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The networked grassroots. How radicals outflanked reformists in the United States' immigrant rights movement

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ABSTRACT

This paper accounts for important shifts in the debate on immigration reform by considering the geographies of protest. Our findings point to the importance of urban hubs of activists and organisations that have worked with one another over extended periods of time. While these urban hubs constitute distinctive activist worlds, they have also connected to one another and coordinated nation-wide actions through a variety of networks (social media, interpersonal, and inter-organisational). Using interviews, network analysis, and data on funding, we show how this decentralised network evolved and eventually outflanked nationally centred and reformist advocacy organisations in recent anti-deportation campaigns.

KEYWORDS

Immigrant rights; social movements; grassroots; immigration reform

Introduction

In spring 2013, the United States Senate passed the 'Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act' (S. 744) with resounding bipartisan support. The bill would have provided half to two-thirds of the total undocumented population (circa 11 million people) with legal status and eventual citizenship. The bill also introduced many restrictions that made millions ineligible for legalisation. Ineligible and recently arrived immigrants would face a surge in restrictive measures as the bill included \$46.3 billion in additional funding for enforcement.¹ The legalisation of eligible immigrants would therefore depend on reinforcing the illegality of many others. The Senate bill was supported by the large national organisations advocating for immigrant rights including the National Council of La Raza, America's Voice, and Center for Community Change. They accepted the restrictions as an unfortunate compromise needed to win over Republican support. By contrast, many grassroots organisations and activists balked. These organisations worked closely with undocumented immigrants and had long struggled to resist the Obama administration's deportation policies. They believed that the Senate bill would institutionalise the divide between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' immigrants, and that those in the latter category would face intensified repression.

One of the organisations critical of the bill was Los Angeles-based National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON).² In addition to supporting day labour

organisations in localities across the country, it focused on fighting federal, state, and local enforcement measures that placed day workers at greatest risk of detention and deportation. By summer 2013, NDLOM escalated its efforts by reinforcing its fight against the federal government's principal deportation measure (Secure Communities), openly criticising the Senate bill, starting a national coalition to demand relief from deportation (the Not 1 More campaign), and branding Obama 'Deporter in Chief'. Early on in the campaign, NDLOM teamed up with undocumented youth activists ('DREAMers') who had pushed for the DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) act in the years before and would go on to play a major role in the Not 1 More campaign. As the Senate bill perished in the House of Representatives and the Obama administration continued its deportation policies, the tide of the national immigrant rights movement started to shift in favour of NDLOM and the DREAMers. After an intense campaign—that we will analyse in detail—Obama conceded. On 17 November 2014, the president enacted an executive order to provide administrative relief to an expected four to five million immigrants. The executive order also called for ending the government's key enforcement measure: Secure Communities. This was the broadest executive action on immigration ever to have been issued in the history of the United States.

How did radical grassroots organisations achieve these successes? This paper shows that grassroots organisations developed strong networks within cities and across the country, which eventually enabled them to outflank national advocacy organisations and assume a leading role in shaping immigration reform. We show how activist clusters worked together in a decentralised network. These local activist clusters consisted of activists and organisations that have worked with one another over extended periods of time. The thickness of localised activist ties has enabled them to collectivise resources and deploy them in a wide variety of struggles covering the gamut of immigration issues. While these local hubs have constituted distinctive activist worlds, they have also connected to one another and coordinated collective actions through a variety of networks (social media, interpersonal, and inter-organisational). This decentralised network stands in contrast to the centralised cluster of several large and resourceful national advocacy organisations (National Council of La Raza, America's Voice, and Center for Community Change). Whereas the centralised cluster became dominant in the late 2000s, the decentralised network has become ascendant since the early 2010s. The failure of the Senate bill and the enactment of the Obama administration's executive order signal the shifting balance of power in the immigrant rights movement.

The first section of the paper addresses the different theories that help explain for centralising and decentralising tendencies within the national social movement. The second section examines these tendencies from empirical data. The remaining section examines how NDLOM and its allies introduced a bottom-up strategy to pursue reforms.

Centralisation, decentralisation, and network brokering

Reflecting on the development of the immigrant rights movement, veteran activist Marisa Franco points out a tension:

I see these developments neither as creating diversity within the movement nor fracturing it. Social movements should be composed of an ecosystem of groups and political forces that

each play different roles. Tension is part of the growth of a social movement; so is a divergence of ideas.³ (*Dissent Magazine*, Spring 2015)

This research is an effort to theorise and analyse the sort of tension Franco suggests. In recent years there has been a growing literature on immigrant rights movements in Europe and the United States (Ireland 1994; Koopmans and Statham 1999; Koopmans et al. 2005; Voss and Bloemraad 2011; Nicholls 2013). The literature has revealed the discursive and political opportunities that channel mobilisations, the mobilising frames that permit activists to gain support among immigrants as well as the broader public, and the resources that permit mobilisations to grow and flourish. The mobilisations covered by this literature often unfold in particular localities yet there is little effort to analyse the conditions that make some cities (certainly not all) into important hubs in national-level struggles. This partially reflects the ‘methodological nationalism’ of the social sciences and the relative inattention to local and context-specific features in the immigration literature (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002; Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2009).

Local opportunity structures and networks

The field of immigration politics has substantially changed with the localisation of immigration enforcement over the past 15 years. This has contributed to making localities into important arenas of immigration debate and conflict. Aggrieved local actors prefer to target subnational levels of government with their claims because the costs of accessing and influencing federal-level decision-making bodies are prohibitively high for small organisations, while a lower threshold for participation exists in local governments. This has encouraged aggrieved local actors to transform the local arena into a major front in national immigration battles. Many of these conflicts remain local, often failing to produce much effect in public debate. However, some small struggles take root and grow into larger mobilisations with regional and national reach. We identify two important factors accounting for the capacities of local activists to develop and sustain their protests.

First, potential opportunities differ across localities. Historically progressive municipalities provide activists with a favourable context to gain public support and develop allies with important political elites (Walker and Leitner 2011; de Graauw, Gleeson, and Bloemraad 2013). Just as important, local politicians are oftentimes more concerned with maintaining public order in their jurisdictions than they are with the legal status of their residents. This can encourage some local politicians to take a pragmatic and more favourable stance on the activities of undocumented immigrants residing in their jurisdictions.

Second, certain contexts provide aggrieved actors with thicker and more diverse support networks (Gould 1995; Diani 2004; Nicholls 2008). When early struggles for immigrant rights emerge in these environments, campaign organisers can develop partnerships with other organisations possessing complementary resources (Nicholls 2008). Sustained collaborations over extended periods of time fortify interdependencies, with participating actors developing sophisticated and tacit knowledge of how best to pool their collective resources. As these relations mature and thicken over time, participants become adept in their abilities to tap locally situated resources (possessed by individual organisations), combine these resources in collective projects, and deploy them in a variety of increasingly risky campaigns.

Networking and scaling up: the strategic work of brokers

Cities possessing political opportunities and supportive local activist networks are in a stronger position to become a hub of urban activism and nurture small struggle into sustained mobilisations. Connecting urban hubs in a national network involves a process of scaling up (Miller 2001; Routledge 2003; Diani 2004; Tarrow and McAdam 2005). Scaling up depends on the availability of brokers who can connect activists to potential allies beyond their localities. For instance, some activists involved in localised struggles may be members of national organisations or have connections to people in distant places. Tarrow and McAdam (2005) argue that brokers do not simply introduce distant activists to one another. They help to align goals, repertoires, and political imaginaries. They connect local activists to previously unconnected outsiders by representing them in ways that resonate with the norms, values, and goals of outsiders. This makes it possible for activists to transcend localism and parochialism, align political projects, and coordinate with others across geographical, sectoral, and ideological differences. When robust activist hubs form in cities, brokers (like those in NDLO) can devise mechanisms and infrastructures to connect certain activist localities into a loosely integrated network. Within this broader configuration, the activist hubs function as relationally intensive drivers: they use locally constructed, strong-tie relations to capture resources, energy, and commitment from local activists and channel them into the broader political circuits of the movement.

Methodology

Our analysis is informed by a range of data sources collected over several years by the authors.

First, we draw on semi-structured interviews with activists, an analysis of *New York Times* articles on immigrant protests and immigration reform for the period 2000–2014; and a LexisNexis search on NDLO for the period 2013–2014.

Second, to assess the differential power of local organisations and national organisations based in Washington DC, we developed a funding database. The nonrandom sample consists of 49 immigrant advocacy organisations derived from three different sources (reputations, the *New York Times* database, the Foundation Center). Tax forms (IRS 990) provided information on the ‘grants and contributions’ received by the 49 organisations from the early 2000s to the early 2010s. The Foundation Center provided data on foundations that have made grants to immigrant advocacy organisations. Based on these data, we have been able to assess investments in the immigrant rights movement and the types of organisations that benefited most.

Third, we analyse the development of networks across localities by collecting online communication about the Not 1 More campaign between individuals (and organisations) on Twitter. The slogan ‘not 1 more deportation’ was first employed by DREAMers, NDLO, and their close allies, and subsequently adopted by a range of actors across the United States. We collected tweets containing the hashtag #not1more between 1 January 2013 and 1 September 2014. We assume a tie between individuals reciprocally mentioning each other. In addition, geographical and other user information was derived from accounts’ self-reported biographies. From this, a developing geographical

profile of the #not1more campaign is outlined. These data allow us to reconstruct how the campaign scaled between the local and national and to verify our expectation (based on theory as well as the qualitative analysis) of a decentralised network.

The mobilising context of Los Angeles: shifting opportunities

The downloading of law enforcement responsibilities to localities has spurred specific and localised conflicts across the national space. At the national level, the Secure Communities programme was preceded by the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), and was piloted in 2008 by the Bush administration and expanded in 2011 under the Obama administration. It has accelerated deportation rates from 30,039 immigrants per year in 1990 to 358,886 in 2008 and to 392,000 in 2011 (Johnson 2012; Lopez and Gonzalez-Barrera 2013). Simultaneously many localities developed their own independent policies to restrict irregular immigrants (Coleman 2007; Varsanyi 2008; Walker and Leitner 2011; Strunk and Leitner 2013; Steil and Vasi 2014). These local measures included restrictions on the solicitation of jobs by day labourers, penalties on employers for hiring undocumented, prohibitions on renting property to undocumented immigrants, the strict enforcement of housing codes, bans on street vending activities, mandates on the use of English for city business (Steil and Vasi 2014, 1110). California was one of the first movers in this restrictive direction. In 1994, 59% of state residents voted to support Proposition 187. The measure proposed severe cuts in assistance for undocumented immigrants in health care, public education, and other social services. Between 1989 and 2005, 60 local governments (municipalities and counties) in California enacted ordinances to restrict the solicitation of work by immigrant day labourers, with 26 of those located in the Los Angeles metropolitan region (Gonzalez 2007, 16).

The city of Los Angeles during this period provided a supportive context for early struggles against increasing restrictions. Progressive councilmembers like John Woo and Michael Hernandez had long reached out to immigrant organisations. Moreover, in 1996 Manuel Contreras—a representative of the most progressive and immigrant-friendly faction of organised labour—was elected to the presidency of the powerful Los Angeles County Federation of Labor (Milkman 2006). In assuming leadership, Contreras embraced the effort by several union locals to organise undocumented immigrant workers in the service industry. His team also worked to make his organisation into a political machine to elect labour and immigrant friendly politicians in Los Angeles and the state (Meyerson 2005). Next to favourable political opportunities, Los Angeles also had a comparatively strong activist network. The city possessed a fast developing social movement infrastructure consisting of militant immigrant rights organisations, innovative unions, and resource-rich university faculty and students (Milkman 2006, 2010; Nicholls 2008). Immigrant rights organisations that had focused on addressing the legal and material needs of refugees and asylum seekers in the 1980s were now turning their attention to the needs of the settled undocumented community (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001). Several organisations in particular⁴ mounted and participated in a series of long-term campaigns to enhance the rights of immigrant workers (Milkman 2010).

Favourable opportunities and strong activist network combined to facilitate a series of high-profile campaigns. One of the earliest and most prominent campaigns concerned the fight for day labourer rights in Southern California. As early as 1989, the Center for

Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA) advocated for the creation of day labour hiring sites ('workers centres') in the city of Los Angeles. The workers centres would provide a safe space for immigrants to sell labour, set a wage floor for competing workers, and provide legal protections against wage theft and exploitation (Patler 2010, 77). CHIRLA convinced the city of Los Angeles to address the growing issue of day labourers by financially sponsoring workers centres instead of banning day labour work, as surrounding municipalities and the county of Los Angeles had done. CHIRLA obtained a contract from the city to manage two workers centres in 1996, and it used this funding to hire a permanent organiser. When the city expanded the day labour programme, CHIRLA collaborated with other immigrant organisations to open and manage the new centres.

Day labour advocacy bound several Los Angeles-based organisations together (CHIRLA, IDEPSCA, CARECEN, El Rescate, and later NDLO). Day labourer advocacy was complex and involved various elements. For instance, creating a new workers centre required recruiting and politicising day labourers, creating support among key stakeholders in a locality (lawmakers, unions, churches, and so on), pushing back on adversaries, and lobbying politicians. Maintaining a healthy centre required a different set of skills and know-how. These included knowing how to negotiate with government officials, ensuring that day labourers comply with the rules and norms of the centre, providing sufficient jobs for workers, and creating a finely tuned administration. Lastly, litigating against day labour ordinances required legal knowledge and economic capital to mount costly lawsuits. Good working relations between organisations with different and complementary resources allowed day labour advocates to mount a successful day labour campaign that spanned the Los Angeles region. IDEPSCA, for example, was extremely skilled in recruiting and politicising immigrant workers through the application of 'population education'. Allied legal organisations like the Mexican American Legal and Educational Defense Fund (MALDEF) and Legal Aid played early and decisive roles in mounting legal defences of day labourers and fighting local anti-solicitation laws.

CHIRLA and IDEPSCA expanded their operations by creating the Day Labor Association of Los Angeles in 1997, which served as a model for a national coalition of organisations working on day labour issues: the NDLO. The director of CHIRLA's day labour programme (former president of IDEPSCA's Board of Directors) helped form NDLO, and it operated under CHIRLA's fiscal sponsorship until 2008. It was designed to serve as a national network between local immigrant organisations running day labour advocacy programmes (like those in Los Angeles). It was in effect an attempt to scale up the 'Los Angeles organizing model' (Milkman 2006) and diffuse the repertoires, strategies, resources, and knowledge developed in the city to organisations fighting similar battles in localities around the country (Dziembowska 2010).

Centralising and nationalising the movement for comprehensive immigration reform

A series of campaigns emerged from localities like Los Angeles, but the tendency in the immigrant rights movement during the late 2000s was national centralisation. Developments in 2006 and 2007 presented new challenges and openings that accelerated efforts by large advocacy organisations to centralise and nationalise the dispersed efforts. The House of Representatives passed the Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal

Immigration Control Act of 2005 (the so-called Sensenbrenner Bill), which aimed to criminalise undocumented migration status (Chavez 2008; Voss and Bloemraad 2011). The Senate by contrast passed the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006. The Senate bill introduced a guest workers programme, a path to legalise millions of undocumented immigrants, and new resources to enhance border enforcement.

Both the House and Senate bills failed to become law, but they encouraged national organisations (Center for Community Change, America's Voice, National Council of La Raza, National Immigration Forum, among others) and their principal funders (Ford Foundation, Open Society, Carnegie Corporation, MacArthur Foundation, Atlantic Philanthropies, NEO Philanthropy, among others) to create a more unified front in the fight for immigration reform. Many believed that the political power of the emerging immigrant rights movement was hampered by its heterogeneity and localism. This limited its abilities to pool resources, focus on a common target, and communicate with a common voice. The leading organisations and funders believed that the immigrant rights movement should centralise and unify the different components of the national movement under a common umbrella, and that this unified movement should focus exclusively on winning the 279 Congressional votes needed to pass the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act.

National foundations played a pivotal role in enabling this strategic effort to nationalise and centralise the movement. Following the failure of comprehensive reform in 2006 and 2007, the largest foundations increased their funding by substantial sums (*New York Times*, November 14, 2014). According to data from the Foundation Center, the largest 20 foundations increased their grants to the 49 immigration rights organisations in our survey from \$30.8 million in 2003 to \$64.5 million in 2012 (see Figure 1). The 2006–2009 period marks the largest increase in funding, growing by a spectacular \$25 million per year. The Great Recession tempered the growth rates in 2010 but they resumed in succeeding years.

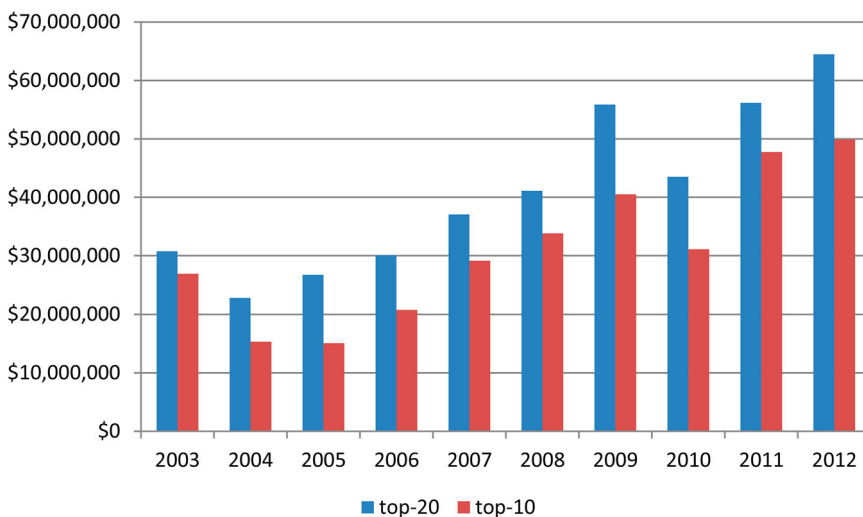


Figure 1. Total amount of grants by top-20 and top-10 of foundations.

While there has been a substantial increase in investments from these and other foundations, Washington DC-based national organisations have benefited the most. Based on a survey of IRS tax filings ('grants and contributions'⁵) of 49 immigrant rights organisations (national organisations in DC [13], national organisations outside DC [8], and local-regional organisations [28]), we found important inequalities in the distribution of grants and contributions. All immigrant advocacy organisations benefited from the increased flow of money over the course of the 2000s but organisations located in Washington DC benefited more than others. They started the decade with a substantial advantage over the other organisations in our survey, but the gap widened after 2006. 'Grants and contributions' grew by 11.6% and 12.2% from 2006–2007 and 2007–2008 for national organisations in Washington DC but declined by –6.23% and –28.48% for national organisations located outside Washington DC. Organisations based in Washington DC retained financial dominance in subsequent years. Drawing on the IRS data set for the 1999–2012 period, National Council of La Raza, Center for American Progress, and Center for Community Change dominate, respectively amassing \$365 million, \$270 million, and \$180 million in 'grants and contributions' during the 13-year period (Figure 2).

The advantages of national, Washington DC-based organisations were not accidental. Leading foundations believed that these organisations and their coalitions were important for pushing immigration reform forward. Following the failure to push for Comprehensive Immigration Reform in 2006 and 2007, grant makers believed that these organisations needed to assume a leading role in a more consolidated, integrated, and centralised movement. A leading strategist for the Atlantic Foundation remarked that,

After that setback, Atlantic provided funds for the key advocacy groups we support—including the Center for Community Change, National Council of La Raza, National Immigration Forum and Asian American Justice Center—to regroup and come back with a proposal for strengthening their efforts next time. The result was Reform Immigration for America

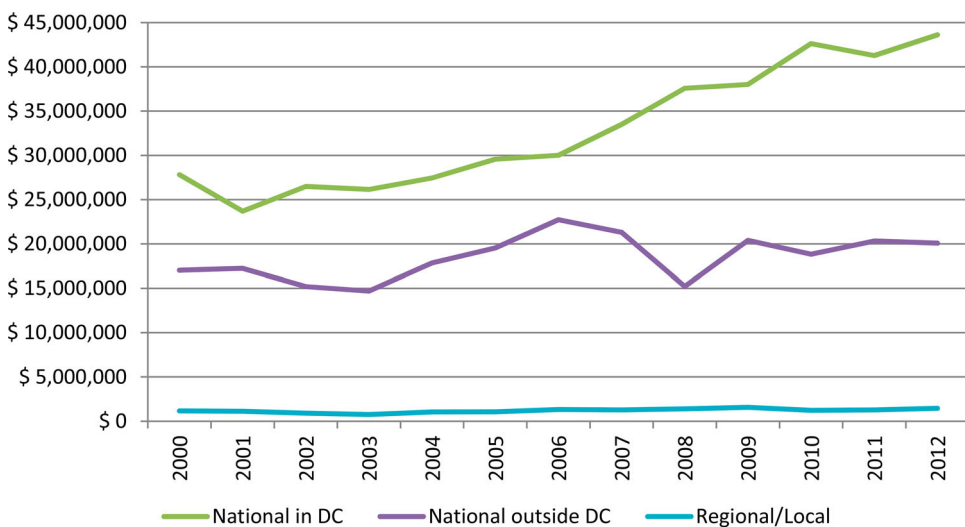


Figure 2. Grant-contribution by geographical attributes.

(RIFA), a strong coalition with resources provided by Atlantic ... and other funders that have enabled the movement to field an unprecedented campaign. (LaMarche 2010)

The foundations provided more resources to Washington DC-based organisations while inducing them to form a national immigrant rights coalition and assume leadership of it. Atlantic alone invested \$69 million in national organisations addressing immigration issues (*New York Times*, November 14, 2014). According to the Atlantic Philanthropy's database, no substantial funds were made available to smaller, local, and membership-based organisations that made up the bulk of the immigrant rights movement.⁶ The Atlantic also financed several retreats among leading organisations to create a strategic plan for the national movement. The plan consisted of four pillars including a method to better connect national leadership to local organisations, voter turnout, 'policy research to underpin their pro-immigrant message', and an effort to bolster the communications and messaging infrastructure of the movement (*New York Times*, November 14, 2014). The self-appointed leadership of the immigrant rights movement was therefore made up of national advocacy organisations (mostly located in Washington DC) and funded by wealthy foundations. Through the sponsorship of these foundations, the leadership created an organisational and communication infrastructure to exert control over the disparate organisations and actors constituting the *national* immigrant rights movement.

The election of Barack Obama to the White House and large Democratic majorities in both chambers of Congress presented the leading organisations a unique opportunity in 2008. Many of the leaders believed that maintaining a unified front in the face of this unique opportunity would help ensure the passage of Comprehensive Immigration Reform. The White House and Congressional Democrats however prioritised economic stimulus, financial regulations, and health-care reform over immigration during the first two years after the election. Democratic leaders suggested that 2010 would be the year for immigration reform. To pressure the White House and Congress to pass immigration reform, the Atlantic-sponsored coalition Reform Immigration for America (RIFA) mounted a large demonstration in Washington DC in March 2010. The organisers demanded that immigration reform should be the first issue on the administration's agenda after the passage of the Affordable Care Act. A representative from the Center for American Progress commented that,

We are trying to send a strong message that when health care is past us, this is the issue that needs to be up at bat. We've been in the bullpen for a long time, and now we want to show the strength of the team and the power of the issue. (Angela Kelley, Center for American Progress, *New York Times*, March 20, 2010)

RIFA and their partners invested millions of dollars and mobilised more than 100,000 people to the March 2010 demonstration. This enormous effort resulted in tepid commitments by the White House and national politicians. The actual demonstration was overshadowed in the news cycle by the passage of the Affordable Care Act, and moderate Republicans expressed scepticism about passing immigration reform during the year. 'If the health care bill goes through this weekend, that will, in my view, pretty much kill any chance of immigration reform passing the Senate this year' (Senator Lindsey Graham, *New York Times*, March 20, 2010). The White House displayed limited interest in pushing immigration reform before a hotly contested mid-term election. To make

matters worse, the Obama administration continued to assert its commitment to mass deportation programmes like Secure Communities.

In spite of these unsatisfying results, the leadership and funders tried to reframe victory by stressing that the demonstration had resulted in greater White House access. A representative from the Atlantic Philanthropies suggested that a one-hour meeting between President Obama and national organisations justified the massive investments. ‘The value of this investment was starkly demonstrated last week when President Obama ... met at the White House for an hour and fifteen minutes with campaign advocates, including seven of RIFA’s steering committee members’ (LaMarche 2010). The multimillion-dollar campaign won access to the White House, but it appears that access benefited the power and positioning of the leadership while producing few if any policy wins. We used the White House visitor records⁷ to assess access to the Obama administration (2009–2014) by the 49 organisations in our ‘grants and contributions’ survey.⁸ We found that these organisations had a combined 745 visits to the White House. Just as important, visits increased over the course of the presidency, from 42 in 2009 to 126, 121, 116, 169, and 171 in subsequent years. Indeed, the RIFA mobilisation coincided with increased access but access (like grants) was not evenly distributed across the organisations in our survey. National organisations headquartered in Washington DC had the most White House visits (525), followed by national organisations outside Washington DC (130), and local-regional organisations (90). Organisations like National Council of La Raza and Center for American Progress had 115 and 81 visits, respectively. Most local-regional organisations had very limited or no White House access. However, larger local organisations in cities like Los Angeles, Chicago, and Boston enjoyed greater access as they became more active in DC-dominated coalitions (RIFA and its later emanations) (e.g. CHIRLA had 13 visits). By contrast, organisations that remained steadfast critics of the Obama administration had very limited access. NDLO, for example, had four White House visits with relatively low-level officials. Figure 3 shows that while Washington DC-based national organisations have dominated White House

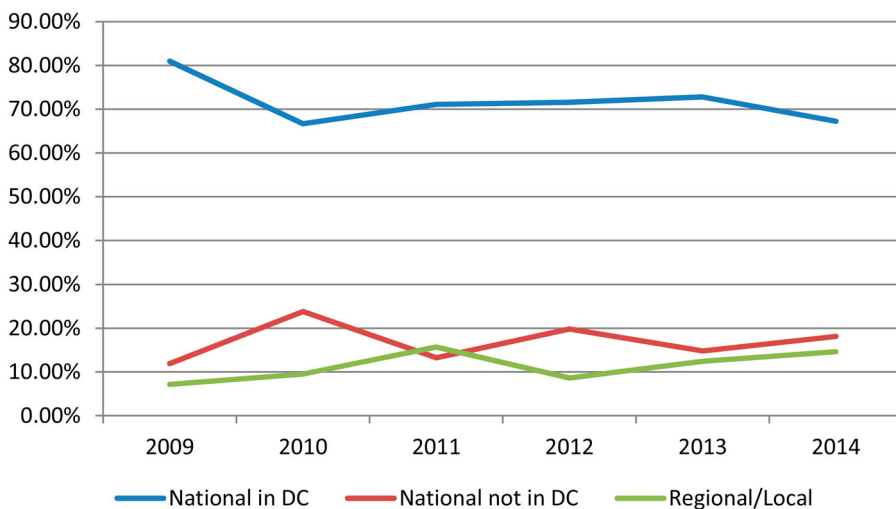


Figure 3. Location and White House visits (percentages).

access, dominance decreased from 81% of all White House visits in 2009 to 67% in 2014. More access was granted in later years to organisations that played cooperative roles with the Obama administration to push for White House-supported immigration reform.

According to one informant who requested anonymity, access has become a marker of status and a means to maximise power within the movement. Access to the White House provides a handful of organisations a monopoly over the distribution of high-value government information. By exercising this monopoly, organisations across the network become dependent on the leadership for scarce information needed to map out political opportunities and devise mobilisation strategies. Just as important, increased access is used by advocacy organisations as a measure of success and legitimacy vis-à-vis large foundations, which in turn can improve funding chances. White House access may not lead to greater influence over the design and passage of immigration policy but it does yield shorter term benefits like increased power, status, and economic capital of dominant organisations. This however comes at the cost of reinforcing oligarchic tendencies in the movement and magnifying conflicts along centre-periphery.

Fighting deportation and enforcement measures through local, grassroots struggles

Building up local strongholds

The two developments we outlined so far—burgeoning local campaigns and failed attempts to achieve immigration reform through centralisation—created the preconditions for a bottom-up revolt in the immigrant rights movement. Many grassroots organisations went along with RIFA's strategy early on but massive investments and insignificant outcomes led many to question the strategy's efficacy. This challenged the legitimacy of the national leadership and its strategy of national centralisation. A former organiser of United We Dream (an undocumented youth organisation) put it the following way, 'These community organizations struggle mightily. They are understaffed and overworked. Here the big national organizations are spending tons of money for this march that doesn't even make the news. That was the beginning of the end for RIFA' (Former organiser, United We Dream, personal interview).

Strategic differences between central and peripheral organisations came into sharp relief in response to Arizona's anti-immigration law S.B. 1070 in 2010. NDLO and MALDEF, in cooperation with local allied organisations, had been organising in Arizona since the mid-2000s. They formed a local coalition to protest the Maricopa County Sheriff Department's belligerent role in 287[g] and Secure Communities programmes. They redoubled efforts in response to the passage of S.B. 1070, but their efforts were rebuffed by RIFA. RIFA insisted that NDLO and its local allies should focus energies on the national effort to pass the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act. Recounting his interactions with the RIFA leadership during the Arizona campaign, the executive director of NDLO noted:

The director of Center for Community Change [leading RIFA organization] says that the enforcement messaging is essentially taking away from their messaging, that it's not the messaging that we need to communicate to America, that it's going to hurt us in the long-term. So, obviously, we said, 'We're very sorry for that, but the thing is we're not going to use the

fight in Arizona and the suffering of people to help this [comprehensive reform] failed effort ... S.B. 1070 is wrong on its own merits.' ... We couldn't come to terms with them. (Director, NDLON, personal interview)

NDLON's longer term aim in Arizona was to build a local activist infrastructure in Arizona. NDLON had already developed good relations with local day labour activists in the area and worked with them to create Puente in 2007. It provided services like English as a Second Language courses and legal aid workshops. Puente also offered community defence courses that aimed to provide immigrant communities with methods to exercise their rights when confronted by local police. After the passage of S.B. 1070 in 2010, NDLON worked with Puente to create a new organisation: Alto Arizona. Alto Arizona functioned as the principal coordinating organisation of the Arizona campaign. It also worked with Puente and their local allies to create 'Barrio Defense Committees' (BDC). The BDCs combined the self-defence tactics of the Black Panther Party with the 'base community' model of the Latin American left.

In addition to building up a local social movement infrastructure, the Arizona campaign employed boycotts in a way that helped extend the issue beyond the traditional immigrant rights community. National and local politicians, businesses, entertainers, academics, and many others became involved in the Arizona campaign through their participation in the boycott. The boycott impacted Arizona's economy and reputation, negatively affecting the state's powerful tourist industry and drawing it directly into the campaign against S.B. 1070. In a letter to the state legislature in March 2011, 60 business leaders demanded that the state stop enacting repressive immigration measures. The letter 'blamed last year's bill [S.B. 1070] for boycotts, canceled contracts, declining sales and other economic setbacks' (*New York Times*, March 18, 2011). While the campaign did not convince the Arizona legislature and governor to repeal S.B. 1070, the United States Supreme Court eventually struck down three out of four provisions. The Justice Department went on to indict the Sheriff of Maricopa County for civil rights violations. The campaign also contributed to ousting state Senate Majority Leader Russell Pearce (the principal sponsor of S.B. 1070) in a special runoff election. The campaign produced what one prominent Republican state senator called 'immigration fatigue' (John McComish, *New York Times*, March 18, 2011). This was precisely one of the central goals of the campaign: to raise the costs of restrictive measures as a way to dissuade other states from copying them. Tom Saenz, the director of MALDEF, framed the Supreme Court victory in these terms: '[T]he decision sends a strong warning to any states or localities that have enacted or that may be considering enacting their own immigration regulation schemes.'⁹

Through the Arizona campaign, NDLON and its allies began to develop an alternative strategy to national centralisation by creating locally grounded coalitions to fight against local *and* national enforcement measures. Between 2010 and 2014 NDLON went on to consolidate this territorial strategy. The strategy aimed to build local mobilisation capacities, and use wins in localities as leverage in broader political and policy battles.

First, building territorial strongholds required building up organisational capacity and strong levels of cooperation in friendly and unfriendly territories. NDLON worked with local allies in Arizona to harness local mobilisation capacities in pitched battles with local and state government officials. The work of building local capacity in unfriendly states continued through NDLON's work in Georgia and Louisiana during the course

of the decade. After the Arizona fight in 2011, NDLO initiated another campaign in Los Angeles against Secure Communities. It sought to pressure local and state officials to opt out of the programme. NDLO and undocumented immigrant youths (DREAMers) developed a strong network of elite allies in the Los Angeles area including the powerful County Federation of Labor, Los Angeles's Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, the city council, and influential members of the state Assembly and Senate. It also drew support from the many different local organisations. This coalition served as the base for a state-wide campaign in 2012 to push for the California Transparency and Responsibility Using State Tools (TRUST) act. This state law restricted California's participation in the Secure Communities programme. The state would only honour Immigration and Customs Enforcement requests to hold undocumented immigrants for those people suspected of committing certain felony crimes. The broad coalition succeeded in pushing Governor Jerry Brown to sign the TRUST Act into law on 5 October 2013. Along with the California Dream Act and a driver license bill for undocumented immigrants (passed in 2011 and 2013, respectively), the TRUST act contributed to making California into a sanctuary for undocumented immigrants.

Second, local struggles have been used in broader political fights. Arizona was selected as a strategic battleground because NDLO and its allies wanted to protect immigrants in the state but also because it was a strategic place to call broad attention to national and local enforcement measures. By calling attention to these matters, NDLO and its allies were able to exert pressure on the Justice Department to file suit against the Arizona law and file charges against the Sheriff of Maricopa County for civil rights violations. Just as important, battles in Arizona were used to warn other states and localities not to pursue similar measures if they wanted to avoid costly fights. Wins in local arenas could under the right conditions produce leverage in the broader fight against enforcement and deportation measures in other government arenas. Arizona and California were, in other words, pressure points within the broader immigration system: focused campaigns in these places could be used to extract wins and changes across the whole system. An NDLO ally remarks that,

There's a sense that we're not going to get anything [from Congress] ... And because nothing is happening in Congress, a lot of the fights are going to be at the state level. We continue to push Obama to stop deportations ... and suspend the Secure Communities. *But our leverage is increased when we get states to push the Feds.* Now, some people don't agree with this strategy ... and say, 'No, you've got to focus only on the Feds and Congress in particular.' (Director, CARECEN, personal interview)

The relative lack of political opportunities in Congress encouraged activists to pursue a strategy to exert maximum pressure in strategic geographical sites (pressure points), with wins in these sites used to increase leverage in other parts of the system.

Networking the grassroots

While territory was an important part of the strategy, NDLO and its allies connected the grassroots through loosely networked national campaigns. The Not 1 More campaign, launched in early 2013, was the most important vehicle for doing this. While the national organisations embraced a 2013 Senate comprehensive immigration reform

bill and sought to pressure House Republicans to pass it (largely reflecting the Obama administration's own wishes), NDLO and its allies criticised Democrats for making too many concessions to 'xenophobes', denounced the Obama administration's record on deportations, and called for the Obama administration to use its executive authority to extend deportation relief to all undocumented immigrants (i.e. *not one more deportation*).

NDLO stressed that Obama's deportation policies would negatively affect his legacy ('Deporter in Chief') if he failed to enact an executive order to stop deportations. The director of NDLO remarked that,

He is after all the 'Deporter in Chief'. But things don't have to stall. By leading the immigration reform debate through actions [an executive order] and not just words, the President can break the impasse and focus Congress's attention on getting something done this year. (Pablo Alvarado, *International Business Times News*, August 9, 2013)

The Not 1 More campaign employed a new and more decentralised strategy to scale out from its territorial strongholds. No formal affiliation has been required to become a member of the network, and organisations have often connected through Twitter and Facebook. Approximately six people—from NDLO and its strategic allies¹⁰—served on the steering committee. A paid NDLO organiser served as director of the network. The steering committee was charged with developing protest actions and creating mobilising frames. These were transmitted to affiliates across the country. The leaders of the campaign did not direct the political acts and language of their distant allies. Instead, they worked with one another on different kinds of actions (press conferences, hunger strikes, civil disobediences, etc.), developed messaging and mobilisation frames, and diffused information about actions to members across the country. The loose nature of the campaign led some NDLO leaders to call it an 'open source' campaign.

Based on our analysis of Twitter activities, the campaign grew steadily from January 2013 until 16,113 unique accounts had used the hashtag #not1more by September 2014. During the first month of the campaign people become involved from the territorial strongholds of the decentralised network (Figure 4). Initially, tweets about the issue and reports from local direct actions are tied to the #not1more campaign from these geographical clusters.

Six months into the campaign these local urban clusters were further consolidated: Los Angeles (14.5% of unique active accounts), New York City (13.8%), DC (11.4%), and Chicago (11.3%).

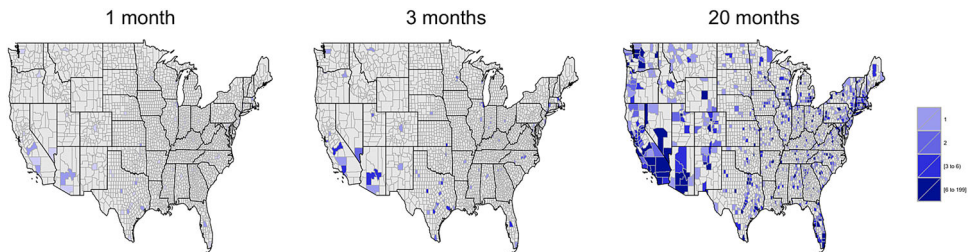


Figure 4. Number of active accounts by county after 1, 3, and 20 months, between 1 January 2013 and 1 September 2014.

Following these urban hubs, secondary regional hubs also appear in southern Florida, eastern Texas, and northern California. After 20 months, the pre-existing activist hubs remained the backbone of the campaign while people from across the nation became involved in the campaign and part of the decentralised network of immigration struggles. Activists from across the country adopted the 'Not 1 More' frame and have blocked buses carrying deportees, engaged in hunger strikes, and disrupted politicians' speeches to call attention to their cause. These were typically local events but their adoption of 'Not 1 More' placed local activism within a broader campaign. While most of the clusters in this network showed a strong geographic orientation, the decentralised campaign also increasingly shows brokering between a variety of sectors. Clusters with a shared organisational orientation (most notably DREAMers, as well as Asian Pacific American organisations, unions and faith-based organisations) have roots in different geographical locations. Members of such organisations shared information across locations, contributing to the rising prominence of the Not 1 More campaign across the country.

The development of this campaign network thus helps to understand how the decentralised strategy became increasingly influential. The common application of the Not 1 More slogan imposes a high degree of strategic unity in a movement made up of many different parts and a weak command and control infrastructure. National advocacy organisations initially dismissed the Not 1 More campaign as an unhelpful distraction because it drew the focus away from the strategy of pressuring House Republicans to pass a comprehensive reform bill. However, the increasing visibility and intensity of the campaign among immigrant activists and the declining probability of comprehensive reform prompted the national organisations to pivot and extend support to the campaign. Congressman Luis Gutiérrez commented on this shift in an interview with *Politico* magazine in February 2014,

It's becoming something that you can't control. People have tried to control it. This administration has put inordinate pressure on people not to criticize the president on his immigration policy ... *But in this low-grade civil war over immigration messaging, those who want the president to act [enact an executive order] increasingly own the narrative.* (Luis Gutiérrez, *Politico*, February 20, 2014, emphasis added)

The slogan 'Deporter in Chief' is an illustrative example of such a narrative that rose to national prominence, having been adopted from its origins in the periphery of the network. The slogan first appeared in August 2011, but was largely ignored until DREAM activists employed the term in a banner drop on 29 May 2013 in Chicago. Starting with initial reports of local activists about the action on Twitter, the slogan attracted attention across the #not1more network that was already in place, facilitating the cognitive work of brokering this slogan to others across geographic and sectoral boundaries. This led to replication of the banner drop in other places like Oakland, California and Homestead, Florida. It was also followed by the adoption of the slogan in other types of local direct actions such as in marches in Los Angeles. Subsequently the slogan 'Deporter in Chief' garnered widespread attention when in March 2014 the executive director of National Council of La Raza, Janet Murguía, used the slogan to denounce the President Obama's deportation policies. She went on to note that his policies were leaving 'a wake of devastation for families across America' (Janet Murguía, *New York Times*, March 13, 2014).

As noted in the previous section, National Council of La Raza was the penultimate status quo organisation in the immigrant rights movement, having had the strongest ties to the Obama administration and greatest access to economic resources. Murguía's direct and critical stance marked a seismic shift. Other national organisations followed suit and began to sharpen criticism of the administration's deportation policies. The executive director of the Center for Community Change, a leading Washington DC-based organisation, asserted that,

We assumed that a Democratic president who wanted to move immigration reform would not pursue a strategy of deporting the people who he was intent on legalizing. That was a totally wrong assumption. And there is a lot of anger about that (Deepak Bhargava, *New York Times*, March 13, 2014)

Other national organisations pressed the administration to change its enforcement and deportation policies. On 4 April 2014 the President of the AFL-CIO, Richard Trumka, backed NDLO's Not 1 More campaign in a formal press release.¹¹ The executive director of America's Voice, Frank Sharry, went on to directly replicate NDLO's message that Obama's legacy depended on enacting administrative relief, 'Does he really want to go down as the "deporter in chief," and the only thing that happened during his second term was beefed-up enforcement and deportations? He's the president. He's got to take action' (*New York Times*, November 14, 2014).

An initially radical phrase like 'Deporter in chief' travelled through activist networks from the periphery to the centre. While the phrase was initially pushed by activists engaged in disruptive direct actions, over time more institutionalised actors in Washington DC also began to refer to Obama as the 'Deporter in chief'. The momentum created by NDLO's Not 1 More campaign ultimately pressured the Obama administration to pass an executive order on 17 November 2014. The executive order would have extended relief to an estimated four to five million undocumented immigrants and repeal the administration's vaunted Secure Communities programme. While these measures are currently stalled in the courts, many in the immigrant rights community understand that this was a significant win and a major vindication of the bottom up, networked strategy.

Conclusion

How did radical grassroots organisations manage to outflank resourceful NGOs and achieve major changes in government policies? To answer this question, we have mapped the evolving networks of NDLO, its allies, and its rivals. We have shown how NDLO's radical discourse was initially confined to the periphery of the social movement space but gained support as a local activist cluster consolidated. Los Angeles provided opportunities for a cluster of burgeoning day labour activists to organise in the 1990s and early 2000s. They worked with local partners to develop new ways to pool their resources in the struggle to expand the rights of immigrant workers. During the course of this struggle, they developed a strategic repertoire that produced a string of local victories. Their successes allowed these Los Angeles activists to build a decentralised network of local organisations working on similar issues (NDLO). The decentralised network configuration enabled Los Angeles-based activists to connect to other

organisations in localities outside Los Angeles. When shifting scale to a national campaign, NDLO and its allies were able to activate these networks in a campaign to exert pressure on the Obama administration.

NDLO's strategy was premised on the idea that immigration enforcement depends on many different institutional points rather than a single locus of power (Congress). They unleashed many campaigns to exercise pressure on these strategic points in order to produce tremors across the whole system. While NDLO and its allies kept an eye on Congress, they also targeted towns, counties, states, the Department of Homeland Security, and the president. By supporting and sponsoring battles in these multiple terrains, they have aimed to undermine the legal, institutional, and ideological foundations of the government's deportation policies. The strategic and geographic characteristics of the movement have become more complex than before, but the movement has by no means become chaotic. Most advocates of this strategy have embraced a common vision that rests on building bases of *territorial* power and *networking* urban activist clusters to pressure state and national officials.

Notes

1. <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/special-reports/guide-s744-understanding-2013-senate-immigration-bill>.
2. In an article on the immigrant rights movement, *Politico* reported that, 'The group most vocal in its demands that Obama act on deportations is the National Day Laborer Organizing Network' (*Politico*, February 20, 2014).
3. <http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/the-outside-inside-game>.
4. Center for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA), Central American Resource Center (CARECEN), El Rescate, Korean Workers Association (KIWA), Southern California Institute of Popular Education (IDEPSCA), among others.
5. IRS filings for 'grants and contributions' exceed the sum reported by the Foundation Center because it covers more grant sources and accounts for non-foundation support ('contributions').
6. <http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/search/grants>.
7. <https://open.whitehouse.gov/dataset/White-House-Visitor-Records-Requests/p86s-yhb#column-menu>.
8. We only included meetings that were 'immigration specific'. We did this by including representatives who specifically dealt with immigration issues for big organisations (e.g. Angela Kelley for Center for American Progress), meetings with representatives from immigrant advocacy organisations, or meetings held with Obama administration officials who explicitly work on immigration issues (e.g. Cecilia Muñoz).
9. www.maldef.org/news/releases/supreme_court_dec_azcase/.
10. NDLO, United We Dream, Interfaith Community Organization (PICO), Presente.org.
11. <http://www.notonemoredeportation.com/2014/04/04/afl-cio-president-trumka-applauds-not1more-campaign/>.

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