

About the Researchers

Timothy Ready

is director of research at the Institute for Latino Studies.

Before

coming to Notre Dame, he was senior program officer in the Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education at the National Research Council of The National Academies. During the 1990s he directed the campaign of the Association of American Medical Colleges to increase racial and ethnic diversity in US medical schools and created a national network of community partnerships to increase the number of students both interested in and academically prepared to pursue careers in the health professions. He was a faculty member in the Department of Anthropology at the Catholic University of America and has researched and written on Latino health and education issues in South Texas, Washington DC, and Chicago.



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Latino Civic and Community Involvement: Findings from the Chicago-Area Survey¹

Introduction

Civic engagement and community involvement are key indicators of incorporation into the social and political life of this country. They are particularly important for understanding patterns of incorporation of Latino immigrants and their US-born children in metropolitan Chicago. Civic engagement can take many forms, including contacting public officials about a community problem, working with neighbors to address local concerns, participating in a demonstration,



and voting. Community involvement can range from individual volunteerism to membership in a church or a school council to participation in the electoral process. Activities indicative of community involvement include working in a soup kitchen, donating blood, and involvement in a parent-teacher organization, labor union, or tenants association.

¹ The 2003 Chicago-Area Survey was a randomized sample of 1,512 Latino, 411 non-Latino White, and 403 non-Latino Black households in metropolitan Chicago (Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will counties). The lines of inquiry and questionnaire were designed by a group of scholars working with the Institute for Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame. Field work was conducted by NuStats Corporation of Austin, Texas. Approximately 21,750 households were eligible for interviewing. A total of 2,326 interviews were completed among Latinos, Whites, and Blacks in the Chicago region. Respondents were 18 years and older; interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish. For more detailed information about the survey visit the website: <http://www.nd.edu/~latino/CAS>. Survey data in this report are from the 1,512 surveys completed among Latino respondents.

An underlying principle of democracy is that all members of society should have the opportunity to move comfortably among these various types of community and civic involvement. Indeed, such

involvement is necessary for the effective functioning of our social and political institutions. Although more than half of survey respondents are foreign born and more than one-third are not citizens

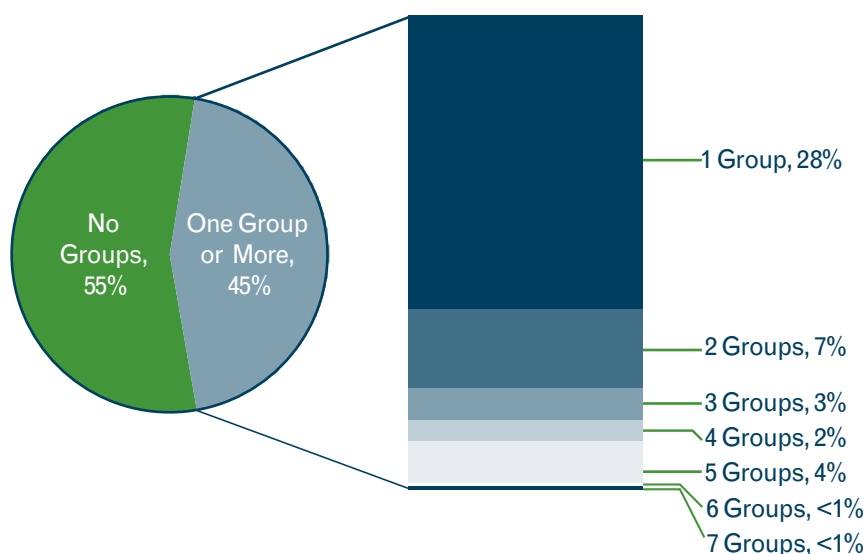
and thus are ineligible to vote,² they are nonetheless extensively involved in civic and community life, as described below.

² Latino involvement in electoral politics is addressed in a separate paper in this series.

Membership in Community and Civic Organizations

As illustrated in Figure 1, 45 percent of all Latinos belong to at least one community group or organization, and nearly one in five belongs to two or more organizations.

Figure 1
Percentage of Latinos Who Are Members of One or More Community Organizations



(7 percent), and parent-teacher organizations, fraternal organizations, and tenants and homeowners associations (each at 6 percent). Four percent of respondents belong to a political action group, 2 percent are members of veterans organizations, and less than 1 percent belong to any other organization not previously mentioned.

The level of involvement of Chicago-area Latinos in community organizations appears to be slightly lower than for Latinos nationally. For example, using the same definition of church membership, 48 percent of Hispanics nationally are members of a church congregation. As in Chicago, church membership also is the most common form of organizational membership for Latinos. The next most common type of organizational membership claimed by Latinos nationally is parent-teacher associations at 17 percent. The organizations next most frequently mentioned by Latinos nationally include neighborhood associations and faith-based organizations (each at 14 percent), fraternal organizations

Church membership is by far the most frequently cited kind of organizational membership.³ Survey respondents were considered to be church members if they reported attending church “nearly every week” or more often. By this definition, a third (33 percent) of Chicago-area Latinos are church members (Figure 2).⁴ Faith-based civic and charitable organizations were the only other organizational category in which more than 10 percent of survey respondents claimed membership. The next most frequently cited organizations to which survey respondents belong are neighborhood watch groups (9 percent), hometown associations

³ Religion and participation in faith-based organizations are discussed in greater detail in a forthcoming paper in this series.

⁴ Using a less strict definition, 47 percent of Latinos could be considered church members, if membership is defined as attending at least once a month.



and political groups (each at 7 percent), and veterans groups (6 percent).⁵

It should be noted that not all members of faith-based community organizations in our survey are members of religious congregations. However, it is clear that church membership is an important pathway into faith-based social action groups, the second most frequently cited form of organizational membership in Chicago. It also should be noted that the 6 percent of respondents who are members of hometown associations can be understood as belonging to transnational community organizations—organizations based on tracing one's roots to a particular town in Mexico or some other country. Interestingly, belonging to a transnational community organization does not lower the probability of being involved in local community groups. In fact, 70 percent of members of hometown associations belong to at least four additional Chicago-based community organizations.

Foreign-born Latinos are much more likely to belong to a community or civic organization than are the US born; 53 percent of the foreign born belong to one or more community or civic organizations compared to only 37 percent of the US born (Figure 3).

Church membership by the foreign born accounts for virtually all

Figure 2
Percentage of Chicago-Area Latinos Who Belong to Community Organizations

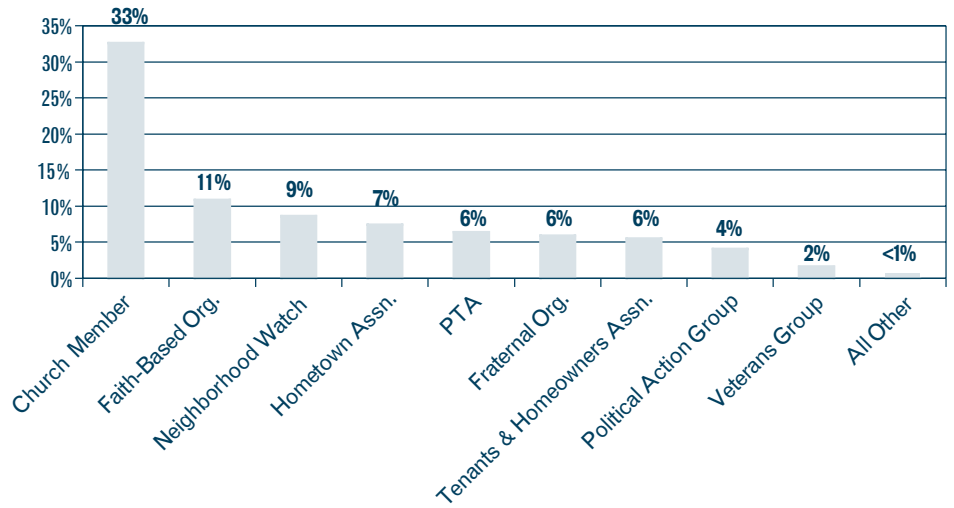


Figure 3
Group Membership by US- and Foreign-Born Latinos

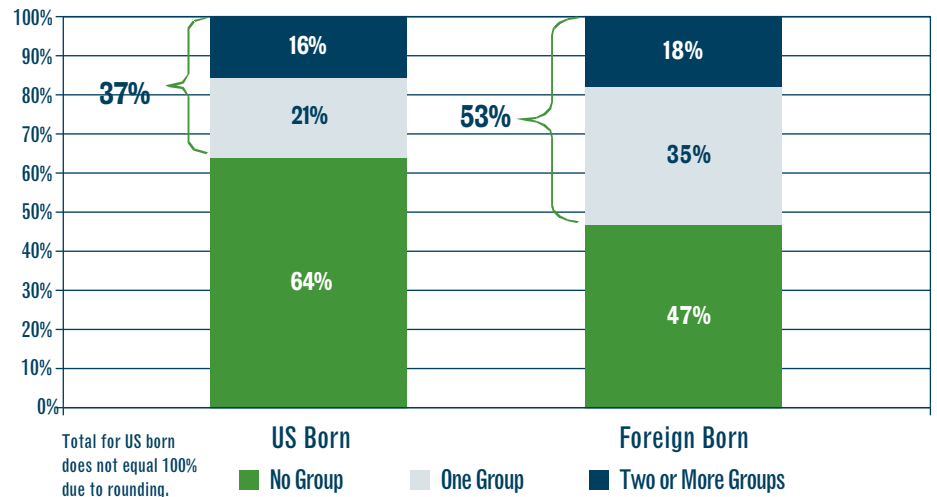
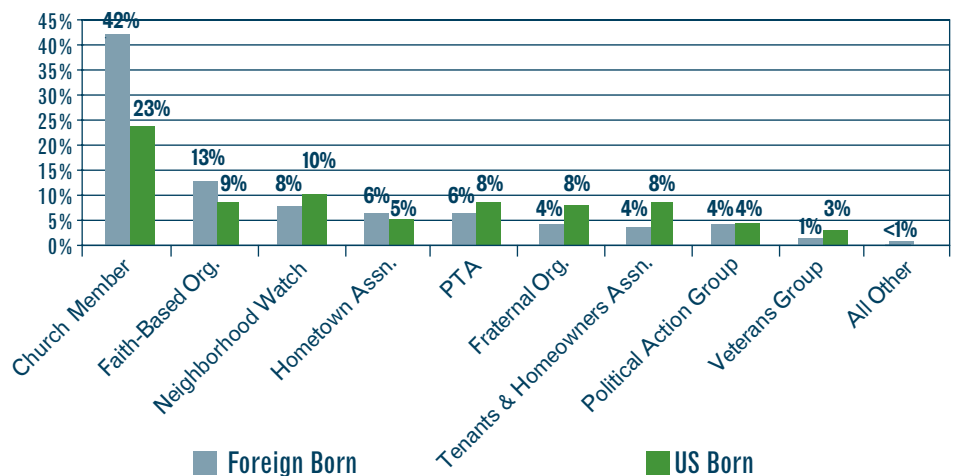


Figure 4
Membership in Community Organizations by US- and Foreign-Born Latinos



5 National data from the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey (SCCBS). See the Saguaro Seminar, Civic Engagement in America, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University: www.ksg.harvard.edu/saguaro.com.

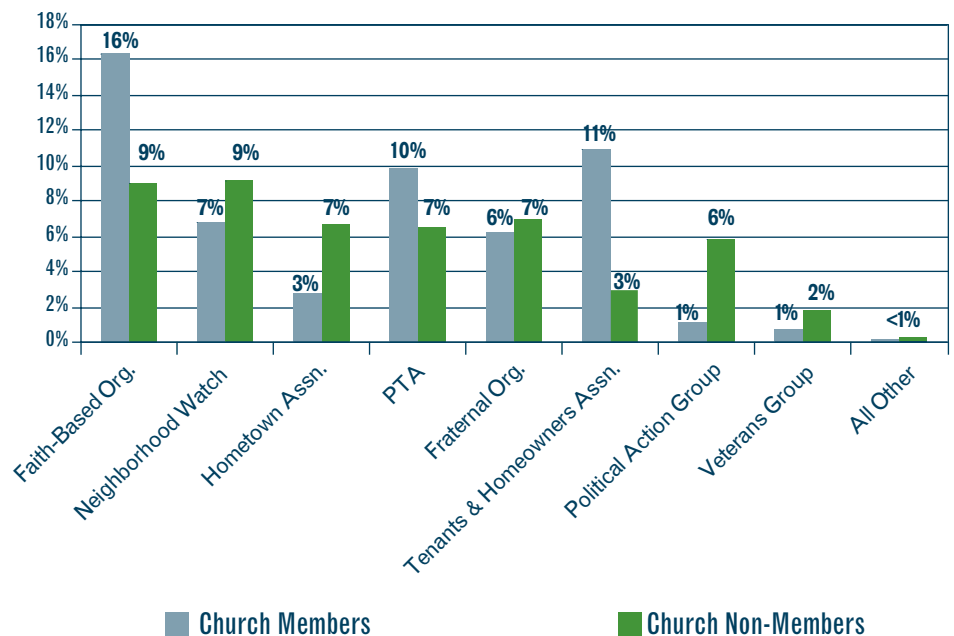


In support of the mission of the Institute for Latino Studies and the Inter-University Program for Latino Research (IUPLR), the Research team provides policy-relevant information and analysis about Latino communities and issues affecting their well-being. The team both contributes to studies originating from the Institute's other programs and centers and from IUPLR member institutions and carries out its own independent projects.

of the difference in organizational membership between the foreign born and the US born. More than two in five foreign-born Latinos are church members compared to slightly more than one in five of the US born. The foreign born also are more likely to belong to faith-based community action groups. For all remaining organizations, whose Latino membership rates are far lower than for churches, either the US born are slightly more likely to be members than the foreign born or there is no difference by place of birth (Figure 4).

Overall, church members are more likely than non-members to belong to other community organizations. Not surprisingly, the biggest difference is in membership in faith-based community groups. Church members also are more likely to belong to parent-teacher associations and tenants and homeowners associations. However, church members are somewhat less likely to belong to the other categories of community and civic organizations (Figure 5).

Figure 5
Membership in Various Types of Community Organizations by Church Members and Non-Members

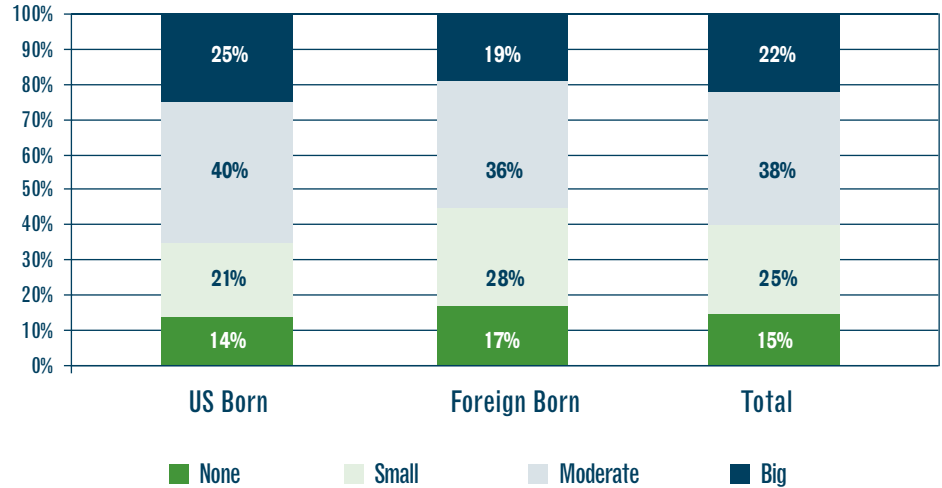


Sense of Efficacy and Involvement in Addressing Neighborhood Issues

Efficacy

Survey respondents were asked, “How much impact do you think people like you can have in making your community a better place to live?” Twenty-two percent of Latinos thought that they could have a big impact and 60 percent thought that they could have at least a moderate impact in making their community a better place to live (Figure 6).

Figure 6
How Much Impact Can People Like You Have on Making Your Community Better?



Actual and Potential Involvement in Addressing Neighborhood Issues

Fourteen percent of Chicago-area Latinos reported having gotten personally involved in helping to solve a problem in their community

in the previous two years. There was no difference in the rate of involvement between US-born and foreign-born Latinos in this regard.

neighborhood issues than the foreign born (60 percent vs. 52 percent). When compared with the US born, the foreign born were more circumspect in their responses, with more than twice as many foreign born indicating that their potential involvement would depend on the issue (15 percent vs. 7 percent).

Survey respondents also were asked about the probability of their getting involved in efforts to address a problem in their neighborhood. Fifty-seven percent indicated that it was at least somewhat likely that they would become involved in efforts to address a problem or issue affecting their neighborhood. US-born Latinos were somewhat more predisposed to becoming involved in efforts to address



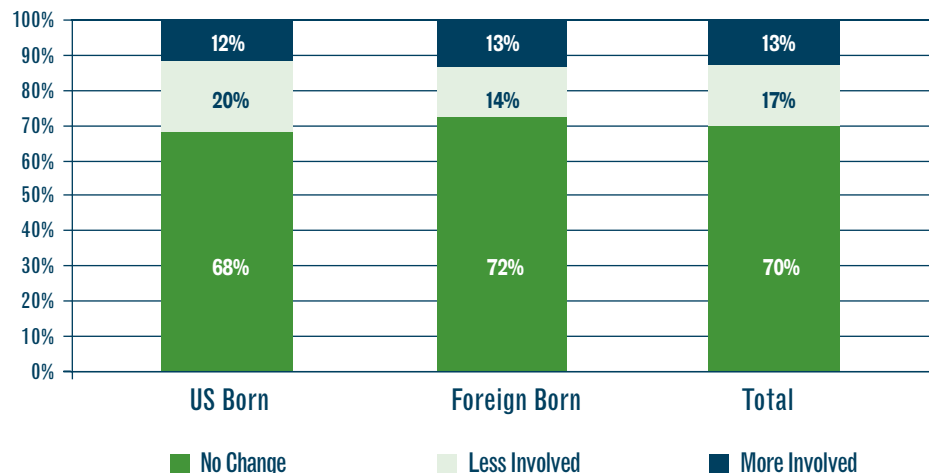
The three wavy lines shown throughout this publication are a symbol from ancient times representing the human intellect in action. From *The Book of Signs*, collected, drawn, and explained by Rudolf Koch (London: The First Edition Club, 1930, page 8).

Trends in Civic and Community Involvement

Respondents were asked, “Would you say that over the past few years you have become more involved in community activities and groups, less involved, or not changed?” Although more than two-thirds reported no change in their level of involvement, more respondents had lowered their level of involvement than increased it. This is especially true of the US born, one-fifth of whom reported becoming less involved while only 12 percent had become more involved with community groups and activities (Figure 7).

Thus, the US born are somewhat more confident of their ability to positively affect their community than are the foreign born (Figure 6) and also are more likely to say they would get involved.

Figure 7
Change in Involvement in Community Activities and Organizations



However, the US born are less likely to belong to a group, and they are more likely than the foreign born to report that their actual level of involvement has decreased in recent years (Figure 7). The percentage of both US and foreign-born Latinos in Chicago who report having actually worked with their neighbors to address a local issue is only 14 percent, substantially lower than the 26 percent of Latinos nationally who report having done so.⁶

⁶ The Saguaro Seminar, *Civic Engagement in America*, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University: www.ksg.harvard.edu/saguaro.com.

Discussion and Conclusion

Nearly half of Chicago-area Latinos are involved in one or more community organizations, with churches being by far the most commonly cited type of organization. The foreign born are more likely to belong to a community organization than are US-born Latinos. This is explained primarily by the fact that the foreign born are twice as likely as the US born to be church members.

More than 60 percent of Latino respondents indicated that they felt that people like them could have at least a moderate impact in making their community a better place to live. Although only 14 percent reported having collaborated with neighbors to improve their community within the past two years, well over half indicated that they would be likely to do so under certain circumstances.

Respondents reported a slight tendency to lessen their level of involvement in community activities and organizations in recent years, with this tendency more pronounced in the US born than among the foreign born.⁷

⁷ According to the Saguaro Seminar, the General Social Survey also shows marked drops from 1994 to 2004 across 14 of the 16 types of associations asked. The only increasing groups were hobby groups (up from 9 percent to 11 percent of respondents) and literary/arts groups (up from 10 percent to 10.5 percent of respondents). Ignoring these two, membership in the other 14 types dropped by an average of almost one-fifth (19 percent) nationally.



The dramatic drop-off in church attendance by US-born relative to foreign-born (immigrant) Latinos is most remarkable. Churches provide an important mooring for immigrant Latinos in the new social and cultural environment of Chicago. While 42 percent of the foreign born are church members—defined by at least weekly church attendance—nearly two-thirds of the foreign born (63 percent) attend church at least once per month. In marked contrast, churches appear to play a much less prominent role for the US-born adult children and grandchildren of the foreign born, who are about half as likely as the foreign born to

be church members or to attend services at least monthly.

Despite language and cultural barriers and the fact that most of the foreign-born Latinos in Chicago are not citizens, they tend to be more involved in their communities than US-born Latinos. This finding, along with the fact that the US born are more likely to report diminished levels of involvement in community activities and organizations, is counterintuitive. These findings would indicate that Chicago-area Latinos' incorporation into civic and community life decreases, not increases, from generation to generation.

It is clear that churches play a key role in the incorporation of immigrant Latinos in metropolitan Chicago but are much less prominent in the lives of the US born. The diminished rates of participation of the US born in churches do not appear to be compensated for by higher participation rates in other types of organizations or in higher reported levels of actual involvement in addressing civic issues. The reasons for US-born Latinos' decreased involvement in churches and the apparent lack of appeal of other forms of community involvement for them are issues that merit further study.



About the Researchers *continued from cover*

Roger Knight holds a Bachelor's degree in sociology from the University of Notre Dame, and he has quantitative research experience in a variety

of topics regarding the Hispanic population in the United States. In 2006 he became a regular contributor to the National Society for Hispanic Professionals' website. In addition, he has professional experience in qualitative evaluation and research at a large educational institution. Knight has previously held positions in database management and data analysis. His interests lie in research methodologies, particularly in human services evaluation and educational research and, more recently, labor market outcomes and other issues related to Hispanic professionals.



Research scientist **Sung-Chang Chun** is a Fellow of the Institute and a member of the faculty of Mercy College, Toledo, Ohio. Born in Seoul, Korea, Chun received his

PhD from the University of Notre Dame. He specializes in immigrant religions, immigrant demographics, and higher education policy issues in the United States. Before joining Mercy College he was a member of the Institute's Research team, where he was in charge of the Census Information Center for the Inter-University Program for Latino Research (IUPLR). He carried out demographic analyses, wrote about a variety of Latino issues, and was involved in creating the Chicago Fact Finder and conducting the Chicago-Area Survey. He has written about Latino-origin group population underestimates, Latinos in distressed communities, wave effect on Cuban political ideology, and black Latinos.

Summary Points

Nearly half of Chicago-area Latinos are involved in one or more community organizations.

Church membership is by far the most commonly cited type of involvement.

The foreign born are twice as likely as the US born to be church members.

More than 60 percent of survey respondents believe they could have a positive impact on their community.

Only 14 percent of Chicago Latinos reported working with neighbors to improve their community in the past two years, compared with 26 percent of Latinos nationally.

Well over half said that they would be likely to cooperate with neighbors under certain circumstances.

Overall, survey respondents reported a slight decline in level of community involvement in recent years, more pronounced among the US born than the foreign born.

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