# Transitions

## The Development of Children of Immigrants

*Edited by*

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# Civic Involvement

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Immigrant youth constitute a vital, diverse, and distinct population whose understandings of and experiences in the civic realm are important in their own right. Their views and actions will also substantially impact the future of the United States—and potentially even our future world with its increasingly interconnected countries and cultures. We begin this chapter by listening to Anita, a 17-year-old second-generation immigrant whose parents came to the United States from India. She took part in one of our interview studies with immigrant families that included a focus on civic involvement. As we will see in the course of this chapter, Anita's account of how she is and is not civically involved, and why, captures in an authentic way the vitality, diversity, and distinctiveness that is characteristic of the civic lives of immigrant youth.

> INTERVIEWER: Are you involved in political activities . . . ?
> ANITA: No, not really. A lot of the protests, I have been asked to go. But I'm a little more conservative than most of my peers. . . . But I'm the president of the National Honor Society, and we organize a lot of community things. I volunteer in a hospital. I also tutor some kids through school.
> INTERVIEWER: Why is it important for you to be involved . . . ?
> ANITA: Because people have this perception that teenagers are, you know, ungrateful, lazy. And that's the first reason. You need to show that you're interested in what happens. Secondly, if you start out young, you'll probably keep doing it. . . . [Also, I tutor] because I think it's really sad to see a kid who wants to learn and do well, and [he] can't. A lot of people argue that, you know, if you come to public school, everyone has the same chance. But it's not true. If your par-

ents are always working because they have to support you, and you don't have a computer at home, things aren't equal. You're probably not going to do as well as other kids who have the fancy computers, and the textbooks, and parents [who] are college graduates. So I think that some kids need extra help, and I think they should get it. [Also,] you know, everyone has taken from this community. Like I feel, I feel so grateful just to be part, like [to] be able to work in America, [to] be able do all the stuff that I do and have everything I have. I really believe in giving back. And I think that the earlier you do it, the better. Because, as I said, it will probably stick with you, and you'll continue it as you grow up.

Anita went on to tell us about a number of her other civic activities. To us, her engagement and passion stand in contrast to the paucity of attention that researchers have devoted to the civic views and actions of immigrant youth.[1] Her engagement can also be a source of inspiration. To better understand the underpinnings of civic behaviors, we listen to what immigrant youth such as Anita have said about their motivation for civic involvement.[2] In this chapter, we also review and synthesize available research on the types and extent of civic involvement of immigrant youth in the United States and discuss how different micro- and macrolevel contexts encourage and discourage this involvement.

## To What Extent Are Immigrant Youth Involved?

In order to capture the scope of immigrant youth's involvement in the civic realm, we need to include a wide array of relevant activities.[3] Sherrod, Flanagan, and Youniss have pointed out that political science research, both generally and on immigrant youth, has traditionally tended to focus on purely political behaviors and to utilize these as proxies for civic involvement.[4] As they have argued, and as illustrated by Anita's interview responses, such an approach misses the breadth and complexities of youth's involvement in civic activities. This situation is even more true for immigrant youth's civic engagement, which often takes nonpolitical avenues. For example, examination of political behaviors such as voting does not take into account youth under the age of 18 or immigrants who are not citizens, even if they are of voting

age.[5] Therefore, it is important when thinking about civic involvement to broaden our conception beyond simple measures of political behavior; these may not be the most appropriate (or even possible) avenues of involvement for immigrant youth, who face specific structural barriers to their political engagement. Thus, we also need to include the civic volunteer activities that often occur through schools and various cultural, social, and religious organizations.[6]

Findings from currently available studies indicate that there are few differences between immigrant and nonimmigrant youth's political and civic involvement when factors such as levels of income and education are taken into account. Lower levels of income and education erect barriers that limit youth's availability to participate in civic activities, as when youth must spend time working to contribute to family income.[7]

Lopez and Marcelo conducted two national surveys that compared first-generation (i.e., foreign-born) immigrants, second-generation immigrants (i.e., those with at least one foreign-born parent), and native-born U.S. residents between the ages of 15 and 25. The surveys included more than 20 different civic, electoral, and political items. Results from one survey, which was conducted over the Internet, show almost no significant differences among the three groups. The results of the other survey, conducted via telephone, indicate that first-generation immigrants were less active than native-born residents in a number of political and civic areas when demographic differences such as socioeconomic status, gender, and region of the country were left unadjusted. However, when these differences were controlled for statistically, few group differences remained. The researchers point out that among the few remaining differences, some such as those relating to voting may reflect structural or legal barriers to young immigrants' involvement.[8]

Huddy and Khatib also surveyed first-generation, second-generation, and native-born youth. In two studies with students from Stony Brook University (the sample sizes were 300 and 341), they asked about both behaviors and attitudes. On seven different measures pertaining specifically to U.S. politics—including voting, patriotism, attention to politics, and knowledge of politics—there were essentially no differences among the groups. These studies did not control for demographic variation, but such differences might have been limited for samples consisting solely of students from the same college.[9]

A study by Stepick, Stepick, and Labissiere examined the activities of immigrant and nonimmigrant students at a college in Miami, Florida (1,334 first-year residents). Their study encompassed 23 different political, civic, and social activities such as discussing politics, volunteering, and watching younger siblings. Results reveal high levels of involvement for all students and few group differences. Averaged across all the activities, about 80 percent of all the college students reported having been engaged often or very often in these activities during their high school years. Among the group differences that did emerge, more native-born residents and second-generation immigrants had been registered to vote than first- and 1.5-generation immigrants (i.e., those born abroad who came to the United States prior to age 12) had. However, native-born residents scored lower than some or all of the immigrant groups did on helping non-English speakers, helping a recent immigrant, and helping an illiterate person.[10] These differences show how important context is for the specific types of engagement in which individuals participate. Immigrant youth have more contact with non-English speakers and with other immigrants, so they are more likely to be in a position to help them. In the United States, native-born and second-generation immigrants are natural citizens, so they are more likely to vote. For activities accessed equally by both immigrants and nonimmigrants, such as donating blood or volunteering, participation levels are similar for both groups.

In a review article on civic engagement among U.S. youth, Flanagan and Levine included a notable finding comparing immigrant and nonimmigrant youth.[11] On the basis of a Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) report by Lopez, Levine, and colleagues, Flanagan and Levine observed that the proportion of youth who had taken part in a protest within the previous 12 months was 23 percent for first-generation immigrant youth, 18 percent for second-generation immigrant youth, and 10 percent for nonimmigrant youth. These numbers come from a nationally representative survey of 1,700 young people age 15 to 25.[12] It is important to note that this survey was conducted during the period of protests occurring in spring 2006 in reaction to proposed changes to U.S. immigration policy, including classifying undocumented immigrants as felons. These issues may explain why twice as many immigrant youth as nonimmigrant

youth took part in the protests, again underscoring the importance of the broader context in influencing youth's choice of activities in which they become involved.

In an ethnographic study focused on immigrant adolescents and their families, Bloemraad and Trost also found high involvement in the 2006 protests. The study was not initially designed to address the protests but happened to include the period from March to August 2006 when they were occurring. In interviews with 40 low-income Mexican-origin immigrant families from California (a total of 79 adolescents and parents), 61 percent of adolescents and 62 percent of parents reported that they had taken part in activities centered around the protests, such as participating in a boycott or attending a march.[13] Here it is important to note differences between high-risk and low-risk involvement; some civic activities involve a higher risk, especially for undocumented immigrants. For example, there are potentially serious consequences for undocumented workers who participate in marches or protests. If the police were to show up, these workers might be identified as undocumented and then deported, a possibility that survey participants noted with caution when discussing their decisions to attend the 2006 protest marches. Conversely, boycotts have relatively few potential consequences in terms of immigrants being outed as undocumented. Of course, these problems and considerations uniquely arise for undocumented immigrants and their family members and often serve to keep such individuals "in the shadows."[14] However, in certain contexts, such as the spring 2006 protests, the issues are of such importance that protests can instigate outpourings of relatively high-risk involvement among immigrant youth and their parents in spite of the potential for serious consequences.

Taken together, the findings from these studies indicate that on overall rates of involvement in political and civic activities, immigrant youth's participation is fairly similar to that of their native-born peers with comparable demographic characteristics. However, immigrant youth often do not have demographic characteristics comparable to those of their native-born peers, so the unique interactions of contexts and immigrants' characteristics should be further researched. Clearly, more surveys of the civic and political behaviors of immigrant youth are needed. The available research also suggests that not all political and civic behaviors carry the same meanings, or risks, for immigrants and

nonimmigrants or for immigrants of different generations and legal statuses. Immigrant youth may be more involved with issues relevant to immigrants, such as translation and protests pertaining to immigrant rights, but they may also be involved with issues that they have encountered among immigrants that also apply to others, such as literacy.

## In What Specific Civic and Political Behaviors Are Immigrant Youth Involved?

There is not enough research available to provide reliable rates of immigrant youth's participation in specific types of civic and political behaviors. However, culling information from studies of immigrant youth helps to provide an understanding of the wide array of behaviors in which they take part. Some activities mainly occur at the individual level, such as keeping abreast of current events, registering to vote, or donating blood. Others revolve around the family system, such as discussing politics with family members and translating for non-English-speaking relatives. Some activities are broader in their focus, such as contacting a public official, raising money for charity, protesting, voting, joining a school club or sports program, boycotting, tutoring, helping senior citizens, or signing a petition. Of course, it is important to remember that these activities typically operate on multiple levels. For example, church is often attended with family and friends and frequently is a source for broader engagement with the community. Also, these types of engagement are not unique to immigrant youth.

Nevertheless, some forms of engagement are attractive to immigrant youth because of their particular experiences. For example, the bilingual or multilingual skills of many immigrant youth often enable them to act as translators for friends, family members, and others in their community who are less fluent in English.[15] For illustration, 84 percent of the 1.5-generation immigrant youth in the Florida sample described above had helped non-English speakers read and write, as compared with 58 percent of nonimmigrant youth performing such services.[16] In Bloemraad and Trost's previously described ethnographic study of immigrant families, the researchers found that fluency in English helped immigrant adolescents navigate mainstream U.S. media and translate information for their parents, who were less fluent in English. In turn, these services

enabled greater family mobilization during the 2006 immigration protests.[17] Researchers have also found that immigrant youth use their facility with different languages when they tutor peers in school.[18]

Along with frequently being bilingual or multilingual, immigrant youth often have a bicultural or multicultural perspective. This multicultural mind-set can lend itself to civic engagement; by virtue of having been exposed to more than one culture and political system, individuals can see both the problems and the benefits of the U.S. system from within and outside the system. Recall Anita in the chapter opening and how she spoke of being "so grateful just to be part, like [to] be able to work in America." Implicit here is a comparison with other places—a perspective more, if not exclusively, characteristic of immigrant youth. This bicultural or multicultural perspective, whether as upbeat as Anita's or not, can increase a person's motivation to work for change and to work to preserve what is valued.[19] Anita said, "I really believe in giving back."

Investigating the multicultural mind-set of immigrants, Myers and Zaman found differences in the ways in which immigrant and nonimmigrant youth conceptualized citizenship. On the basis of the questionnaire and interview responses of 77 adolescents, they observed that immigrants tended to see themselves as "global citizens" rather than as citizens of one sovereign nation. Although nonimmigrant youth were aware of global issues or issues that cross national borders, they were nonetheless more likely to define citizenship in terms of their own nation.[20] As these immigrant youth become adults, this "global citizen" perspective could lead to their broader consideration of factors when making political or civic decisions. Rather than having a U.S.-centered framework, these immigrant adults will be able to take into account a multitude of perspectives and thus will be able to engage with an increasingly interconnected world.

In sum, the specific civic and political behaviors in which immigrant youth engage are myriad and highly varied. The multiplicity of these behaviors in part stems from the distinctive immigrant experiences of knowing more than one language and seeing the world from more than one cultural vantage point.

## What Motivates Immigrant Youth to Become Involved?

Immigrant youth's motives for becoming involved in highly diverse civic activities are also multiple and different. Similar to the variety of ways in which immigrant youth become involved, their reasons for doing so range from the more personal, such as facilitating identity work or assisting with family matters, to the more distant, such as bettering their community or feeling related to their culture. Again, it is important to remember than these various levels interact and overlap.

As discussed earlier, immigrant youth's cultural identities can function as a conduit to their political and civic involvement. Chan found that cultural motives influenced Asian American immigrant college students' choices of civic participation. For example, they joined ethnic clubs and organizations as a way to explore their ethnic identity and meet other coethnic students. Their civic behaviors were also influenced by their relationships with family members such as older siblings who were engaged in particular volunteer opportunities (sometimes ethnically affiliated) and with friends who were involved in various service projects and often invited study participants to join. These avenues of initial involvement often snowballed into civic activities with other organizations.[21]

On the basis of ethnographic work with Bangladeshi, Indian, and Pakistani Muslim immigrant high school students, Maira used the terms *polycultural citizenship* and *flexible citizenship* to describe the intersection of cultural identities and civic involvement. She observed that immigrant youth drew on their multiple cultural identities (i.e., polycultural citizenship)—religious, nation of origin, panethnic—to explain their participation in U.S. civil society. Furthermore, they combined these diverse cultural identities in flexible or changing ways (i.e., flexible citizenship), depending on the specific nature of the civic participation at hand.[22]

In addition to mentioning identity motives, immigrant youth, just like nonimmigrant youth, invoke community motives when explaining their reasons for civic participation. Wanting to better society, feeling the need to give back to the community, and desiring to improve the conditions of various people are popular motives for civic participation. For example, Stepick, Stepick, and Labissiere quoted a first-generation

Haitian youth from their study in Florida who had volunteered in order to "help people."[23] An interview study in Canada found that African immigrant youth also focused on community considerations—for example, discussing the importance of voting, which they regarded as a duty of those who hold democratic citizenship.[24] These issues of citizenship might be more important to immigrant youth, who do not take their citizenship for granted, than they are to native-born youth.

In addition to these types of community motives, immigrants have spoken of "cultural motives" for their civic participation.[25] These are motives that reference either their cultural or national backgrounds or that pertain to their experiences as immigrants more generally. In a qualitative analysis of interviews with Indian and Salvadoran immigrants (80 adolescents and adults), Jensen identified seven different cultural motives for engagement. For example, "cultural remembrance" was a common motive involving immigrants' desire to remember and maintain the values and customs of their culture. This motive was often evidenced through their participation in cultural activities and classes, such as "taking an active role in Indian places, like the temple." Motives referred to as "traditions of service," immigrant adolescents and parents explained, involved activities in which their culture or religion prescribed engagement. Another common cultural motive was "bridging communities," which inspired immigrants to undertake a pursuit in order to gain an appreciation for U.S. culture while also sharing insights about their own backgrounds.[26] These cultural motives focus on engagement as a way for immigrants both to bond with others of similar cultural backgrounds and to traverse different cultural communities.

However, the multicultural backgrounds of immigrants are not always received positively. Immigrant youth also speak of discrimination, stereotypes, and barriers in regard to their cultural and immigrant backgrounds. These impediments can be systemic, legal, personal, or any combination thereof. Such negative experiences can inhibit youth's civic engagement and lead to isolation and withdrawal—although, paradoxically, they can also prompt immigrant youth's civic involvement and resilience in the face of discrimination.

As noted in the previous discussion of the 2006 protests over immigration reform, discriminatory and restrictive policies can galvanize immigrant youth and prompt their civic participation. Sief has highlighted

the rallying effect that other restrictive policies, particularly those regarding immigrant youth's access to higher education, have had on promoting youth's civic engagement.[27] As Sief explains, the U.S. Supreme Court's *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) decision mandated that undocumented children cannot legally be excluded from K–12 education. In response to proposed changes to this law, such as Proposition 187, which would have required proof of citizenship for children to enroll in K–12 education in California, immigrant youth joined groups opposing the proposition.[28] However, after being eligible for public education from kindergarten through twelfth grade, undocumented students then encounter significant barriers to their higher education currently in place in the United States. Undocumented students do not have Social Security numbers, which are necessary to apply to colleges; often are not eligible for financial aid due to their undocumented status; and frequently are not fluent enough to navigate the complex and expensive application process for higher education. Consequently, groups that push for undocumented students to have more access to higher education, such as proponents of the DREAM Act or in-state tuition movements, are popular among immigrant youth, for whom these issues are especially salient. One such group, the Students Informing Now (SIN) collective, primarily provides immigrants with college information and assistance. The mission of this student group is "to give hope to those behind us, those who want to attend college but might not know they can."[29] These organizations provide ways for immigrant youth to become civically involved to combat perceived discrimination and legal barriers. The difficulties of immigrant life motivate these youth to help others facing situations similar to their own.

Immigrants have to deal not only with institutional barriers such as exclusionary laws but also with more personal instances of discrimination. Research has shown that such occurrences can also motivate immigrant youth's civic involvement. In discussing this phenomenon, Stepick, Stepick, and Labissiere present the example of Ronald, a second-generation Cuban adolescent who channeled a perception of discrimination into political engagement. In his interview, Roland referred to the negative media portrayals of Cubans during the Elián González case in 1999. This case involved a six-year-old Cuban boy who, unlike his mother, had survived their journey by raft when fleeing from Cuba

to Miami. A controversy erupted over whether the boy should be returned to his father in Cuba, as the father and the Cuban government demanded, or should stay in the United States, as his U.S. relatives and the Miami Cuban community wanted. González was sent back to Cuba after U.S. government agents forcibly seized him from his Miami relatives. Commenting on the media portrayals of Cubans during this time, Ronald said, "That [the media coverage] was completely and totally out of proportion because all it would show in the news was people, you know, setting trash cans on fire, getting in fights with the cops. When you see stuff like that and it's about you, you realize that, you know, they wanted to make us look like the angry Cubans. Right? To make everybody hate us."[30] Motivated to take action to counter these media portrayals, Ronald and many other Cubans had attended peaceful daily vigils in front of the Miami house where Elián was living.

Describing a process of becoming motivated that is similar to—but also different from—the one that Stepick and colleagues observed, DeJaeghere and McCleary provide the example of a Mexican high school student in Michigan who experienced personal discrimination while attending a protest. The student recounted, "We walked to the capital protesting for the immigrants, telling our rights and singing. There were people [who] were telling us to go from their country, [saying] that we were invading their country, and telling us that we're a piece of shit and throwing . . . things [at us]."[31] DeJaeghere and McCleary theorize that experiences like this one in which immigrants are "being made as other" lead some immigrants to reject the image and its implications and instead work toward assuming more positive personal and public identities by taking part in civic and political activities. Sief concurs, stating that many immigrant youth become engaged in the civic realm to counter negative stereotypes.[32] However, most participants in the DeJaeghere and McCleary study reported that they had felt alienated and discriminated against, experiences that often produced negative emotional responses.[33] Even though some immigrant youth become civically or politically involved to counter negative stereotypes, their participation in these activities does not reduce or negate the pain caused by exclusion and discrimination. Their involvement can, however, demonstrate their resiliency. Immigrant youth, then, have many different motives for participating in civic and political activities. They share some

motives with nonimmigrant youth, but others are relatively distinct to their experiences—for better and worse—of being immigrants and having ties to different cultures. However, even negative experiences such as encounters with stereotypes, barriers, and discrimination can serve as stimuli for civic and political participation.

## What Roles Do Different Contexts Play in Immigrant Youth's Civic Involvement?

As is evident, immigrant youth are immersed in a variety of contexts that influence civic behavior, from macrosystems such as the political and legal spheres and media to microsystems such as educational institutions, family, and friends.[34] These contexts can either facilitate or hinder civic involvement.

At the political and legal level, there are many factors that influence immigrant youth and their civic engagement. Some immigrant youth point to positive aspects of the U.S. legal system as reasons for getting involved. Specifically, the protection of free speech is seen as a boon. As one immigrant explained, "What makes America different from a lot of [other] countries is that the freedom of speech grants people the right to say what they want on any issue, which is good. Definitely good— because it alerts people [to] things that they might not have been able to break down or able to notice."[35] Likewise, the United States provides opportunities for people to protest peacefully with minimal fear of legal repercussions. For example, Bloemraad and Trost tell of Señora Sanchez, a legal permanent resident who spoke of attending a rally with her daughter during the 2006 protests: "There were a lot of people and they invited me. . . . I am not like that [someone who participates] either. Not at all . . . I did not think that there would be so many people, and my older daughter could not believe what she was doing. I told her that there is nothing bad and we are just supporting people."[36] Sanchez's observations also highlight how, even for relatively high-risk participation activities such as protesting, the costs to individuals in the United States are less than they would be in some other parts of the world.

As noted earlier, experiences with legal barriers and discrimination can serve as rallying points for immigrant youth working for change. However, such experiences can also reduce immigrant youth's civic par-

ticipation. In a study of more than 5,000 second-generation immigrant adolescents, Portes and Rumbaut found that negative responses to the statement "There is no better country to live in than the United States" were highest among youth who had reported experiencing discrimination.[37] Such responses were especially prevalent among youth from Haiti, Jamaica, and the West Indies, who Rumbaut noted may be the most likely to experience racial discrimination.[38] Negative perceptions of and negative experiences with the U.S. governmental system and discrimination, then, can hinder civic involvement among immigrant youth.

The media are an important platform for the representation, dissemination, and transmission of norms and images. Wray-Lake and colleagues noted that Arab immigrant youth who regarded media portrayals of their culture and religion as negative also were more distrustful of the U.S. government. In response to an open-ended question that states, "Movies and television programs sometimes show certain countries or groups of people as enemies of America. . . . These days what groups do you think are shown as enemies of America?" the researchers found that 61 percent of Arab immigrant youth in their study identified Arabs, Muslims, or Middle Easterners as groups depicted as "enemies" of the United States. Furthermore, these youths' responses were more negative regarding the belief that the U.S. government is responsive to everyone than were those of Arab immigrant youth who did not feel that their own cultural, religious, or national group was perceived in enemy terms.[39]

Negative media images of ethnic groups may thus lead to immigrant youth's less-than-positive views of the U.S. system of government and possibly to less civic involvement. However, media images—even negative ones—can also lead to immigrant youth's increased civic participation. As noted earlier, Stepick and colleagues found that the media attention given to the Elián González case mobilized Cuban immigrant youth to take political action, at least partly because they considered the portrayals of Cubans negative and inaccurate.[40] Similarly, Maira found that some South Asian Muslim immigrant youth paid close attention to media images of Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11 and then sought to counter stereotypic images in their everyday actions.[41] For example, one Asian Indian immigrant youth wrote the words "INDIA + MUSLIM" on

her bag. To her, this display was a way of signaling that she was Muslim, that Muslims are diverse, and that Muslims are a visible and legitimate part of U.S. society. This youth said, "Just because one Muslim did it in New York, you can't involve everybody in there."[42]

Among microlevel contexts, school is an integral component of many immigrant youths' civic participation. We saw in the chapter opening that Anita tutored through her high school and also belonged to an honors society. Flanagan and Levine have argued that college is also a crucial context for civic behaviors because opportunities for youth's involvement are plentiful.[43] With respect to college, Bloemraad and Trost maintain that "youth participate [in civic activities in college] because little is stopping them, costs are modest, and they have time on their hands."[44] Flanagan and Levine have pointed out that although youth who do not attend college may participate in civic activities through church, work, the military, AmeriCorps, and community organizations, these institutions provide fewer occasions for civic engagement than college does. They also emphasize that the membership in many of the institutions that have historically catered to those who do not attend college, such as unions and fraternal social organizations, has decreased greatly and that these organizations do not provide as many opportunities for civic engagement as they once did.[45] While college is an excellent context for civic engagement for youth who attend, these opportunities are not as readily available to youth—immigrant and nonimmigrant—who do not.

Religious institutions, another microlevel context, have been and continue to be an important context in immigrants' social and civic lives.[46] One study of immigrant youth and adults found that half of the participants' civic activities occurred in the context of religious organizations.[47] (It is worth noting that this statistic is similar to one Putnam noted for the general U.S. population's rate of participation.)[48] Furthermore, the study indicates that religious organizations—unlike other institutions such as schools, social service groups, and cultural and political organizations—attract participants evenly across age groups as well as across national and religious backgrounds. While the religious context was important for immigrants' civic involvement, findings also show that few immigrants spoke of having religious or spiritual motivations when explaining their own civic involvement or why such involvement is important more generally. Only 12 percent of immigrant adults

spoke of having religious or spiritual motivations; for immigrant youth, the comparable number was a mere 3 percent.[49] These findings suggest that although religions institutions provide important ways for immigrants to participate in civic activities, involvement with religion is not necessarily an important explanation for their doing so.

Given the high level of commitment to family that immigrant youth often evince,[50] it is important to understand the relationship between the religious context and the civic realm. In a study of high school students, Bogard and Sherrod found that immigrant youth who felt a strong allegiance to their family also strongly agreed with a measure of civic orientation that included items prescribing community service, staying informed, and helping the needy.[51] Bloemraad and Trost noted in their ethnographic research that political socialization was bidirectional, with parents and youth influencing one another. They observed that adolescents and parents accessed different social networks and different information sources. For example, parents tended to watch non-English, ethnic media, whereas youth were more tuned in to mainstream U.S. media and the Internet. In turn, parents and youth shared their different pieces of information. Doing this allowed them to exchange information about different ways to be involved and enabled them to participate in the 2006 protests together.[52] On the basis of research with Asian American immigrant college students, Chan also noted the importance of family for civic engagement. Parents, aunts, uncles, and older cousins not only modeled civic behavior for youth by belonging to and talking about particular groups and activities; they also invited youth to join the organizations and activities.[53]

Chan found that friends and peers similarly recruited immigrant youth in her study to join groups and activities.[54] Clearly, Anita's peers had tried to recruit her for political activities—albeit in her case not successfully. Nonetheless, friends are important during adolescence and emerging adulthood in general,[55] and immigrant youth are no exception. Chan noted that many of the Asian American immigrant college students in her research reported that they had first become involved in student organizations because their friends were involved and had invited them to join.[56]

Friends ask friends to participate in activities. Conversely, the lack of an invitation may also result in a lack of participation. For example,

Bloemraad and Trost mention an adolescent girl who, though sympathetic to the goals of the immigration protests of 2006, did not participate in them. When asked why she had not, she said that her friends had gone but that "they didn't even tell [her]" they were going. She said that if they had invited her, she would have gone.[57] Friends and peers, then, are an important context that lead some immigrant youth to become involved in civic behaviors—but without friends' or peers' invitations, the youth sometimes do not engage in them.

A wide variety of contexts at the macro- and microlevels influence immigrant youth's civic involvement or lack of it. Previous research has provided an initial understanding of some of the important contexts and the ways in which they facilitate or hinder involvement. However, more research on how the intersection of these contexts impacts the involvement of immigrant youth is needed since each individual is enmeshed in many contexts simultaneously. A greater understanding of the connections among contexts would provide a more complete picture of immigrant youth's civic engagement.

## What Are Fruitful and Necessary Future Directions?

As we have seen, interesting and important research on the civic involvement of immigrant youth has been conducted, but many unanswered questions remain. Future studies should take into account the variation in immigrant youth's situations. Bloemraad and Trost's ethnographic work, for example, considers the importance of parents' documentation status to youth's civic engagement. The researchers found that two-thirds of the children whose parents were undocumented or legal permanent residents had participated in the 2006 protests, whereas about half of the children of naturalized parents had done so.[58] The sample size for this study was small, but it notes an important source of variation among immigrant youth. Wray-Lake, Syvertson, and Flanagan's study of Muslim immigrant youth suggests that considering how the dominant society views different immigrant groups can provide insights into immigrant youth's civic attitudes and behavior.[59] Flanagan and Levine have highlighted ways in which differences in immigrant youth's educational circumstances and levels of attainment may influence their opportunities for civic engagement.[60] When research is

designed to consider these areas in which immigrant youth vary, we will gain a better understanding of the similarities and differences in their civic involvement.

In addition to focusing on the diversity of immigrant youth, it would be fruitful for future research to explore the implications of immigrant youth's multicultural skills and perspectives for civic involvement. Some work has already been conducted in this area,[61] even if many of the insights have come about through respondents' answers to questions designed for other purposes. Qualitative research designed to study immigrant youth's perceptions of the ways in which their navigation of different cultures relates to their civic attitudes and involvement should be undertaken next. Listening to immigrant youth like Anita is important. A qualitative approach could provide new emic insights, generate new theories, and place a primary focus on the everyday lived experiences of immigrant youths. Finally, from a developmental point of view, longitudinal research could help address unanswered questions about immigrant youth's civic engagement. Longitudinal work could clarify the extent to which immigrant youth's motives for civic involvement or for their lack of it change from early adolescence to adulthood. It could reveal the potentially positive benefits of their engagement in civic behaviors. Clearly, Anita thought that becoming involved in civic activities at an early age was important and beneficial for her: "I think that the earlier you do it, the better. Because, as I said, it will probably stick with you, and you'll continue it as you grow up."[62] As researchers, we should be inspired to test her thesis and draw from her experience. Longitudinal work could also provide opportunities to examine the waxing and waning importance of different contexts throughout immigrant youth's adolescence and into their adulthood. As noted previously, friends take on added significance in the lives of immigrant children as they move into adolescence. Likewise, their recruitment into civic activities and organizations may gain in importance. However, the influence of friends may wane as youth move into adulthood and as other contexts such as work increasingly become more relevant to them.

## Conclusion

To return to the question asked at the outset: Why is it important to study immigrant youth's involvement in the civic arena? The world is changing. Globalization is occurring at a fast pace, and nations and peoples are no longer able to ignore the rapid increase in diversification. Immigrant youth are at the forefront of this diversification within and among nations. They will, in increasing numbers, become the citizens, leaders, and face of the United States in the years to come. With their multicultural perspectives, immigrant youth are well poised to navigate and bridge civic and political matters in U.S. culture by utilizing the myriad global interconnections that are changing the face of the civic and political realms.

### NOTES

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294 LENE ARNETT JENSEN AND JUSTIN LAPLANTE

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