age eighteen and over; the sum of these two numbers provides a rough estimate of the eligible voting-age population. Assuming that the relative proportions of U.S. and foreign-born Hispanics (by age and citizenship status) remained the same from 2005 to 2007, one can estimate the eligible voting-age population for 2007 by combining the 2005 census figures with Hispanic population projections for 2007 from the State Demographer (Harcourt 2006), and then examine the growth rate. This suggests a 13 percent increase in the Hispanic population eligible to vote from 2005 to 2007, to 167,029 individuals. This is the figure employed for the crude estimate of the Latino voter registration rate in Clark County. The figure does not take into account people who may have been disqualified to vote based upon developmental disability or other legal factors.
  - 25 Data on the number of Hispanics voting in 2006 were obtained from Clark County Election Department (see n. 23).
  - 26 In 2002, Brian Sandoval, a Republican, was elected as attorney general. In 2005, Sandoval left this position after being confirmed as Nevada's first Latino federal district court judge.
  - 27 Within county institutions, Dario Herrera served recently on the Clark County Commission; at the present time, however, there are no Latinos serving on the commission or on the city councils of Las Vegas, North Las Vegas, or Henderson. Five judges of Latino origin were elected to positions in Nevada district and family courts in 2006. It is unclear if any of these judges have strong ties to the migrant community.
  - 28 See survey research on registered Latino voters from twenty-three states, including Nevada, as presented in Lake Research Partners (2007). In a personal contact with the Lake Research Partners staff, they indicated that the Nevada sample size was not large enough to be disaggregated for further analysis of attitudes in Nevada.
  - 29 This information was obtained from a Peruvian migrant in Las Vegas, July 2007.
  - 30 For example, in the Mexican elections of 2006, absentee ballots from the United States may have given Felipe Calderón—the PAN candidate—the advantage that he needed in order to clinch a very narrow electoral victory over his main rival, Andres Manuel López Obrador of the PRD. Data from the IFE suggest that of the 32,621 valid absentee ballots received from abroad, 58 percent went for Calderón (*Reforma* 2006). For preelection preferences among

- migrants surveyed, see Suro and Escobar (2006).
- 31 Molina's visit was not the first time a Guatemalan candidate had traveled to Las Vegas. In 2002, Alvaro Colom, who was running in the 2003 Guatemalan presidential elections, campaigned in Las Vegas on a trip that included several major U.S. cities (see Tuman and Gearhart, forthcoming).
  - 32 My understanding of the sequence of events in the 2006 protests and marches relies heavily on Lazos (2006), Pratt (2006), and discussions with former movement organizers.
  - 33 As noted in Part II of this report, the division that emerged in 2006 between the Culinary Union and Mexican hometown associations still exists.
  - 34 The issuance of consular identification cards for Mexican nationals—which are now accepted by some banks in Las Vegas—has helped to alleviate this situation somewhat. Nevertheless, for other groups of migrants from Latin America, the threat of robbery remains a serious issue. For background on the Mexican consular identification cards, and examples of migrants who were robbed on payday, see Pratt (2003).
  - 35 This information is based partly on personal contact with individuals who have assisted migrants in individual labor disputes during the past five years. The claims are also supported by the fragmentary data on injury rates among migrants in selected sectors.
  - 36 These donations are frequently pooled with funds raised by other Michoacán associations in the United States and combined with contributions from the Mexican state, which provides matching funds under programs such as the “3 X 1” initiative.
  - 37 Interviews 15, 16, 2008. Unfortunately, during the interviews, the local research team was unable to obtain systematic, detailed records on the projects supported by the local federation.
  - 38 Interview 15, 2008.
  - 39 Interview 16, 2008.
  - 40 Interview 2b, 2007. As noted in Part I, some of the other associations that represent Latin American migrants (e.g., from El Salvador) have low visibility in the local community.
  - 41 Interview 4, 2008.
  - 42 Interview 16, 2008.
  - 43 Interview 16, 2008.
  - 44 Answers and comments submitted by interviewee via electronic mail (follow-up to Interview 7a, 2008).
  - 45 See the summary of Silvano Ramos López's presentation in the roundtable discussions in the Appendix.
  - 46 This question also arose in Interview 12, 2007.
  - 47 Answers and comments submitted by interviewee via electronic mail (follow-up to Interview 10a, 2008).
  - 48 Interview 5, 2008.
  - 49 Interview 14, 2008.
  - 50 Answers and comments submitted by interviewee via electronic mail (follow-up to Interview 10a, 2008). See also Interview 11, 2007.
  - 51 Interview 6b, 2008. Culinary Union Local 226 has approximately sixty thousand members, of which about 50 percent are Latino. As a result, the union has tremendous potential to organize the vote.
  - 52 Interview 5, 2008.
  - 53 Interviews 15, 16, 2008.
  - 54 Answers and comments submitted via electronic mail, (follow-up to Interview 7a) 2008.
  - 55 Ibid.
  - 56 Interviews 5, 6a, 6c, 2007, 2008.
  - 57 Interview 6c, 2008.
  - 58 Interview 2, 2007.
  - 59 Interview 14, 2008. A member of a local writers' group (which has ties to some of the local hometown associations) suggested that Hispanics in Politics has a low profile among Mexican immigrants (interview 1, 2007).

- 60 Interviews 4, 5, 7a, 10, 12, 14, 15, 2008.
- 61 Interview 14, 2008.
- 62 Data provided by the Clark County Elections Department, June 2007 and February 2008.
- 63 For information on the methods used to calculate these figures, see note 24. This is the figure employed as the denominator in order to estimate a crude Latino voter registration rate in Clark County in 2007 and early 2008.
- 64 Interview 9, 2008.
- 65 CNN, "Election Center 2008, Primaries and Caucuses—Nevada," <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/primaries/results/epolls/index.html#NVDEM> (accessed January 22, 2008); <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/primaries/results/epolls/index.html#NVREP> (accessed January 22, 2008).
- 66 Low levels of turnout in the Nevada caucuses in 2000 and 2004 were due primarily to the fact that the elections were scheduled late in the campaign season, when a front-runner had already emerged.
- 67 Regrettably, the Democratic Party only gave a vote total for the entire state; the party only reported the number of delegates won in each county.
- 68 On this point, see Interviews 6a, 2007, and 12, 2007. During the roundtable discussions, Pam Egan and David Thronson made this same point.
- 69 This does not imply that such individuals lose their identity tied to their county of origin; they may, in fact, come to experience a sense of binational identity through their civic participation.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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