Civic Engagement Patterns of Undocumented Mexican Students

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Abstract

This study examined the civic engagement of undocumented Mexican students. Civic engagement was defined as providing a social service, activism, tutoring, and functionary work. Survey data results ($n = 126$) suggest that despite high feelings of rejection because of their undocumented status, part-time employment, and household responsibilities, 90% of respondents had been civically engaged. Females and students with higher academic achievement and extracurricular participation demonstrated higher civic engagement whereas older students were more likely to have participated in activism. Policy implications of undocumented Latino college student civic engagement are discussed.

Resumen

Este estudio examina el compromiso cívico de estudiantes mexicanos indocumentados. Compromiso cívico se definió como la provisión de servicio social, activismo, tutoría y, trabajo funcional. Resultados obtenidos de cuestionarios ($n = 126$) sugirieron que a pesar de sentimientos altos de rechazo debido a su estado de indocumentados, empleo de tiempo parcial, y responsabilidades caseras, el 90% de los participantes se habían comprometido cívicamente. Mujeres y estudiantes con logros académicos más altos y participación extra curricular demostraron compromise cívico más alto mientras que estudiantes de mayor edad participaban más en activismo. Implicaciones estratégicas para el compromiso cívico de estudiantes universitarios Latinos indocumentados se discuten.

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Although much has been written on immigrants and civic engagement, most of this research is primarily focused on adult naturalized and native-born Latino citizens (DeSipio, 1996; Ramakrishnan & Espenshade, 2001; Sierra, Carrillo, DeSipio, & Jones-Correa, 2000). This article examined the civic engagement of undocumented Latino young adults in the United States. According to Passel and Cohn (2009), there were 1.7 million undocumented youth between the ages 18 and 24 living in the United States in 2008. Latinos represent approximately 78% of this undocumented population. Whereas 58% of U.S.-born 18- to 24-year-olds are enrolled in college, have been enrolled in college, or have a college degree, the figure is only 26% for undocumented young adults of the same age (Passel & Cohn, 2009). Not only do these students endure the same stressors and risk factors as other Latino immigrant youth, they also face constant institutional and societal exclusion and rejection because of their undocumented status (Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009). They are not eligible for most scholarships, do not qualify for any form of government sponsored financial assistance, cannot obtain a driver's license, are legally barred from formal employment, and may be deported at any time. Undocumented students initially received legal access to public education as a result of the 1982 Supreme Court case of Plyler vs. Doe. The Court ruled that undocumented children must be provided access to a free public education because citizens and/or potential citizens cannot achieve any meaningful degree of individual equality without it, and that they should not forfeit their education because of their parents' decision to immigrate illegally. Although the United States Supreme Court mandates that undocumented children in public schools be accepted as students, because of current immigration policies, they are not accepted as citizens. This puts them in an extremely difficult situation, particularly when they reach college age. How are they responding? Do they resent American society? Or do they find hope and embrace their role in American civic society? Is it possible for undocumented immigrant young adults to participate in American civic life, even as they remain "officially" outside the polity as noncitizens? Relatively little is known about undocumented youths' civic engagement. The present study aimed to examine the civic engagement patterns of undocumented high school, community college, university students, as well as recent college graduates.

Civic Engagement

Consistent with the research on civic engagement (Hodgkinson & Weitzman, 1997; Nolin, Chaney, Chapman, & Chandler, 1997; Youniss, Mclellan, & Mazer, 2001), in this study civic engagement was defined as providing a social service, activism, tutoring, and functionary work. Social service activities entail interaction with people in need such as visiting, feeding, or caring for the homeless, poor, sick, elderly, or handicapped. Activism activities are those focused on a particular social issue or cause such

as the environment, a political party, human rights, or other causes that do not entail direct interaction with the needy. Tutoring involves coaching kids, providing volunteer child care, or academic assistance to students struggling academically. Finally, functionary work activities are those that entail cleaning/maintenance work or organizing/administrative work, such as cleaning up a public beach.

Research on civic engagement shows that families, educational institutions, and organizations all play an important role in influencing youth to be civically engaged (Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin, & Keeter, 2003; Kelly, 2004; Metz & Youniss, 2003; Torney-Purta, 2002; Youniss et al., 2002). Parents and family members play an important role by setting examples. The literature shows that when parents, siblings, and extended family are civically engaged, youth are more likely to develop civic competence (Youniss et al., 2002). Similarly, minority and majority youth who come from homes where at least one family member has volunteered are more likely to be involved by joining a club, an organization, wearing buttons, or volunteering, compared with youth who come from homes where no one volunteers (Andolina et al., 2003; Kelly, 2004).

Like family influences, educational institutions also play a central role in fostering an interest in civic engagement (Andolina et al., 2003). Research has found that when schools help organize volunteer opportunities, and make community service a graduation requirement, students are more likely to continue to be civically engaged after graduation. The types of clubs they have available for students to join are also predictive of later civic engagement. Furthermore, when students are members of political organizations on campus, they are more likely to be civically engaged after graduation compared with students who never joined political clubs (Andolina et al., 2003; Torney-Purta, 2002; Youniss et al., 2002).

Personal Benefits of Civic Engagement

There are many benefits for being civically engaged, besides the benefits that service has on society as a whole. Civic engagement can act as a protector for risky behaviors. Research has shown that youth civic engagement is positively correlated with good attendance, higher grade point average (GPA), higher self-esteem, higher academic self-efficacy, involvement in extracurricular activities, and motivation to learn (Eccles & Barber, 1999). Additionally, civic engagement has the power to influence career aspirations and further political involvement (Balsano, 2005).

Immigrant Youth and Civic Engagement

Although there is an increasing body of research on immigrant youth, attention to civic development and engagement is missing and is much needed given the ongoing national political debate about immigration, citizenship, and what it means to be "American." On virtually a daily basis, American news media features stories about immigrants' civil rights and responsibilities, and the nature of their commitment to the United States and American values. There has also been an increase in news stories about immigrants

entering into the public debate through various forms of civic engagement, ranging from public marches to local community projects to student walkouts. The civic potential of young immigrants became evident in early 2006 when rallies were held across the United States in support of immigration policy reform that was sympathetic to immigrants. Students held rallies or walked out of school to express their support for immigrant workers and the need for immigration reform (Bada, Fox, & Selee, 2006). Whereas the recent immigration policy reform debate in Congress has focused on economic, security, and legal issues, the debate has largely ignored the civic engagement of immigrant youth.

In one of the few studies to examine immigrant youth civic engagement, Stepick, Stepick, and Labissiere (2008) find that 80% of first-generation, 90% of 1.5 generation, 89% of second-generation college freshman in South Florida volunteered or had done community service in the past 12 months compared with 87% of nonimmigrant students. The rates for the 1.5 and second-generation students was higher than the 82.6% reported for freshman nationwide in 2001 (Sax, Lindholm, Astin, Korn, & Mahoney, 2001). Even the first-generation immigrants compare favorably with the approximately 75% of high school seniors nationwide who did volunteer or community service in high school (Lopez, 2003).

On the other hand, Lopez and Marcelo (2008) find that among young adults between the age of 15 to –25 years, unadjusted for demographic factors, when compared on a wide range of civic engagement measures, immigrant youth in their sample were less engaged than the children of immigrants or natives. However, many of the differences observed between immigrant youth and natives were mitigated after controlling for demographic factors, suggesting that differences in engagement are explained by factors such as socioeconomic background. The authors also suggest that civic engagement differences may reflect structural barriers to engagement that young immigrants face more than a desire not to get involved.

Finally, in her ethnographic study, Jensen (2008) notes that some immigrant young adults are motivated to tutor, help others, and take part in politics out of concern with the needs and accomplishments of their immigrant and cultural communities, as well as with the representation and respect afforded these communities within the larger polity. The immigrant adolescents she interviewed were more civically engaged at the community than political level. The 88% participation rate among the adolescents she interviewed was higher than the 75% of high school seniors who reported community service or volunteering within the past 12 months in a recent national survey (Lopez, 2003).

Undocumented Immigrant Students

Although literature exists on first- and second-generation immigrants, there is a lack of research on the undocumented immigrant student population. In one of only a handful of studies, Dozier (1993) found three central emotional concerns for undocumented college students: fear of deportation, loneliness, and depression. Dozier found that fear of deportation was so central to undocumented students' experiences, it influenced almost every aspect of their lives. Some students reported being afraid of going to

hospitals because they worried that their immigration status would be questioned. Because their legal status made it impossible to obtain work authorization, they were sometimes forced to stay in bad work conditions because they feared not being able to find another job. Additionally, undocumented students were often reluctant to develop close emotional relationships with others for fear of their undocumented status being discovered.

In another qualitative study focusing on undocumented female Mexican college students, Munoz (2008) reports that all respondents reported frustration, helplessness, shame, and fear because of their undocumented status, but they also reported being highly involved on campus in extracurricular activities as a way to feel a sense of belonging. Gonzalez, Plata, Garcia, Torres, & Urrieta's (2003) ethnographic research also highlights the negative impact of undocumented status on students' academic achievement. For example, a young woman who grew up in a household with three other siblings and a single mother recalls participating in various extracurricular activities while maintaining a stellar 4.38 grade point average until she found out she was undocumented. Afterwards, she discontinued most of her activities, dropped her Honors and AP courses, and her GPA fell to 2.5.

Oliverez's (2006) qualitative research with Latino undocumented high school seniors finds that most lived in small crowded apartments where they could not find a quiet space to study. In all, 60% of her participants lived in crowded homes with six or more people, and 90% lived in single or studio apartments where everyone slept in the same room. Many students reported not having enough time or being too busy to complete their school work because they held jobs that sometimes left them too tired to focus on school. Sixty percent reported working after school or on the weekends between 16 and 40 hours per week. All students reported being frustrated by the restrictions they encountered because of their undocumented status. Similar to Munoz (2008), 40% chose to be proactive by engaging in community service or mentoring activities to help undocumented youth like themselves.

Civic Development of Undocumented Students

By virtue of the extensive civic development efforts of schools, both formal and informal, undocumented students adopt an American social and political identity prompting them to act and behave according to the democratic and civic ideals they learn in school. Their adherence to American democratic values has been nurtured for years by teachers, extracurricular activities, and the social studies curriculum (Hess, 2005; Ochoa-Becker, 1996; Thornton, 1991). However, as they approach the transition from secondary education to higher education, their legal dilemma comes to the forefront as the Plyler decision no longer guarantees their educational access once they complete high school. As a result of their legal limbo, some youth might develop a weak affection for a system where they feel treated like an outsider and may disengage completely from civic action because of their feelings of marginalization. Others may become engaged in collective action with other undocumented youth who share in their sense of disenfranchisement

(Flanagan & Gallay, 1995). Such collective efforts have the potential to build a sense of personal efficacy, a belief that social change is possible and that their actions can have an impact on the political process (Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954). Because most, if not all, undocumented Latino youth aspire for citizenship, and there are many in the process of becoming citizens, they may be likely to participate in various forms of civic engagement, even if their status prevents them from participating in some activities.

The findings from the few studies focusing on undocumented Latino youth suggest that while both documented and undocumented immigrant Latino youth face similar educational and psychological risks, undocumented youth's precarious legal status translates into additional risks. The effects of legal marginalization on civic engagement, however, have not been studied.

The present study is the first to examine civic engagement of undocumented youth. It addressed the following two questions: (a) What are the civic engagement patterns of undocumented youths? and (b) How does undocumented and low socioeconomic status affect Latino youth's civic engagement? Consistent with previous literature on ethnic minority youth (Yates & Youniss, 1996), it was hypothesized that greater feelings of rejection and marginalization because of their undocumented status would be associated with lower levels of civic engagement. It was also hypothesized that greater obligations outside of school such as part-time employment during school and greater levels of household responsibilities would be associated with lower levels of civic engagement (Stepick & Stepick, 2002).

Method

Participants

One hundred and twenty-six undocumented Latino high school seniors, community college, university students, and recent college graduates participated in the study. The average age of participants was 20.44 ($SD = 2.40$) years. Females comprised 63% of the sample. The male-to-female ratio in this study is similar to the national college enrollment rates for Latinos. Hurtado, Saenz, Santos, and Cabrera (2008), for example, reported that of all Latinos enrolled in college in 2006, 61% were female, and more specifically, Mexican students had a female ratio of 63%. The high school group in this study was gender balanced with 50% female. Table 1 indicates that the mean age when participants immigrated to the United States was 7.28 ($SD = 4.37$) years old. All participants were born in México. Similar to the overall estimated immigrant and undocumented population (Passel, 2003), the majority of participants resided in either California or Texas, accounting for 73% and 18% of the sample, respectively. The remaining 9% resided in various other states including Virginia, New York, Washington D.C., Georgia, Missouri, and Washington.

The mean years of education for respondent mothers was 8.30 ($SD = 4.34$) years whereas respondent fathers had a mean educational attainment of 9.85 ($SD = 4.51$) years. Participants also reported high levels of part-time employment during school with 62%

Table 1. Background and Psychosocial Variables

	Male (*n* = 46)	Female (*n* = 76)	Total (*N* = 122)
	M (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)
Age	20.32 (2.60)	20.45 (2.33)	20.44 (2.40)
Immigration age	7.50 (5.16)	7.15 (3.88)	7.28 (4.37)
Mother's years of schooling	8.08 (4.30)	8.73 (4.39)	8.30 (4.34)
Father's years of schooling	9.27 (4.44)	10.22 (4.54)	9.85 (4.51)
Household responsibilities[a]	2.87 (1.08)	2.88 (1.14)	2.88 (1.12)
Hours worked/work in high school	14.29 (12.41)	12.16 (13.28)	12.84 (12.95)
Hours worked/work in college	29.49 (19.27)	23.41 (15.50)	25.63 (17.12)
High school GPA	3.41 (.66)	3.52 (.49)	3.48 (.55)
College GPA	3.13 (.45)	3.18 (.50)	3.16 (.48)
Rejection due to status[b]	4.33 (1.65)	4.14 (1.52)	4.21 (1.56)

Note: GPA = grade point average. Variables not sharing a subscript are significantly different from each other at the .05 level within the school category columns. There were no significant sex differences across all background variables.
a. Scale for household responsibilities ranged from 5 (*almost every day*), 4 (*once or twice a week*), 3 (*once in a while*), 2 (*almost never*), 1 (*never*).
b. Scale for rejection because of status ranged from 7 (*always*), 6 (*almost always*), 5 (*often*), 4 (*sometimes*), 3 (*seldom*), 2 (*almost never*), 1 (*never*).

reporting working during high school and 88% in college. For the overall sample, students worked 12.84 (*SD* = 12.95) hours per week during high school. In college, the average number of hours worked per week increased to 25.63 (*SD* = 17.12). An examination of the 62% and 88% of students who reported working during high school or college, respectively, reveals that the average number of hours worked per week is much higher at 21.38 (*SD* = 9.45) in high school and 30.04 (*SD* = 14.93) in college. Thus, the students who did work during high school and college, worked very long hours. In addition to part-time employment, students also reported having various responsibilities at home like caring for their younger siblings and helping the family with shopping. Results from a 3-item, 5-point likert scale of household responsibility from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*almost every day*, α = .72) indicates that on average, participants had household responsibilities "once in a while" (*M* = 2.88, *SD* = 1.12). Despite these time commitments outside school, all respondents reported high academic achievement levels with an overall high school grade point average (GPA) of 3.48 (*SD* = .55) and a college GPA of 3.16 (*SD* = .48).

Procedure

Students were selected from a convenience sample recruited using e-mail and flyer advertisements to various Latino student organizations. Information flyers were also passed out in several high school and college classrooms. Participants were also asked to forward our information to other students that met our study criteria of being undocumented. The

recruitment flyers and e-mails invited students to participate in a research study that focused on "the educational experiences of undocumented students." This is the only detail that participants received regarding the purpose of the study during recruitment. After the completion of the survey, students were debriefed about the purpose of the study and were provided the opportunity to ask additional questions. E-mail and printed flyer announcements contained a link to an online survey hosted by Surveymonkey.com that took approximately 45 minutes to complete. The online survey did not collect names, e-mails, school names, or any other identifying information to protect the identity of participants.

The first part of the online survey consisted of open-ended questions that asked participants to list their academic achievements, civic engagement experiences, extracurricular activities, leadership positions, and enrollment in advanced level academic courses. The second part of the survey consisted of school background and demographic information. The third and final part of the online questionnaire consisted of various likert-type style, self-reported questions designed to assess perceived societal rejection because of undocumented status and responsibilities at home.

Measures

Based on the civic engagement literature (Hodgkinson & Weitzman, 1997; Nolin et al., 1997; Youniss et al., 2001), we operationalized four main civic engagement indicators: (a) providing a social service, (b) activism, (c) tutoring, and (d) functionary work. Following is a description of the measures used in the online survey.

Total civic engagement. In four separate open-ended format questions, students were asked the following, "Please list any volunteer or community service activities during elementary school/middle school/high school/college." Open-ended responses were then coded into one of the four civic engagement categories described below. After all civic engagement activities that students listed were coded into one of the four categories, counts for each category were summed to create a total civic engagement score.

Social service. Open-ended responses that indicated having performed volunteer or community service work that required interaction with people in need were coded as social service for each distinct activity. For example, if a respondent reported volunteer work in a homeless shelter feeding the homeless, poor, sick and also reported volunteer at a convalescent home caring for the elderly or handicapped, she or he received a score of 2 on the social service index.

Activism. Open-ended responses that indicated having engaged in activities focused on a particular social issue or cause such as the environment, a political party, human rights, or other causes that did not entail direct interaction with the needy were coded and counted as activism. For example, if a respondent reported two separate activities, one focused on immigrant rights and a different one focused on environmental justice the respondent received a score of 2 on the activism index.

Tutoring. Tutoring was defined as coaching, child care, or academic assistance. For example, volunteer work that entailed tutoring students on academic subjects or providing free child care through an educational or community-based organization was coded as tutoring.

Functionary work. This category was defined as having participated in community service or volunteer activities that entailed cleaning/maintenance work or organizing/administrative work. An example of functionary work is cleaning up a public area such as a beach.

Extracurricular activities. Students were asked to list all the school-sponsored extracurricular activities during K-16. Extracurricular participation was defined as participation in the following activities: student council, sports, band/music/choir, drama/theater, newspaper/magazine/yearbook, cultural dance, clubs, YMCA/YWCA, Boys/Girls Club. After the extracurricular activities were coded, they were counted and summed to create a total extracurricular participation score.

Leadership position. Students were asked to list leadership positions held during K-16. Leadership positions were defined as having held the following positions: student council officer, sports captain, club officer, band chair, yearbook/newspaper editor, student club officer. After the leadership positions were coded, they were counted and summed to create a total leadership positions score.

GPA. The GPA variable was calculated by asking students to report their overall high school GPA on a standard 4.0 scale. Previous research that included Latino high school students (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987) has found a strong correlation, .76, between self-reported grades and official grades.

School awards. Students were asked in an open-ended format to list all awards they received in high school. An academic award was defined by student of the month award, honor roll, attendance award, spelling bee/writing/poetry contest award, subject award (i.e. science award), school sports award, band/music/choir award, community service award, citizenship award for good behavior, or student of the year award. After the awards were coded, they were counted and summed to create a total awards score.

High school/college employment. Students were asked, "How many hours per week did you work in high school/college?"

Rejection because of undocumented status scale. This scale was composed of 3 statements such as "Because of my undocumented background I feel that I am not wanted in this country." Participants responded using a 7-point likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*) with higher scores indicated high feelings of alienation. The scale had a high Cronbach's α of .89.

Family responsibilities. The family responsibilities scale was composed of three items such as, "When you were growing up, how often did you get your brothers or sisters ready for school?" Participants responded using a 5-point likert-type scale from 1 (*never*) to 5(*almost every day*) The scale had a Cronbach's α of .72.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Civic engagement. Table 2 reports the percentage of respondents who had participated in the various forms of civic engagement in elementary school, middle school, high school, college, and a cumulative tally that sums up civic engagement from elementary

Table 2. Civic Engagement Rates During High School, College, and Lifetime

	Elementary School		Middle School		High School		College		Lifetime	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Volunteered 41+ hrs/year	7	8	2	11	28	39	20	35		
Civic engagement	37	38	44	37	63	77	44*	65	85	92
Social service	0	4	4	1	4	10	0*	15	6*	24
Political activism	0	1	2	1	2	4	13	23	15	25
Tutoring	17	23	17	15	17*	41	11*	28	41*	65
Functionary work	24	23	26	24	52	58	35	42	78	77
Extracurricular activities	54	54	61	63	83	89	50	60	93	97

*Gender differences are significantly different at the .05 level.

school until the time of the survey. Results indicate that in elementary school, 38% were civically engaged. In middle school, civic engagement rates increased to 41%. In high school, 73% participated in some form of civic engagement with 34% reporting spending more than 40 hours per year doing volunteer work. More specifically, 7% provided social services, 3% were involved in activism, 29% tutored, and 55% performed functionary work. Overall 86% of all respondents also participated in extracurricular activities during high school. Chi-square analyses revealed that in high school, female students engaged in tutoring activities at higher rates than their male counterparts, $\chi^2(1) = 7.14$, $p < .05$. In college, 55% participated in some form of civic engagement with 28% reporting spending more than 40 hours per year doing volunteer work. More specifically, 8% provided social services, 18% were involved in activism, 20% tutored, and 39% performed functionary work. Overall, 55% of all respondents also participated in extracurricular activities during high school. Chi-square analyses revealed that in college, female students engaged in overall civic engagement $\chi^2(1) = 5.26$, $p < .05$, providing a social service, $\chi^2(1) = 7.73$, $p < .05$ and tutoring at higher rates than their male counterparts, $\chi^2(1) = 4.95$, $p < .05$.

In all, 89% of students had participated in some form of civic engagement during K-16. Furthermore, 15% had provided social services, 20% had been involved in activism, 53% had tutored, and 78% had done some type of functionary work. Overall, extracurricular participation rates during the formal schooling years was 95%. A chi-square analysis by gender indicated higher K-16 rates of providing a social service, $\chi^2(1) = 6.16$, $p < .05$, and tutoring, $\chi^2(1) = 6.38$, $p < .05$ for females (see Table 2).

Participants versus nonparticipants. A comparison of civic engagement participants versus nonparticipants revealed higher extracurricular participation for students that

had volunteered, $t(124) = 3.16$, $p < .05$, as well as higher levels of academic performance, $t(124) = 2.25$, $p < .05$, higher number of academic awards, $t(124) = 2.86$, $p < .05$, and higher number of leadership positions, $t(124) = 4.19$, $p < .05$. Although students that had participated in some form of civic engagement reported higher levels of societal rejection because of their undocumented status, the difference only approached significance, $t(124) = 1.95$, $p < .10$. Social service participants had higher levels of extracurricular participation, $t(124) = 2.03$, $p < .05$, higher levels of academic awards, $t(124) = 4.06$, $p < .05$, and higher number of leadership positions, $t(124) = 2.10$, $p < .05$, than students that had not provided social services. Similarly, activism participants had higher levels of extracurricular activities, $t(124) = 3.05$, $p < .05$, academic awards, $t(124) = 4.91$, $p < .05$, and higher sense of societal rejection because of their undocumented status, $t(124) = 2.01$, $p < .05$, compared with those that had not engaged in political activism. Tutoring participants had significantly higher GPA's, $t(123) = 2.52$, $p < .05$, higher number of academic awards, $t(124) = 3.41$, $p < .05$, and leadership positions, $t(124) = 2.00$, $p < .05$, than students that had not been involved in tutoring activities. Finally, students who had performed functionary duties had higher number of academic awards, $t(124) = 2.41$, $p < .05$, had higher levels of extracurricular activities, $t(124) = 3.16$, $p < .05$, and a higher number of leadership positions, $t(224) = 3.12$, $p < .05$. To summarize, contrary to our initial hypotheses, working longer hours during school, greater household responsibilities, and higher feelings of rejection because of undocumented status are not associated with lower civic engagement. In fact, students who reported participating in political activism reported higher levels of societal rejection because of their undocumented status. Overall, results indicate that students who reported the highest level of extracurricular participation, higher academic achievement, and higher number of leadership positions had higher civic engagement rates (see Table 3).

Analysis of Variance

The next set of analyses examined the relationship between background characteristics, school participation, academic achievement, perceptions of social exclusion, and civic engagement. Students were divided into three groups based on their levels of overall civic engagement: no civic engagement, low civic engagement, and high civic engagement. Results indicate that in all, students who did not report any civic engagement had lower rates of extracurricular activity participation, $F(2, 109) = 11.46$, $p < .05$; lower GPA, $F(2, 109) = 4.99$, $p < .05$; lower number of academic awards, $F(2, 109) = 15.21$, $p < .05$; and lower number of leadership positions, $F(2, 109) = 18.99$, $p < .05$, than students with high civic engagement. Furthermore, students with low civic engagement had lower extracurricular activity participation, lower academic awards, and lower leadership positions than high civic engagement students (see Table 4).

Civic engagement clusters. The last analysis examined the relationship between participation in different types of civic engagement and academic and psychosocial outcomes. Participants were divided into four clusters, those who had not been involved in any type of civic engagement, those who had only been involved in one type of civic

Table 3. Civic Engagement Participation by Demographic, Academic, and Psychosocial Characteristics

	Civic Engagement		Social Service		Political Activism		Tutoring		Functionary Work	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Hrs worked during school	17.82 (13.38)	14.71 (13.36)	16.25 (12.22)	17.47 (13.61)	18.41 (13.62)	16.98 (13.36)	17.23 (13.06)	17.34 (13.70)	18.14 (13.03)	15.44 (14.09)
Family responsibilities	2.89 (1.17)	2.83 (.85)	3.19 (1.26)	2.82 (1.09)	2.92 (1.10)	2.86 (1.13)	3.01 (1.18)	2.78 (1.07)	2.88 (1.18)	2.86 (.98)
Extracurricular participation	2.92[a] (1.68)	1.73[b] (1.20)	3.44[a] (1.95)	2.59[b] (1.59)	3.56[a] (1.53)	2.48[b] (1.64)	2.98 (1.82)	2.51 (1.53)	3.02[a] (1.66)	2.05[b] (1.50)
GPA	3.41[a] (.43)	3.18[b] (.46)	3.45 (.32)	3.36 (.46)	3.37 (.38)	3.37 (.46)	3.48[a] (.42)	3.28[b] (.44)	3.41 (.41)	3.27 (.52)
Rejection because of status	4.34* (1.47)	3.62 (1.86)	4.50 (1.22)	4.16m (1.62)	4.76[a] (1.25)	4.06[b] (1.61)	4.40 (1.40)	4.07 (1.66)	4.35 (1.45)	3.90 (1.77)
Academic awards	2.68[a] (1.70)	1.59[b] (1.22)	3.89[a] (1.84)	2.26[b] (1.53)	3.78[a] (1.76)	2.14[b] (1.47)	3.06[a] (1.86)	2.07[b] (1.39)	2.73[a] (1.69)	1.98[b] (1.53)
Leadership position	1.58[a] (1.25)	.41[b] (.80)	1.94[a] (1.30)	1.28[b] (1.24)	1.67 (1.14)	1.29 (1.29)	1.63[a] (1.26)	1.18[b] (1.24)	1.60[a] (1.25)	.88[b] (1.16)

Note: GPA = grade point average. Civic engagement category columns not sharing a superscript are statistically different at the .05 level.
*p < .10.

Table 4. Civic Engagement Levels by Demographic, Academic, and Psychosocial Characteristics

	No Civic Engagement (n = 22)	Low Civic Engagement (n = 44)	High Civic Engagement (n = 46)	Total (n = 112)
Hrs worked during school	14.71[a] (13.36)	18.30[a] (15.20)	18.64[a] (13.61)	17.76 (13.63)
Family responsibilities	2.83[a] (.85)	2.81[a] (1.13)	2.95[a] (1.20)	2.87 (1.10)
Extracurricular participation	1.73[a] (1.20)	2.41[a] (1.45)	3.50[b] (1.74)	2.72 (1.67)
GPA	3.18[a] (.46)	3.35[a,b] (.51)	3.51[b] (.28)	3.38 (.43)
Rejection because of status	3.62[a] (1.86)	4.33[a] (1.62)	4.45[a] (1.42)	4.24 (1.61)
Academic awards	1.59[a] (1.22)	2.00[a] (1.41)	3.43[b] (1.71)	2.51 (1.69)
Leadership position	.41[a] (.80)	1.16[b] (1.03)	2.11[b] (1.30)	1.40[b] (1.28)

Note: GPA = grade point average. Civic engagement category columns not sharing a superscript are statistically different at the .05 level.
*p < .10.

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engagement, (e.g., tutoring), those who had been involved in two types of civic engagement (e.g. tutoring, social service), and those who had been involved in at least three or more civic engagement types (e.g. tutoring, social service, activism). Students did not differ in the number of hours worked per week during school, or family responsibility levels. Students who engaged in two or more types of civic engagement activities had greater levels of extracurricular participation than those that had no civic engagement participation, $F(3, 122) = 6.84$, $p < .05$. Also, students with two types of civic engagement activities had higher GPA's than those with no civic engagement, $F(3, 122) = 2.31$, $p < .05$. The cluster groups did not differ in feelings of societal rejection because of undocumented status. Students with two or more types of civic engagement activities reported higher levels of academic awards than those with no civic engagement, $F(3, 122) = 12.56$, $p < .05$. Finally, students with one or more civic engagement activity had higher leadership experience levels than those with no civic engagement, $F(3, 122) = 7.04$, $p < .05$.

To summarize, our study found high levels of civic engagement among undocumented youth. Eighty-nine percent of participants reported at least one civic engagement activity during K-16. The most frequent type of civic engagement was functionary work, followed by tutoring, activism, and providing social services, respectively. Overall, civic engagement and extracurricular participation rates decrease in college compared with high school levels. Although there is a decrease in tutoring and functionary work, college students are more involved in political activism and providing social services compared with high school rates. Students who had participated in some form of civic engagement had significantly higher GPA's than nonparticipants. Female students reported higher levels of overall civic engagement, social service, and tutoring activities. *T*-test analyses also revealed that participants who reported any type of civic engagement, and more specifically activism, providing social services, and functionary work also had higher levels of overall extracurricular participation.

Our initial hypotheses regarding the relationship between sense of rejection, part-time employment, household responsibilities, and civic engagement were not supported. Sense of rejection and part-time employment during school were not associated with lower civic engagement. Higher levels of family responsibilities, part-time employment and sense of rejection because of undocumented status did not dissuade students from becoming civically engaged.

Discussion

This article investigated the extent to which undocumented youth are civically active in the United States. Few studies have focused on civic participation with respect to noncitizens, largely ignoring the role of the noncitizen. In particular, we have focused on civic activities such as providing social services, working for a cause, political activism, tutoring, and functionary work. By analyzing these measures of civic engagement, we find that undocumented Latino youth have high rates of civic participation. Although previous studies have examined the role of traditional demographic factors in predicting participation, we isolated factors such as extracurricular participation, academic

Table 5. Civic Engagement Clusters by Demographic, Academic, and Psychosocial Characteristics

	No Civic Engagement (n = 22)	One Civic Engagement Category (n = 52)	Two Civic Engagement Categories (n = 31)	Three or More Civic Engagement Categories (n = 21)	Total
Hrs worked during school	14.71[a] (13.36)	17.26[a] (13.72)	18.40[a] (14.52)	18.36[a] (11.23)	17.29 (13.38)
Family responsibilities	2.83[a] (.85)	2.87[a] (1.17)	2.69[a] (1.12)	3.25[a] (1.22)	2.88 (1.12)
Extracurricular participation	1.73[a] (1.20)	2.46[a,b] (1.58)	3.23[b,c] (1.52)	3.62[c] (1.88)	2.71 (1.67)
GPA	3.18[a] (.46)	3.36[a,b] (.44)	3.50[b] (.47)	3.40[a,b] (.31)	3.37 (.44)
Rejection because of status	3.62[a] (1.86)	4.21[a] (1.57)	4.29[a] (1.52)	4.75[a] (1.06)	4.21 m (1.56)
Academic awards	1.59[a] (1.22)	2.02[a,b] (1.38)	2.90[b] (1.54)	4.00[c] (1.84)	2.49 (1.67)
Leadership position	.41[a] (.80)	1.37[b] (1.27)	1.77[b] (1.23)	1.81[b] (1.21)	1.37 (1.26)

Note: GPA = grade point average. Civic engagement category columns not sharing a superscript are statistically different at the .05 level.

performance, and household responsibilities and analyzed their relationship to civic participation among undocumented Latino youth. With these findings, conventional notions of minority participation should be revisited with particular attention to immigrant communities. We find that a majority of noncitizen college-going Latino youth are participating in American civic life.

Our findings also both expand on and challenge current notions of civic engagement. The results indicate high levels of civic participation among undocumented students with 90% of participants reporting civic engagement in the form of providing social services, activism, tutoring, and functionary work. As a comparison, the NAEP reports that 58% of 12th-grade students are involved in volunteering in their communities (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). Stepick et al. (2008) find that among first-year college immigrant college students, 80% of first-generation, 90% of 1.5 generation, and 89% of second-generation volunteered or had done community service in the past 12 months compared with 87% of nonimmigrant students. The rates were higher than the 82.6% reported for freshman (Sax et al., 2001) and the 75% of high school seniors nationwide (Lopez, 2003).

It is not completely surprising that students in our study had higher civic engagement rates compared with national trends because college and college-going students tend to be more involved in civic engagement activities (Eccles & Barber, 1999). What is surprising is the fact that their high civic engagement rates are also accompanied by various obstacles they face because of their socioeconomic and undocumented status that include working long hours per week during high school and college to pay for school and personal expenses, and in many cases, helping out their families with a variety of household responsibilities.

Because of the Plyer decision, undocumented students are politically socialized through the educational system and other civic institutions to become actively engaged "citizens." The undocumented Latino youth in our study appear to embrace their role as contributing civic participants. Despite their social marginalization, undocumented Latino students in this study demonstrated a strong commitment to civic engagement. Rather than become completely dejected, hopeless, and apathetic, they invest time and effort in community service, volunteerism, and activism.

So what can be expected in the future of undocumented college students who demonstrate high levels of civic engagement as young adults if they were to become legalized? Research consistently shows that youth who are civically involved continue to do so as adults. Ladewig and Thomas (1987) found that membership in organizations during youth predicts membership and leadership in community organizations into adulthood. McAdam (1988) and Fendrich (1993) report that individuals who participated in civil rights activities as adolescents during the 1960s continued to be politically active both at the local and national levels 25 years later. Furthermore, participating in high school government has been linked with political participation in adulthood (Hanks & Eckland, 1978; Otto, 1976; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Thus, these findings suggests that because service has been a formative experience for undocumented students in our study, they will most likely continue to assume leadership positions in their community and remain civically active throughout their lives.

Design and Sampling Considerations

This research is limited in several respects. Although we have adjusted for some factors that may explain differences between civic engagement participants and nonparticipants, students chose whether to participate in civic engagement activities, and as such, selection effects not considered in this study may influence the findings. For example, support from parents appears to influence the decision to participate and to stay involved in after-school activities (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; Fletcher, Elder, & Mekos, 2000). The peer group also plays a role (e.g., Coleman, 1961; Eder, Evans, Parker, 1995; Hultzman, 1995). In addition, the correlational nature of the study prevents us from drawing causal conclusions regarding developmental antecedents and civic engagement outcomes. More longitudinal studies are required to establish the developmental pathways to citizenship and volunteering competencies to more fully understand the role of their antecedents.

Future research is needed to examine how these and various other individual factors actually moderate associations underlying development of civic engagement. If a central goal in a democratic state is for all citizens to feel invested and engaged in the politics and well-being of society, researchers need to shed more light on how factors such as poverty, legal marginalization, and discrimination influence development of civic participation. In this age of globalization, when traditional conceptions of the nation-state and national identification are changing rapidly, identifying the factors that determine or contribute to a person's identification and allegiance to a given state or society (or alternatives) is crucial (Stepick & Stepick, 2002). Despite its limitations, results of this study add to the small but growing knowledge about key precursors of civic engagement among undocumented students. A deeper understanding of developmental pathways to civic engagement has the potential not only to illuminate long-held conceptual models about the development of competence in the context of society but also to inform efforts by societies and communities to encourage and shape the active participation of their citizens.

Conclusions

Our results suggest that despite ongoing concerns about their legal status, participants in this study reported high levels of civic engagement. Nevertheless, the long-term civic benefit to American society is uncertain because of their legal status. The United States government does not recognize undocumented immigrant youth as formal members of society regardless of their various civic contributions and academic accomplishments. Despite recently introduced federal legislation know as the Dream Act to legalize high achieving and civically engaged undocumented youth, current negative public opinion regarding immigration continues to put these model citizens in the shadows with few prospects to fully realize their potential as civic leaders.

This study challenges simplistic characterizations of undocumented students as "law breakers," and instead, presents a more nuanced way of considering the various ways undocumented youth contribute to American society. Our results also suggest that

research on Latino youth's civic involvement should not be limited to just legal citizens but instead should include large enough samples of foreign-born respondents, including noncitizens, to fully examine the scope of civic participation among all Latinos. We should not lose sight of the noncitizen immigrant population in America, because as our data suggest, they make important contributions to our society and are active participants in social and political life.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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