Our Existence is a Political Issue: Examining the Political Participation of Undocumented Latinx Immigrants in the Midwest

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my children, Evi and Hayden. Being your dad is my greatest accomplishment and I will forever be grateful for the opportunity to watch you grow. Thank you for inspiring me to finish this work. It is for my grandfather Ray, who passed away shortly before my dissertation defense. I wish you could have been here to celebrate with me. Finally, it is also dedicated to the undocumented community and the countless families who have been impacted by the immigration process. I would not have been able to complete this project without your willingness to trust me with your stories. Thank you.

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Abstract

The 2016 Presidential election pushed debate about undocumented immigrants and immigration reform back into the forefront of the national conversation. It also increased the hostile rhetoric surrounding undocumented immigrants and mixed-status families, contrasting with how the previous presidential administration constructed these individuals. This renewed focus on immigration and immigration enforcement has led academic researchers and social work practitioners to seek out advocacy interventions for undocumented Latinx populations. Many of these interventions have focused on safely facilitating the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants.

These studies have often measured the activities of undocumented immigrants by applying traditional measures of political participation. Traditional measures of political participation generally refer to activities aimed at creating change within the political process. Too often, these works view the political participation of undocumented immigrants through the lens of individuals being "undocumented and unafraid" or "living in the shadows" (García, 2021). This narrative assumes that undocumented Latinx immigrants view political participation through traditional definitions and categorizes individuals who do not engage in traditional forms of political participation as inactive. They have not considered that undocumented immigrants may have redefined political participation to include activities that they consider to be more accessible. These studies also do not consider how the events of the 2016 Presidential election have impacted how undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest define and engage in political participation.

I fill this gap in the literature around the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants through the context of three research questions: (1) How do undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest define political participation? (2) Did the 2016 presidential election impact the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest, and if so, how? (3) How does inclusive subnational immigration policy influence the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest?

To answer these questions, I conducted 32 in-depth interviews with undocumented Latinx immigrants living in the Midwest from June 2018 through April 2019. I find that respondents in my sample defined political participation in three different ways: 1) traditional definitions of political participation focusing on electoral politics and influencing voters within their networks, 2) individual engagement, and 3) everyday resistance forms of political participation. The 2016 Presidential election increased the levels of anger, fear, and disappointment within the undocumented community, but these emotions motivated them to increase their political participation. Finally, I find that inclusive subnational immigration policy helped buffer the hostile federal immigration policy and encouraged undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest to engage in political participation. These results will help sociologists and social workers better understand how undocumented Latinx immigrants think about and engage in political participation.

Chapter 1 Introduction

"When we solely prioritize voting as a form of political participation, we consequently delegitimize the voices of people who can't participate in that way. Communities are fighting to survive, are fighting to have their collective voices heard every day. But instead of sharing mutual aid networks, showing up for them on their terms, and providing them the attention so they can disrupt and be heard, you all continue to put most of your resources into electing politicians that want to silence them and claim you're 'voting for the voiceless.' Communities aren't voiceless. They are ignored. Different things." Bianca, 20

Undocumented Latinx immigrants have a long and storied history of activism within the United States (Burciaga & Martinez, 2017; Chavez, 2012; Negrón-Gonzales, 2017; Nicholls, 2013; Seif, 2016). The 2016 Presidential election pushed debate around undocumented immigrants and immigration reform back into the forefront of the national conversation. It also increased the hostile rhetoric surrounding undocumented immigrants and mixed-status families. This renewed focus on immigration and immigration enforcement has led academic researchers and social work practitioners to seek out advocacy interventions for undocumented Latinx populations (García, 2019; Gonzales, 2011; Lopez, 2019; Menjívar, 2006; Menjivar & Abrego, 2012; Nicholls, 2013; Patler et al., 2021). Many of these interventions have focused on safely facilitating the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants (García, 2021; Negrón-Gonzales, 2017; Nicholls, 2013; Wong et al., 2019).

Previous studies focused on the political participation of undocumented immigrants have uncovered a great deal of information about how they engage in traditional political

participation, what factors encourage and discourage traditional political participation, and how their status has impacted their participation (Negrón-Gonzales, 2017; Nicholls, 2013; Wong et al., 2019). These studies have measured undocumented immigrants' political activeness through the use of traditional measures of political participation. (García, 2021; Negrón-Gonzales, 2017; Nicholls, 2013; Wong et al., 2019). Traditional measures of political participation generally refer to activities aimed at creating change within the political process (Alford & Friedland, 1975; Milbrath, 1965; Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Nicholls, 2013; Wong et al., 2019). Too often, these works view the political participation of undocumented through the lens of individuals being "undocumented and unafraid" or "living in the shadows" (García, 2021). This narrative assumes that undocumented Latinx immigrants view political participation through traditional definitions and categorize individuals who do not engage in traditional forms of political participation as inactive. They do not consider that undocumented Latinx immigrant populations may have redefined political participation to allow them to participate on their terms (García, 2021). This could lead researchers and activists to incorrectly categorize undocumented immigrants as inactive when really, they have found new or different ways to engage in political participation. Inquiring about how undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest define political participation can help us better understand how undocumented Latinx immigrants think about political participation and their roles as political actors. By better understanding how undocumented Latinx immigrants define political participation and the type of resources they need, researchers and practitioners can build more meaningful collaborations with undocumented communities and develop stronger advocacy partnerships.

All immigrants, but especially undocumented Latinx immigrants, were forced to deal with a barrage of anti-immigrant, racist, and nativist rhetoric for the duration of the 2016

Presidential election (García, 2019, 2021; Negrón-Gonzales, 2017; Prieto, 2018). In addition to the increasingly hostile rhetoric, undocumented immigrants faced a litany of policy changes at the federal, state, and local levels, significantly impacting their ability to engage with their communities and everyday activities (García, 2019, 2021). The events of the 2016 Presidential election, and the uncertainty surrounding the deferred action for childhood arrival (DACA) program, have combined to create a significant external stressor that can fundamentally change how undocumented Latinx immigrants define and make sense of political participation (Pearlin & Bierman, 2013, pp. 326–327). Political participation is especially relevant in sociology and social work because it has long been used as a measure of immigrant assimilation and incorporation and as a target for social work advocacy-based interventions aimed at empowering undocumented groups (Burciaga & Martinez, 2017; García, 2021; Gordon, 1964; Negrón-Gonzales, 2017; Nicholls, 2013; Prieto, 2018; Swank, 2012; Wong et al., 2019). Before sociologists and social workers can work to create effective interventions aimed at increasing political participation among undocumented Latinx immigrants, they first must understand how undocumented Latinx immigrants understand political participation.

This dissertation seeks to fill this gap in the literature by giving undocumented Latinx immigrants the space to define political participation themselves and expand on the actions they consider political participation. I do this through the context of three research questions: (1) how do undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest define political participation? (2) Did the 2016 presidential election impact the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest, and if so, how? (3) How does inclusive subnational immigration policy influence the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest? To answer these questions, I conducted thirty-two in-depth interviews with undocumented Latinx immigrants

living in the Midwest from June 2018 through April 2019. I utilize undocumented critical theory, theories of political participation, and the undocumented immigrant experience in the United States to ground these interview responses and extract common themes from my data (Abrego, 2011; Abrego & Negrón-Gonzales, 2020; Aguilar, 2019; Alford & Friedland, 1975; Campbell, 2011; García, 2019, 2021; Gonzales, 2016; Menjívar, 2006; Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Skocpol, 1988; Soss, 2002). Addressing these questions will allow me to see how undocumented Latinx immigrants' experiences have shaped how they make sense of and engage in political participation. Researchers and organizers can then use this information to collaborate more effectively with undocumented Latinx communities to support them as they engage in political participation. By exploring how undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest define political participation, I also answer the call of undocumented activists and scholars to center the knowledge and experiences of undocumented immigrants living in the United States through formal research (Abrego & Negrón-Gonzales, 2020; Aguilar, 2019; García, 2019).

This dissertation's results have theoretical, empirical, and practical implications for both the fields of social work and sociology. First, it will develop a more complete theoretical explanation for the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants. Previous political participation definitions have not allowed undocumented Latinx immigrants to contribute to defining the term for themselves. I will form a more robust theoretical definition of political participation by allowing undocumented Latinx immigrants to provide their definition of political participation, and compare them to the definitions of political participation new have seen in the social movements literature. Definitions of political participation are especially relevant given the current political context, with increased hostile rhetoric concerning undocumented Latinx immigrants, and the more punitive enforcement policies the federal

government has implemented since the 2016 Presidential election. Data was collected during the beginning of the Trump Presidency when there was an increase in immigration enforcement and immigration policy measures at the national and sub-national levels (García, 2019, 2021; Prieto, 2018). This period provides a unique opportunity to examine how undocumented Latinx immigrants define political participation and how the presence of significant external stressors such as policy changes may influence these definitions.

This dissertation will also contribute to the literature on undocumented Latinx immigrants' immigration and assimilation experience in the United States. While the undocumented Latinx immigrant experience is similar to the experience of documented Latinx immigrants in many ways, the lack of legal protection adds a fundamental and important difference between the two groups. Sociologists and social workers have used political participation to measure assimilation and incorporation of immigrant groups; however, traditional measures often exclude undocumented populations because they focus on voting and engagement with government institutions (Alba & Nee, 2005; Alford & Friedland, 1975; Gordon, 1964; Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Wong et al., 2019). By allowing undocumented Latinx immigrants to reconceptualize what it means to engage in political participation and become a part of their community, I will provide insight into how undocumented Latinx immigrants have been incorporated into their community in ways that previous studies may have missed. I will also clarify how documentation status and national and sub-national immigration policies have impacted the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest.

In addition to these research contributions, this project will also make practical contributions to social work. It will give social work practitioners the tools necessary to better

work with and organize undocumented Latinx immigrant populations. As practitioners understand how undocumented Latinx communities define political participation, they will be able to more effectively support and advocate for undocumented populations by supporting the activities identified by the community as political participation. Better support and more effective collaboration with the undocumented Latinx community will help increase the sustainability of this activism and build more trust between organizers and the community. This project will allow organizers and policy advocates to develop models of best practices to help ensure they do not increase the disenfranchisement of undocumented Latinx immigrants. Overall, this dissertation will arm social work practitioners and policy advocates with the information necessary to provide better services to undocumented Latinx populations, advocate on their behalf, and help undocumented communities gain the resources they need to advocate for themselves.

Chapter Two of this dissertation will provide an overview of the relevant bodies of literature related to my research questions. These bodies of literature include the research on political participation, the political participation of undocumented immigrants, undocumented critical theory, and the general undocumented experience. Chapter two will also discuss the literature on policy feedback effects, how policy can shape political participation, and the social construction of target groups. The chapter will summarize knowledge generated in these fields, identify the gaps that are still present, and discuss how the contributions of this dissertation help fill some of those gaps.

In Chapter Three, I discuss and justify my methodological choices for the study. I will review work done with undocumented immigrants in the past and discuss how they influenced my methodological choices, the role that my social identity played in these methodological

choices, and an overview of my sample's demographics and descriptive statistics. This chapter will help provide the background information necessary for the following empirical chapters.

Chapter Four will discuss how the undocumented Latinx immigrants in my sample have defined political participation. Respondents in my sample defined political participation in three different ways: 1) through the use of traditional definitions of political participation focusing on electoral politics and influencing voters within their networks, 2) defining political participation as acts of individual engagement with community members and peers, and 3) defining forms everyday resistance as political participation. Understanding how undocumented Latinx immigrants define political participation will help scholars and activists shape interventions that better match community needs and provide space for undocumented community members to engage in participation in a way that makes sense for them. I argue that sociologists and social workers must move beyond applying traditional definitions and measures of political participation to undocumented Latinx immigrants. Instead, scholars and activists should open up the space for undocumented Latinx communities to define political participation for themselves. While traditional definitions of political participation are helpful, they have been used to create a narrative framing undocumented Latinx immigrants as undocumented and unafraid or pushed into the shadows. This narrative can often discourage undocumented Latinx immigrants from engaging in traditional forms of participation, create concern that community activists are only interested in their political goals, and create barriers to collaboration. By allowing undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest to define political participation for themselves and supporting those activities, organizers and policy advocates can increase trust within the community. This trust can help repair damaged relationships and build a more sustainable political participation within the undocumented community.

Chapter Five examines how the 2016 presidential election impacted the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest. I argue that the 2016 Presidential election a significant event for the undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest. The respondents in my sample made it clear that the 2016 Presidential election added to the stress and burden they felt as undocumented Latinx immigrants in the United States. Many of my respondents mentioned the election of Donald Trump or the 2016 Presidential campaign without being prompted, illustrating its significance to them. They also mentioned the prominence of negative immigrant narratives, the uncertainty surrounding DACA, and the increased presence of immigration enforcement as events that made them reevaluate how they engaged in political participation. Almost universally, the individuals I spoke with mentioned that the 2016 election increased their fear, frustration, and disappointment with the country. In addition to the general fear, anger, and distrust my respondents felt, many also identified the 2016 election as the first time they felt genuinely unaccepted by their community. In many ways, the respondents in my sample mirrored the dichotomy we see in the literature. They felt more fearful and less safe; however, they also felt the need to be more engaged and resist what they felt were overly punitive federal measures. These feelings left my respondents in a difficult position. They had to balance their need to push back against an openly hostile administration while maintaining their safety and well-being. Many of my respondents mentioned that 2016 served as a jumping-off point for their political participation. This included many engaging in traditional forms of political participation for the first time after the 2016 election.

Based on the responses from the undocumented, it became clear that the events of 2016 pushed many of my respondents towards political participation. They were able to translate their fear, anger, and distrust into political participation; however, it was an arduous process. DACA

status allowed some to engage in political participation because they felt somewhat protected from deportation. Given the importance of DACA in helping undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest engage in political participation, I argue that policy advocates should continue to push for policy protections at both the national and sub-national levels. Community support from allies and advocates was also vital in helping undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest engage in political participation. This support included issuing statements of support validating the presence of undocumented immigrants as valued members of the community. This support was key to helping undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest convert the fear, anger, and distrust they felt into political participation.

Chapter Six will discuss how inclusive subnational policy has influenced the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest. Based on the responses of the undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest, subnational immigration policy impacted their political participation. Specifically, inclusive subnational immigration policy was an important tool to buffer negative federal policies, rebuild trust, and repair community relationships for undocumented Latinx immigrants. Inclusive subnational immigration policy also served as a source of motivation for political participation. Finally, undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest often viewed local policy arenas as a more accessible access point for those engaging in traditional forms of political participation. These findings fall in line with the results Garcia found in her work. Supportive local policy can be an essential avenue to help undocumented Latinx immigrants engage in political participation (García, 2021). As such, I argue that local policy can serve as an important target of policy intervention for social work practitioners working with undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest, especially in contexts where the community has expressed the desire to advocate within their local communities.

Finally, chapter seven will conclude the dissertation by summarizing the findings across these chapters and discussing their implications for both social work and sociology.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

To address my research questions, we must first review three related bodies of scholarship: (1) previously developed measures of political participation, with a specific focus on the use of political participation as a measure of immigrant assimilation and the political participation of undocumented immigrants, (2) the literature on the undocumented experience and development of undocumented critical theory, and (3) the literature on policy feedback effects and their impact on the political participation of socially constructed target groups. These bodies of literature provide the necessary theoretical background to the research questions posed in chapter 1. I will start by summarizing the work done surrounding political participation. Understanding the previous work on political participation, including how the term has been defined, sets the foundation for exploring how undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest define political participation. I will then highlight the literature on the undocumented immigrant experience. This canon of literature clarifies that undocumented immigrants' experience is fundamentally different from their documented peer's experience and warrants specific study. Finally, I will introduce the literature on policy feedback effects and the social construction of target groups. By understanding how policy affects participation and how social groups perceive their social problems, I will be able to examine the role that immigration policy has played in shaping how undocumented Latinx immigrants think about and engage in political participation.

2.1 Traditional definitions of Political Participation

Early studies of political participation tended to focus on three types of issues: comparisons between the political decision-making process concerning expanding the electorate

and engaging in voting procedures, statistical comparisons of trends in political reactions, and comparisons of the influence organizations and interest groups exert on the mass electorate (Alford & Friedland, 1975). Within the field of sociology, when researchers have explored these issues and defined political participation, they have almost always focused on actions aimed at creating social change through influencing governmental institutions and elected officials. For example, Milbrath defines political participation as individual acts meant to influence the political system in some way (1965). Later Milbrath and Goel would offer a broader definition that defined political participation as actions by private citizens intended to influence or support government and politics (1977). Alford and Friedland defined political participation as "present or past activities by citizens, organizations and groups that are aimed at influencing the selection and actions of governmental structures and personnel (1975)." These early definitions of political participation almost exclusively focused on voter turnout, activities that targeted the electoral or policy process, and often on citizens' actions (Milbrath & Goel, 1977). They presented political participation as a stable engagement of individuals, groups, and corporations in the voting, lobbying, and policy process through governmental institutions (Alford & Friedland, 1975).

More recently, studies of political participation have expanded beyond voting and engagement with elected officials to include activities like political protest, social disruption, political violence, and social movement activities (Fisher, 2012; Levine, 2007; Sanchez, 2006). However, these definitions are still very much focused on actions aimed at influencing government officials and social policy outcomes (Kourvetaris & Dobratz, 1982). For example, Milbrath and Goel define participation as "those actions of private citizens by which they seek to influence or to support government and politics."(1977, p. 2). Similarly, Verba, Lehman, and Brady define political participation as "any activity that has the intent or effect of influencing

government actions – either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies (1995, p. 37).” They go on to argue that individuals who engage in political participation have the option of doing so on the national, state, or local levels. However, these levels are still meant to refer to interaction with government entities (Verba et al., 1995). More recently, Sanchez argues that political participation is most often defined as a set of activities citizens utilize to influence government structure, the selection of government officials, or government policies (2006). Some definitions have expanded to include non-voting activities. Levine defines participation as individuals or groups engaging in community development, public meetings, the public policy process, political advocacy, or community organizing (2007). The focus on the actions of citizens and engagement in formal electoral politics can delegitimize the actions undocumented Latinx immigrants consider to be forms of political participation. The delegitimization of their actions by organizers and policy advocates can lead them to be labeled as disengaged when they are simply finding new ways to engage in political action, given the limitations surrounding their status.

As sociology and social work continued to develop definitions of political participation that centered on the attempts of citizens to influence elected officials and public policy, academics began to develop measures to capture whether or not one engaged in these activities (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Levine, 2007; McAdam, 1986; Uslaner & Brown, 2005; Verba et al., 1995). Initially, voting was the most common and analyzed measure of political participation. However, as referenced above, these measures have expanded to include non-voting activities like information seeking, research, joining community organizations, campaigning for a social issue, and engaging in social protest (Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Pritzker et al., 2015; Richards-Schuster et al., 2019; Verba et al., 1995). These non-voting types of political participation are the

most relevant to undocumented Latinx immigrants because, as non-citizens, they are formally excluded from the voting process (Sanchez, 2006). Initially, there was little thought of how immigrant groups or undocumented Latinx immigrant groups defined and engaged in political participation. That would change, however, as political participation began to be used as a measure of immigrant incorporation. While this proved useful, the narrow scope of these definitions and measures may lead to undocumented Latinx immigrants being categorized as not engaged in political participation when they consider themselves engaged and connected to their community.

2.1.1 Political Participation as a Measure of Immigrant Incorporation

While the early studies of political participation were aimed at understanding the activities of citizens within the United States, political participation quickly became a marker for immigrant group assimilation and incorporation as well (Alba & Nee, 2005; Farley & Alba, 2002; Gordon, 1964; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Telles & Ortiz, 2008)**.** Gordon's foundational work on assimilation laid out a seven-step process for immigrant groups (1964). These seven steps start with cultural or behavioral assimilation, structural assimilation, marital assimilation, identification assimilation, attitude reception assimilation, behavior reception assimilation, and civic assimilation (Gordon, 1964). His theory assumed that assimilation was a linear process that led toward upward mobility and incorporation into their new country. Political participation could be considered a marker of structural assimilation in Gordon's model. Structural assimilation referred the process of immigrant groups becoming fully engrained in their host societies' social institutions (Gordon, 1964). As immigrant groups became more politically active and incorporated into social institutions, they would be considered structurally assimilated. However, like the studies referenced above, the measures used to gauge political participation

focused on voting and electoral behavior. So, it is possible that these measures are not effectively assessing how engaged immigrant and undocumented immigrant groups are in their communities.

Another major shortcoming of Gordon's assimilation model was that it focused on the experience of white European immigrants during the first and second immigration waves to the United States (Alba & Nee, 2005; Farley & Alba, 2002). More recent immigration scholars argue that traditional assimilation models do not apply to newer immigrant groups. More specifically, newer groups' experiences as people of color make their immigration and assimilation experience different from earlier immigrant groups' experiences. For more recent immigrant groups, assimilation was not a linear process toward upward mobility (Alba & Nee, 2005; Farley & Alba, 2002; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Telles & Ortiz, 2008). These groups can experience upward or downward assimilation depending on several factors, including but not limited to the length of duration in the U.S., their social capital, the social context of their receiving community, and geographical location (Alba & Nee, 2005; Farley & Alba, 2002; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Telles & Ortiz, 2008). This led to a call to develop new assimilation theories that better encompassed the experience of new immigrant groups.

A part of the call for new theory included the development of theories specific to the Latinx immigration and assimilation experience (Telles & Ortiz, 2008). Latinx immigrant groups are fundamentally different from the immigrant groups who came to the United States during the first two immigration waves. The first key difference is that, unlike the first two immigration waves from Europe, the Latinx immigration wave is still ongoing (Jimenez, 2009). Formal policies severely limited the number of immigrants from European countries, eventually ending their immigration waves (Pedraza & Rumbaut, 1996). This did not occur for Latinx immigrants,

and there has been a consistent flow of new immigrants from Mexico and Central and South America over the last century (Jimenez, 2009). The second key difference between Latinx immigrant groups and other immigrant groups is the unique relationship Latinx immigrants have had with United States immigration policy (Jimenez, 2009). Historically Latinx immigrants have been separated from other immigrant groups through policy. As an example, Latinx immigrants were excluded from the quotas of the Immigration Act of 1924 [1] because Mexican and other Latinx immigrants were then actively recruited for their labor.[2] This is one example highlighting how Latinx immigrant groups have been commodified in ways other immigrant groups have not (Telles & Ortiz, 2008). They have long been coveted because of their ability to fill a labor need; however, their ability to fill this labor need has never been enough to be deserving of citizenship or full incorporation into United States society (Telles & Ortiz, 2008). These differences have made the assimilation experience for Latinx immigrants unique. This is especially true of undocumented Latinx immigrants.

These differential experiences of non-white immigrant groups may have revealed limitations of Gordon's model. However, they did not prevent political participation from being used as a measure of immigrant assimilation and incorporation for immigrant groups. Many of these studies used traditional measures of political participation to determine whether or not these immigrants were engaged. For example, in *Fluid Borders*: *Latino Power, Identity, and Politics in Los Angeles*, Garcia Bedolla takes an in-depth look at the political participation of Latinx individuals in California (2005). She highlights the importance of social capital, local

[1] The 1924 Immigration Act placed ended open immigration to the United States from Europe. It capped the number of immigrants from any country to two percent of the number of people from that country who were already living in the United States as of the 1890 census.
[2] The Bracero Program was a policy implemented in 1942 that recruited Latinx immigrants to the United States to fill the labor need in the agricultural industry. It ended in 1964.

context, and identity to the political participation of the Latinx individuals in her sample (Garcia Bedolla, 2005). Pushing back against earlier work highlighting socioeconomic status as the best predictor of political participation Garcia Bedolla argues that the relational interaction between local context and identity plays a fundamental role in determining if and how Latinx individuals engage in political participation (2005). In her research, Garcia Bedolla applied traditional measures of political participation to Latinx immigrants (2005). Eventually, other sociology and social work scholars followed this trend when they began investigating the political participation of undocumented immigrants. The political participation of undocumented immigrants is expanded on in the next section.

2.1.2 The Political Participation of Undocumented Immigrants

As research on undocumented immigrants expanded, many researchers within sociology and social work sought to better understand how they engaged in political participation (Abrego, 2011; Burciaga & Martinez, 2017; García, 2021; Negrón-Gonzales, 2014; Nicholls, 2013; Pallares & Gomberg-Muñoz, 2016; Swerts, 2017; Wong et al., 2019). Undocumented Latinx immigrants have a storied history of engaging in political participation (García, 2021; Negrón-Gonzales, 2014; Nicholls, 2013; Pallares & Gomberg-Muñoz, 2016; Robles & Gomberg-Muñoz, 2016; Wong et al., 2019). This is especially true for undocumented Latinx immigrants who have been socialized and educated in the United States (Negrón-Gonzales, 2014). Many undocumented Latinx immigrants are educated within the U.S. public school system, where they are inculcated with the ideas of meritocracy, free will, and individuality (Negrón-Gonzales, 2014). They learn these lessons while also living under the threat of deportation and being systematically denied access to resources because of their citizenship status (Negrón-Gonzales, 2014). Negrón-Gonzales argues that in many ways, “the lives of undocumented Latino youth are

characterized by the legal and social contradiction inherent with growing up in the United States but also being excluded from its institutions." (2014) She expands her argument to claim that this tension has sparked political participation among undocumented youth activists in California (Negrón-Gonzales, 2014). Negron-Gonzales states, "that the tension between undocumented Latinx youth's juridical identities as undocumented migrants devoid of citizenship or residency as defined by immigration law and their subjective identities as U.S. raised children with insider access to most aspects of society has created a platform for political action among undocumented Latinx youth activists in California." (2014) Undocumented immigrants have been motivated by the disjuncture between their inclusions and exclusions in U.S. society to engage in political action. Negron- Gonzales continues, "this disconnect has shaped their political lives and identities as undocumented Latinx youth, and because they have they have internalized the notion that individuals have the power to make change have been inspired to engage in political participation." (Negrón-Gonzales, 2014)

Sociologist Walter Nichols examines how the social construction of undocumented immigrants impacted the early DREAMER movement and activism of undocumented immigrants. In the early 2000s, large groups of undocumented Latinx youth began to organize and demand that they be given status as legal residents (Nicholls, 2013). Frustrated by the numerous barriers they encountered as they came of age, undocumented Latinx youth began to make claims about their right to inclusion. To make their demands seem more reasonable to the general public and to gain a legitimate public voice, early undocumented Latinx activists created narratives that focused on their desire to achieve the American Dream (Nicholls, 2013). The "Dreamers," as they would go on to be called, strategically built narratives around their desire to gain access to higher education and contribute economically to society. Another critical aspect of

this narrative was the innocence of Dreamers. The Dreamers were not individuals who consciously decided to break the law. They were brought to the county as children by their parents and were mostly culturally assimilated into American society (Nicholls, 2013). Dreamer activists used this narrative to develop an organizing strategy where "deserving" immigrants were given a voice and "undeserving" individuals were silenced (Nicholls, 2013). This was a strategic choice made by organizers to gain public support for immigration reform; however, this choice resulted in the formation of deserving and undeserving distinctions within the undocumented community that impacted the political participation of undocumented immigrants (Nicholls, 2013). Undocumented immigrants who fit the narrative developed by activists were seen to be “deserving” of political reform and were the voices that were amplified. They were often featured in advocacy campaigns and encouraged to engage in (what has been defined in this paper as) traditional forms of political participation. Individuals who did not fit into the “deserving” category were often pushed to the side and discouraged from engaging in the same type of political participation (Nicholls, 2013).

However, as these deservingness narratives began to become normalized and codified in public policy, they also eventually motivated undocumented immigrants who did not fit these narratives to engage in traditional forms of political participation. The Immigrant Youth Justice League in Chicago provides a good case study examining the impact that deservingness narratives and DACA had on the political participation of undocumented immigrants (Unzueta Carrasco & Seif, 2014). Unzueta Carrasco and Seif explored how one group of 1.5 generation undocumented organizers in Chicago, the Immigrant Youth Justice League (IYJL), has responded to normative rules of citizenship, specifically through advocacy against the deportation of individuals who do not fit in the hegemonic models (2014). Many undocumented

activists found these deserving and undeserving distinctions problematic and exclusionary. In response, these activists pushed back against the distinctions (Unzueta Carrasco & Seif, 2014). This was particularly true when many felt too much blame was being targeted at their parents, who were also often undocumented, for the United States' broken immigration system. They also were rightfully disturbed by the narrow scope of what it meant to be "deserving" of relief from deportation (Unzueta Carrasco & Seif, 2014). The deservingness distinctions established early in the DREAMER movement eventually served as a catalyst for both "deserving" and "undeserving" undocumented immigrants to engage in traditional forms of political participation (Unzueta Carrasco & Seif, 2014).

In *Activism after DACA: Lessons from Chicago's Immigrant Youth Justice League,* Jorge Robles and Ruth Munoz-Gomberg used the Immigrant Youth Justice league to examine the impact of DACA on the political participation of undocumented immigrants (2016). Robles and Munoz-Gomberg argue that the prolonged state of liminality experienced by conditional status holders has consequences for immigrant organizing efforts (2016). On the one hand, work eligibility has allowed many "DACAmented" youth to pursue opportunities previously closed to them, while protection from deportation has dampened their sense of urgency for comprehensive immigration reform (Robles & Gomberg-Muñoz, 2016). On the other hand, the limitations of DACA, including its exclusion of working adults and ineligible youth, have encouraged the continuation of organizing efforts, especially for leaders who are the most highly politicized within the larger youth movement (Robles & Gomberg-Muñoz, 2016). Their research suggests that conditional immigration statuses are limited mechanisms of repression (Robles & Gomberg-Muñoz, 2016). Conditional statuses bring holders under the purview of state surveillance without entirely removing the threat of deportation (Robles & Gomberg-Muñoz, 2016). This study begins

a shift towards examining how specific policies influence the political participation of undocumented immigrants; however, it continues the use of traditional definitions of political participation as its outcome variable. This is a trend that would continue as scholars continued to focus on how undocumented immigrants sought to affect the electoral process or government-based action but did not provide space for undocumented immigrants to define political participation for themselves (Negrón-Gonzales, 2014, 2015; Nicholls, 2013; Pallares & Gomberg-Muñoz, 2016; Wong et al., 2019).

As the above literature shows, a great deal of scholarship has been conducted on the political participation of undocumented immigrants in the United States. This literature has shown how undocumented immigrants have been politically socialized, what motivates them to engage in political participation, how they have dealt with varying social constructions, and how specific policies have influenced their willingness to engage in political participation. However, they were still grounded in the established literature on political participation and used measures of engagement focused on activities aimed at influencing the electoral and policy process. That is not to say that studies are not useful. However, we must have a clear sense of how undocumented Latinx immigrants define political participation, or we risk categorizing politically active individuals as inactive because they engage in different activities.

2.2 The Undocumented Immigrant Experience

Within sociology, the study of culture has been a cornerstone of empirical inquiry (Young, Jr., 2004). Part of cultural inquiry has also included moving beyond the establishment of values and norms and transitioning to focusing on how individuals make sense of their everyday experiences (Young, Jr., 2004). If we want to truly understand the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants, we must also understand their day-to-day experience in the

United States. Then we can examine how this experience has shaped how they think about and engage in political participation. Fortunately, a great deal of scholarship has focused on the unique experiences of undocumented immigrants living in the United States (Abrego, 2014; Chavez, 2012; Dreby, 2015; García, 2019; Gonzales, 2011, 2016; Lopez, 2019; Menjívar, 2006). These studies have provided valuable insights into the lived experiences of undocumented immigrants in the United States. These works have focused on topics including the day-to-day barriers faced by undocumented Latinx immigrants (Abrego, 2011; Chavez, 2012; Dreby, 2015; Menjívar, 2006), the shared experiences of undocumented immigrants (Gonzales, 2016), the ways liminal legality has impacted the lives of undocumented immigrants (Abrego, 2011; García, 2019, 2021; Menjívar, 2006; Swerts, 2017), the impact of documentation status on undocumented and mixed-status families (Abrego, 2014; Dreby, 2015; Lopez, 2019), and the impact of documentation status on work and educational opportunities for undocumented immigrants (Gonzales, 2016; Patler et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2019). A review of the literature focusing on undocumented immigrants reveals an experience marred by exclusion, barriers, uncertainty, resilience, and strength. It also reveals that interactions with policy, both federal and local, institutions, and their community have significantly impacted how undocumented immigrants make sense of the world (Abrego, 2011, 2014; Barak, 2017; Chavez, 2012; Dreby, 2015; García, 2019; Gonzales, 2016; Lopez, 2019; Menjívar, 2006). More specifically, undocumented immigrants' status and limited societal inclusion have had ramifications on their interactions with policy, institutions, and community. These interactions have had a direct impact on several areas of their lives, including their civic experiences, educational experiences, and familial experiences (Abrego, 2011, 2014; Dreby, 2015; García, 2019, 2021; Menjívar, 2006). I expand on the specifics of this literature below.

Roberto Gonzales has done extensive work chronicling the experience undocumented young immigrants face when discovering they are undocumented. As undocumented Latinx youth transition from children to adults, they exit the legally protected status of K through 12 students and enter into adult roles that require legal status as the basis of participation (2011). During this transition, they become aware of the ramifications of being undocumented. The transition from early adolescence, in which they had important "inclusionary access," to adulthood, in which they are denied daily participation in most institutions of mainstream life, represents a highly traumatic event (Gonzales, 2011). This transition from protected to unprotected status can serve as the initial motivation for undocumented immigrants to engage in political participation (Negrón-Gonzales, 2014). They become angered by their exclusion and want to act. However, as they try to engage in traditional types of political participation, they often become frustrated or feel unsafe in public spaces, which in turn can lead them to find other ways to remain engaged (Negrón-Gonzales, 2014).

This feeling of limited inclusion for undocumented immigrants is also documented very well by Cecilia Menjivar in her article “Liminal Legality: Salvadoran and Guatemalan Immigrants’ Lives in the United States” (2006). In this article, Menjivar examines the role of documentation status on present-day immigrants (2006). Specifically, she interviewed Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants to learn how legal status shapes their identity, relationships, and community interactions (Menjívar, 2006). Menjivar argues that documentation status impacts every facet of undocumented life, from health to work opportunities to educational opportunities and how they engage with and in their community (2006). The experiences of undocumented immigrants are so different from their documented peers that you can categorize the two groups as two unique social classes (Menjívar, 2006). She then takes this analysis one

step further and examines how "in-between" status or liminal legality shapes the socio-cultural spheres of immigrants' lives (Menjívar, 2006).

Menjivar goes on to argue that uncertainty surrounding immigrants' legal status permeates their lives and affects their decisions concerning job opportunities, community interactions, and family planning (2006). In her view, the state uses immigration policy and status to create and recreate an excluded population continually made vulnerable by blurring the boundaries of legality and illegality (Menjívar, 2006). This blurring of boundaries creates uncertainty among immigrants that can affect their sense of citizenship and belonging. The uncertainty tied to the multiple statuses created by immigration law relates closely to issues of citizenship, inclusion, and immigrant incorporation (Menjívar, 2006). These multiple statuses, including liminal statuses, then shape how immigrants understand their place in U.S. society, notions of citizenship, belonging, and exclusion (Menjívar, 2006).

Additional research has suggested that the ambiguity around status and limited societal inclusion is especially relevant for undocumented immigrants (Abrego, 2011; García, 2019; Menjívar, 2006; Patler et al., 2021; Unzueta Carrasco & Seif, 2014). Menjivar continues to argue that undocumented immigrants often find novel ways to reconfigure family forms because of their liminal status (Menjívar, 2006). Undocumented immigrants' liminal status also pushes them to create new and varied perceptions of religious and cultural institutions in their communities (Menjívar, 2006). In other words, their liminal status leads them to reconceptualize these socio-cultural phenomena in a way that works in their current social context. Following this line of logic, it stands to reason that their documentation status could lead undocumented immigrants to redefine political participation.

Abrego builds off this line of research to argue that documentation status influences the legal consciousness of undocumented immigrants (2011). She finds that undocumented immigrants' identities, sense of belonging, and interpretation of status vary by social position (Abrego, 2011). However, despite varying social positions and experiences, the fear and stigma of being undocumented demonstrated to be a barrier to claims-making and collective mobilization (Abrego, 2014). We see the impact of status on everyday life expanded in *Legal Passing: Navigating Undocumented Life and Local Immigration Law* by Dr. Angela García. Dr. García examines the impact of national and subnational immigration policy on the everyday lives of undocumented individuals (2019). She argues that laws shape the everyday life of citizens, immigrants, and undocumented immigrants in the United States, pointing out that state and local immigration laws are especially impactful for those without legal status (García, 2019).

The above scholarship makes clear that living without legal status in the United States fundamentally shapes the experiences of undocumented immigrants. Additional research is warranted to discover how these experiences have shaped the thoughts and actions of undocumented immigrants. As such, this dissertation attempts to extend the work of these scholars by focusing specifically on how the undocumented experience, including the experience of liminal legality, shapes the way undocumented Latinx immigrants define and make sense of political participation.

2.2.1 Undocumented Critical Theory

The literature makes clear that undocumented immigrants in the United States have a unique experience that shapes their day-to-day lives. In order to better understand and explain the experiences of undocumented immigrants living in the United States, Carlos Agular has developed what he has termed undocumented critical theory (2019). Undocumented Critical

Theory borrows aspects from Critical Race Theory, Latina/o Critical Theory, and Tribal Critical Theory to produce a theoretical lens that can better understand the nuanced and liminal experiences of undocumented individuals living in the United States (Aguilar, 2019). Undocumented Critical Theory is based on four assumptions about the undocumented experience. These assumptions include: (1) Fear is endemic among immigrant communities, (2) different experiences of liminality translate into different experiences of reality, (3) parental *sacrificios* become a form of capital, and (4) *acompañamiento* is the embodiment of mentorship, academic redemption, and community engagement (Aguilar, 2019). More simply, Aguilar argues that these four tenets shape the everyday experiences of undocumented immigrants, impact how they make sense of their social contexts, and shape how they construct their social reality, including how they make sense of political participation (2019).

While Aguilar worked to develop a more robust theoretical framework to explain how documentation status shapes the experiences of undocumented immigrants' other scholars have worked to center the voices of undocumented populations in research. In their work, *We Are Not Dreamers: Undocumented Scholars Theorize Undocumented Life in the United States*, scholars Leisy Abrego and Genevieve Negrón-Gonzales make a conscious decision to center undocumented scholars as theorists of the undocumented experience (2020). They make a methodological choice to highlight the empirical work of undocumented individuals living in the United States to help push undocumented immigrants from the object of empirical study to the producers of empirical work (Abrego & Negrón-Gonzales, 2020). The motivation behind the work of Aguilar, Abrego, and Negron-Gonzales is to better explain the undocumented experience by centering the voices and shared experiences of undocumented immigrants living in the United States.

While this is not an exhaustive list of scholars who have helped to advance the empirical and theoretical contribution of undocumented immigrants, they provide the theoretical foundations for this research project. This project aimed to acknowledge that documentation status cannot be disentangled from political participation, and it is important to allow the undocumented community to define political participation for themselves. By providing space for the undocumented community to clarify how they make sense of political participation, documented and undocumented scholars can work with the undocumented community to develop more complete theoretical explanations and more effective organizing strategies. While I want to make clear that this dissertation still centers on undocumented immigrants as the object of study, community-based methods were employed to make the participants active subjects in the research and center their experiences. I am not an undocumented scholar but have attempted to engage the undocumented community in a way that allows their experiences to generate new theory. Applying undocumented critical theory to the political participation of undocumented immigrants allows the population to illuminate precisely how they make sense of political participation and how they engage with their communities. More specifically, this dissertation provides insight into how documentation status has shaped how undocumented Latinx immigrants have defined and engaged in political participation. Understanding how undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest define political participation can help us better understand how they view themselves as political actors and their political agency. It can shed light on what political activities they view as accessible, their option for engaging with their community, and how they make claims to citizenship through these actions despite not having formal status.

2.3 The Impact of Policy Feedback Effects on Political Participation

The literature on political participation and the undocumented experience provide solid foundations to explore how undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest define political participation and if the 2016 presidential election impacted their political participation. However, to address the third question of this dissertation, how does inclusive subnational immigration policy influence the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest? -- we must introduce two additional theoretical frameworks, policy feedback effects and the social construction of target groups. These frameworks can help us understand how undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest make sense of the messages sent through formal policy and rectify differences between how they are constructed by the general public and their day-to-day experiences. This allows us to then think through how public policy and the social construction of target groups can lead to large and varied consequences for the mass political behavior of undocumented Latinx immigrants.

Theda Skocpol defined policy feedback effect as "the ways policies, once enacted, restructure subsequent political processes" (Mettler & Soss, 2004, p. 60). Policy feedback effects occur on the macro and micro levels. At the macro level, policy feedback effects operate within institutions and impact larger societal structures such as federal departments, state offices, and other social institutions. Policy can set the administrative arrangements for these entities and set expectations for how they operate (Mettler & Soss, 2004). On the micro-level, policy feedback effects can influence the social identities, political goals, and capabilities of social groups. Policy feedback effects are used to define membership to a society, establish who is included in this membership, influence the degree of inclusion of various members, meaning of citizenship, shape group identity, frame policy agendas, and motivate the actions of public officials (Mettler

& Soss, 2004). Combining the theoretical frameworks of social construction and policy feedback effect allows us to understand how policy can influence social groups' formation and political participation. More specifically, they explain how social policy can set boundaries through eligibility requirements, and policy feedback effects influence how groups interact with institutions. (Mettler & Soss, 2004; Schneider &Ingram, 1993). Policy feedback effects influence whether problems within a target population are seen worthy of being addressed as public concerns (Mettler & Soss, 2004; Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Groups that are told their problems are not public problems and that they do not deserve the respect of the government can often be discouraged from engaging in mass political participation (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Conversely, if a group feels elected officials and policymakers are ignoring them, they may be encouraged to engage in less traditional means of political participation, such as social movement activity (Burciaga & Martinez, 2017; Robles & Gomberg-Muñoz, 2016; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Unzueta Carrasco & Seif, 2014).

For example, when studying the political participation of individuals involved in social welfare programs, Joe Soss contends that social insurance recipients (e.g., those receiving social security benefits) are treated like social citizens, rights-bearing individuals, and consumers of services. In contrast, public assistance recipients (e.g., those receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) are treated as dependent objects of social control (Soss, 2002). This differential treatment will make individuals participating in social assistance programs less likely to be politically active than those participating in social insurance programs (Soss, 2002). Soss argues that public policy can either support or discourage political engagement (2002). His findings suggest that welfare policy designs are political forces that have important effects on the beliefs and actions of individuals. The design of welfare policy affects political learning (2002).

Soss's work utilizes social welfare policy to show how policy feedback effects operate at the federal policy level. Angela Garcia does similar work with undocumented immigrants but focuses on immigration policy and extends her analysis to national and subnational policy (García, 2019, 2021). She defines national immigration as policy that comes from the federal legislature or executive branch and defines subnational policy as legislation that originates at the state or municipal level and attempts to clarify how each type of policy impacts how undocumented immigrants are integrated into their communities and society at large (García, 2019). Garcia argues that immigration policy fundamentally shapes the day-to-day lives of undocumented Mexican immigrants in countless ways (2019). These laws set boundaries on how individuals can participate in society, the resources they can access, and the punishments for violating these boundaries, both formally through prosecution and informally through fear and stigma (García, 2019). This position has been supported by other scholars who have examined the impact of immigration law and immigration status on work prospects, physical health, mental health, social service utilization, and access to higher education (Doshi et al., 2022; Mallet et al., 2017; Novak et al., 2017; Patler et al., 2021).

The above literature indicates that the policy feedback effects from federal-level policy can drastically impact outcomes for undocumented Latinx immigrants. However, they do not shed light on how federal policy feedback effects interact with local policy feedback effects. Garcia introduces the importance of subnational immigration policy feedback effects on the day-to-day lives of undocumented immigrants in the United States. She assesses the impact of national and subnational immigration policy on undocumented immigrant communities (García, 2019). She points out that restrictive measures can exclude undocumented immigrants from fully engaging in their community but pushes back against the notion that restrictive subnational

measures automatically push undocumented immigrants into the shadows (García, 2019). These restrictive policies can often lead undocumented immigrants to develop new and innovative ways to engage in their communities (García, 2019). However, despite these key findings, Garcia argues that much is still unknown about how local immigration laws impact undocumented Latinx immigrants (2019). García continues this line of research when she examines how subnational immigration policy influences the political participation of undocumented immigrants living in California (García, 2021). Using data from interviews conducted with ninety-four undocumented Mexican immigrants Garcia argues that local immigration law creates the unique environments that shape how and why undocumented immigrants engage in political participation (García, 2021). García interviewed individuals living in both restrictive (areas with local laws that limited or denied undocumented immigrants rights and resources) and accommodating (areas with local measures that extended rights and resources to undocumented immigrants) localities (2021). Her findings suggest that accommodating local contexts encourage broad and more expansive political engagement, increased political efficacy, and more direct and visible political participation (García, 2021). Conversely, restrictive localities create a local threat that drives deep issue-specific political socialization, constrains political efficacy, and encourages limited and often indirect political participation focused on local immigration issues (García, 2021). She concludes that local policy and contexts fundamentally shape how undocumented Mexican immigrants engage in political participation and can either push back against or reinforce national policy feedback effects (García, 2021). This dissertation seeks to add to this literature by providing a clearer picture of the specific impact of policy feedback effects on the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest.

In addition to clarifying how national and subnational policy feedback interact, this dissertation also illuminates how these varying policy feedback effects may lead undocumented Latinx immigrants to develop alternative definitions of political participation. The literature on policy feedback effects argues that policy can have a direct impact on whether or not an individual or group engages in political participation (Abrego, 2011; Campbell, 2005, 2011; García, 2019, 2021; Mettler & Soss, 2004; Skocpol, 1988; Soss, 2002). However, these studies almost exclusively on traditional measures of participation to determine if and how participation is impacted (Abrego, 2011; Campbell, 2005, 2011; García, 2019, 2021; Mettler & Soss, 2004; Skocpol, 1988; Soss, 2002). It does not leave open the possibility that those who turn away from traditional political participation reconceptualize the concept. It simply labels them as politically disengaged and assumes that they do not work towards change in other ways.

We can see how the liminal legality of undocumented immigrants plays out at the federal and local levels. The need to navigate policy feedback effects at multiple levels is another unifying experience for undocumented immigrants in the United States. Managing these varying and often contradictory policy messages has the potential to fundamentally alter how undocumented Latinx immigrants think about and engage in political participation. It could push them to engage in traditional activities aimed at affecting governmental or institutional change, or it could lead them to abandon these traditional measures and look to reconceptualize the concept in a way that makes more accessible for them.

2.3.1 The Role of Policy Feedback Effects in Shaping the Social Construction of Target Groups

Another key aspect of policy feedback effects is how they shape the social construction of target groups. One of the ramifications of the 2016 Presidential election was the introduction

of a new immigration policy and changes to the enforcement of previously established policies (Foley, 2017; García, 2019, 2021; Negrón-Gonzales, 2017). The discussion of immigration and immigration policy became commonplace in the United States, and we saw an increase in the number of immigration policies implemented (García, 2019, 2021). As the discussion of immigration policy and immigrants increased, we began to see a contestation of undocumented Latinx immigrants' social construction. The early Dreamer movement saw deservingness frames set around age, educational attainment, assimilation, and age of entry to the United States (Nicholls, 2013; Robles & Gomberg-Muñoz, 2016; Unzueta Carrasco & Seif, 2014). However, after the 2016 Presidential election, there was a push to frame all undocumented immigrants as underserving (Foley, 2017). This shift forced undocumented immigrants in the United States to defend the legitimacy of their presence within the community. The contestation of how they are socially constructed as a group may also impact how they define and engage in political participation.

The literature on the social construction of target groups assumes that shared characteristics possessed by a target population, in this case, undocumented Latinx immigrants, are socially meaningful. It also states that specific valence-oriented values, symbols, and images are often attributed to these populations (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). It also makes clear that these target populations are fluid and can change depending on time and context (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). The social construction of a target population is most often thought of in terms of how the public and elected officials think of a specific population and how likely they are to benefit from or be burdened by social policy (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). However, these social constructions are often meaningful to those in the population. They can alter how they make sense of their social and political contexts, including how they define political participation

(Schneider & Ingram, 1993). The narratives that accompany these constructions can motivate or discourage action within these socially constructed groups. It stands to reason that as all undocumented immigrants are reconstructed in the United States, the process of defending their existence may shape how they define and engage in political participation.

In the United States, immigration policy has been used to socially construct deserving and undeserving immigrants (Chavez, 2013; Newton, 2002; Nicholls, 2013). Previously, deserving and undeserving distinctions were based on an immigrant's status as a legal resident. Those who were in the country with documentation were considered deserving, while those who were undocumented were considered undeserving (Nicholls, 2013). In the early 2000s, these constructions began to change. Large groups of undocumented Latinx youth began to organize and demand that they be given status as legal residents (Nicholls, 2013). Frustrated by the numerous barriers they encountered as they came of age, undocumented Latinx youth began to make claims about their right to inclusion. To make their demands seem more reasonable to elected officials and to gain a legitimate public voice, early undocumented Latinx activists created narratives that focused on their desire to achieve the American Dream (Nicholls, 2013). The "Dreamers," as they would go on to be called, strategically built narratives around their desire to gain access to higher education and contribute economically to society (Nicholls, 2013). Another key aspect of this narrative was the innocence of Dreamers. The Dreamers were not individuals who consciously decided to break the law (Nicholls, 2013). They were brought to the county as children by their parents and were, for the most part, culturally assimilated into American society (Nicholls, 2013). Dreamer activists used this narrative to develop an organizing strategy where "deserving" immigrants were given a voice and "undeserving" individuals were silenced (Nicholls, 2013).

These distinctions were then solidified through advocacy and the development of public policy. More specifically, the DREAM ACT and DACA translated the narratives of deservingness into formal eligibility requirements. The advocacy strategy of highlighting the stories of deserving undocumented Latinx immigrants led to an unintended consequence of excluding undeserving immigrants from these policies. For an undocumented immigrant to avoid deportation, he or she had to meet the requirements laid out by these bills and executive orders (DREAM ACT of 2017, 2017; United States Department of Homeland Security, 2017).

In the current social context, we are again seeing these socially constructed boundaries being contested, especially for undocumented Latinx immigrants. While it is important to reinforce that not all undocumented immigrants are of Latinx origin, undocumented Latinx immigrants must also navigate a racialized immigration rhetoric in ways that other undocumented immigrants do not (Brown, 2013). The current administration has used a combination of racialized immigration rhetoric and increasingly punitive immigration enforcement to push a group that, in the aftermath of the Dream Act activism, had gained deserving status back into an undeserving category (Foley, 2017; García, 2019, 2021; Negrón-Gonzales, 2017). The current administration is attempting to shift the social construction of undocumented Latinx immigrants from an advantaged group to a deviant group (Foley, 2017; García, 2019, 2021; Negrón-Gonzales, 2017). So, while previous literature has established how undocumented Latinx immigrants have been socially constructed and the role that federal policy has played in this process, this study will also provide the opportunity to examine how they respond to the contestation of their deserving status.

While research on the social construction of target groups provides an excellent framework to examine how policy and policy debates can frame the political needs and the likelihood they

will receive a response from elected officials, it does not consider how group members make sense of or respond to these social constructions. This dissertation expands this body of literature by exploring how the social construction of undocumented Latinx immigrants influences how they make sense of political participation.

2.4 Conclusion

These bodies of literature provide essential information for better understanding undocumented Latinx immigrant political participation. However, each also leaves unanswered questions or gaps that need to be addressed. Previous studies frame participation within traditional definitions, which often focus on voting and affecting public policy. This has allowed us to learn valuable information about the political participation of undocumented immigrants in the United States. However, these studies have ascribed these measures of political participation to the undocumented community without seeking input from the population. Too often, these works view the political participation of undocumented immigrants through the lens of individuals being "undocumented and unafraid" or "living in the shadows." These narratives assume that undocumented Latinx immigrants view political participation through traditional definitions and categorize individuals who do not engage in traditional forms of political participation as inactive. They have not examined alternative definitions of political participation or considered that undocumented immigrants may have reconceptualized the definition to find spaces to engage in political participation on their own terms. Even works that acknowledge the problematic nature of deservingness frames often only highlight them as barriers to engaging in traditional forms of political participation. They do not consider that undocumented Latinx immigrants may have redefined political participation in a way that allows them to participate on their own terms.

Similarly, previous research has shed light on the undocumented immigrant experience in the United States. Their day-to-day experiences have been shaped by their documentation status. This has led to the development of theoretical frameworks aimed at helping scholars better understand these shared sets of experiences and centering the voices of undocumented immigrants. However, until very recently, these frameworks have not been applied to examine undocumented immigrants' political participation. Previous scholarship has been limited to how undocumented immigrants engage in traditional definitions of participation and what factors help facilitate or discourage participation. However, it does not explore how undocumented folks have reconceptualized political participation. This can help promote the notion that undocumented immigrants are 'undocumented and unafraid' or 'living in the shadows' when, in reality, their participation is much more nuanced.

Finally, a great deal of research has been done on how public policy can influence political participation. The work on policy feedback effects and the social construction of target groups has provided very important knowledge concerning how policy impacts political participation. However, less work has been done on how immigration policy feedback effects at the national and local levels interact. There also has not been much work around how policy feedback effects and contested social constructions could lead certain groups to develop new conceptualizations of political participation.

This paper builds on these previous studies by giving undocumented Latinx immigrants the space to define political participation and expand on the actions they considered examples of political participation. It also examines how specific factors like the 2016 presidential election and inclusive subnational policy have shaped these thoughts and actions. This allows us to gain insight into how undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest have made sense of

themselves as political actors and their political agency. It adds to the theoretical literature around policy, local contexts, and political participation, and provides insight into how to better support the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest.

Chapter 3 Methods, Social Identities, and Data

In this chapter, I will lay out my methodological choices, review the role my social identities played in the research process, summarize my methodological approach, review the demographic characteristics of my sample, and discuss the limitations of the sample. Where necessary, I will provide a theoretical justification for my methodological choices. I intend to be clear about my process so that future social work and sociology scholars working with undocumented populations may review it. I have attached my full interview protocol in an Appendix at the end of this dissertation.

3.1 Methodological approaches and Social identities

Before describing the specific methods of this study, I would like to spend some time discussing the rationale for my mythological choices. The lived experiences and realities of undocumented Latinx immigrants made it very difficult to reach this population using traditional recruitment methods. Undocumented immigrants live among citizens and legal residents and do not differ from their documented counterparts in any noticeable way, making them difficult to identify (Chavez, 2013). Most undocumented immigrants keep their citizenship status a secret due to the risk of deportation and anti-undocumented sentiment in the United States (Chavez, 2013). Given their lack of government-sanctioned documentation, these Latinx immigrants must always guard their status to prevent the possibility of deportation (Chavez, 2013). The need to protect their status has only increased in the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election, which has led to an increase in hostile rhetoric concerning immigrants, immigration policy, and the uncertainty surrounding the continuance of DACA (Aranda et al., 2022; García, 2019; Massey &

Sanchez, 2012; Negrón-Gonzales, 2017; Prieto, 2018). The threat of being deported and separated from their family understandably makes many undocumented Latinx immigrants unwilling to disclose their status, especially to individuals they do not know or trust (Chavez, 2012; Prieto, 2018). These challenges meant that commonly used recruitment methods, such as generating a random sample from a sampling frame or even using recruitment flyers, were not appropriate, feasible, or practical. Sustained community engagement and trust-building were required to support recruitment efforts.

To effectively conduct this research and maintain an ethical commitment to community-first methods, I needed to work to build trust within the undocumented community, build authentic relationships, and, as much as possible, become intertwined with the community. I needed to work to build meaningful relationships and rapport with my respondents (García, 2019; Lopez, 2019; Prieto, 2018). This project often required participants to share difficult and traumatizing personal events with me. If I wanted my respondents to move beyond surface-level answers, I needed to build a space of trust and respect. My social identities and positions greatly impacted my ability to connect with my participants on campus.

I identify as a multi-ethnic, white, Mexican-American. I often present as a white male and do not speak Spanish fluently, but I am the son of a one-time undocumented Mexican immigrant father and white European mother. My presentation of a white male and lack of Spanish speaking ability often created a justified sense of skepticism among my respondents when I first met them. Many undocumented individuals I spoke with had a healthy skepticism of researchers whom they feared were only interested in working with their community because it was a trendy topic. However, I was able to counteract this skepticism by sharing my own story as a member of a mixed-status family and the impact that immigration policy had on my family. I

began each interview by telling my respondents my story and the motivation for this project. Hearing my story often helped my respondents see me as someone who had been directly impacted by immigration policy and who was not motivated strictly by self-interest. As one respondent, Dario put it

> I really appreciate you sharing your story. I think for me, one of the questions I always ask researchers is, why are you doing it? Especially when it comes to undocumented immigrants because I feel that it's such a big topic right now, or a hot topic or whatever, researchers want to research it. And really want to drive in and get to know the stories and whatnot. So, I think that's a great thing, don't get me wrong, but at the same time, it's like, it also makes me question like are we just being used as some tool for them to further their education or whatnot. So, I think that by you sharing your story for me, it means a lot, and I definitely get where you're coming from and why you're doing this work.

I was also aided by my identity as a father. When I started my interviews, my oldest daughter had just turned eight months, and I was very much in the middle of adjusting to life as a parent. My identity as a parent often served as a point of commonality with my research participants and allowed for a more casual relationship. This identity was beneficial to bridging gender and generational differences between my respondents and me. It allowed us to discuss shared experiences not directly tied to the research project and build lasting relationships. For example, when my first interviewee contacted me because she was concerned about finding childcare, we discovered that our daughters were exactly one month apart in age. I invited her to bring her daughter along for a playdate while we went through the interview guide. While many might argue this is a blurring of boundaries, it significantly improved the experience for the

respondent and myself and further connected me to the local community. The interview became much more conversational, and the respondent became much more comfortable sharing their experiences with me.

In addition to my social identities, I benefited from my position on campus, working and advocating with undocumented students. While collecting data, I also held a research position with an organization on campus dedicated to increasing access to higher education for undocumented students and deferred action for childhood arrival (DACA) recipients. The organization worked closely with the undocumented student group on campus as well as with undocumented community members and allies across the country. Several of my colleagues had direct ties to the undocumented populations. Through my work with this research organization, I was able to build strong ties with the student community, become seen as a trusted ally, and be seen as a resource that students could rely on for assistance. As my colleagues learned more about me and my work, they helped connect me to their networks outside our geographic region. Without the relationships I developed through working with this research organization, I would not have had so much success recruiting from the Chicago area.

I do not share these experiences to say that being a member of a mixed-status family, a parent, or engaged in on-campus advocacy is necessary to conduct qualitative research with the undocumented community. However, in my experience, it was necessary for me to reflect on my identities and the way they impacted my approach to this work and how I connected to my participants. This anecdotal experience mirrors other researchers working with undocumented and immigrant populations (Barak, 2017; García, 2019; Lopez, 2019; Prieto, 2018).

3.2 Methods

This study addresses three research questions: (1) How do undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest define political participation? (2) Did the 2016 presidential election impact the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest, and if so, how? (3) How does inclusive subnational immigration policy influence the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest? I adopted a qualitative approach utilizing in-depth interviews to address this question. I chose in-depth interviews for this research project for two reasons. First, in-depth interviews' broad, open-ended, and narrative nature allowed undocumented Latinx immigrants to provide more profound and extensive responses than a close-ended survey or secondary data analysis (Weiss, 1994). More specifically, in-depth interviews allowed respondents to explain how they make sense of political participation as a phenomenon (Weiss, 1994). Second, several scholars working with undocumented immigrants have successfully utilized in-depth interviews to address their research questions (García, 2019; Gonzales, 2016; Lopez, 2019; Negrón-Gonzales, 2015; Nicholls, 2013). Many issues facing undocumented immigrants and questions being asked about their experiences require a high level of nuance and depth to answer. In-depth interviews are often used with this population as a result.

3.2.1 Recruitment

To build trust within the undocumented Latinx community, I spent two years volunteering with community organizations within Michigan, including groups on the campus of a large public University that served and worked with undocumented populations. This strategy has been utilized successfully by other researchers who study undocumented immigrants and allowed me to become a known and trusted agent within the undocumented Latinx community

(Abrego, 2011; Gonzales, 2016; Lopez, 2019; Nicholls, 2013). These organizations, located in Southeastern and Western Michigan, conducted state and federal policy advocacy, direct services, urgent response, legal services, English as second language classes, and educational advocacy. Each organization acted as a gatekeeper to the undocumented community. As my colleagues learned more about me and my work, they helped connect me to their networks outside our geographic region.

As I built relationships with stakeholders and community members within these organizations, I gained their trust, and they began to vouch for me in the undocumented community. They would pass along my contact information so that community members could contact me and, in some instances, introduce me directly to individuals who had expressed an interest in participating in my study. After conducting my first research interviews, I utilized snowball sampling methods to recruit additional participants. From there, new respondents would reach out to me to ask any questions they had about the study and set up a time to chat. Snowball sampling is a nonprobability sampling strategy where the researcher asks an initial respondent to recommend additional participants (Heckathorn, 2011). It is a common method among researchers working with undocumented immigrants and other hidden or difficult-to-reach populations (Chavez, 2012; García, 2019). After each interview, I would provide the respondent with a few business cards with my contact information and then ask that they pass them along to anyone they thought would be a good fit for my study. From there, new respondents would reach out to me to ask any questions they had about the study and set up a time to chat. The use of snowball sampling allowed me to reach a diverse group of participants and allowed me to expand into large midwestern cities outside of Michigan as well.

3.2.2 Study Eligibility

Subjects were eligible for participation in this study if they met the following criteria: 1) They were over the age of 18, 2) Currently lived within the United States without citizenship, legal permanent residence, or a valid visa, and 3) Immigrated to the United States from the countries of Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay, Venezuela, Cuba, Haiti, or the Dominican Republic.

I decided to include only Latinx immigrants for two reasons. First, the majority of undocumented immigrants living in the United States hail from Mexico, Central, or South America. As of 2019, the Migration Policy Institute estimates that 8.2 million (73%) of the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States were born in Mexico, Central, or South America (Migration Policy Institute, 2022). Second, Latinx immigrants have a long and unique history that warrants discussion separate from other immigrant groups (Telles & Ortiz, 2008). United States immigration policy has treated Latinx immigrants in a distinct manner, mainly in response to economic interests that depended on a large, low-skilled labor pool (Telles & Ortiz, 2008). These distinctions have seen Latinx immigrants be excluded from the quota system established by the Immigration Act of 1924, be formally recruited to fill a labor need through the Bracero program in the 1940s, and then explicitly targeted for deportation by Operation Wetback during the 1950s. Often these policies and their enforcement directly led to the creation of a uniquely exploitable population of undocumented workers (Telles & Ortiz, 2008).

So, while not all undocumented immigrants emigrate from Mexico, Central, or South America, undocumented immigrants from these regions have a unique history of interactions with the United States immigration policy. Latinx immigrants' unique history with past

immigration policy could influence how they make sense of the current political landscape in the United States and uniquely shape how they think about political participation. This, combined with the fact that immigrants from these regions comprise the majority of undocumented immigrants living in the United States, warrants this project's specific focus on the Latinx undocumented population.

3.2.3 Interview Process

Interviews were conducted in secure locations on campus, within the respondent's home, at community organizations, or via telephone and video chat. I began each interview by obtaining oral informed consent. Due to concerns regarding maintaining confidentiality, I did not collect participants' signatures or keep hard copies of the informed consent documents. Instead, I asked each participant to verbally consent on the audio recording at the start of each interview. After participants provided informed consent, I began each interview by sharing my personal story, detailing why I was interested in studying immigration policy, political participation, and working with undocumented populations. This included sharing that I was a member of a mixed-status family and experience being separated from my father because of his documentation status. After sharing my story, I asked respondents to share their own story. Starting with this open-ended and broad question allowed respondents to disclose parts of their story that they were most comfortable with at the beginning of the interview. Then as respondents became more comfortable in the setting and sharing their stories with me, I introduced more focused questions concerning their families, documentation status, community experience, thoughts on immigration policy, deserving and undeserving narratives, and political participation. I ended each interview by allowing respondents to address any issues they felt were important but not addressed through

the interview protocol. Each interview lasted between one and two and a half hours, and participants received a $40 incentive for their time.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim with participants' permission. Audio files were deleted once transcription was completed. In addition to audio recording, I took field notes during and after the interview process. During the interview process, I would highlight specific sayings or points that struck me as interesting and relevant. These were primarily surface-level, in the moment, notes that directed me to items I thought could be connected to my research questions. After completing the interviews, I would relocate to a quiet place to reflect and write my field notes. These places included my office, local coffee shops, and restaurants. These post-interview field notes were deeper in nature. During these reflections, I would review the entire interview and process the stories that had just been shared, and I started to develop larger thematic connections. It also allowed me to think about how my latest interview related to my previous interviews and think through the larger picture that was forming. I also noted any personal feelings or reactions I had during the interview, body language cues from my respondent that I may have picked up during the interview, and any other contextual factors that I thought were relevant.

3.2.4 Coding

I used the Dedoose software program to code the transcribed research interviews. Coding was done exclusively by the primary investigator. A combination of flexible, open, and thematic coding was used to analyze the data. Flexible coding was used initially to develop a codebook to be used to analyze the interview transcripts. Flexible coding is an inductive approach to data analysis that assumes the following. First, researchers used a semi-structured interview with a sample size of more than 30 to conduct their research. Second, some combination of induction

and literature – or theory-based coding that is not entirely inductive was used, even in the first steps of analysis, was used. Finally, the researcher has comfort with the process of relating independent and dependent variables to one another (Deterding & Waters, 2018). In this instance, the initial codebook was influenced by previous literature and interview notes I took while speaking with participants.

After the initial codebook was developed, I took an open coding approach to the interviews. Open coding is a process in which the researcher reads each transcript line by line and uses the data available, in this case, the participant's own words, to develop codes to summarize the thoughts of their participants (Emerson et al., 2011). Open coding was used to develop a more extensive codebook and identify relevant themes in my participants' responses.

Identifying themes was necessary to move to the next stage of my analysis, focused coding. Focused coding is a line-by-line analysis of the transcripts to build up and further elaborate on interesting themes (Emerson et al., 2011). In total, I conducted three rounds of coding to identify relevant themes and definitions to address how undocumented Latinx immigrants define political participation, how their political participation has changed since 2016, and how national and subnational immigration policies impacted their thoughts and actions.

3.3 Data

3.3.1 Sample

I conducted thirty-two in-depth semi-structured interviews with undocumented Latinx immigrants living in the Midwest from June 2018 through May 2019. Respondents ranged in age from eighteen to forty-four years old. The median age of my respondent was 23.5 years. On average, my respondents had lived in the United States for slightly more than 18 years. Nineteen

respondents identified as female (59.4%), while thirteen identified as male (40.6%). All respondents currently resided in Michigan or Illinois. Within the sample, fourteen respondents (44%) grew up in large urban areas with significant Latinx populations, and eighteen respondents (56%) lived in small, predominantly white cities or towns. Respondents' countries of origin included Mexico, Chile, Guatemala, Honduras, and Venezuela. Twenty-five respondents (78.1%) had been granted deferred action for childhood arrivals (DACA) status. Seven respondents (21.9%) were fully undocumented and did not have any legal status to reside in the United States. The majority of my sample (twenty-five respondents; 78.1%) had attended at least one semester of college classes, and each respondent was currently employed. The respondents provided this demographic information throughout the course of the interview. For a more detailed description of my sample demographics, see tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1

Participant name (pseudonym), age, and years of U.S. residence

Name	Age	Years in the U.S.
Ana	23	19
Valerie	22	18
Hugo	31	27
Sophia	28	25
Lena	22	19
Selena	19	16
Freddy	22	15
Isabella	20	17
Bianca	20	17
Marisol	28	19
Dario	22	16
Jorge	22	18
Joseph	31	25
Diana	27	21
Vanessa	18	14
Yvette	21	15
Jamie	29	18
Carmen	27	18
Fernando	24	16
Sergio	22	15
Max	22	17
Erica	20	15
Juan	29	18
Kassandra	24	18
Efren	36	20
Rosita	22	6
Ivan	25	23
Orlando	31	12
Silvia	38	29
Julia	25	20
Ivana	19	16
Maria	44	16
Average	25.3 years	18.5 years

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Category	n
Gender	
Male	13
Female	19
Total	32
Country of Origin	
Mexico	25
Venezuela	3
Guatemala	2
Chile	1
Honduras	1
Total	32
DACA Status	
Yes	24
No	08
Total	32
Residence	
Predominately White City Population less than 120,00	18
Large Urban City Population of more than 120,000	14
Total	32
College Experience	
No College	5
Some College	12
2-year degree	4
4-year degree	7
Grad degree	4
Total	32

3.3.2 Limitations of Sample

While the information and knowledge generated from the stories of my respondents offer valuable insight into how undocumented Latinx immigrants understand and define political participation, my sample also has some notable limitations. First, because of the convenience sample, it may be difficult to translate these findings beyond the geographical region. Even within the region, the sample tends to skew towards younger undocumented with higher levels of education. Additionally, most of my respondents had been in the United States for a significant amount of time, and many had been granted DACA status. It is possible that individuals who have not been in the United States as long, have not had similar levels of education, or are in different age brackets could have vastly different views on political participation. The vast majority of respondents in my sample were Mexican. Latinx individuals are not monolithic, and it is possible that increased representation of other Latinx ethnic groups could alter these findings. Finally, perhaps the most significant limitation of this data set is its focus on undocumented Latinx immigrants. While I was clear about the justification for why I chose to focus on the undocumented Latinx immigrant population, these findings cannot necessarily be applied to other undocumented populations. We must continue to highlight that not all undocumented immigrants are Latinx and that differing origin countries can impact the experience of undocumented immigrants living in the United States.

However, that is not to say there are not lessons we can draw from this data set. It is reasonable to expect some overlap between respondents in my sample and other undocumented Latinx immigrants in smaller, predominately white cities and large urban ethnic enclaves, particularly in the Midwest. Additionally, as more and more undocumented Latinx immigrants graduate high school and enter college, we could see a demographic shift in levels of educational

attainment among undocumented Latinx immigrants in the United States (Migration Policy Institute, 2022). Despite some limitations on generalizability, the lessons learned from this sample can still help us develop a more complete understanding of political participation and takes a step toward centering the voices of the undocumented Latinx community.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has summarized my methodological choices, the role my social identities played in the research process, my methodological approach, summarized the demographic characteristics of my sample and discussed the limitations of my sample. Over the following three chapters, I will discuss the results from this data. Specifically, I will discuss how undocumented Latinx immigrants in my sample define political participation, how the 2016 presidential election affected their political participation, and how subnational immigration policy has impacted how they define and engage in political participation.

Chapter 4 Our Existence is a Political Issue: How Undocumented Latinx Immigrants in the Midwest Define Political Participation

"Our existence is a political issue. It's your identity. And because you know that you have to think about it every single day, it does get, like, exhausting." Selena, 19

As described in chapter two, a tremendous amount of previous scholarship has focused on how undocumented Latinx immigrants have engaged in political participation through the use of traditional definitions and measures (Burciaga & Martinez, 2017; García, 2021; Negrón-Gonzales, 2014, 2015; Nicholls, 2013; Pallares & Gomberg-Muñoz, 2016; Robles & Gomberg-Muñoz, 2016; Unzueta Carrasco & Seif, 2014; Wong et al., 2019). These traditional definitions and measures of political participation generally include actions intended to influence government and policy through voting, lobbying, political protest, political violence, or social disruption (Alford & Friedland, 1975; Milbrath, 1965; Milbrath & Goel, 1977). Few studies consider how undocumented Latinx immigrants define political participation or give them space to define the term themselves. This scholarship has also helped develop a narrative concerning undocumented Latinx immigrants being either undocumented and unafraid or pushed into the shadows because of their documentation status (García, 2021; Nicholls, 2013). While there is undoubtedly some truth to this narrative, it vastly oversimplifies the political experiences of undocumented Latinx immigrants. It does not account for the possibility that undocumented Latinx immigrants have reconceptualized political participation in a way that works for them.

Recently, scholars have begun to think about broader definitions of political participation for undocumented groups. However, even these expanded definitions still rely on traditional concepts of participation focused on creating systemic change, such as political efficacy (comfort level engaging in political participation) and political socialization (becoming informed about political issues) (Garcia, 2021). While this work was a step in the right direction, it did not capture whether undocumented immigrants considered activities beyond influencing the electoral or policy process to be political participation. They also still do not provide opportunities for undocumented immigrants to define the term themselves. Allowing undocumented immigrants to offer their own definitions of political participation allows researchers to see how undocumented Latinx immigrants view themselves as political actors and what activities they view as accessible forms of participation, given their documentation status. It also provides the opportunity in the future to see how their definitions of political participation map onto their actions.

Much of this project was motivated by my experience working with the undocumented community. The community members I knew considered themselves politically active. Even if they were not engaged in what community organizers considered to be political participation, they still found ways to advocate for themselves. It felt disingenuous to categorize these individuals as "pushed into the shadows" because they were not participating in rallies, directly trying to influence policy, or focused on impacting elected officials. My community work led me to believe that we had an opportunity to expand how we think about political participation to more appropriately represent the experiences of undocumented immigrants living in the Midwest. This project aims to chronicle how undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest understand political participation and open up the space for them to define the term for

themselves so that, as researchers and advocates, we can better understand their political experience and how they make sense of themselves as political actors.

The period I conducted my dissertation research was an especially important context to capture how undocumented Latinx immigrants understand political participation. I began conceptualizing this project during the lead-up to the 2016 Presidential election. During the campaign, the country saw an increase in hostile political rhetoric around immigration, broadly and specifically undocumented immigration (Aranda et al., 2022; García, 2021; Massey & Sanchez, 2012; Prieto, 2018). After the victory of Donald Trump, the country also saw an increase in immigration-related policy at both the national and subnational levels (García, 2019, 2021). These policies were both restrictive (policies that excluded undocumented immigrants from rights, resources, or benefits) and inclusive (policies that granted undocumented immigrants rights, resources, or benefits) and generally increased the prevalence of discussion around immigration (García, 2021). Almost all of the respondents in my sample identified the 2016 Presidential election, increased volume of immigration-related policy, the overturning of DACA, and the subsequent immigration discourse as significant events in their lives. Many identified these events as significant external stressors. Previous research has shown how external stressors around immigration policy can affect the mental well-being of undocumented immigrants and DACA recipients (Patler, Hamilton, and Savinar, 2021). I wanted to extend that framework to examine how these stressors did or did not change how undocumented Latinx immigrants defined and engaged in political participation.

4.1 In Their Own Words – Three frameworks for Defining Political Participation.

After coding my respondents' interviews, a few things became clear. First, many respondents in my sample did not have one universal definition for political participation. Fifteen

of my thirty-two respondents used multiple frameworks to define political participation. For my respondents, political participation was more of a spectrum than any one set of activities. As one respondent, Isabella, a twenty-year-old undocumented immigrant from Mexico, said, "I know political participation can mean different things to different people depending on what they're capable of, what they're knowledgeable of, and what they're willing to sacrifice." Bianca, a twenty-year-old woman from Chile, mentioned that it was necessary to value all types of participation from undocumented immigrants given their status, "it depends on your vulnerability as well. If you have something that could put you in danger, it's perfectly valid not to do public or traditional participation. That's why I value stories so much." Bianca explicitly mentions the value of sharing stories as a form of political participation. However, the implication behind this quote was that, in her view, all types of participation from undocumented immigrants were legitimate forms of political participation.

Jaime, a twenty-nine-year-old activist from Mexico, shared a similar sentiment: "Over time, I've come to learn that political participation is really broad. It can take so many different forms. I guess to summarize, to me, political participation is what we are doing on a day-to-day basis to fight against oppressive forces and to improve the world and our communities." In this case, Jamie still focuses on the goal of political participation as change but is clear that it does not necessarily have to involve interaction with government, elected officials, or policy. Juan, a twenty-nine-year-old undocumented immigrant from Mexico, echoed this sentiment during his interview when he stated, "[Political participation] can take many different shapes or forms, but I think at the end of the day, it's about people getting together and taking the initiative to make a change." The undocumented Latinx immigrants in my sample expressed that because their status limited them, their participation might take many forms that may or may not directly relate to

influencing governmental action. They viewed these alternative actions as valid forms of participation.

So, while respondents in my sample used a range of activities to define political participation a few themes emerged. First, almost my entire sample considered themselves politically active. Specifically, twenty-six, or eighty-one percent, of my respondents self-identified as individuals who engaged in political participation. However, what that looked like varied for each of my respondents. Additionally, even though the respondents used defined political participation in multiple ways three types of definitions were most common: traditional definitions of political participation, political participation as individual engagement, and political participation as everyday resistance. Each of these categories mapped onto types of political participation we have seen discussed within the social movement literature (Alford & Friedland, 1975; García, 2021; Hanisch, 1969; Hill & Laredo, 2020; Lopez & Zúñiga, 2010; Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Nicholls, 2013; Wong et al., 2019). Traditional definitions of political participation were cited most often by this group, and individuals in my sample using these definitions defined political participation as voting, engaging in political rallies or protests, contacting elected officials, and generally trying to influence the governmental and policy process. The literature on traditional definitions of political participation was covered extensively in chapter two and had great relevance to the undocumented Latinx immigrants in my sample.

Another definition my respondents used to operationalize political participation was individual engagement. These definitions included engaging with other individuals in one-on-one settings to help provide context to the immigration debate. Often my respondents were trying to provide a face to the immigration debate or challenge the thinking of someone in their community. They did not have policy change in mind when doing this but hoped to improve

their local climate. The definitions of political participation focusing on individual engagement are similar to the intergroup dialogue models of political participation. Intergroup dialogue is a program that challenges individuals to grasp the significance of social identities and think critically about the structure of social inequalities (Lopez & Zúñiga, 2010). Its focus is to build intergroup understanding and asks participants to think critically about the causes and consequences of social inequality and become active agents of social change (Lopez & Zúñiga, 2010). While it would not be accurate to say that the respondents in my sample defining individual engagement as political participation are defining political participation as intergroup dialogue, there is a significant overlap between the two concepts. The respondents in my sample were not necessarily looking to debate the individuals they engaged with about immigration policy. Instead, they hoped to provide them with a new perspective by sharing their story. The use of personal narrative and one on one engagement is a strategy used by other marginalized groups participating in social movements. This includes the early DREAMER and LGBTQ+ movements (Enriquez & Saguy, 2016; Swerts, 2015). Social movements literature has long studied the ability of individuals' stories to do political work. This ability was reflected in the responses of the undocumented Latinx immigrants from my sample (Swerts, 2015).

Finally, the last definition used by my respondents to define political participation was everyday resistance. Respondents using this frame argued that their existence is, in essence, a political issue; therefore, everything they did was a form of political participation. Previous studies have noted that when asked how to improve their communities, undocumented immigrants often mentioned forming mutual aid networks and increased community resources but did not frame them as acts of political participation (García, 2019). Individuals in my sample highlighted that their status made everything they did a form of political participation, including

developing mutual aid networks, helping others access social services, or accessing services themselves. Because they viewed their identity as political, they reasoned that all of their activities were a form of political participation. They were also mindful of how heavy a burden this could be and often considered their coping mechanisms and self-care strategies as a form of political participation. Interestingly, some of the individuals in my sample transitioned the activities they considered to be self-care, like art and music, into more direct forms of political participation.

Again, this is a concept we have seen previously in the movement literature and builds off the feminist notion that the personal is political and identity politics (Bernstein, 2005; Hanisch, 1969; Hill & Laredo, 2020). The notion that the personal is political was first developed in the late nineteen sixties by feminist scholars to encourage examination of the public/private divide and provide a theoretical framework grounded in personal experiences (Hanisch, 1969; Hill & Laredo, 2020). The notion of the personal as political also laid the groundwork for the development of identity politics (Bernstein, 2005). Identity politics emerged in the late nineteen seventies and has become a staple of social movement scholarship (Bernstein, 2005). Identity politics generally describes the role politics, culture, identity, and personal experience can play in social movement activities (Bernstein, 2005). Based on the response of my interviewees, identity politics and the idea that the personal is political were relevant to how they defined political participation.

Table three provides a more detailed summary of how often each of these definitions were used by my respondents. In the sections following Table three I will provided and expanded explanation for each type of definitions used the respondents and provide more detailed discussion and analysis of traditional definitions of political participation, individual engagement

definitions of political participation, and every day resistance definitions of political participation.

Table 3

Definitions of Political Participation

Definition	*Number of participants using the definition*	Operationalization	Example quote
Traditional Definitions	32	Political participation defined as voting, engaging in political rallies or protests, contacting elected officials, and generally engaging in the formal political process	I define political participation as making your voice heard in political spaces.
Individual Engagement Definitions	7	Political participation defined as the use of personal narratives in individual settings to advocate for better treatment of undocumented immigrants and to help provide context to the immigration debate	I will use my story to give face to the issue, so the next time that person thinks of undocumented immigrants, they think of me and not a problematic stereotype they heard on the news.
Everyday Resistance Definitions	12	Political participation defined as everyday activities such as going to work or school, accessing services, and purchasing goods within their community.	Given the current conditions where every single day we're being threatened with deportation, we're being attacked all over the media, we're being scapegoated for so many of the country's problems, just the mere act of surviving, of being who we are, of going to school or going to work, is political participation.
Multiple definitions	15	Participants used a combination of the above categories to define political participation.	

Notes. The total number of definitions used exceeds the number of participants because some participants used more than one type of definition.

4.1.1 Traditional Definitions of Political Participation

Despite being formally excluded from the electoral process and being unable to vote, it was clear that many of my respondents defined political participation as actions meant to influence electoral politics. When asked to define political participation, everyone in my sample mentioned what can be considered traditional definitions of political participation. Again, they did not always limit how they thought about political participation to traditional measures; however, it became clear that these traditional measures were crucial components of how they defined political participation. Undocumented Latinx immigrants in my sample using these definitions highlighted the importance of voting, protest, and involvement in political campaigns, generally making one's political voice heard and being informed about relevant policy issues in the community. For example, Ana, a 23-year-old undocumented woman from Mexico, offered this response when asked to define political participation:

> so, growing up, I always thought voting was political participation, but I can't do that. But there are other things that you can do to help advocate for others. You can help canvas or go to a protest. There are a lot of ways you can have your voice heard without filling out a document. At the end of the day, I think it comes down to having your voice heard.

Even though Ana knew she could not vote, she still viewed it as a critical component of political participation and looked at other ways to impact the voting process. For her, this meant being very active in a local community organization, being very public about her documentation status, and engaging in political protest. Ana shared, "For me, political participation has started with [Community Organization] and understanding how powerful community organizing can be." Her involvement with a local community organization influenced Ana's definition of political participation to be rooted in impacting the electoral process and making her voice heard. The

notion of making their voice heard was something commonly discussed among my respondents. As Isabella put it, "I define political participation as making your voice heard in political spaces."

These definitions and others like them align with what we commonly see in the political participation literature and should not be surprising, given undocumented Latinx immigrants' long history of engaging in social protest and activism (Nichols, 2012; Garcia, 2021). However, an interesting theme emerged even within traditional definitions of political participation. Many of the individuals I interviewed made a conscious decision to become vote influencers within their social networks. In her most recent work, Garcia noted a similar finding examining how local immigration policy influenced the political participation of undocumented Mexican immigrants in California (2021). Using data from interviews conducted with ninety-four undocumented Mexican immigrants Garcia argues that local immigration law creates the unique environments that shape how and why undocumented immigrants engage in political participation (García, 2021). García interviewed individuals living in both restrictive (areas with local laws that limited or denied undocumented immigrants rights and resources) and accommodating (areas with local measures that extended rights and resources to undocumented immigrants) localities (2021). Her findings suggest that accommodating local contexts encourage broad and more expansive political engagement, increased political efficacy, and more direct and visible political participation (García, 2021). Conversely, restrictive localities create a local threat that drives deep issue-specific political socialization, constrains political efficacy, and encourages limited and often indirect political participation focused on local immigration issues (García, 2021). She also found that undocumented immigrants in restrictive localities often relied on "proxy participation" by leaning on eligible voters in their networks to express their interests during local elections (García, 2021).

The notion of "proxy participation" is similar to my respondents' desire to become a vote influencer. Even though they were excluded from voting, these respondents still considered it a crucial aspect of political participation. Therefore, they made it a point to become the person within their networks that others went to for information about political issues and candidates. Unlike Garica's sample, this was equally true of respondents in restrictive and inclusive localities. I conducted these interviews after the events of the 2016 Presidential election, and the intense hostile rhetoric produced nationally seemed to increase the urgency for undocumented immigrants to find a way to engage in political participation. In that sense, the national policy had become more restrictive. It could have pushed the undocumented Latinx immigrants in my sample to seek more indirect ways to engage in political participation regardless of whether their locality was inclusive or restrictive. Alternatively, they could have simply been looking for ways to make their interests represented in the absence of being able to vote themselves. They were not trying to get people just to vote; they were trying to convince their networks to vote in a way that benefited the undocumented community. As Vanessa, an 18-year-old woman from Mexico, stated, "I guess my lack of voting rights leads me to be active [as an influencer]. I can't vote. I can't express my voice in that way, so I would like to encourage people who can vote and who can participate in that way to go vote." This notion of being a vote influencer was mentioned by slightly more than half (seventeen) of my thirty-two respondents.

Being a vote influencer was especially relevant for Isabella, a 20-year-old Mexican woman. When she offered her definition of political participation, she started by sharing a story about her mother, explaining:

> I think about my [undocumented] mom, who gets her news from Facebook and who goes to church meetings, and even though the bishop says vote for Trump, she'll talk to our

> family and her friends, telling them about the issues and why they shouldn't. Even though she can't vote, she's telling them about things that they should be aware of and trying to influence how they vote. I've never seen her in the streets or contacting elected officials, but she still engages in political participation.

As Isabella continued, she elaborated on how this definition of political participation led to her approach within her network, sharing, "last summer during the primary, I had friends come up to me and ask, Isabella, I know you can't vote but what's your take on this? I don't care about politics but tell me who to vote for." Influencing who others vote for is an important form of participation for me." She consciously chose to try to have her interests represented within the voting system through her documented friends and family.

Dario, a 22-year-old man from Guatemala, echoed this definition of participation. As he put it,

> [Political participation is] different for me. For me, it's like keeping people updated when voter registration is going to happen and reminding people to vote. Kind of call them out in a way, like you can vote, so you should vote. Also, providing resources to help them get registered to vote, so they know where and when they are supposed to vote, who the candidates are, and things like that. You know, taking on that responsibility of like, well, I'm gonna get people to vote, you know, at the, you know, different elections. And I'm gonna convince them to cast their ballot, and I'm gonna get more voters to vote with me and my community.

Dario connected this as a responsibility not just for himself but also for his community. For Dario, political participation was not merely about self-interest but also the undocumented community's general good. Carmen, a twenty-seven-year-old woman from Mexico, went even

further and created voting materials for public distribution. "I actually put together and distributed a voting guide for this [election] cycle. I put all of the candidates, even the racist ones, on it so folks could be better informed. At the end of the guide, I put a little section saying this is how I would vote if I could vote." My respondents have sought to make their voice heard in the electoral process through their documented networks or through a form of "proxy participation" (García, 2021).

Respondents within my sample still primarily focused on voting, but some made it clear that voting in and of itself was not always an adequate type of participation. One of the more powerful statements in this regard came from Bianca, a twenty-year-old woman from Chile. She had begun to grow frustrated with allies and advocates strictly focusing on voting and electoral politics as political participation, stating:

> When we solely prioritize voting as a form of political participation, we consequently delegitimize the voices of people who can't participate in that way. Communities are fighting to survive, are fighting to have their collective voices heard every day. But instead of sharing mutual aid networks, showing up for them on their terms, and providing them the attention so they can disrupt and be heard, y'all continue to put most of your resources into electing politicians that want to silence them and claim you're 'voting for the voiceless.' Communities aren't voiceless. They are ignored—different things.

Bianca's frustration grew from her view that the concern was frequently with electing more progressive candidates who ignored the undocumented community without being held accountable. Accountability was also an essential aspect of political participation for Dario. As he put it, "political participation is holding people accountable when they say they'll support us

whether that means elected officials, universities, or people in our everyday lives." So, while the accountability Dario referenced certainly included activities that we consider traditional definitions of political participation, his notion of everyday accountability extended to other areas, establishing the need to consider definitions of political participation beyond voting and other associated activities.

4.1.2 Individual engagement as a form of Political Participation

The second way undocumented Latinx immigrants from this sample defined political participation was as a form of individual engagement. These definitions of participation focused on using personal stories and narratives in individual settings to advocate for better treatment of undocumented immigrants and immigrant groups. Sometimes individuals would use their stories to advocate for policy change, but more often, they engaged in one-on-one settings with other individuals outside of political settings. Individuals who used individual engagement to define political participation employed methods similar to those who worked to be vote-influencers, mentioned in the previous section. However, there was a key difference between the two types of definitions. Vote influencers had a clear goal in mind when they engaged with someone within their network. They wanted to convince that the person they were speaking with to vote in a specific way. In most instances they also had an existing relationship with this person. In the case of individual engagement there was not a clear goal to influence another individual's voting selection and they did not necessarily have a pre-existing relationship. These interactions were more about having a conversation around immigration and immigration reform.

Individual engagement definitions are similar to an intergroup dialogue approach to changing individuals' views and opinions of immigrants and undocumented populations (Lopez & Zúñiga, 2010). Respondents in my sample who were not as comfortable being public with

their documentation status or did not feel connected to or supported by their communities tended to use this frame. This individual engagement could also be seen as a type of "proxy participation" because it allowed undocumented Latinx immigrants in my sample to engage in more indirect and covert ways (García, 2021). It is important to note that they did not view their lack of participation in traditional forms of political action as not engaging in political participation; instead, they had redefined their actions as an alternative form of participation. Efren, a thirty-six-year-old male from Mexico who expressed worry that engaging in more public forms of political participation could bring negative consequences, clearly represents this type of definition, explaining:

> For me, participation isn't always about being public, especially now. Sometimes it means stopping when you hear someone say something awful and letting them know why it's problematic. I will use my story to give face to the issue, so the next time that person thinks of undocumented immigrants, they think of me and not a problematic stereotype they heard on the news.

Efren considered himself to be engaged in political participation, but he was doing so on his terms in a more private way. Similarly, Valerie, a twenty-two-year-old woman from Mexico, was more comfortable engaging individuals in one-on-one settings and considered "telling your story, trying to convince others why you should stay here" a form of political participation. Respondents viewed telling their stories both as a means to educate and persuade individuals about the issues facing undocumented Latinx immigrants. Efren would add that "educating others is a form of participation" and that educating people about these issues was the first step in political participation. Joseph, a thirty-one-year-old man from Mexico, echoed this point, sharing, "[I realized] how powerful just simply being educated was in political participation. I

think education is one of the first things that makes people want to engage in political participation. Once you become aware of an injustice, you can't unknow what you know." So, while these individuals did not engage in what many scholars consider traditional public forms of political participation, they did define political participation in a way that allowed them to feel engaged. Individuals defining political participation in this way seemed to be searching for a way to operationalize political participation that allowed them to include the activities they felt safe engaging in and were not systematically excluded from, such as voting.

4.1.3 Everyday resistance as a form of Political Participation

The final definition utilized by individuals in this sample was everyday resistance models of political participation. In many ways, these definitions were similar to feminist theories highlighting the personal as political (Hanisch, 1969; Hill & Laredo, 2020). They focused on everyday activities as a form of political participation. The subjects' everyday actions were not directly connected to political action, voting, or sharing personal narratives, but rather, they defined political participation as actively participating in everyday society. These undocumented Latinx immigrants defined political participation as going to work or school, accessing services, and purchasing goods within their community. Bianca made this point early in our interview,

> Sometimes it [political participation] doesn't necessarily mean taking a certain number of hours organizing, or marching, or things like that. Sometimes it's just about your story or enduring and resisting everyday life. That's just as powerful and has just as much strength [as traditional political participation]. [Undocumented] People have a lot of reasons why they can't engage in traditional participation, but that doesn't mean they're inactive.

Here, Bianca is touching on a common theme among my recipients in the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election. The intense debates, hostile rhetoric, and increasing punitive national

immigration policies were a lot to process. Moreover, while many felt the urge to advocate and organize for their community, they understood that they could do so simply by being present in their communities. For example, Isabella viewed her everyday success as political participation, stating, "I participate by succeeding. I'm coming for everything they told me I couldn't have. By thriving every day, I'm pushing back against negative stereotypes and showing folks that I belong here." Although Isabella used traditional frames to define political participation, she also viewed her day-to-day life as an equally important type of participation. Marisol, a twenty-eight-year-old woman from Mexico, expressed a similar definition but was clear that her day-to-day activities did not need to be exceptional for them to be a form of political participation. As she put it, "for me, political participation simply means surviving. Just being here and being ok is a form of political participation. I don't need to be exceptional or prove that I belong here. I do that simply by living my life." Marisol wanted to clarify that for her, as an undocumented Latinx immigrant, merely being present was a type of political participation. Jamie echoed this statement when he said,

> For the undocumented community, it [political participation] can be boiled down to just surviving in this country. Because given the current conditions where every single day we're being threatened with deportation, we're being attacked all over the media, we're being scapegoated for so many of the country's problems, just the mere act of surviving, of being who we are, of going to school or going to work, is political participation. When we do these things, we're telling the system no, we're here to resist. We are resisting. We are proving you wrong. This is who we are, and by living and existing, we are resisting this xenophobic, racist administration.

Respondents made it clear that they viewed their identity as political, and since their identity was political, everything they did was a form of political participation. Selena, a nineteen-year-old woman from Mexico, framed it by explaining, "our existence is a political issue. The fact that we exist and are here in the U.S. is a political problem for a lot of people. I participate every time I go to school, every time I get gas or go to the store, whenever I participate in life, it becomes political." Freddy, a twenty-two-year-old male from Mexico, reinforced this idea when struggling to define political participation, "I don't know, because it feels like everything we do can be taken politically. I think we sometimes participate just by existing because, you know, there are some people you think our presence is merely a political issue that needs to be solved." For Selena and Freddy, their everyday lives were a type of political participation. Their presence in the United States forced them to engage in the larger political debate surrounding immigration and immigration reform, "immigration reform is more than a policy issue for me. It is my life. I have to think about immigration every day, and it can be exhausting." Bianca shared something similar, saying, "participation isn't optional for us. This is an identity." The respondents in my dissertation were acutely aware that their status and presence in their communities were a form of political participation. This was often a heavy burden for them to bear and inclined many to consider things like their professional choices, resource building, and self-care as additional forms of political participation.

Many of the respondents who discussed their identity as a form of political participation specifically named two types of activities as political participation. These activities included everyday activities associated with their jobs and their self-care and coping strategies as forms of political participation. For example, Jorge, a twenty-two-year-old undocumented immigrant from

Mexico, discussed how he considered his professional activities to be a form of political participation.

> I'm a tortoise in my political participation. I'm doing everything I'm doing now professionally, building these networks, trying to build my business, building credibility in the community so that I can help people later on and help people get the tools to create change. I want to create both financial and social capital so I can help create change down the road. Maybe I'm not the one leading the charge, but I can be a supporter. I've always seen myself as a good follower and supporter.

Jorge viewed the everyday activities that he was doing now as a pathway to more traditional types of political participation in the future. Though he did not see himself as someone who would seek political office or be in front of a protest, he did see himself as someone who could lend support behind the scenes. Professional activities as a form of participation were also a theme relevant for Selena, who worked in the research field. "Definitely the research I do for [on-campus research org]. I know that I'm behind a computer, but the information we provide is being used to build resources for the community. In Selena's view, while her research did not lead to direct policy change, it was still a form of participation because it provided a resource for the undocumented community. Similarly, Julie, a twenty-five-year-old woman from Mexico, viewed her professional responsibilities as a migrant educator as a form of political participation. While her job primarily aimed to provide academic support to migrant youth, she viewed that as a form of political participation.

> One of my jobs was as a migrant education tutor. I worked with Hispanic kids who were struggling academically, and when I was working with them, I tried to talk to them a lot about the opportunities that were available to them that they might hear about otherwise.

> Things like telling them, encouraging them to go to college, and telling them about resources for them and their families. That was another way I engaged in political participation. I volunteered with a lot of organizations that provided services to immigrant and undocumented immigrant communities.

Developing and accessing resources was a significant component for individuals who used everyday resistance frames to define political participation.

Ivana, a 19-year-old woman, born in Mexico, mentioned this when discussing the types of political participation she has engaged in, "I try to connect people to resources. I've built a big network, and I think I can have the greatest impact connecting these people to resources." Connecting the community to resources seemed to be especially important to the individual in my sample because resources were often scarce and hard to find for undocumented immigrants. Fernando, a twenty-four-year-old man from Honduras, mentioned this point as he discussed helping other undocumented people find and access resources on his campus, "a lot of times people in the community don't know that there are resources available here. The resources here aren't well advertised, so we took it on ourselves to help advertise for the community." Jaime also mentioned that he would help individuals apply for DACA and saw applying for DACA itself as a form of political participation.

> I was one of the first people to apply [for DACA] in the country. I applied because, one, I wanted to hold the Obama administration accountable. I also saw it as a strategy for the long run because I knew a lot of people were going to be suspicious of DACA. One of the things we learn is to not believe promises. We need to see action to see that they are delivering on their promises. I applied to help get rid of the fear my community had and show them that they could trust this process. I also knew that the more DACA recipients

> that we had, the harder it would be to take away down the road. I saw it as a way to build political power. And seeing where we're at now, it was the correct strategy.

For these respondents accessing and helping others access resources was a crucial part of their political participation. These activities may not have directly involved advocating for governmental or policy change. However, they often helped undocumented communities improve their day-to-day life and gain access to the resources they needed.

Self-care activities were the last type of everyday resistance individuals used to define political participation. As the above quotes illustrate, many of the people I spoke with carried a heavy burden with their undocumented status. The respondents were constantly forced to think about immigration and immigration policy, and this stress took its toll on their mental and physical well-being. As Bianca put it,

> I feel like feeling like you have so much to do is a barrier. You burn yourself out, and then it makes it harder to do things. It depends on your vulnerability as well. If you have something that could put you in danger, it's perfectly valid not to do public or traditional participation. If you're focusing on making money to make ends meet, you're doing what you need to do for yourself. You've got to make sure that you're doing ok. I don't want to say this is a barrier, but in a way, I feel like taking care of yourself is a type of political participation. You're resisting the things that are going on in your life. That in of itself is a lot.

This related to a common theme of my respondents, the desire to recognize that for undocumented immigrants prioritizing their well-being represented a form of political participation. These self-care practices provided space for them to be more engaged in their communities and be present. In some cases, these coping or self-care strategies became more

direct forms of political participation. Dario turned to art as a well to deal with the isolation, fear, and hostility he encountered, but that soon turned into a vehicle for his political participation.

> One of my coping mechanisms was art. Art has a lot to do with how I am involved politically. I was put in the art program in 7th grade, and that was how I challenged a lot of fear, isolation, and frustration. I had a teacher who really supported my art. She saw how talented I might be, and in 11th grade, I was put in the International Baccalaureate program, and we picked a theme. My theme was immigration and culture. So that's when I started diving into my identity of being undocumented, of being an immigrant, being Latino, and being Guatemalan as well. That's one of the things that was a challenge because so many Latino issues are Mexican driven and a lot of times, I felt left out because I'm Central American. I'm Guatemalan not Mexican. So those types of things for me felt like I really needed to show my culture with my artwork. I consider that as a political activity. I don't think art is given enough credit. Art has a lot of power. If you can show an issue in a way that gets people's attention or make them question something, then you are making an impact and bringing awareness to an issue and are being involved. So, that's when I started taking political action through art. I would create art around the topic of immigration. At first, it was art around immigration broadly but then started touching on undocumented issues too.

While it is not uncommon for social movement researchers and community activists to recognize art as a form of political participation, for Dario, it started as a form of self-care. As he coped with his experience through art, it soon turned into a form of political participation. Dario was not the only respondent who mentioned art as a form of political participation. Juan, a twenty-

nine-year-old musician from Mexico, also mentioned art when describing an activity, he would define as political participation,

> I think my art is an act of political activism. My music and my lyrics, not necessary that they bring up awareness, but they resonate with the experiences of other people, that is very needed because political activism doesn't necessarily mean you have to engage with a public official, but it could also be the fact that you are, my hope is that my music can reach out to another person feeling the same way and those lyrics resonate with a person so that they know they aren't the only person going through this, and that we have some sort of sympathy or resonance in the music and that person feels empowered or that they feel like, hey it's ok to feel like this because this is a larger issue than myself. I feel like that is being politically involved.

Juan was aware that his music might bring awareness to the issue of immigration but was not doing it to create change. Instead, he was trying to normalize other undocumented immigrants' everyday frustrations and struggles and viewed that as a form of political participation.

Both Dario and Juan started these activities without the intention of utilizing them as forms of political participation. However, because of their status and identity as undocumented immigrants, their activities soon became a form of political expression. We also see this with the respondents defining their everyday activities as political participation. This highlights a larger point: the individuals in this sample sought to use the skills and resources they had, whether they be professional skills and resources, community building resources, or artistic skills, to engage in political participation. By having the space to engage in the activities they were comfortable doing, Dario and Juan could find a new and alternative avenue for participation and eventually transition to more intentional political activities.

Respondents in my sample pointed to activities such as art and music as both self-care and forms of political participation. They also defined self-care and everyday activities as forms of political participation. While it is important to validate the thoughts and definitions of political participation provided by undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest, it is also fair to question if everything they do is a form of participation. As researchers, we do lose analytical power by using such a broad definition of political participation. However, in this case, the critical point from this finding is that undocumented Latinx immigrants in my sample strongly desire to view themselves and have others view them as politically engaged. Being viewed as engaged in political participation allows them to claim a form of legitimacy as community members that they are often denied through their lack of citizenship status. As organizers, instead of categorizing these actions as bouts of inactivity, it is essential to validate these activities and support alternative forms of political participation. This support can help undocumented Latinx immigrants feel connected to their community and the movement and potentially lead to more traditional forms of political participation in the future, as we saw with Dario and Juan in this sample.

Utilizing strictly traditional definitions of political participation, we might look at these types of everyday resistance as outside the realm of political participation and frame undocumented Latinx immigrants as inactive; however, that would be a mistake. These are not individuals who have been pushed into the shadows; they have simply reconceptualized political participation in a way that works for them. As community organizers, if we do not recognize and support these activities as legitimate forms of political participation, we risk further alienating undocumented Latinx immigrants and making it more challenging to form meaningful collaborations.

4.2 Conclusion – Expanding how we think about political participation as researchers, community organizers, and policy advocates

The initial intent of this project was to expand on the theoretical definitions of political participation based on the experiences of undocumented Latinx immigrants living in the Midwest. However, based on the responses from my sample, it seems undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest think about and define political participation in the ways we have seen it previously defined in the social movement literature. However, understanding how undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest think about political participation does provide valuable insight into how they make sense of themselves as political actors and what activities they see as accessible. Based on the findings of my dissertation research, undocumented Latinx immigrants use a spectrum of activities to define political participation. These activities generally fit into one of three categories, traditional definitions of political participation, individual engagement as political participation, and everyday resistance as political participation have previously been used in the social movement literature (Alford & Friedland, 1975; Hanisch, 1969; Hill & Laredo, 2020; Lopez & Zúñiga, 2010; Milbrath, 1965; Nicholls, 2013; Wong et al., 2019). The undocumented Latinx immigrants in this sample most commonly defined political participation using traditional definitions focused on activities meant to create change within the electoral or policy process.

Although undocumented Latinx immigrants are formally excluded from voting, many respondents in this sample highlighted voting as an important part of their political participation. Instead of going to the polls, the undocumented Latinx immigrants I spoke with made it a point to become vote influencers within their social networks to have their voices expressed through their documented friends and family. This finding mirrors Garcia's work with undocumented

Mexican immigrants in California (2021). Because they are formally excluded from voting and not always comfortable engaging with elected officials, they often seek to influence the voting patterns of their social networks. They do not simply encourage people to vote in elections; they push for them to vote in a way that best serves the undocumented community. The undocumented Latinx immigrants in this sample employed creative means to ensure their interest was expressed through their documented citizen friends and family.

A potential explanation for so many respondents in my sample being comfortable with these more public forms of participation could be their DACA status. While DACA does not provide them with full inclusion, it does provide a measure of security compared to being fully undocumented. Further research should be conducted to see if those without DACA status are as likely to use traditional definitions of political participation. Additionally, many of the respondents in my sample have resided in the United States for a significant period of time and were educated in the U.S. school system. Much of their political socialization happened in the United States, which could have encouraged the use of traditional definitions of political participation.

So, while traditional definitions of political participation are relevant to the undocumented Latinx immigrants in this study, they did not only consider these traditional measures as valid forms of political participation. With their precarious legal status and general inability to disconnect from the immigration debate, they understood, recognized, and respected when they or other undocumented Latinx immigrants chose to engage in other ways. Specifically, many still viewed one-on-one engagement as a type of political participation. These interactions were not always public and could be labeled as a form of proxy participation. However, they provided respondents with a way to safely engage with community members to

affect small micro-level changes inside their communities and classrooms. Finally, the undocumented Latinx immigrants in my sample defined political participation as everyday forms of resistance and self-care activities. Some of the respondents in my sample consider their existence to be political. They considered a wide range of everyday activities, from being present in their community, chasing professional aspirations, building and accessing community resources, and engaging in self-care to be political participation. These individuals did not view themselves as pushed into the shadows. Instead, they were redefining political participation to make sense for them. While it is reasonable to push back against the idea that every activity undocumented individuals engage in is a form of political participation, this definition spoke to a larger point. When the undocumented did not feel that traditional forms of participation were accessible, they looked for ways to reframe activities they could participate in as a form of political action.

So, while these results may not expand our theoretical conceptualization of political participation, they suggest that undocumented immigrants are aware of how political participation is traditionally defined. When they felt those activities were not options, they expanded definitions to include activities that were more accessible. Expanding their personal definitions of political participation allowed them to view themselves as engaged. This point could be especially important to undocumented Latinx immigrants because they lack legal status. They cannot claim formal citizenship status because of their documentation status, so they are attempting to claim another form of citizenship through their community and political participation and actively resisting their formal exclusion from the governmental process. It may be beneficial to think about ways that they can support the alternative activities identified as

political participation by undocumented and undocumented Latinx immigrants, including forms of self-care.

These findings have broad implications for both sociology and social work. From a theoretical standpoint, when working with undocumented Latinx immigrants, it may be necessary to move beyond traditional definitions of political participation and push past over-simplified narratives that paint undocumented immigrants as undocumented and unafraid or pushed into the shadows. These narratives can make undocumented immigrants feel ignored and less willing to form collaborations. Similarly, for political organizers, we must not become too narrowly focused on electoral outcomes. As social work practitioners, policy advocates, and community organizers, we have to be willing to create space for alternative definitions of political participation. We must begin with conversations about what the community needs and work to provide tools to support other types of political participation that they deem most important and make space for alternative forms of political participation. As we follow community members' lead in defining political participation, we will create more inclusive organizing spaces. This includes supporting individual engagement and everyday resistance forms of pollical participation. As we better understand how communities define political participation, we can work towards building the resources the community needs to engage in political participation more effectively.

Chapter 5 How the 2016 Presidential Election Impacted the Political Participation of Undocumented Latinx Immigrants in the Midwest

"When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists." Donald Trump 6/16/15

The 2016 Presidential campaign and election pushed undocumented immigrants and immigration reform back into the forefront of the national conversation and created a great deal of uncertainty within the undocumented community (Aranda et al., 2022). It also increased the negative rhetoric surrounding undocumented immigrants and mixed-status families (Aranda et al., 2022; Foley, 2017; García, 2019). This negativity starkly contrasted with how the previous administration had constructed undocumented immigrants (Abrego & Negrón-Gonzales, 2020; Foley, 2017; García, 2019, 2021; Negrón-Gonzales, 2017). In addition to the significant amount of hostile immigration rhetoric used during the campaign, the election of Donald Trump produced an increase in national and subnational immigration policy (García, 2019, 2021). At the federal level, immigration policy became much more restrictive, punitive, and focused on more vigorous immigration enforcement (Abrego & Negrón-Gonzales, 2020; Aguilar, 2019; Foley, 2017; García, 2021; Negrón-Gonzales, 2017). During this period, the Trump administration temporarily overturned the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) executive order (United States Department of Homeland Security, 2017). This set up a long court battle and put the future of DACA very much in doubt. Previous research has indicated that the implementation

of DACA was a significant event for the undocumented community (Aranda et al., 2022; García, 2019, 2021). DACA impacted several factors of their life, including but not limited to mental well-being, educational opportunities, job opportunities, the ability to access social services, and political participation (Abrego, 2011; Abrego & Negrón-Gonzales, 2020; Aranda et al., 2022; Flores, 2016; Hope et al., 2016; Mallet et al., 2017; Patler et al., 2021; Seif, 2016; Wong et al., 2019). Given the importance and prominence of DACA to undocumented Latinx immigrants in the United States, it is reasonable to assume that when the federal government ended DACA, it significantly impacted the undocumented community.

In their recent article Aranda et al. use the case of DACA to examine how young undocumented immigrants adapted to the policy changes of the Trump administration and the fast-changing policy environment (Aranda et al., 2022). They argue that the threat of policy change and uncertainty surrounding the DACA program created a sense of anticipatory loss and decreased ontological security among undocumented immigrants with DACA status (Aranda et al., 2022). The sense of anticipatory loss and decrease in ontological security, or the confidence one has in the constancy of their social and material contexts, produced a wide range of emotions, including anxiety, sadness, disappointment, anger, and resentment within the undocumented community (Aranda et al., 2022). They argue that understanding these emotions is key to understanding agency that can impact the incorporation of undocumented immigrants (Aranda et al., 2022). The response to the loss of DACA and subsequent feelings produced by this policy change did impact undocumented immigrants' thoughts about educational attainment, labor market incorporation, feelings of belonging, and civic participation. However, they did not necessarily push undocumented immigrants to withdraw from their communities (Aranda et al., 2022). Instead, they found that the loss of DACA, feelings of anticipatory loss, and decreased

ontological security resulted in various responses from the DACA recipients they interviewed. Some individuals stalled progress toward goals and reduced aspirations or changed their plans altogether (Aranda et al., 2022). However, other DACA recipients adapted to the policy changes by accelerating their goals and becoming more civically integrated through social action (Aranda et al., 2022). Many of these themes were also present in my interviewees' responses and will be discussed later in this chapter.

The work of Arnanda et al. and the initial responses from undocumented Latinx immigrants in my sample point us to the importance of understanding how emotions have influenced the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest (2022). Within the last thirty years, social movement scholars have investigated the role that emotions play in participation in social movements (Ariza, 2021; Jasper, 2011; Walder, 2009). The body of literature concerning emotions and social movements allows us to understand how the emotions stemming from the 2016 Presidential election, termination of DACA, and increase in immigration policies have impacted undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest's motivation for action. Additionally, this theoretical framework allows us to analyze the strategic dilemmas undocumented Latinx immigrants face when considering engaging in political participation and the decision-making process around the actions in which they engage (Jasper, 2011; Walder, 2009).

Jasper distinguishes between the different types of emotions that are most relevant to social movements (2011). He identifies reflex emotions as emotions such as anger, fear, joy, and shock that are automatic and quick responses in reaction to specific events (Jasper, 2011). Moods are energizing or de-energizing feelings that persist over time. They are fluid and can be affected by reflex emotions (Jasper, 2011). Each of these types of emotions can influence whether or not

someone participates in political participation or social movements (Jasper, 2011; Walder, 2009). The responses to reflex emotions and moods are often dictated by an individual's affective commitments or loyalties and their moral emotions (Jasper, 2011). Affective commitments and loyalties are stable and positive feelings one holds about objects such as peers, communities, or the broader society (Jasper, 2011). Moral emotions are feelings of approval or disapproval based on moral intuition, values, or principles held by individuals (Jasper, 2011). So, in the case of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest, an important question arises: Have the negative emotions produced by the 2016 Presidential election, the executive branch's attempt to end DACA, and the general increase in hostile immigration rhetoric been enough to reduce their political participation? Or are their affective commitments and moral emotions enough to encourage political participation in response to the negative reflex emotions and moods those actions produced?

Immigration researchers have also begun to examine how undocumented immigrants have responded to the increasing number of immigration policies being implemented at the national and subnational levels (García, 2019, 2021). At the subnational level, localities implemented immigration policies that either reinforced the more hostile and punitive policy coming from the federal level or attempted to buffer these harsh federal policies with more inclusive local measures (García, 2019, 2021). These messages are sent through policy feedback effects, or the messages that policy and policy debate send about the merits of a social issue (Skocpol, 1988; Soss & Schram, 2007). The policy feedback effects produced by recent national and subnational immigration policy varied. At the federal level immigration policy sent messages of exclusion and lack of valid social presence. Some subnational immigration policy echoed the federal government's messages of exclusions. However, other subnational policy

feedback effects to sent messages of support and valued presence to the undocumented community (García, 2019, 2021). Once again, we see two conflicting points that do not necessarily lead to an easily predictable path of political participation for undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest. In order to clarify these contradictions, this chapter examines what emotions were produced by the 2016 presidential election and campaign, the contestation of DACA, increasingly hostile immigration rhetoric, and differing policy feedback effects, and how those emotions impacted undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest's political participation. Like other recent studies, this chapter attempts to bring the works of literature around emotions and social movements, policy feedback effects, and political participation together to examine how the 2016 Presidential election, loss of DACA, and increased implementation of immigration policy have affected undocumented Latinx immigrants (Aranda et al., 2022; García, 2019, 2021; Patler et al., 2021).

My dissertation applies this question to these events' impact on the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest to clarify two competing and unclear theoretical arguments regarding the political participation of undocumented immigrants. The sociology of emotions and social movement literature suggests that emotional responses can encourage or discourage participation in movements (Aranda et al., 2022; Ariza, 2021; Jasper, 2011; Walder, 2009). This literature suggests that a critical component to converting reflex emotions and moods into political action is the strength of the affected group's affinity commitments and loyalties and the ability to appeal to their moral emotions (Jasper, 2011). These two notions seemingly conflict in the case of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest. After the political events listed above, the initial reflex emotions were primarily negative and reasonably could decrease the loyalty and affinity commitments undocumented

Latinx immigrants felt to the larger U.S. society. However, it is also possible that their commitment to their local and undocumented communities and appeal to moral emotions could increase participation (Jasper, 2011; Walder, 2009).

Similarly, the movement literature does not provide a clear expectation regarding political participation in the presence of a hostile federal policy environment (García, 2021). There is empirical evidence that suggests a negative social construction and restrictive policy limits individuals' political participation engagement both with the general population and undocumented immigrants (Abrego, 2011; Campbell, 2011; Mettler & Soss, 2004; Nicholls, 2013; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Soss, 2002, 2005). Within the undocumented literature, research suggests that negative social constructions and deservingness frames established through the DREAMER movement can discourage participation from those who do not fit into the DREAMER narrative or, more precisely, meet the DACA eligibility requirements (Chauvin & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2014; Newton, 2005; Nicholls, 2013). Research suggests that stronger periods of immigration enforcement and punitive immigration policies can lead undocumented immigrants to withdraw from more public forms of activities to avoid interactions with immigration enforcement agencies (Asad, 2020; García, 2021; Lopez, 2019). However, we have also seen examples when groups, and specifically undocumented immigrant groups, have felt threatened, feared losing their rights, and were negatively constructed, and instead of becoming disengaged, mobilized and increased their political participation (García, 2021; Prieto, 2018; Robles & Gomberg-Muñoz, 2016; Seif, 2016; White, 2016).

Throughout my dissertation interviews, my respondents made it clear that the 2016 Presidential election had a significant impact on them. Many brought up the election without being prompted, illustrating that this event elicited strong emotions from them. They mentioned

that the increasingly hostile rhetoric and uncertainty around DACA and immigration reform had made things more stressful for them in their everyday lives. Many also noted that the election served as a jumping off point for their political participation. The prominence of negative immigrant narratives, the uncertainty surrounding DACA, and the increased presence of immigration enforcement made them reevaluate how they engaged in political participation. Almost universally, the individuals I spoke with mentioned that the 2016 election increased their fear, frustration, and disappointment with the country. In addition to the general fear, anger, and distrust my respondents felt, many also identified the 2016 election as the first time they felt truly unaccepted by their community. In many ways, the respondents in my sample mirrored the dichotomy we see in the literature. They felt more fearful and less safe; however, they also felt the need to be more engaged and resist what they felt were overly punitive federal measures. These feelings left my respondents in a difficult position. They had to balance their need to push back against an openly hostile administration while maintaining their safety and well-being.

Respondents in my sample balanced this tension in a few different ways. For some, it meant becoming more vocal in their political participation and engaging in what we consider to be traditional forms of political participation like protest and issue advocacy. This included many engaging in traditional forms of political participation for the first time after the 2016 election. For others, it meant they engaged in less public forms of political participation, such as individual engagement or everyday activities as a form of resistance. They felt the need to be more strategic with their participation and to whom they disclosed their status. Engaging in less public political participation allowed them to remain active while feeling safe in their community. Whether my respondents processed this increase in fear, distrust, and anger through being engaged in more traditional measures of political participation (see chapters two and four)

was influenced by their DACA status and by how supported they felt in their community. While the type of political participation varied among my respondents, many specifically mentioned that they did not want the negative, hostile rhetoric coming from the executive office to silence their activity. Most in my sample felt the need to do something to counteract the negative stereotypes being perpetrated by the Trump administration and its supporters.

5.1 General Reaction to the 2016 election and negative immigration rhetoric – an increase in disappointment, fear, and anger across the community

The first thing that became clear when talking to my respondents about the events leading up to and after the 2016 Presidential election was that they significantly impacted how they viewed the United States and their community. They consistently mentioned how the negative tone affected their day-to-day experiences and how much ambiguity they felt around their prospects in the United States. The emotions associated with this ambiguity ranged from disappointment, fear, uncertainty, and anger. As Jorge, a twenty-two-year-old Mexican man put it,

> (Sigh) It's disappointment, but it's the honest kind of disappointment where you really thought people were better. Because the way I'm seeing it is people just want to feel good about who they are without doing anything. There is no evidence, and we've had studies like the Mariana Boatlift, where just out of nowhere, a bunch of Cubans came to Miami all at once, and how did that affect wages? It didn't. How did it affect job opportunities? It did not. So, you have these types of examples where people should at the very least be indifferent about people coming in and wanting a better life for themselves. But people just want to make others out to be the bad guy, and for what gain? You know? And it makes you feel like your whole existence is being put in jeopardy just for someone to

> feel, ‘well, at least I'm not an illegal’ you know? You see it with a bunch of other issues. Like, why do people make life for the LGBTQ community so difficult? Like how does it affect you? They just want to feel good about themselves without doing anything on their end. So, it's this moral rent-seeking. They are trying to make themselves holier than thou without being holier than thou. They're not increasing their 'holiness'; they're trying to decrease others.

The sentiment expressed here by Jorge made it clear he viewed the election results as another example of what he termed moral rent-seeking by the majority. He did not view the support for Donald Trump as being connected to legitimate policy concerns over undocumented immigrants being present in the United States. Instead, he attributed it to non-immigrants trying to prop themselves up by tearing down the immigrant community and was disappointed by this behavior. In the same vein, Joseph, a thirty-one-year-old Mexican male living in a district carried by Trump, struggled to reconcile his individual experiences with members of his community and the election results. When asked how the 2016 Presidential election affected him, Joseph initially provided a lighthearted response, “I'm afraid of old white men now (laughs). There have been instances where I'm invited to breakfast, and folks get a hint of my background and try to very hostilely engage me, I've had those experiences, but they are few and far between. But the election was the most I've ever felt rejected." Even within this joke, Joseph notes that the 2016 election was the most significant act of rejection he had experienced in his community. His tone became much more serious as he continued,

> I think for the majority of my experience, people tend to be nice, and polite, and kind. So, there isn't one story where I'm like, oh, I felt so ostracized or excluded. I think where I felt it the most was the results of the 2016 election. I recall thinking throughout the

> primaries and the entire election cycle that as Trump was gaining popularity, I can understand logically how there are people who would back that kind of person because they align themselves with those views. I'm not ignorant of the fact that there are people who are more racially biased against certain people. Or that they have concerns about certain policies and they aren't fully informed to know better or whatever it might be. But to me, I think I was counting on the fact that as a national consensus, as an entire population, that the America I had been taught about in elementary school, the America that was the melting pot, that accepted others, that wasn't exclusionary, that gave everyone a chance, that was ideally inclusive, was going to show then candidate and now President Trump that his values don't align with the core value that we as Americans have. But that wasn't the case. I started to think about (pause) statistically the people that I have contact with, people in my community, people that I run into at the coffee shop, the people I say hi to walking on the street, my colleagues at work, I started to think about that statistically, once I walk into this room, and there are 20 people there; statistically, 13 of these people, voted for Donald Trump. Essentially, they voted against me. I took it very personally because I have so much at stake with what the President does. I felt like I had more to lose and more to gain. I think that everyone in the community is affected by the election results, but I felt much closer to the epicenter and the blast radius of it. That is an example of when I felt the most rejected because the people I thought were going to pull for me didn't. Collectively that was when I felt the most depressed or disillusioned.

Like Jorge, Joseph very clearly articulates feeling let down by the country as a whole and, in his case, the community where he lived. He had to reconcile his mostly positive daily interactions

with the fact that his peers, at best, did not care enough about the undocumented population to prevent Donald Trump from being elected and, at worst, supported his candidacy. This theme was common among my respondents, especially those living in areas where most of their geographic community voted for Donald Trump. Joseph was not the only participant to struggle with this issue. Sophia, a twenty-eight-year-old woman from Mexico who also resided in a county won by Trump, expressed a very similar sentiment.

> In 2016 when Donald Trump was elected, everything has changed for me in the sense that I was very aware and very in tune with who my county and state voted for. Then there was this like change within me, where I was like, I don't know if I can trust that person sitting across the room for me. I've been very open all these years like, you know, I'm like I was open before and I trusted too easily. I don't even know if they like me or if they want me here?

Yvette, a twenty-one-year-old woman from Mexico, expressed a similar feeling of rejection since the 2016 election.

> It has made me feel uncomfortable and like I am at fault for being undocumented. It just makes me feel like I really don't belong. Or that legally I'm breaking the law by just being here, honestly. I don't know the rhetoric and the media, and everything makes me feel like people don't want us here. Obviously, there is a lot involved, not just the fact that it's against the law, I know it's difficult to provide a universal immigration reform, or at least that's how they make it feel, but yeah, I just feel like I am at fault now that I'm 21 and I could easily go back to my home country, but yeah, I feel uncomfortable and unwelcomed by people outside of my community.

This disappointment and feelings of exclusion led to uncertainty around whom undocumented immigrants could trust. As Efren, a thirty-six-year-old Mexican immigrant, explained,

> I'm more cautious now because you don't know what people are thinking. People seem to be ok being a lot worse than they used to be because of what the President is saying. He says it, and then other people think they can say it and are saying it. There is a lot more open hostility and racism now. So, I'm much more cautious about what I do and how I engage publicly.

So, while Efren had not stopped engaging in political participation, he was much more cautious about when and how he participated. Marisol, a twenty-eight-year-old activist from Mexico, shared a similar sentiment

> over the last year or so I've kind of tapered out a bit. It's like I can't, one I don't feel safe to be open about my status anymore. I look back at a lot of my being public with being undocumented and was like maybe I was being a little reckless with that. So, it's part of my hidden identity that I don't, like I talk about it with people I know and trust, but I don't bring it up as frequently as I used to.

Marisol was a professional activist, so she did not stop engaging in political participation. However, she did become less likely to share her personal connection to the issue because she was unsure if she could count on her activism to prevent her from being deported. She went on

> a lot of activists have been deported or detained in the past year or year and a half. There used to be this understanding that if you were in the DREAMER movement, that if you went out in the streets and shared you were undocumented, the more open you were, the more people knew, the more people had your back. They could put pressure on ICE to release you. Now, folks will still put pressure on ICE, but that pressure on ICE hasn't

> worked as often. Recently there have been some really public deportation cases where the pressure simply hasn't worked. Really since the spring of 2017, we've seen that our previous tactics haven't worked. So, now we're trying to figure out what to do next. So, the fear for me is that now if I'm detained, I don't think a public campaign would save me.

Marisol is reflecting a realization that many in the sample acknowledged. They realized that the rules had changed after the 2016 election. There was a level of uncertainty among the undocumented community that led to increased fear and questions about their status in the United States.

While individuals like Jorge and Joseph highlighted their disappointment with the 2016 election results, many others expressed increased fear. For example, Ivana expressed an increased concern for not only herself but also her mother,

> My story right now is one of fear, frustration, and unknowns. I don't know if one-day DACA is going to be gone. I don't know what's going to happen if I get sent back to Mexico. This is the country I've called home almost all of my life and where I grew up. My mom works seven days a week, ten hours a day, and I respect her so much. My dad passed away three years ago, and now, it's like, ok, am I going to lose her too? I already lost my dad and I'm really worried that one day my mom just won't be home because she's been detained. It used to be you'd very seldomly hear reports of ICE being around the area, but now you hear it about all the time. I fear for my mom, and I know that if I fear for her, other people with undocumented parents fear for them as well. I feel like we're hiding. And the policies really affect me because I've seen so many people in my community get deported.

The increased presence of ICE and stronger immigration enforcement was a common source of fear for my respondents. They noticed an increase in patrol vehicles within their communities and heard about more large-scale immigration raids. Silvia, a thirty-eight-year-old woman from Venezuela, also mentioned ICE's more visible presence in her community as a significant source of fear,

> I never felt so scared as the time that I saw ICE. I was shaking. I came straight home. I didn't want to leave my house, even though I had to pick up my daughter. It scares you knowing they are around. They have been around much more since the election.

Efren also expressed an increased level of fear around raids in his community,

> The fear for me has increased since 2016. I worry about the factory my mom works at getting raided. I fear that my participation or my public activity is going to make my family a target. The levels of anxiety have risen in the undocumented community post-2016. To see the growth of what used to be a minority to be now the majority is daunting. It wasn't surprising to me, but I think it was a shock to people who weren't previously active. I never thought we'd get to the point that having a deportation plan would be normalized, but that's where we're at right now. Yes, there are higher levels of fear and stress in our communities right now.

This fear did not stem strictly from immigration enforcement. It also extended to community police. Maria, a forty-four-year-old woman from Venezuela, explained, "Now I'm very uncomfortable when I'm driving or talking to other parents at my kid's school. Or like when I see the police driving behind my car, it's terrifying." Maria was afraid that any disclosure of her status at her daughter's school or interactions with local law enforcement would lead to her detention.

The other relevant emotion expressed by my respondents was anger. When asked how the 2016 election impacted her, Isabella responded

> it's become normal for me to hear political officials, or the President, or other powerful people talk about me and my community in that way (negatively). And I try to remind myself to still be angry and still remind myself how ridiculous their claims are because even though I know they aren't true, I think I get used to people saying them and it's no longer shocking.

Selena also expressed anger with both elected officials and people in her community,

> it just makes me mad. It makes me mad that politicians think that they could just sit in a meeting and say, 'oh, yeah... I don't want that[DACA] anymore. Why? Oh, just because, I don't care. And then go home to their families and go eat at a Mexican restaurant. Like, what are you doing? Like they (pause) like, obviously, their life experiences are completely different than undocumented individuals, and their lack of empathy makes me angry. It doesn't impact them, and they don't care. So, yeah, that makes me angry.

This anger also extended to her community. She continued,

> one thing I would say is that there are a lot of fake people. There are a lot of people that you grew up with thinking that they like you or thinking that they're your friend, but at the end of the day, you realize that they're going to be the ones who vote for Trump. I get so upset when I think about it.

Selena's sentiments are similar to those of Joseph and Sophia, but Selena's feelings are defined by anger instead of disappointment.

The 2016 Presidential election had a clear impact on my respondents. Whether it was disappointment, fear, or anger, they expressed that the election and increased hostility affected

their day-to-day experiences. Once it became evident that the 2016 election had impacted the undocumented Latinx immigrants, the next step in this project was to explore how this increase in disappointment, fear, and anger influenced the political participation of the undocumented Latinx immigrants in my study. After speaking with my respondents, it became evident that the 2016 Presidential election, repeal of DACA, and the increasingly hostile immigration rhetoric violated their sense of moral emotions. In this case the openly derogatory rhetoric and ill will expressed towards immigrants during and after the election had violated the undocumented Latinx immigrant's sense of inclusiveness, equality, and fairness. As Joseph, Jorge, and Selena expressed they believed in an America that was inclusive of immigrants or at the very least did not actively seek to tear them down. When they saw the support the anti-immigrant and racist rhetoric used during the election received they took it as an affront to their values and morals. This violation of their moral emotions and their affinity commitments and loyalty to the undocumented community helped push them towards engaging in political participation.

5.1.1 The impact of disappointment, fear, and anger on the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest.

The undocumented Latinx immigrants I interviewed mentioned increased disappointment, fear, and anger directly after the election. The way they processed that disappointment, fear, and anger fell more in line with the literature suggesting that marginalized groups will mobilize and increase their participation to secure their rights when met with a significant external threat. It also supports research within the emotions of social movement literature that suggest negative reflex emotions and moods can be translated into action if the affected group has strong affinity commitments or loyalties to their border communities or if the political event violates their moral emotions. (Jasper, 2011). My respondents were clear that

despite being more fearful of the new administration, they felt the need to increase their participation. This need to increase their participation was driven partly because they felt that the values and ideas associated with Donald Trump's election did not align with their personal values or the values they wanted their country to uphold. As Rosita, a twenty-two-year-old woman from Guatemala, explained, "the current administration both scares me and motivates me. Dealing with negative stereotypes is hard, and I feel less safe now, but I want to engage and change people's minds. I want to show them Trump is incorrect." This notion of increasing political participation to push back against the negative stereotypes that became increasingly present in the aftermath of the 2016 Presidential election was prominent for many of the respondents in my sample. Kassandra, a twenty-four-year-old woman from Mexico, summarized this well when she shared,

> The political climate right now is very different. At first, I was scared about sharing my story with people from outside of my community, and it made it hard to participate. Now I think the negativity has made me want to be more active. I think that's true for a lot of people in my community. So many of us were in disbelief that Trump was elected. A lot of people were angry about the comments he made about Mexican-American, so we wanted to do something about it. We wanted to show that we are not what this person said we are. I think that helped people come together and be more politically active. We want to make sure he's not in office for eight years. We don't know what is going to happen to our community if he wins again, so I'm being more active. He started making all these threats about ending DACA and deporting everyone, so we have to act.

This quote very much falls in line with the literature suggesting that threatened communities will mobilize to protect their status in the community. It is similar to what we saw late in the

DREAMER movement when the community began to push back against the deservingness frames established through the DREAM Act and DACA eligibility requirements (Asad, 2020; Prieto, 2018; Robles & Gomberg-Muñoz, 2016; Seif, 2016). People were scared but felt that it was essential to increase their voices. In fact, for some respondents, the 2016 Presidential election is what prompted them to become active for the first time. Ivana specifically mentioned that she did not become politically active until after 2016, "I didn't start getting active until after the election. So even though I am fearful, it's definitely made me more confident in my voice." Ivana's view was not uncommon among the people I spoke with during my interviews or in my experience working with the undocumented community. During my time working with immigrant organizations, we saw an influx of new community members who wanted to get engaged for the first time. Within my sample, eleven individuals expressed that 2016 served as a jumping-off point for their political participation.

The desire to push back against negative stereotypes was a significant part of what motivated individuals in my sample but was not the only factor. My respondents also expressed that after the election, they felt the need to increase their political participation so that they could support the broader undocumented community. This can partially be explained by the emotions and social movement literature. The individuals I spoke with had a strong sense of affinity and loyalty to their peers in the undocumented community. They felt an obligation not only to themselves but to their peers, and this helped encourage them to engage in various forms of political participation. As Julie shared,

> It [the negativity] makes me want to participate more. The negative rhetoric gives me a desire to prove them wrong. Or maybe not necessarily prove them wrong but maybe just show up for your communities. It makes you want to be present and say, hey, these

> people are saying these negative things about you, but we know that's not true. We know that our communities are so much more [than the negative stereotypes], so much more powerful. We bring so much to the table. Part of you wants to participate to change people's minds and also to show the greatness from your communities.

Julie expresses very well that while she has the desire to push back against negative stereotypes and social constructions, her participation is also a way to show up for her community and help empower them. While she may have been motivated initially by a desire to disprove negative stereotypes, her community was driving her participation. Juan echoed this sentiment when discussing how the 2016 Presidential election influenced his political participation. "I felt the need to increase my participation because I knew my community needed support. There was a lot of work that needed to be done, and I wanted to make sure I was there for my community." Juan was less interested in disproving the negative rhetoric but wanted to ensure he did what he could to support his community. The desire to support the undocumented community was a critical factor in encouraging Sergio, a twenty-year-old Mexican immigrant to engage in political participation.

> Like I mentioned before, I think it made me want to fight the system. It made me want to speak up. Like this Tuesday, I'm going to Springfield advocating to representatives, and I'm going to remind them that we are depending on them to make a change. The environment is so hot, and it makes me want to help my community.

The desire to support their community was a key motivating factor that pushed respondents in my sample toward increasing their level of political participation.

So, while the events of the 2016 Presidential election did seem to increase the political participation of the individuals in my sample, it also made them reassess how they participated. As Jamie, a twenty-nine-year-old male undocumented immigrant from Mexico, shared

> I think the negative rhetoric has pushed me to be more vocal and more active ever since a particular candidate announced his candidacy to the Presidency in 2016. It's not entirely tied to Trump. It's tied to any elected official that is employing xenophobia, racism, and hateful rhetoric to push a certain agenda. However, the election has made me more cautious and made me more active in many different ways to push for change instead of just public activism. I'm more strategic about how I engage now.

Jamie, then shared a similar thought that also tied back to the point Marisol made above,

> On election night, when the GOP controlled all three branches of government, I realized we were in real trouble. That made me hyper-sensitive, hyper-active, hyper-everything. I realized that this was really impacting my well-being and that I needed to do things differently. I needed to be active, but I needed to be active in a way that also prevented burnout and protected my own well-being.

Again, this highlights how my respondents had to balance their desire to show up for the community in a way that made them feel as safe as possible. Striking this balance meant transitioning from traditional and public forms of political participation to less public activities for some. Max, a twenty-two-year-old male college student born in Mexico, also expressed a new desire to increase his political socialization. "To be honest, I think it has increased my awareness of these policies. It woke me up in a way and made me be more thoughtful about keeping up with current events." Max's actions align with recent research that indicates that undocumented immigrants may look to political socialization as a form of participation during

increased hostility and immigration enforcement (García, 2021). Erica, a twenty-year-old woman born in Mexico, shared that she desired to be more engaged in political participation but in a way that made her feel safe. This included pursuing more political socialization and redefining political participation in a way that included doing well academically and connecting with her family.

> It also made me want to be more informed, but it made me be less public but not less active. I focused on my academics and being with my family. Now, I'm more fearful. Before the election, I never thought about ICE doing a raid in my community, but now I think about it all the time. I'm always thinking about the threat of being detained. Like I want to go to this volunteer event, but I'm not sure if it's safe. What if ICE shows up here or at a rally? So, I participate by being informed, by doing well academically, and by helping keep my family informed.

Max also expressed how his everyday actions were a form of political participation because they pushed back against the executive branch's negative stereotypes.

> I think it encourages me to be active in a way because I want to prove them wrong. I want to show them all of the great things I can accomplish and the contributions that undocumented people can make to the country. Like, when Donald Trump said that all immigrants are rapists and criminals, and whatever he said when he was categorizing all immigrants as terrible people. It motivated me to do better in school and do more in my community to show that he was wrong. I want to prove that his comments weren't true. In some ways, I see my success as a form of political participation, and I try to help others in my community achieve the same success and to do better.

These forms of participation allowed Erica and Max to stay engaged while still feeling safe within their community. In Erica's case, doing well academically and connecting with her family are activities that would fall outside of traditional definitions of political participation. One might be tempted to label this as an example of the post-2016 political climate discouraging undocumented Latinx immigrants from engaging in political participation. However, Erica still considered herself engaged and specifically listed these activities as forms of political participation. They were crucial to her participation and allowed her to remain connected to the undocumented movement. For Max, his success became a data point to push back against negative stereotypes and thus became a form of political participation. Erica and Max provide additional examples of how undocumented Latinx individuals have redefined political participation to allow them to engage safely.

In addition to political socialization, individual engagement became an essential type of participation for individuals I spoke with, especially those in more restrictive local contexts. Joseph expressed that the 2016 election made him want to engage more with the community members who disappointed him.

> I pay taxes (laughs), and I pay for these people's salaries. Whether I'm officially or unofficially counted as a member of the community I'm still here and I'm present. I've been here for twenty-some years now and I'm part of the fabric of the community. If I keep to myself I'm not helping. I got to step out there and talk about it and try to get involved. For me, I've kind of homed in on more of that interpersonal human connection, this is how the policy affects my participation. I know those people have the ability to vote, and I can influence them. That is the way I can influence policy. I've become less active in public spaces and tried to influence the issue at a more personal level.

Max took a similar approach to increase his political participation. He had already become more engaged publicly in what we consider to be more traditional forms of political participation but also made it a point to do more through individual engagement. Max expanded how he engaged in political participation because he felt the need to do more after the 2016 Presidential election. He did not believe it was enough to engage with elected officials or attend a protest as forms of political participation forms. He felt the additional need to create a personal connection with individuals in his social network, even if they did not support undocumented immigrants.

> Like at my university, there are a lot of folks who are conservatives and will say I agree with what Trump is saying, and I'll try to engage them. I'll ask, do you really understand what they are saying? Do you really know what it's like for undocumented immigrants? Like I try to fact-check their points of views with my stories. Like one time, I heard a classmate saying really harsh things, so I approached him after class and asked him to come to the undocumented student group and hear their stories. After he heard their stories, he said, 'oh man, I'm sorry,' and I told him I didn't do this for an apology. I just want you to think about these stories next time you hear some of the negative things from politicians. He ended up joining an undocumented ally group.

For Joseph and Max, the 2016 election pushed them to increase their political participation through more individual engagement. Across my sample, the impact of the 2016 Presidential election seemed to increase my respondents' desire to engage in political participation. The sense of urgency in the community had increased, and they searched for ways to contribute to change despite having to navigate a much more dangerous political climate.

5.1.2 The role of DACA status and community support in facilitating action

After speaking with my respondents, a clear trend toward political participation emerged after the 2016 Presidential election despite the more dangerous political context. They could channel their increased disappointment, fear, and anger into political participation, but it was a taxing process. As Efren said in our interview, "That fear motivates me, but it takes a lot of energy to turn that fear into activity." This was especially true for those engaging in traditional and more public forms of political participation. Sergio, a respondent who indicated he had been more active since the election of Donald Trump, also acknowledged how challenging engaging had become for the undocumented community.

> We see a lot of raids and they are done on purpose. Our community always gets raided. Last time it was a community mall where people share the culture, and ICE brought vans and took so many people away. My family was going to go that day but decided not to at that last minute. But it's hard to have power when they are trying to make you live in fear.

My respondents made it clear that engaging in political participation had become more difficult for them yet still showed a clear trend towards political participation post-2016. As this trend toward political participation, including many who engaged in political participation for the first time after 2016, became apparent, I wondered what influenced my respondents' participation types. What allowed them to push through the fear, hostility, and negative rhetoric and engage in different forms of political participation?

As I probed for clarification on what had allowed the undocumented Latinx immigrants in my sample to process their increased levels of disappointment into political participation, two prominent factors emerged: DACA status and community support. As mentioned in chapter three, one of my sample's limitations is that most of the people I spoke with were DACA recipients. Being DACA recipients provided them with a certain level of protection and

conditional status in the United States. While they were not as confident that their DACA status would prevent them from being deported, and they worried that DACA would be fully rescinded, they did acknowledge that there was a certain level of privilege associated with having DACA. As Ivana, a nineteen-year-old female immigrant from Mexico, expressed this point when she mentioned how DACA gave her the confidence to engage in political participation for the first time after the 2016 election. “I’ve been able to do that [be more active] because I know DACA is still active, and that's a bit of an armor or protection for me.” Bianca, a twenty-year-old woman, born in Chile, expressed similar thoughts when talking about how her DACA status influenced her participation,

> The other thing has been how things have escalated politically has been a push to get more involved. It was a wake-up call like this stuff is happening, and you are in a position of power because you have DACA status. How are you going to use it? I started to think more about my DACA status, and yes, it's a weird status. I'm undocumented but not fully undocumented. The government already has our names, so it doesn't really matter. If I'm out to the government, I might as well be out publicly. I'm somewhat protected, while someone who doesn't have DACA isn't protected at all, and they might not be comfortable using their voice. There are folks in my community who are more vulnerable than me.

Ivana and Bianca expressed a common theme among the undocumented Latinx immigrants who participated in these interviews. They understood that while their status still limited them, they had more protection than those who were fully undocumented. In Bianca's case, the fact that the government already had her personal information reduced the risk she felt when engaging in public activism. Those with DACA status felt like they had an additional level of protection that

helped them transfer their feelings of disappointment, fear, and anger into more public forms of political participation. Like others in this sample, they felt the need to advocate for the community, and the limited protection offered through their DACA status allowed them to feel comfortable doing so.

There were those in my sample who did not have DACA status and were motivated to increase their engagement following 2016. For DACA recipients and those without DACA status, support, both at the individual and community level, was a critical factor in their political participation. Sophia highlighted this point during her interview when she said

> I've had a lot of great support system, and so that was kind of how my attitude shifted sure from, you know, during these past two years where it's, you know, really hard to participate, but I've been able to lean on that support system to engage in political participation and still be highly active and involved.

Sophia was able to lean on her individual network to help process all of the negativity and still stay active within her community. Ivana mentioned the importance of support from federal and local politicians when discussing what helped her engage in political participation:

> Knowing that the Dems won the house and that there are elected officials here that support DACA, and that the Mayor would show up at this [immigrant rights] rally. If these people can support us, then I can be engaged. My want for change is bigger than my fear. If there has been a change in my activity, it's that it's become more public. Before, I might help folks access services, but I was really quiet in my participation.

Having visible support from the broader community helped Ivana engage in political participation. Another respondent, Diana, a twenty-seven-year-old female graduate student born

in Mexico, mentioned the importance of community members and allies who were willing to let undocumented immigrants engage in participation on their terms.

> One of the things that have really helped me has been [community organizations] advocacy and support. They aren't a political organization, but the issue impacts the population they serve so they have become more active. But they've been active in a really great way. Like they aren't just pushing things like doing rallies or electing certain officials. They are following the community's lead and validating what they consider political participation, even if that might look a little bit different. Having my voice validated like that and knowing there is a group of people who will support me no matter what encourages me to stay engaged.

Here Diana expresses the value of allowing and encouraging the undocumented community to participate in their own way. It allowed them to feel validated and connected to the broader community.

While many factors led my respondents to increase their political participation after 2016, DACA status and community support were most mentioned by the people interviewed for this dissertation project. This was especially true for those engaging in more public political participation. Support for those engaging in non-traditional types of participation was also necessary. When their actions and ideas were validated, it helped them feel more connected to their community and supported in their engagement.

5.2 Conclusion

This chapter explores how the events of the 2016 presidential election, attempt to overturn DACA, and increased hostile rhetoric around undocumented immigrants influenced the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants living in the Midwest. The 2016

Presidential election, termination of DACA, increase in hostile immigration rhetoric, and subsequent immigration policies elicited strong emotional responses from the undocumented Latinx immigrants living in the Midwest within my sample. Specific emotions mentioned by the respondents included disappointment, fear, and anger within the undocumented community. The literatures on the emotions of social movements, policy feedback effects, and social construction of target groups does not provide clear expectations to how these events would impact the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest. After speaking with the respondents in my sample it they indicated that these emotions encouraged them to increase their political participation.

Despite the increase of disappointment, fear, anger, and distrust produced by the events listed above, the undocumented Latinx immigrants I interviewed were motivated to increase their political participation. In this case this was explained by the above events violating their moral emotions and their strong affinity for the broader undocumented community and, in some cases, their local networks. This affinity was helped by supportive local policies and general support from the community. So instead of being dissuaded from political participation in the aftermath of the 2016 Presidential election the Undocumented Latinx immigrants in my sample were encouraged to increase their engagement in political participation to advocate on behalf of the undocumented communities. This affinity was often helped by supportive local policies that extended benefits to the undocumented communities and identified them as valued community members. This point will be expanded on more in chapter six. Community support was also crucial to my respondents, both through individual networks and the larger community in terms of building their affinity commitments and loyalty. Additionally, the limited protection offered

through DACA status helped some respondents combat the increased fear produced by the election of Donald Trump and the subsequent increase in immigration enforcement activity.

These findings also provide insight into how organizers can support undocumented immigrants and help turn the emotions they felt in the aftermath of 2016 into political participation. Public statements, allyship, and personal support were critical to the respondents I interviewed. Measures such as DACA can help undocumented immigrants feel less vulnerable and help provide access to resources they need to feel more connected and safer within their community. This connection and safety can, in turn, help facilitate their participation by increasing the affinity they feel for their local community and networks. While this point was not expanded on in this chapter, local governments have responded to the negativity emanating from the Trump administration with more supportive local measures (García, 2019, 2021). The local level could provide an important avenue to show support for the undocumented community through symbolic statements of support and formal policies that extend resources and rights to the population. Chapter six will examine local policy's role in shaping how undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest think about and engage in political participation.

Chapter 6 How Subnational Immigration Policy Shapes How Undocumented Latinx Immigrants in the Midwest Engage in Political Participation

"Sometimes when it comes to immigration policy and how it allows people to participate in their communities fully, I get this imagery in my mind about playing on a team, like a high school team for like football or something like that, and how you have the running capability, the catching capability, you are able to block, you're a team member, you're a team player, you want to participate, you want to help your team, you want to help others, you want to play, you want to succeed, you want to score, you want to tackle, and you want to participate in that game. You have your equipment, you have your jersey, you have your helmet, and you're ready to go. And instead of letting you be on that team, you're told to just sit on the sidelines and watch other people play. Sometimes even with that rhetoric and how vile it can be, you get the sense that people don't even want to see you on the sidelines. They just want to see you sit in the bleachers." Joseph, 31

Scholars have conducted much research in sociology and social work that indicates that public policy can influence political participation (Campbell, 2011; García, 2021; Mettler & Soss, 2004; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Skocpol, 1988; Soss, 2005). Public policy generally influences policy in two ways. First, policy sets formal eligibility requirements for public resources, rights, and benefits to individuals living in the community (García, 2021; Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Perhaps even more important than the formal access to the resources, rights, and benefits are the messages these policies send to the population (Abrego, 2011; Campbell, 2011;

Levitsky, 2014; Mettler & Soss, 2004; Skocpol, 1988; Soss, 2005). Policy feedback effects influence both the social construction of target groups and how these groups see view their ability to make political demands (Abrego, 2011; Campbell, 2011; Levitsky, 2014; Mettler & Soss, 2004; Newton, 2002; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Skocpol, 1988; Soss, 2002, 2005). The messages sent through policy often attempt to shape what issues are considered public problems that merit solution through policy intervention and public dollars (Abrego, 2011; Campbell, 2011; García, 2021; Levitsky, 2014; Mettler & Soss, 2004; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Skocpol, 1988). These messages are purposeful and frequently sent to help the government achieve its formal policy goals more insidiously (Goodman, 2020). They also shape how populations engage in political participation by reinforcing whether or not their place in society and problems are legitimate public concerns (Campbell, 2011; Levitsky, 2014; Mettler & Soss, 2004; Newton, 2002; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Skocpol, 1988; Soss, 2002, 2005). In his quote above, Joseph illustrates the power of policy to influence political participation. He wants to participate and be an active member of the political process and his community. However, the consistent barrage of hostile rhetoric and exclusionary policy have made it difficult for him to engage in political participation. This feeling falls in line with what we have seen in the literature surrounding the social construction of target groups and policy feedback effects (Abrego, 2011; Campbell, 2011; Chavez, 2013; Mettler & Soss, 2004; Newton, 2002; Nicholls, 2013; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Skocpol, 1988; Soss, 2005). While these barriers did not completely prevent him from engaging in political participation, they made it more challenging.

The power of policy to impact political participation has been especially relevant to the immigrant experience in the United States. The access and limitations set by immigration policy at the national and subnational level, as well as the accompanying messages sent via said

policies, have shaped the daily lives of immigrants and undocumented immigrants living in the United States. Formal immigration policy has led to the removal, or deportation through a judicial order, of more than 3.1 million people and the return, deportation without a judicial order, of an additional 1.4 million people since 2012 (United States Department of Homeland Security, 2020). These numbers do not include the number of immigrants who have chosen to self-deport because of the hostility and lack of resources available to them without going through the immigration system (Goodman, 2020). A central component of immigration enforcement in the United States has been using policy to produce a social context that actively discourages immigrants from remaining in the United States (Goodman, 2020). These more insidious methods of immigration enforcement have allowed the federal government to reduce deportation-related expenses, restrict immigrants' rights and instill a sense of fear in the community without being seen as directly responsible for the removal of immigrant populations (Goodman, 2020). For those who remain in the country, the way they engage with their communities is often shaped by these policies and allows the government to exert a certain level of control over the population (Barak, 2017; Goodman, 2020; Lopez, 2019).

Much of the literature above has focused on how federal policy has shaped political participation in the United States. More recently, scholars have extended this analysis to local and institutional level policies (García, 2021, 2021; Mallet et al., 2017). Angela Garcia has been a leader in this field when it comes to subnational immigration policy (2019, 2021). In her book, *Legal Passing: Navigating Undocumented Life and Local Immigration Law,* Garcia argues that states and local policies are critical components of immigration law (2019). Specifically, state and local laws shape daily life and pathways for incorporation for undocumented Mexican adults (García, 2019). Stated more plainly, Garcia argues that local policies and receiving communities

play a significant role in shaping the day-to-day life of undocumented Mexicans in California and how they integrate into their local communities (García, 2019). Garcia defines restrictive subnational policies as those that attempt to reduce the rights and benefits available to undocumented immigrants to make their day-to-day experiences more difficult. She defines accommodating subnational policies as those that extend rights and benefits to undocumented immigrants to more fully integrate them into their local community (2019). In her most recent work, Garcia asks, "do local laws impact the political behavior of undocumented immigrants, and if so, how?" (2021, p. 1669). Using the data from ninety-four undocumented Mexican immigrants, she explores how political participation varies between individuals living in accommodating localities and individuals living in hostile localities (García, 2021). She argues that local immigration laws shape the scope of political socialization, political efficacy, and political participation of undocumented immigrants (García, 2021). Specifically, Garcia suggests that undocumented immigrants respond to hostile and restrictive localities by pursuing political knowledge to understand and avoid locally situated danger (García, 2021). While Garcia notes that individuals in restrictive locales may have a low sense of political efficacy, they still engage in political participation in more covert ways, including attempting to influence the political views of their citizen networks (García, 2021). This finding is very similar to what my respondents mentioned in chapter four when they specifically referenced being a vote-influencer as an important form of political participation. However, being a vote influencer was relevant for undocumented immigrants in restrictive and accommodating areas in my sample. Garcia argues that accommodating local policy allows undocumented immigrants to develop a strong sense of political efficacy that permits a different form of political participation that is more direct, public, and spans broad issue areas (García, 2021). Garcia concludes that subnational immigration

policy significantly shapes political engagement for undocumented immigrants (García, 2021). Garcia further argues that it is increasingly important to study local policy's effects on political participation (2021). This point has remained true in the aftermath of the 2016 election as federal-level policy became more restrictive and openly hostile, and the United States has increased its focus on immigration policy on all levels (Foley, 2017). Immigration is a policy issue that continues to trickle down to localities and merits the attention of scholars.

In this chapter, I clarify how subnational immigration policy shapes the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest, in the context of a hostile federal administration. The chapter examines how individuals make sense of multiple policy feedback effects and how they view local policy in the context of a hostile federal administration. I ask how does inclusive subnational immigration policy influence the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest? Like Garcia, I define inclusive subnational policies as those attempting to extend rights and resources to undocumented immigrants. I also include symbolic resolutions that express support and affirm the presence of undocumented immigrants (Garcia, 2019, 2021). While these resolutions may not provide additional resources to the community, the statement of support can be meaningful given the constant negative tone from the federal government. This chapter extends the work of Garcia in many ways. My chapter and Garcia's recent work focus on the role of subnational immigration policy on the political participation of undocumented immigrants. I used Garcia's research to develop much of this chapter's conceptualization, including the definition of subnational policy and operationalization of inclusive subnational policy. My decision to utilize a "law-in-action" approach to policy studies was very much motivated by Garcia's work (2019). A "law-in-action" approach examines the impact of law on the people, in this case undocumented Latinx immigrants, instead

of focusing on the legal processes of policies or users of the law (e.g. local sheriffs, bureaucrats, or service workers) (García, 2019). My goal is to illuminate the experience of undocumented Latinx immigrants experience with subnational policy are also inspired by Gracia's work (García, 2019, 2021). I was also able to interview residents in both inclusive and restrictive localities. Table four provides a summary of the number of respondents living in supportive and restrictive local contexts at the time of their interviews.

Table 4
Respondent's local policy environment

Policy environment	*n*
Undocumented Latinx immigrants living in inclusive local policy environments	21
Undocumented Latinx immigrants living in restrictive policy environments	11
Total	32

There are also key differences between this chapter and the work of Garcia that allow me to extend her work. First, I conducted my dissertation interviews after the 2016 Presidential election compared to 2014 for Garcia's sample. The political context had changed drastically between when Garcia interviewed her respondents and when I conducted my dissertation interviews and provided a new context for how local policy may shape undocumented Latinx Immigrants. More specifically, the tone of the federal government became much more hostile towards both documented immigrants and undocumented immigrants (Aranda et al., 2022; Foley, 2017; García, 2021; Negrón-Gonzales, 2017). The changing federal context could fundamentally change the way undocumented Latinx immigrants make sense of the local policy in their communities. Additionally, my sample included individuals from more diverse ethnic backgrounds. While most of my sample was Mexican, I was also able to speak with individuals from Guatemala, Venezuela, Chile, and Honduras. While there are not enough individuals from these origin countries to generalize their responses, my sample does add additional Latinx perspectives and is a step towards expanding the Garcia's findings beyond just undocumented Mexicans. Another critical difference is the geographic location of my respondents. Garica drew her sample from individuals living in both accommodating and restrictive localities in California. My respondents reside in the Midwest within Michigan and Illinois, where the political context and focus on immigration policy have been much different than in California. California has a larger undocumented population than Michigan and Illinois and has a much longer history of local-level immigration policy to analyze (Migration Policy Institute, 2019, NCSL, 2020). California has served as a common locality for individuals studying undocumented immigrants, while less work has been done in the Midwest (García, 2019, 2021; Nicholls, 2013; Patler et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2019). Additionally, the local policy contexts of California, Illinois, and

Michigan are much different. The President's Alliance for Higher Education and Immigration is an alliance of American College and University leaders who aim to increase the understanding of how immigration policy impacts students, campuses, and communities (President's Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, 2022). As a part of this work they have developed a rubric ranking a range of state policies based on how inclusive they are of undocumented immigrants (President's Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, 2022). They identify the most inclusive policies as offering comprehensive access and the least inclusive policies as restrictive or prohibitive (President's Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, 2022). California has long been considered to be an immigrant friendly state and offers comprehensive access to undocumented residents in the areas of higher education, professional and occupational licensure, and driver's license (President's Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, 2022). Undocumented immigrants living in California are able to access in-state tuition, state-based financial aid, obtain professional licensing, and driver's licenses (President's Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, 2022). This is also true of undocumented residents in Illinois but these measures were passed more recently (President's Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, 2022). Michigan is categorized as offering undocumented residents limited access to higher education, does not have a state-wide policy addressing occupational and professional licensing for undocumented residents and does not allow undocumented residents to receive driver's licenses (President's Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, 2022). Previous research has indicated that local receiving contexts can impact the experience of undocumented immigrants and by extending the work of Garcia to a new local context we can work towards a more complete understanding of how these theories play out in different contexts (Burciaga & Martinez, 2017; García, 2021) Seeing how subnational immigration policy influences the

political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants in a new and different social context allows us to gain greater insight into how local policy affects undocumented Latinx immigrants outside of California. Again, while these findings may not be generalizable, they still add to what we know about how local policy shapes the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants and can serve as an excellent complement to the work done by Garcia. As we see how these theories play out in different local contexts, we can begin to make broader statements about the impact of local policy on the political participation of all undocumented Latinx immigrants and provide the foundation to expand the work to undocumented immigrants more broadly.

Based on the responses of the undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest I spoke to subnational immigration policy impacted their political participation in positive way. The respondents of this study most commonly mentioned three themes regarding local policy. First, supportive or inclusive local policies, could help buffer the more restrictive policy and negative rhetoric from the federal level. Second, favorable local policy helped motivate my respondents to engage in political participation. Local served as a source of motivation and pathway for entry to political participation for many of the undocumented individuals interviewed for this dissertation. This second theme ties to the first, but despite the desire to increase their political participation expressed in chapter five, my respondents also acknowledged that it was difficult to engage within their new and generally more hostile political environment. One of the things that helped them overcome their fear and anxiety about engaging in political participation was being located in areas with more supportive local policies. These policies provided a reprieve for the negative federal policy tone and in some cases offered them protection from federal immigration enforcement agencies. Finally, undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest often viewed

local policy arenas as a more accessible entry point for those engaging in traditional forms of political participation. These findings fall in line with the results Garcia found in her work. Supportive local policy can be an important avenue to help undocumented Latinx immigrants engage in political participation (García, 2021). As such, I argue that local policy can serve as an important target of policy intervention for social work practitioners working with undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest. Many respondents felt local policies and elected officials were an easier target for advocacy and were more willing to engage in these spaces than in federal-level advocacy. Those in areas with supportive local policies also felt safer engaging in political participation and felt like the local policy context provided more opportunities to create change. Those living in restrictive localities also expressed that local advocacy provided a more realistic avenue for change and offered a safer arena of activism than targeting the federal administration. I expand on each of these points below.

6.1 The Importance of Local Policy in Times of Stringent Immigration Enforcement

Immigration policy has influenced the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants (García, 2021; Negrón-Gonzales, 2014; Nicholls, 2013). This is reflected in the literature and the responses presented in chapter five of this dissertation. The increased negative policy feedback effects and more restrictive federal policy in the aftermath of the 2016 Presidential election increased my respondents' desire to engage in political participation; however, it also made it more challenging to do so. My respondents were well aware that federal policy was not the only type of policy that impacted their day-to-day circumstances. The individuals I spoke with were also keenly aware of the potential that local policy had to impact the everyday circumstances and political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest. For example, Jamie, a twenty-nine-year-old male activist from Mexico, expressed that

local policy was extremely important to the engagement of undocumented Latinx immigrants than federal policy.

> I would say that local policy is extremely important. It can either be pro-immigrant or anti-immigrant. It can either make the community extremely afraid, or it can inspire hope and resistance. Local policy, regardless of whether it's supportive or restrictive, can greatly impact political participation. I've heard from many friends and family members who say that local policy has a huge impact on their activity, both recently and historically, going back to the 80s, 90s, and 2000s. Local policy can really make or reduce space for the undocumented community.

Joseph, the thirty-one-year-old Mexican man quoted at the beginning of this chapter, shared a similar idea. His initial quote referenced federal policy, but as he continued to expand on his point, he talked about the role local policy could play in how undocumented Latinx immigrants engaged in their community.

> So, when it comes to thinking about policies and how they enable or disable people to give their best to the common good, that's the imagery I think of. When policy is not in favor, or when it restricts people, it keeps people from being a participant and wanting to engage in your community. Like paying your share in taxes, that's a good thing. I can contribute to that, it's not such a burden, but it becomes harder when it feels like I'm not wanted in the community. So, um, being out there on the field, and being a part of the community, and feeling acknowledged makes contributing and helping your team easier. When local policies are not favorable and they are against, or they restrict and they're exclusionary, I think it prevents those kinds of people who are ready to play and who want to contribute from engaging with the community. The people, you know, who are

> willing to put in the work to be on that field and to have that jersey, restrictive [local] policy prevents them from participating.

Joseph would go on to expand why these restrictive policies were not only harmful for undocumented immigrants but for the community overall.

> We already have all these negative messages from the federal government, and when there are additional local policies that are restrictive, it prevents people who are capable from participating, and the community loses out on their contributions. And you [the community] lose out, you lose out on the investment that they've made, the investment the community as a whole has made. Being able to leverage that person's skills and the contributions they can make through favorable local immigration policy should be a goal of communities, especially now.

However, like Jaime, Joseph pointed to supportive local policy as a path to encourage the political participation and better integration of the undocumented community.

> Being able to leverage that person's skills and the contributions they can make through favorable local immigration policy should be a goal of communities, especially now.
>
> Supportive local policy is what we want and what helps us engage in political participation.

Both Jamie and Joseph highlight the ability of local policy to facilitate or discourage political participation. Joseph goes a step further than Jamie, though, when making clear the need for supportive local policies in the face of the political climate following the 2016 Presidential election. Joseph was not the only respondent to mention that supportive local policy helped ease the burden of the punitive federal policy and increasingly aggressive rhetoric from the federal level. Lena, a twenty-two-year-old woman born in Mexico, also expressed the importance of

supportive local policy when we spoke in the summer of 2018. While she does not mention the policies specifically, she was referencing inclusive local policy that had been passed in her area. Shortly after the 2016 election, her city had passed an ordinance affirming that immigrants (documented and undocumented alike) and refugees were a valued part of the community. In addition to this symbolic support, the local government also implemented policies prohibiting city employees and law enforcement from inquiring about immigration status and declined to honor Immigration, Customs, and Enforcement retainer warrants.

> I think just knowing that especially like if you live in a place where they're very supportive towards the undocumented community, it just really gives you a feeling like the community is with me. And that support makes you think we need to push harder for it [support]. Like, let's push to be a sanctuary city, or maybe like California, let's try to be a sanctuary state. Knowing that your local government or your local police force is behind you and supporting you makes it easier to just keep pushing forward. It's really encouraging, and it makes you want to keep fighting and fighting. I definitely couldn't imagine living somewhere where your community doesn't support you. So, I feel bad for people who do live in those areas. Like just you're fighting so hard, and no one has your back like no one is with you.

Lena is expressing how vital community support was to her in the aftermath of the more negative federal policy that had been implemented. Not only did she feel supported based on the words of her local elected officials, but she was also encouraged by the formal policy implemented at the local level to protect the undocumented community. This support helped her stay motivated in the face of the hostile policy coming from the federal government. Lena's quote also provides a good example of the range of support provided by inclusive local policy. At the baseline level,

local policy can offer symbolic support through formal statements affirming undocumented immigrants as valued community members. At it's most inclusive level local policy can extend resources and benefits to undocumented immigrants living in their jurisdiction. The respondents in my sample pointed to local policy as positively influencing their political participation. Even those living in restrictive municipalities talked about the importance of inclusive local policy and expressed a willingness to fight for inclusive policy at the local level.

6.1.1 Local policy as a measure of community support, buffer to federal policies, and tool to rebuild relationships

Chapter five described how the respondents in this study were motivated to engage in political participation but were also unsure if it was safe to do so. Many were searching for additional support and resources to help them engage in political participation. As Rosita, a twenty-six-year-old woman from Guatemala, shared

> The [Trump] administration both motivates and scares me. Sometimes it [the current context] makes me want to do more but dealing with the negative stereotypes, and extra enforcement is hard. Sometimes it discourages me from engaging. I want to change people's minds, but I also have to feel safe. If I feel unsafe, I don't say anything or participate. The [local city] resolution supporting us helped me feel safe. It made me feel like my community wanted me here and didn't agree with the national policies.

Rosita is expressing a feeling that came up often among the respondents I interviewed. Even though they felt the need to engage in political participation, the federal policy climate made them unsure if doing so was a good idea. This fear and uncertainty made it more difficult for individuals to engage in political participation. As Efren, a thirty-six-year-old Mexican man, clarified in chapter 5, "that fear [produced by the federal government] motivates me too, but it

takes a lot of energy to turn that fear into activity." The feelings expressed by Rosita, Efren, and other respondents make sense, given what we know about how restrictive policies can influence political participation and the generally negative tone coming from the federal government at the time (Abrego, 2011; Campbell, 2005; García, 2019, 2021; Mettler & Soss, 2004; Negrón-Gonzales, 2017; Nicholls, 2013; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Soss, 2002). So as organizers and policy advocates, it is important to consider how we can combat these negative policy feedback effects and support the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants. The undocumented Latinx immigrants I spoke with identified supportive subnational immigration policy as an important form of support that helped them increase their engagement. Supportive subnational policies aimed at expressing the value of undocumented immigrants to the community served as a source of support that helped encourage their participation, as Rosita expressed in the second part of her quote. In this case, we see local policy feedback effects helping offset the negative federal policy context to help undocumented Latinx immigrants engage in political participation. Rosita is expressing here and what was echoed by others was that local policy could help offset the exclusion they felt from the increased immigration enforcement at the federal level. Isabella, a twenty-year-old-college student living in a supportive local context, explained

> These [local] policies make it feel safer to engage. I think that the reason we felt comfortable doing a rally or being in the newspaper or the things that are more public forms of participation was because we felt safe. If you feel safer engaging politically, it makes you more willing to engage. I think about BLM rallies when they're met with counter-protesters that could easily become violent and have become violent. I think that

> if we were in a city or campus where there were more active anti-immigrant people, I might stop or at least be more strategic about when I engage.

Here Isabella is reflecting that the increased anti-immigrant sentiment stemming from federal policy had led to a fear of being physically attacked by anti-immigrant activists. Knowing that there was at least enough local support to get affirming and supportive local policy implemented made her feel comfortable enough to engage in more public forms of political participation. She expanded on this point when she recalled her first time engaging in a public rally.

> My status and inability to vote have been difficult and, for a long time, made it hard for me to engage. For a while, it was my status, so like the rally we did, it was run by [Student Group]; we decided that at the end we'd share our personal story and status. Basically, we were all going to come out [as undocumented] in a very public way. That was the first time I had ever done that in front of a crowd. The only reason I did it was because I felt like we built up our community. We built up our community and our support systems, and we were doing in a group of people who supported our cause, so I felt relatively safe.

The safety provided by supportive policy passed at the local level also served as a point of hope during the aftermath of the 2016 election for the undocumented Latinx immigrants interviewed for this dissertation. When discussing the impact of supportive local policy Selena, a nineteen-year-old born woman born in Mexico, stated

> Yeah, honestly, I'm so grateful for like the cities that are like Sanctuary cities that support undocumented and DACA individuals. Like when the county or even like the universities that give statements of support to undocumented students or DACA students and kind of like go against the federal government and what they're saying, it just kind of like gives

> you this sense of hope. Maybe you do belong somewhere, and you should stay there because they'll protect you. And these people actually think about you and they care about you.

Formal statements of support issued through resolutions were significant to the undocumented Latinx individuals in this sample, given the feelings of disappointment and distrust produced by the 2016 election results (see chapter five). These local policies helped rebuild trust for the undocumented community and often served as a source of hope for the respondents in this sample. As Carmen, a twenty-seven-year-old woman from Mexico, succinctly put it, "positive local policy is like a little breath of fresh air when we're fighting the federal government." Similarly, Max, a twenty-two-year-old male who emigrated from Mexico, said, 'positive local policies show that there is a way and that things can change. These small changes provide hope. I think that's a good way to describe it; they bring me hope." This hope proved to be critical to helping my respondents engage in political participation.

In addition to symbolic statements, local anti-collaboration policies stating that local authorities will not collaborate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) or inquire about an individual's immigration status were especially important for undocumented Latinx immigrants in my sample. As Sergio, a twenty-two-year-old Mexican man, stated, anti-collaboration policies helped him feel more comfortable engaging with his community.

> I feel like local policies like the ones here in (inclusive city) they make it easier to advocate and use my voice. Like the anti-collaboration policies actually make me feel like I can engage with the police without being scared they'll call ICE. I think local policies can buffer the negative federal policies. They make me feel like I have space and that I can reach elected officials.

Fernando, a twenty-four-year-old male born in Honduras, also referenced anti-collaboration policies and helping rebuild trust in local governments:

> Yeah, I think local policy is important. For example, I know California passed a policy where they won't collaborate with ICE. I think that's a positive thing and helps me see that there are some areas or communities that still support us.

Fernando did not reside in California but was aware of their statewide policies supporting undocumented immigrants. Even though he did not directly benefit from these policies, they helped him overcome some of his negative feelings stemming from the 2016 Presidential election. Ana, a twenty-three-year-old born in Mexico, also made it a point to reference anti-collaboration policies as an example of her community showing support.

> The local Sherriff here is very like has been very supportive [of the undocumented community]. They've been making statements that they're not going to work with ICE or that they're not going to profile or ask about immigration status during traffic stops, and Seeing that is like really hopeful. It makes me happy to live where I live and know that we're protected in a small sense. To me, it's the community showing you [undocumented immigrants] that they're going to do whatever it takes to make sure that you are supported here because you are a part of the community.

Here Ana is expressing that these anti-collaboration policies helped rebuild some of the distrust she felt after the election. Ana, Sergio, and Fernando all saw these anti-collaboration policies as evidence that the majority of their communities' values did not align with the federal government's views and that their communities were willing to support them.

The fear, anger, and distrust undocumented Latinx immigrants felt towards their local communities after the 2016 Presidential election was genuine. However, for the respondents in

my sample, positive local policy helped rebuild some of their trust in the community. These supportive local policies helped provide hope for undocumented Latinx immigrants facing more restrictive federal policies. This hope and subsequent support provided by local policies helped rebuild trust within the community. This support and trust helped foster a feeling of safety among undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest. The increased feeling of safety often was enough to help the respondents I spoke with overcome the many barriers they faced to engage in more traditional and public forms of political participation. It should be noted that local policy broadly seemed to have a positive effect on my respondents. In many cases respondents did not have supportive policies implemented where they lived. But in the era of twenty-four-hour news cycle and social media they were often aware of local policies that were implemented in other areas. While these undocumented Latinx immigrants did not directly benefit from these polices seeing other communities formally show support to the undocumented community encouraged them. It seems as though that with all of the negative rhetoric present during the 45th Presidential administration the undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest were looking for whatever type of policy support they could find. Even seeing other communities advocate on their behalf and allies openly support them helped boost their political participation and rebuild some of the trust lost from the 2016 Presidential election. Many of the people I spoke with cited inclusive local policies as a source of motivation for their political participation. This was expressed well by Bianca, a twenty-year-old college student born in Chile

> Knowing that there are cities and certain places that welcome people and actively try to support people reminds you that not the whole county hates you. Not everyone thinks in a negative way, and it reminds you that certain things can change. It reminds you that you just need to get the right people together. It also reminds you that a lot of people didn't

> vote. There were a lot of younger people or more liberal people who simply didn't vote. So, the election didn't necessarily represent how the country is and that makes you question how do we make it more representative?

This quote also provides an excellent transition to the next theme around local policy expressed by my respondents, inclusive local policy as a source of motivation for political participation.

6.1.2 Local policy as a source of motivation for political participation

The respondents in my sample also made it clear that positive local policy often motivated them to engage in political participation. This was due in part to the feelings of support and hope mentioned above. The feelings expressed by my respondents fall in line with what we would expect, given the literature on policy feedback effects and the social construction of target groups (Campbell, 2005, 2011; García, 2021; Mettler & Soss, 2004; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Soss, 2002). These supportive local policies told the undocumented community that their problems were legitimate social concerns and warranted policy interventions. As the undocumented community started to process these local policy feedback effects and saw them as a point of departure from the negative tone they received from the federal government, they were encouraged to engage in political participation. As Carmen put it

> I think local policy is what matters the most. I'm glad to see cities and states pass things to fight back against the federal government. It gives us some breathing room and is motivating for me. It also makes us feel like we're accomplishing things.

She highlighted local policy as important to the undocumented community. She viewed local policy implementation as a significant show of support that local communities were willing to battle the federal government with their undocumented residents. Seeing these local policies implemented at the local level provided a sense of accomplishment and another opportunity to

celebrate small-scale victories during the highly contentious federal policy landscape. Jorge, a twenty-two-year-old Mexican-born man, expressed a similar sentiment when he shared

> I think inclusive local policy is a lot more inspiring [than federal policy]. I think policy needs to go from the top to the bottom to be effective, so if you challenge from the bottom up [local level], you can make a lot of progress. It's a lot more inspiring to see more positive local policy and to see a plausible target for change.

Here Jorge highlights the real impact local policy can have on undocumented Latinx immigrants. Respondents in my sample viewed local policies as a more realistic and obtainable target of policy advocacy. To Jorge and others I spoke with these local policies offered an opportunity to benefit the undocumented community through formal policy and an additional avenue for their participation.

The more positive subnational immigration policies helped send the message that undocumented Latinx immigrants should be engaged in the community and that their issues were public issues that warranted being addressed by policy, despite what the federal government was saying. This also motivated some to push for more rights and resources. As Isabella shared

> I also think it [inclusive subnational policy] makes you feel like you have more support to push for further policy issues that will set the bar for other communities. That is more encouraging than being constantly shut down, which is really helpful given what we see coming from the federal government.

Similarly, Marisol, a twenty-eight-year-old female activist born in Mexico, said this when discussing how she was motivated by inclusive subnational immigration policy

> It's been really encouraging. It's good to see that people are responding and taking action to protect people. At first, I was a little resentful and thought maybe if these policies were

> in place earlier, we wouldn't be where we are, but I had to work to get over that because it's not helpful. People are here now, and we should take advantage of that and push for more at the federal level.

Even though there was some frustration on Marisol's part that these inclusive policies were not in place earlier, she still found motivation in their recent action that made her want to continue to push forward. Again, this theme came up often when talking to my respondents. Ivan, a twenty-five-year-old from Mexico, succinctly stated, "supportive local policy is part of what folks need to get involved, especially now. Like for me, they make me want to get involved with something bigger than myself and push for more at the federal level too." Supportive local policy motivated undocumented Latinx immigrants to engage in political participation individually and work with others to create change. As Ivana, a nineteen-year-old Mexican immigrant living in a supportive local context, summarized,

> Inclusive local policies make me happy and encourage me to work with local communities. They give me hope that there will be a change, and they give me hope to encourage others to help make those changes in our state.

Finally, this point is summarized well by Bianca,

> I feel like as a community that often is ignored, to kind of see that when people listen [at the local level], they're able to work things out as well, to see that we can be listened to and create change, that kind of like motivates you more. It's like if I can do this [create change at the local level], there are more things that I can bring about. So, like when these things happen, you create more welcoming spaces, and that goes back to this notion of community. It brings out the best in people. With that support comes empowerment,

> and with empowerment, you get to see people who really want to have their voices heard and want to do change. They are able to have more agency to do so.

Bianca is expressing that in her experience, rebuilding a stronger sense of community is vital to motivating undocumented Latinx immigrants to engage in political participation. Seeing more inclusive subnational policy passed was especially helpful in rebuilding her trust and a sense of community. Based on the responses of my respondents, it was clear that inclusive subnational immigration policy encouraged undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest to engage in political participation.

6.1.3 Local policy as an entry point for political participation

In addition to the role of positive subnational immigration policy in helping rebuild community trust and motivating political participation, it also served as a more accessible access point to engage in political participation for many of my respondents. As has been pointed out several times, the respondents I spoke with felt the need to engage in political participation but were apprehensive because of the restrictive policy and negative tone from the federal government. This caused many to look to the local level as an avenue to engage in political participation. Hugo, a thirty-one-year-old man, born in Mexico, mentioned this when describing how he got involved in the local political scene,

> I'm pretty active with our local officials. I'm like involved because they're people I know, you know? I see them in the city and at events, then slowly, like, I got to know a couple of people in Council. I talked to them and started sharing some goals I had for the city. Even though this isn't the most supportive area, it was still easier for me to talk to those guys than it would be a senator to the President.

Hugo's policy goals ranged from issues concerning immigration, local economic issues, and business opportunities, and he was eager to advocate for these issues and was very comfortable doing so with local officials because he knew them personally.

> I know this; the council members they are aware that I'm the community. So, they can do whatever they want to do with policy, and they have helped me out. I think it because I have, I feel like I have that, that influence here, I guess. Yeah, at least I have more influence here than I would with Trump because I can talk to the Council, and they see me like every day. I also don't have to worry about these guys calling ICE or CBP or whatever.

Again, Hugo saw local policy as a more accessible entry point for his participation and an arena where he wielded more influence. This was interesting considering that Hugo lived in an area with more restrictive subnational immigration policies. However, he felt he was helped out by local policy regarding his business ventures. Hugo credited this support to the influence he could wield at the local level due to his personal connections. Hugo could form those connections, at least in part, because he was not concerned about dealing with federal immigration enforcement when talking to his local council members. The idea that local policy was an area where undocumented individuals could make a significant impact was a theme that other respondents expressed in my sample. For example, Diana, a twenty-seven-year-old Mexican woman, expressed that she also felt like she could have the most impact by engaging in political participation at the local level.

> I think on the local level; I feel like this is where I can make the most change. When local officials have spoken out in favor of us to me, I think that has been powerful because I think it sets a tone for how people should engage with and support my community. I

> think I've been glad to know that locally that response has generally been welcoming and supporting. Like when all those sanctuary cities were coming out, that was really powerful. It showed a sense of unity and resistance that gives you hope and sanity when it feels like everything else is falling apart or being challenged. That made me want to engage in these local spaces and push for resources there.

Diana is expressing how supportive subnational policies helped make her feel like she could engage in political participation within her local community. Hugo and Diana provide evidence that local-level politics can be more accessible to undocumented Latinx immigrants living in restrictive (Hugo) and inclusive (Diana) localities. In Diana's case, the local support made her feel like local politics were an area where she could advocate for her community. In Hugo's case, even though he was in a restrictive locality, he was less worried about his local officials reporting him to immigration enforcement agencies. This comfort level allowed Hugo to build personal relationships with his local officials in a way he could not with federal elected officials. This sense of comfort allowed Hugo and other undocumented immigrants I spoke with be comfortable engaging in political participation at the local level when they would not have necessarily been motivated to engage in federal level advocacy.

One key theme that my respondents mentioned but not quite often enough to be featured in this section was institutional policy as an avenue for political participation and advocacy. Many of the individuals I interviewed were college students or college graduates. They mentioned the activism they engaged in on their respective campuses as a significant feature of their political participation. They viewed the institutional policy at their respective institutions as another source of support or exclusion. The role of institutional policy feedback effects on undocumented Latinx immigrants is an area that could be further explored in the future.

Overall, the undocumented Latinx immigrants expressed that local political arenas felt like more accessible avenues of political participation and the policy activity at the local level had an impact on their political participation. In cases where individuals resided in supportive localities, they were encouraged to engage with local policy because they felt they had more significant influence at this level. The undocumented Latinx immigrants in my sample felt this influence could be more easily translated into additional resources within their local communities than achieving federal policy change. In restrictive localities, respondents indicated that they were less concerned about being reported to immigration authorities and could better build personal relationships with elected officials. The personal relationships that my respondents were able to build helped them feel more secure within their home communities and made less fearful of immigration enforcement. My respondents felt like even though they did not have policy support from local elected officials that there was more space for dialogue around these issues.

6.2 Conclusion

Subnational immigration policy played a key role in shaping the political participation of the undocumented Latinx immigrants in my sample. Inclusive subnational immigration policy helped rebuild community trust following the 2016 Presidential election and served as a buffer to the more restrictive national immigration policies during that period. Inclusive subnational policy also motivated the undocumented Latinx immigrants in my sample to engage in traditional forms of political participation. Lastly, local policy arenas also offered a more accessible entry point for political participation for some of the undocumented Latinx immigrants in my sample. Further research should be conducted to determine how institutional policy influences political participation. This study's findings very much align with what we would expect based on the literature surrounding policy feedback effects, the social construction of target groups, and

subnational immigration policy. Specifically, the positive local policies helped send messages of support and validation to the undocumented community and encouraged them to engage in political participation.

Like Garcia's work, this chapter documents that subnational policy plays an essential role in shaping how undocumented Latinx immigrants engage in political participation. The inclusive policy helped foster more public engagement for the individuals I spoke with, as it did for the respondents in Garcia's research (2021). For those living in restrictive localities, the personal connection to local elected officials helped them feel more comfortable engaging in political participation compared to the federal level.

While it is clear that subnational immigration policy and subnational policy more broadly influence political participation, it is fair to ask what the implications of these findings are for social work. Based on the findings of this chapter, there is a strong argument for community organizers and policy advocates working with undocumented Latinx immigrants to work with the community to develop local policy interventions. As discussed in chapter five, the 2016 election increased the anger, fear, and distrust among undocumented Latinx immigrants. While these feelings prompted a desire to increase their political participation, they had legitimate concerns about doing so. These concerns were amplified by the negative policy feedback effects and hostile rhetoric coming from the federal level. Inclusive local policy has the potential to help rebuild trust and offers a more accessible access point to participation for undocumented Latinx immigrants. The potential for local policy also exists to offset the negative federal policy and extend additional rights and resources to the community. Of course, the community should set the target and policy goals. However, there seems to be real value in forming community collaborations to push for policy change at the subnational level.

Chapter 7 Conclusion and Implications

Within sociology, understanding how individuals make sense of their social environment has been a cornerstone of empirical inquiry (Young, 2004). This scholarship includes moving beyond the establishment of values and norms and focusing on how individuals make sense of their everyday experiences (Young, 2004). We have seen this line of scholarship applied to undocumented Latinx immigrants living in the United States (Abrego, 2011, 2014; Abrego & Negrón-Gonzales, 2020; Barak, 2017; Chavez, 2012; García, 2019, 2021; Gonzales, 2011, 2016; W. Lopez D., 2019; Menjívar, 2006; Nicholls, 2013; Pallares & Gomberg-Muñoz, 2016). Sociology and social work have shown interest in political participation as an area of study (Alford & Friedland, 1975; Levine, 2007; Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Sanchez, 2006; Wong et al., 2019). The study of political participation has included studying the influence social policy can have on the political participation of individuals living within a society (Campbell, 2005, 2011; Mettler & Soss, 2004; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Skocpol, 1988; Soss, 2002). More recently, this field has been expanded to include the study of how policy influences the political participation of undocumented immigrants living within the United States (García, 2021; Negrón-Gonzales, 2015; Nicholls, 2013; Pallares & Gomberg-Muñoz, 2016; Robles & Gomberg-Muñoz, 2016; Wong et al., 2019). This dissertation brings these topics into conversation with each other by examining the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest. The findings of this dissertation shed light on how undocumented Latinx immigrants define political participation, how undocumented Latinx immigrants were

impacted by the 2016 Presidential election and subsequent restrictive federal policy, and the role of inclusive subnational immigration policy plays n shaping their political participation.

The first empirical chapter of this dissertation chronicled how undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest understood political participation. It opened up the space for them to define the term for themselves so that, as researchers and advocates, we can better understand their political experience. As we better understand how they define political participation, we can work towards better understanding how undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest define political participation. developing. As organizers and policy advocates, we can develop more effective interventions to support the political participation of the undocumented community.

Based on my dissertation research findings, undocumented Latinx immigrants used a spectrum of activities to operationalize political participation. These activities were similar to how we see political participation defined in the social movement literature and generally fit into one of three categories: traditional definitions of political participation, individual engagement as political participation, and everyday resistance as a form of political participation. Individuals using traditional definitions defined political participation as voting, engaging in political rallies or protests, contacting elected officials, and the types of activities we see identified in the political participation literature. Interestingly, although they were formally excluded from the voting process, many respondents in this sample highlighted voting as an essential part of their political participation. Instead of going to the polls, the undocumented Latinx immigrants I spoke with made it a point to become vote influencers within their social networks to have their voices expressed through their documented friends and family. Traditional definitions of political participation were the most commonly used definitions among the respondents in my sample. Another frame my respondents used to define political participation was individual engagement.

These definitions included engaging with other individuals in one-on-one settings to help provide context to the immigration debate. Often my respondents were trying to provide a face to the immigration debate or challenge the thinking of someone in their community. These individual engagements could be public events but more often were in more personal settings such as classrooms or during everyday community interactions. The respondents utilizing these definitions saw individual engagement as a pathway to create change by improving their local climate. Finally, the last definition used by my respondents to define political participation was everyday resistance. Respondents using this definition argued that their existence is, in essence, a political issue; therefore, everything they did was a form of political participation. This included self-care as a form of political participation, attending school, accessing social services, and generally engaging with and in their community as forms of political participation.

The second empirical chapter of this dissertation examined the impact that the 2016 Presidential election, increased hostile policy rhetoric, and implementation of more restrictive federal-level immigration policy had on undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest's political participation. After speaking with the respondents in my sample, a few things became clear. First, the election results increased the levels of disappointment, fear, and anger within the undocumented community. These feelings led undocumented Latinx immigrants in this sample to question whom they could trust within their community and made them reevaluate how they engaged in political participation. While the election produced powerful emotions among my respondents, it did not reduce their engagement in political participation. Almost across the board, the individuals I spoke with felt the need to increase political participation after the 2016 Presidential election. Increasing their participation looked different depending on the respondent. Some increased their activity in more traditional and public forms of political participation.

Others redefined the concept to include activities that allowed them to engage in a way that made them feel safe and secure. However, to my respondents, all of these activities constituted a form of political participation. The limited protection offered through DACA status helped some respondents combat the increased fear produced by the election of Donald Trump and the subsequent increase in immigration enforcement activity. Community support was also crucial to my respondents through personal networks and the larger community. The feeling of support helped encourage the respondents in this dissertation study to maintain or increase their levels of political participation.

Finally, the third empirical chapter of this dissertation examined the influence subnational immigration policy had on the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants living in the Midwest. Inclusive subnational immigration policy helped rebuild community trust following the 2016 Presidential election and served as a buffer to the more restrictive national immigration policies during that period. Inclusive subnational policy also motivated the undocumented Latinx immigrants in my sample to engage in traditional forms of political participation. Lastly, local policy arenas also offered a more accessible entry point for political participation for some of the undocumented Latinx immigrants in my sample. Implications for practice and future research concerning undocumented immigrants.

The results produced by this dissertation are consistent with similar research we have seen on political participation within sociology and social work. The respondents in my dissertation sample primarily defined political participation in ways we have seen in the literature. My respondents most commonly used traditional definitions focused on affecting the electoral process, social policy, or institutional change. Additionally, some individuals used their personal narratives to create change at the individual level within their communities and social

networks. These actions were similar to what we have seen within the LGBTQ movement and Intergroup dialogue models of political participation (Enriquez & Saguy, 2016; G. Lopez & Zúñiga, 2010; Swerts, 2015). Finally, individuals using everyday resistance models of political participation very much fall in line with what we have seen within the feminist movement (Bernstein, 2005; Hanisch, 1969; Hill & Laredo, 2020). The notion that the personal is political has long been used among marginalized groups to highlight how their everyday actions become political. One somewhat new form of political participation used by the undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest was self-care as a form of political participation. Self-care has been recognized as essential to individual well-being and as an important tool to maintain political participation but generally has not been identified as a form of political participation (Powers & Engstrom, 2020; Rowe, 2016). However, the respondents in my sample felt it was a key component of their participation. Some may argue the value of defining forms of self-care as political participation. If everything becomes political participation, then how do we focus on activities that create change, and what type of analytical ability do we have? However, the critical point here is that undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest expressed a desire to see themselves and be seen as politically active. For some, that meant engaging in more traditional forms of participation. However, for others, that meant reconceptualizing the activities they found most accessible to them as forms of political participation. When given this space, they were often led to more formal types of political participation. This finding speaks to a need for organizers to be willing to meet undocumented Latinx immigrants and undocumented immigrants more broadly where they are at in terms of their participation.

While the initial goal of this empirical chapter was to expand the theoretical definition of political participation based on the experience of undocumented Latinx immigrants, the results

suggest that undocumented Latinx Immigrants in the Midwest mostly define political participation in ways we have seen it defined previously. However, important contributions can still be taken away from this dissertation. First, given that the majority of undocumented Latinx immigrants I spoke with defined political participation in a way we have seen in the past, it suggests that previously developed interventions aimed at increasing political participation could be relevant to undocumented Latinx immigrants. It may be appropriate to work towards helping influence voters, contact elected officials, or engage in social protest. However, it is important to be open to helping undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest engage in less public types of participation and provide space for self-care. In some cases, these forms of self-care, especially artistic endeavors, can lead to more traditional or public forms of participation. Working in collaboration with the community and developing action plans with significant input from undocumented activists can help build strong relationships between activists, allies, and the community. This can help repair the damage done to these relationships in the aftermath of the 2016 Presidential campaign and election. Community organizers and activist scholars can better support undocumented Latinx immigrants in their political participation as the relationships improve.

One of the reasons it is so vital to help rebuild trust with the undocumented Latinx community is that they expressed a strong desire to resist the more restrictive federal immigration policy and hostile rhetoric produced by the 2016 Presidential election. Almost universally, my respondents expressed a desire to increase their political participation post-2016; for many, 2016 served as motivation to engage in political participation for the first time. However, there were still significant levels of fear, distrust, and anger within the community. They felt let down by their communities and acknowledged that it was more challenging to

engage in political participation. Given the stricter immigration enforcement and increased anti-immigrant sentiment present during the Trump administration my respondents understood that they might need to be more strategic in how they engage. The emotions sparked by the 2016 presidential election primed the undocumented Latinx immigrants to engage in political participation, but it also increased their need for support. This support ranged from formal protections like those issued through DACA, affirming statements from the community, willingness to validate the activities that fell outside traditional definitions of political participation, and more supportive subnational immigration policies. Supportive subnational immigration policies were especially important because they helped motivate undocumented Latinx immigrants to engage in political participation by buffering the negative federal policy rhetoric and providing a tangible resources to undocumented immigrants. These findings align with what we would expect based on the literature surrounding policy feedback effects, the social construction of target groups, and subnational immigration policy (Campbell, 2011; García, 2019, 2021; Mettler & Soss, 2004; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Skocpol, 1988; Soss, 2002). Specifically, the inclusive local policies helped send messages of support and validation to the undocumented community and encouraged them to engage in political participation.

In summation, social work practitioners and policy advocates working with undocumented Latinx immigrants be mindful of ways that they can help rebuild trust and relationships with the community. The actions that the undocumented Latinx immigrants considered helpful to rebuilding that trust included expanding definitions of political participation and validating the actions they considered political participation. This included expanding the focus of political participation beyond electoral politics, helping to build resources within the community, and providing avenues for self-care. These types of support can help

promote affinity commitments and loyalty within the undocumented community and motivate them to engage in political participation. Another key form of support included formal statements of support for the undocumented community and inclusive subnational policy. Subnational policy provided a more accessible entry point for undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest to engage in political participation. Rebuilding trust will allow organizers to form stronger collaborations with the undocumented community and facilitate their political participation. As this trust is rebuilt, it will become easier to organize and build sustainable political coalitions with the undocumented community. As these coalitions are built, it may make sense strategically to target policy interventions at the local level, as individuals in my sample expressed that this was a more accessible entry point for their political participation.

7.1 Future directions of research

While the information gained from the results of this dissertation helps us better understand the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants living in the Midwest, many questions remain unanswered. First, my sample was small and not representative. Further study should be done with the undocumented Latinx community to see if these results are replicated with other community members outside of the Midwest, including those who do not identify as Latinx. Similarly, more research should be conducted with newly arrived undocumented Latinx immigrants, those without DACA, and older undocumented Latinx immigrants. My sample tended to skew towards younger respondents with DACA who had college experience. Undocumented Latinx individuals who do not fit these demographic characteristics may answer these questions differently. A potential factor shaping my respondents' responses is that many were educated in the United States and were college

educated. It is possible that undocumented Latinx immigrants with different social demographic would respond to these questions differently.

The social context has also changed since I conducted these interviews. Donald Trump was voted out of office, and while there still has not been large-scale immigration reform passed, the tone from the federal government has become less hostile. Further research should be conducted to see how the change in administration has shaped how undocumented Latinx immigrants make sense of political participation. A few respondents in my sample also mentioned campus-level advocacy as an important part of their political participation. The role of academic institutions and institutional policy in shaping undocumented Latinx immigrants' political participation warrants further study. Finally, I justify why I focused on undocumented Latinx immigrants for this study, but the non-Latinx segment of the undocumented population continues to grow within the United States. Little work has been conducted with these populations, and it could be beneficial to both social work and sociology to expand these research questions to non-Latinx undocumented immigrants.

7.2 Post dissertation reflection and broader implications

Initially, I planned on framing this section as a discussion of how we move forward organizing around immigration while our world "is not on fire." Marisol's response during our interview motivated this line of thinking. She wondered what organizing would look like going forward under a new administration. Though Joe Biden had not officially announced his candidacy when we spoke, there were rumors that he would emerge as the democratic front runner, and Marisol questioned how that would affect immigration advocacy

> I wonder what will happen going forward and how we will keep people active, especially if there is a new administration. Don't get me wrong. The Trump administration has been

> awful. This is not a comment of support for what they have done, but his election has brought more urgency. Now these policies are so blatantly hateful that people have felt the urgency to act. People were deported under Obama, so many people were deported, but his administration did a good job of covering up the deportations and doing just enough to keep people pacified. It's like right now, our lives are on fire, so of course, people are going to act. But how do we organize when things aren't on fire? How do we create change when things are just bad enough to be annoying but not set your life isn't on fire?

I was tempted to frame our current social context as one that was not on fire, especially regarding immigration policy. It is fair to say that with all of the new issues referenced above taking over the public debate, immigration reform has been somewhat pushed onto the political backburner. Immigration reform has been put on the political backburner despite the lack of long-term policy solutions. It seems that for many, the goal was to remove Donald Trump from office, and once that was achieved, the specifics of immigration reform became less important to them. While the Biden and Harris administration overturned several of the Trumps administration's most restrictive immigration reforms, many are still in place. DACA is still very much in limbo and currently not approving new applications. The House and Senate have not passed comprehensive immigration reform, and there is not currently a clear path for undocumented residents in the United States to be granted citizenship or permanent residency. However, there also seems to be less urgency to resolve these issues from the general public. Undocumented Latinx immigrants and immigration reform advocates may have less overtly hostile federal policies to deal with; however, they still do not have the inclusive policy reform they were promised in front of the 2020 Presidential election. How we push for more inclusive federal immigration reform when

allies and advocates do not have the same urgency they did before 2020 is an important question to answer going forward.

However, it would not be accurate to say that the world is not on fire. In many ways, the fire has spread to new issues and new arenas. A great deal has changed since I spoke with my dissertation participants. The United States has experienced a global pandemic, a change in Presidencies, claims of election fraud and attempted insurrection, a new economic crisis, a string of mass shootings, and during the drafting of this chapter overturning of Roe v. Wade and the loss of abortion rights in the United States. In many ways, the policy legacy left by the former administration is being felt by documented populations in our current context and producing similar feelings of anger, fear, and distrust in a several different communities. At the same time, those feelings are still very much relevant to the undocumented community, who are still searching for more inclusive policy solutions to adjust their immigration status.

So, as I reflect on the findings, I cannot help but think about how we apply the lessons learned from the political participation of undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest to our current social context. As I reflect, I keep going back to the sense of anger, fear, and distrust that the 2016 Presidential election caused for the undocumented community. I think about the damage it did to their relationships with the broader community and how we can use the lessons from this research to build the path forward with other communities that have had their trust broken. A few things stand out to me. One of the key findings regarding how undocumented Latinx immigrants in the Midwest defined political participation was their view of self-care and everyday activities as a form of political participation. I am reminded of Bianca's growing frustration over political participation only being defined as things that focus on creating institutional-based change (e.g., voting, policy, or elected officials) and organizers not being

responsive to the community. Going forward, as social work practitioners and organizers, we must work to listen to and validate different definitions of political participation and support the value of those activities. Respondents in my sample made it clear that they were more likely to engage with the community and engage in more public activism when they felt supported. This included providing space to engage in political participation on their terms, formal statements of support, and inclusive subnational immigration policy. As organizers, I think it is prudent that we take a page from our clinical counterparts and be open to meeting the community where it is at regarding the activities they consider to be examples of political participation. As we validate their work and allow them to engage in ways that work for them, whether that be in providing support to public forms of protest, helping develop narratives for individual engagement, or leaving space for self-care, we invite them to join more formal advocacy spaces. As we broaden our perspective of political participation, we create more inclusive organizing spaces by validating the community's activities. As we build strong collaborations, we also build more political power, which will be necessary going forward.

I am also reminded of the importance of local and subnational policy. While there is undoubtedly a need to advocate and push for policy change at the federal level, the local level can provide resources and support in the face of more restrictive federal policy. As federal protections and rights are stripped away through policy, localities can help fill these gaps. If the lessons learned from undocumented Latinx immigrants in this sample can be applied to other groups, there is the potential for local policy to also serve as a more accessible access point for people to engage in political participation. Social workers, community advocates, and policy practitioners have the potential to collaborate with communities at the grassroots level to create real change at the subnational level. This, in turn, can help build momentum toward large-scale

federal-level change. The feelings produced as policy becomes more restrictive at the federal level can motivate individuals to become more active. Social workers can help capitalize on this motivation by helping to build trust and helping provide opportunities to engage in political participation at the local level.

Appendix

.

Start interview telling respondent about me and my story/motivation for the project…

Introduction -

Tell me a little bit about where you grew up and where your family came from…

- Probes:
    - what country were you born in?
    - How long did your family live there?
    - Did your family live in a large city or a rural area?
    - What did you family do for a living in (name of city/country)?
    - Do you still have family and friends there?
        - What type of communication do you have with them?

When did your family decide to come to the United States?

Why did you/your parents decide to come to the US

- Probe here – ask for specific motivations

How many people do you have in your immediate family?

- How many of those folks live with you?
- Are your family members documented?
- What kind of documentation/papers do they have?
- Are any of your family members undocumented?
- How many of your close friends or family members are undocumented?
    - If you had to guess what percentage of the people you are closest with are undocumented?

How long have you and your family been living in the US?

How long have you and your family been living in (specific area)?

Could you tell me what you/your parents did for work before coming to the US?

What do you/your parents do for work now?

Did you attend school in (specific area)?

- How many years did you spend in the (specific area) school system?
- Where else have you attended school? How long did you attend school in those locations?

Identity/Connection to the community -

You mentioned you have been in (specific area) since (pull answer from above). Can you

describe your community to me?

What are some of the things you like about living in (area here)?

Could you tell some of the things that you don't like about living in (area here)?

Do you feel like you have been accepted by (area here)?

- Could you describe some of the ways you have/haven't felt accepted?

How do you identify?

Do you think that there is a common identity among Latinx immigrants in the US?

- How about in (area here)?
- If yes, could you describe that common identity?

Do you think that there is a common identity among undocumented Latinx immigrants?

- Could you explain how this undocumented identity is the same or different from the broader Latinx identity you mentioned above?

How has being Latinx affected your experience in (area here)?

How has being undocumented affected your experience in (area here)?

What does it mean to you to be (pull from above)?

What does it mean to you to be undocumented?

How is your identity as (pull from above) the same or different than your identity as an undocumented immigrant?

Involvement/Political Participation -

How did you find about (specific organization here)?

How long have you been familiar with (specific organization here)?

Would you tell me some of the things you have done with (specific organization here)?

- Probe – ask for details about the specific services they have utilized and programs they have participated in with the organization.

You answered a question in email about some of the political activities. I wanted to give you a chance to expand on that question. How do you define political participation?

- Probe – would you describe some of the activities you think a politically active person would do?

Have you participated in any of the activities (insert advocacy group name here)? Could you tell me specifically what you did with (group name)?

- Do you consider yourself to be politically active?
- What are some of the things that you have done? (ask for specific activities)
- (If no) Can you tell me why you haven't participated in their activities? (probe for specific reasons?)
- (if no) What are some of the factors that have made it hard for you to be politically active?

DACA/Dreamer/Immigration debate

Now I'd like to spend a sometime talking about the public debate around immigration and immigration reform.

Are you familiar with the eligibility requirements for DACA?

- (if yes) could you explain DACA's eligibility requirements to me?

Are you eligible for DACA?

- (If yes) Have you applied for DACA?
    - (If yes) Could you tell me a little more about why you decided to apply for DACA?
    - (If no) Could you explain to me why you decided not to apply for DACA?
- (if no) can you explain how you felt when you found out that you were not eligible for DACA?

Do you think the eligibility requirements are fair?

- (if yes) What specifically do you think is fair about these requirements?
- (if no) What specifically do you think is unfair about the DACA requirement?

A lot of the current debate around immigration has centered on who should be allowed to stay in the United States. Could you explain what factors you think should be taken into consideration when deciding if someone should be allowed to stay or forced to leave the United States?

How would you describe someone you thought should be allowed to remain in the US?

How would you describe someone you thought should not be allowed to remain in the US?

When you hear about others talk about you deserves to remain in the US how does it make you feel?

If you hear someone speak negatively about undocumented Latinx people does it make you want to become more politically active or less politically active? Why?

- Can you give some examples of when you've heard someone speak negatively about undocumented groups? What did they say?
- Or – what have you heard people say when they argue that undocumented Latinx folks should be allowed to remain in the US?
    - What did you think about their argument?

If you hear someone speak positively about undocumented Latinx people does it make you want to become more politically active or less politically active? Why?

- Can you give some examples of when you've heard someone speak positively about undocumented groups? What did they say?
- Or – what have you heard people say when they argue that undocumented Latinx folks should be forced to leave the US?
    - What did you think about their argument?

2016 Election

- Have you been impacted by the 2016 Presidential campaign election? If so, how?
- We've seen an increase in negative rhetoric and more restrictive federal policy be implemented. How has influenced you?
    - How has it impacted your political participation?

Local Policy

I want to spend some time talking about policy now and how it impacts your participation.

- As we've seen a lot more negative rhetoric and restrictive policy from the federal level we've seen local communities to respond to these policies.
    - How do local policies play into your participation?

Motivation for Engagement

What are some other things that do/would motivate you to become politically active?

- Probe for specific examples

What are some other things that do/would discourage you from being politically active?

- Probe for specific examples

Is there anything else you'd like to share with me?

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