

Community Leaders but not Political Candidates:
Paradoxes of Belonging, Power Relations and
Alternatives to Formal Politics in a Majority-Minority California County

By

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Abstract

This study investigates why there is little official Hispanic political representation in Colusa County, when the majority of the population is Hispanic. The research focuses on the lack of Hispanic candidates as a primary explanatory factor and poses the following question: Why are more traditionally qualified Hispanics not running for political office in Colusa County? Relying on interviews with 18 Hispanic leaders in the county, the study disentangles the structural and individual explanations that shed light on this research question. The findings show how perceptions of power, belonging, status and identity shape Hispanic leaders' perspectives of the local political system and ultimately limit their political ambition.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The motivation for this study is to better understand why there is little official Hispanic¹ political representation in Colusa County, when the majority of the population is Hispanic. The research focuses on the lack of Hispanic candidates as a primary explanatory factor and poses the following question: Why are more traditionally qualified Hispanics not running for political office in Colusa County? Within this overarching research question, the study addresses how perceptions of power, belonging, and identity affect Hispanics' political candidacy choices.

The modern American democracy depends primarily on elected officials who are voted into political office to represent the interests of their constituents (Mayhew, 1974). Yet, if the elected officials do not reflect the majority of the constituency, then their policies, political decisions, and practices could be out of sync with the people they presume to govern. Indeed, there is the expectation that politicians “speak as the constituents would” instead of merely “speaking for” them (Young, 2000: 127). If elected officials do not understand, empathize or even recognize the interests of the majority of the constituents, then how are they to adequately “speak as” those they purport to represent?

The political representation dilemma is the main focus of this study. In Colusa County, Hispanics comprise 55 percent of the total population (up from 52 percent in 2000) but have no representation in the two city councils or among the five county

¹ The pan-ethnic term “Hispanic” is used to refer to individuals who are from or have ancestry from Spanish-speaking countries in Mexico, Central America, or South America. “Hispanic” is used in lieu of Latino because the interviewees in this study most often used “Hispanic” when referring to co-ethnics in the community. Nevertheless, Mexican was also substantially used and reflects the large percentage of immigration specifically from Mexico. Similarly, the author recognizes that there are potentially homogenizing and essentializing problems inherent in using the a pan-ethnic term such as Hispanic (Anzaldúa, 1987; Oboler, 1995).

supervisors (US Census, 2010). In fact, there are only two Hispanic elected officials in the entire county: one on a local school board and the other on the county's school board.

The initial assumption may be that there are not enough Hispanic registered voters to support and elect co-ethnic candidates into office. Indeed, only 31 percent of registered voters in Colusa County are Hispanic. Yet, the election results do not fully explain the lack of representation: over one-third of all the Hispanic candidates who ran in the last 14 years were elected to office. Despite the successes of Hispanic candidates, only 12 Hispanic residents have actually been on the ballot during that time period. Therefore, the issue does not appear to be only about being able to win an election. Rather, it appears that the main reason is not having enough Hispanic candidates run for office. The absence of more Hispanic candidates willing to throw their hats into the political race is a significant barrier to gaining more Hispanic political representation in the county. If there are no Hispanic candidates on the ballot, how can the voters elect them?

Before continuing with the research question, it is necessary to answer the question of why co-ethnic political representation is important. Moreover, what do Hispanic elected officials offer their co-ethnic constituents that others might not?

DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION

Organized settings where community members are able to share their policy or planning perspectives exist—such as *charettes* for city planning or town hall meetings for local, state, and even national policy deliberations—but the majority of policymaking in the United States is conducted by elected officials themselves, with or without the involvement of residents (Verba et al., 1995). It is important that the representatives who

are elected to public office reflect the community members they serve. With that in mind, *descriptive representation*, defined as political representation by representatives of the same social, racial, and/or ethnic group as a particular constituency, has been shown to provide both substantive benefits (e.g., favorable policy outcomes or allocation of funds) and symbolic benefits (e.g., comfort with approaching co-ethnic representative or increased political participation by co-ethnic constituents) for minority constituents (Pitkin, 1967; Canon, 1999). Descriptive representation is characterized by the shared ascriptive (i.e., inherited or involuntary) traits of the representative and a particular constituency, but it is the shared experiences of discrimination, disadvantage, and cultural similarity between the polity and the policy maker that result in decision makers that better represent a disadvantaged group's interests (Mansbridge, 1999).

Regarding substantive benefits, political scientists have found that Hispanic representatives are more likely to vote in favor of policies of particular importance to Hispanic constituents (Kerr and Miller, 1997), and other minority representatives (e.g., black politicians) have been found to promote positive policy outcomes for minority constituents such as government financial resources being directed to disadvantaged schools or neighborhoods (Ueda, 2006). Additionally, there is support for descriptive representation being an important component for advancing women's interests as men have been found to be less likely to champion issues of particular importance for women (Mansbridge, 2009; Swers 1998).

Along symbolic lines, descriptive representation has been shown to foster a sense of inclusion within the public arena for Hispanic residents, which has been linked to encouraging increased civic and political engagement (Pantoja and Segura, 2003). In the

same vein, Tate (2001) analyzed a statistically representative sample of black voters throughout the United States and discovered that satisfaction for congressional representatives was higher for black voters whose representative was also black.

In summary, descriptive representation has been shown to offer more constituent satisfaction, increase political engagement, and support social or minority group's economic and social values. Descriptive representation does not guarantee these benefits, but empirical research affords enough evidence to consider it at least one avenue for gaining equitable representation of Hispanics in political decision making.²

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study captures how political power within a community does not necessarily parallel the shift in the demographics of the population. A preliminary problem with making this transition in Colusa County is the lack of political ambition among many of the Hispanic community leaders who are in the most favorable positions to run for office. Underlying the lack of political ambition, there is an enduring political and economic structure within the county that perpetuates the image of political power in Colusa County, which in turn shapes and often minimizes how potential Hispanic candidates interpret their own role within the political system.

Gramsci's theory of hegemony coupled with Foucault's governmentality serve as a framework to understand how the perception of power in Colusa County informs and restrains the formal political ambition of the Hispanic leaders in this study. Both theories offer guidance in understanding the limitations the interviewees place on themselves as a

² The author recognizes that the interests of individuals within the Hispanic community are diverse.

result, at least in part, on the subordinate or tangential role they seem themselves playing in the county's economic and political hierarchy. This formation of power is constructed in the mind based on their lived experiences, and it then manifests itself in the Hispanic leaders' political choices. The theories described below provide a lens to gain a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between the perception and exertion of political power in Colusa County, and the incorporation, acceptance, and/or resistance to those power structures.

Electoral politics does not exist in a vacuum; it is contextual and influenced by the multiple modes of power that exist in a particular electoral district, and, more broadly, at the state, national, and global level. Thus, in order to examine the dialectical nature of Hispanics' political choices, it is necessary to examine where power resides and how power is exerted and maintained within a specific geographical and economic context. The primary concern is to highlight how the epistemological construction of power—rather than simply the ontological existence of material power structures—constrains the political motivations and ambitions of marginalized community members. This section describes Gramsci's theory of hegemony; connects Gramsci's theory to and distinguishes it from classical Marxism and Foucault's governmentality, and discusses the power dynamics of farm laborers and farm owners.

Gramsci wrote of the power exerted on the subordinate group from both the State and the ruling elites. In Gramsci's philosophy, the State's power and control is obtained by coercion or "direct domination" that is exercised by a disciplinary, even physical, force shrouded under the guise of the State's legal authority (Gramsci, 2008:12). The power wielded by the ruling class, which he calls 'hegemony,' is secured through consent

(rather than coercion) from the subordinate group. The distinction between the two types of power is important: the State exerts power through direct dominance (coercion), while the elite class uses a more subtle form of power (hegemony) that is acquiesced willing from the subordinate group (consent). The latter form of power, hegemony, is the principle concern of this thesis.

Instead of the exertion of direct control, hegemony is a form of power that is wielded through conscious or subconscious submission of the subordinate group to the dominant group, and it is rooted in the “prestige...the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production” (Ibid: 12). In other words, the dominant group obtains its status, and the subsequent consent from the subordinate group, through their superior positions in the production hierarchy and the control they possess over those in the subordinate group whose financial security is dependent on the patronage or employment by the ruling class. Herein lies the link to Marxism: social and economic domination by capitalist elites (the dominant group) perpetuates an inequitable division of labor that favors the elites at the expense of the working class (the subordinate group) (Marx, 1932).

Gramsci also agreed, in part, with Marx’s theory of ‘economism,’ where politics is an extension of the economy, and the government exclusively serves capitalist interests. The difference in the two political perspectives is that Gramsci saw openings for the subordinate group to become leaders and form allies across subordinate groups to gain power within the political system; while, in Marx’s economism, capitalism must fall before the political power structure can change because it is believed that there is no separation between the political and the capitalist system. Gramsci’s theory of hegemony

recognizes the power that is wielded through the State by or on behalf of the dominant class. However, contrary to Marxism, it allows for the possibility of the subordinate group to make new alliances (with the working class and other marginalized groups) and gain political ground, but only if the subordinate group recognizes the political possibilities and reneges on the consensual relationship. This recognition is a difficult task given the subordinate group's dependence (whether real or perceived) on the ruling class, which makes the perpetuation and maintenance of hegemony that much easier.

The final important element of Gramsci's hegemony is that hegemony accounts for power exerted by the ruling class not only over the working class but also on other subordinate groups, including those that are marginalized by a non-economic element (e.g., ethnic minorities). A hegemonic argument, therefore, can incorporate both class and social components to examine the power dynamics in a society or a specific location.

While Gramsci's analytical lens is on structural issues of the State and the elite class, Foucault's concept of governmentality focuses on "the individual construction of reality in the human mind" (Castells, 2010: xxviii). Foucault's theory of governmentality is introduced here to give a "poststructuralist reading of Gramsci" (Kenway, 1990: 172).

Foucault's 'governmentality' primarily differs with Gramsci's 'hegemony' in the way that the formation of power is theorized (Smart, 1986). In contrast to hegemony, governmentality power does not reside solely within the State and the elite class (Pringle, 2005). Rather, power is decentralized and disseminated through discourses that exert control and dominance over the body (Foucault, 1977). This power exercised over the body is a political tactic exerted through economic and other means:

The body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, torture it, force it to

carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up...with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but...the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body (Foucault, 1977: 25-26).

The incorporation and comparison of theories from Foucault and Gramsci follows other scholars who have combined both theorists' notions of power formation and maintenance in their own work (Holub, 1992; Olssen, 1999). Gramsci's theory of hegemony helps explain how the Hispanic leaders in this study concede that the political arena is a domain primarily for non-Hispanic white, economic elites and their families. Foucault's theory of governmentality then helps draw a more direct link between the political reality in Colusa County (i.e., that one out of every three Hispanic candidates has won their election), with the conceptualization of political reality in the minds of the study's Hispanic leaders (i.e., that Hispanic candidates are highly unlikely to win an election in the county).

This case study adds qualitative data currently lacking in the political science literature on the role of ethnicity and immigration in candidacy decision-making. It also addresses aspects of culture and belonging typically excluded from analyses of political activity. The study incorporates traditional findings of who runs for political office while introducing new explanations for why Hispanics, in particular, may decide not to run for office. These explanations draw on empirical evidence from the case, theoretical considerations, and immigration literature related to economics, culture, and national allegiances.

This study analyzes the lack of Hispanic political representation in Colusa County by focusing on the factors that influence the political ambition and candidacy choices of

Hispanic residents with the traditional qualifications of political candidates. Chapter 2 summarizes the literature on candidate emergence and formal political participation to account for social, economic, and cultural factors related to individuals' candidacy choices as well as the affordances, limits, and alternatives to political participation. Chapter 3 outlines the methods utilized, and describes the case study setting of Colusa County and the sample population. This includes the use of a case study approach focused on key informant interviews, but also collection of voter registration data and other archival materials such as historical texts, newspaper articles, and county pamphlets. Chapter 4 presents the research findings and focuses on the responses of Hispanics leaders. Issues emerging from the interviews center around individual and structural factors that preclude Hispanic leaders from running for political office. Chapter 5 analyzes the findings, offers suggestions for further research, and identifies implications for policy and practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review of Candidate Emergence and Formal Political Participation

This chapter summarizes the literature that guides the analysis of the unbalanced Hispanic political representation in Colusa County. First, the political science scholarship on candidate emergence is laid out, including political opportunity structure theory and nascent efforts to identify theories that better fit minorities' candidacy decisions. This is followed by the sociological literature on immigrant incorporation that delves deeper into the complexities of Mexican American and Hispanic immigrant lives in America, particularly in the first and second generation.

CANDIDATE EMERGENCE: TO RUN OR NOT TO RUN

Political scientists have dominated the academic discussion of electoral politics, and, as such, they have steered the research on the subject towards studies of current or former politicians and their associated professional positions, political exposure, and underlying ambitions in running for office (Gaddie, 2004; Cuellar, 2011). In studying those individuals that have already made the decision to run for office, the literature ignores the more confounding question of why qualified individuals choose not to run for office, particularly racial or ethnic minorities and women (see Lawless and Fox, 2010 for an exception).

While the post-candidacy literature does not typically illuminate the processes by which candidates make the initial decision 'to run or not to run,' it does afford insight into the potential shared traits and circumstances of many successful politicians (i.e., political proximity, lack of incumbent opponent, and rational decision-making). Since

these traits and circumstances could be at play when studying the Hispanic candidate emergence process, this section gives a summary of the most cited similarities among successful candidacies along with a more inclusive perspective on the factors entailed in deciding whether or not to run for office. Finally, the section takes a close look at the scant literature on the candidate decision-making process of minority citizens.

Rational Actors and Preferable Political Opportunity Structures

Since Joseph Schlesinger (1966) developed the concept of the political opportunity structure and its influence on a candidate's decision to enter an election, political scholars tend to focus their analysis on objective factors of the political context (e.g., incumbent opponents; size of population; paid/unpaid position) compared with set characteristics of the candidates (e.g., professional position; potential campaign supporters/contributors) (Black, 1972). The main theory of this strand of literature is that candidates act as rational actors and evaluate their chances of success based on an analysis of their personal qualifications and the "political opportunity structure" in which they find themselves (Schlesinger, 1966). Armed with the knowledge of the political situation of a particular political race, they assess key factors that could influence their chances at winning the race against the benefits of obtaining the seat. For these analysts, political candidates are, in essence, prudent risk takers that carefully weigh the costs of running for office with the possible benefits of obtaining the seat (Black, 1972).

A few early studies used the political opportunity structure to broach the complexity involved in explaining the lack of political representation by women. Susan Welch (1978) challenged previous notions that there were simply too few qualified

women to successfully win a political seat. Her study ruled out the absence of highly qualified women as an explanation for low female representation in 12 Midwestern state legislatures, citing lack of political recruitment as a more likely explanation. More recent literature has also found evidence that qualified minority candidates would run in higher numbers if they were pursued by political parties and interest groups (Moncreif, Squire and Jewell, 2000).

Continuing with this line of inquiry, Wilma Rule (1981) conducted a nation-wide study of the political contexts in which women are elected. She confirms that there were substantial populations of eligible women in the majority of the states, but some states had socio-political conditions that were deemed unfavorable for the emergence of female candidates, such as a history of state-level gender inequality and weak social welfare systems³ (Ibid). These scholars debunked the previously held myth that there were too few professionally and educationally competent women to run for office, but their political opportunity structure analysis looked for alternative explanations exclusively within the political context, without taking into consideration the perspectives of the women themselves.

Despite a lack of comprehensive research of the intrapersonal and social complexities that shape a qualified candidate's decision to run for political office, political scholars continue to narrowly concentrate their analysis on the political opportunity structure paradigm and neglect other explanations for potential female candidates' reluctance to enter an otherwise favorable political race (Scola, 2006).

Lawless and Fox (2010) present a notable exception to this rule with a study of candidate

³ The state level gender inequality was defined by "failure to ratify the 19th amendment" or failure to ratify women's suffrage; and the weak social welfare system was defined as states that spent less than the average on education and social welfare programs (Rule, 1981).

emergence of women that combines both the statistical breadth of a political science study and the sociological depth of feminist research. Through surveys and more in-depth interviews, these authors move beyond an analysis of the political opportunity structure for explanations of unequal female political representation. Instead, they explore how a “gendered psyche” can inhibit women from finding themselves qualified to run for political office, even when they possess ample educational, professional and political participation qualifications (Ibid).

Yet, their analysis is restricted almost entirely to non-Hispanic white women, with only 68 Latinas included in a study of 1,704 total women (Ibid). There continues to be a general lacuna of literature that investigates the interplay of race and ethnicity on candidacy decision-making.

Interplay of Race and Ethnicity on Candidacy Decision-Making

The absence of Hispanic candidates as an explanation for uneven Hispanic representation is not a new concept. In 1978, Ray Gonzales, the prolific editorialist and former California assemblyman, noted that the Mexican American or Chicano population in California had both the Hispanic leaders and the Hispanic voters, but they lacked the Hispanic candidates willing to run for state office (Gonzales, 2006). Despite this early observation, only recently have scholars begun to recognize that there is a need to thoroughly investigate the absence of minority residents running for political office in many districts, particularly at the local level (see Shah and Marschall, 2011).⁴

⁴ See also the Local Elections in America Project at <http://leap.rice.edu>.

Kazee (1994) indicates the importance of studying potential candidates, but in his edited volume there were only two chapters that presented race and ethnicity as analytical sites of inquiry, and the political context was once again the primary analytical variable (Abel and Oppenheimer, 1994; Canon et al., 1994). Similarly, Shah and Marschall (2011) attempt to study the intersections of race and ethnicity in local candidacy decisions, but their site of analysis (Louisiana) limits their study to black candidates and potential black candidates. What we do learn from this study is that analyzing electoral politics at the local level, rather than the more common state and federal analyses, modifies the factors that influence electability and the subsequent decision-making process of potential candidates. Contrary to studies at the state level (Welch, 1978; Moncreif et al., 2000), political recruitment is not a salient factor for local elections, since local elections are typically non-partisan (i.e., multiple candidates identifying with a particular party can run in the general election), and local elections, therefore, do not draw the same interest from national political parties and recruiters (Shah and Marschall, 2011). On the other hand, the presence of an incumbent opponent continues to play a detrimental role at the local level for minority candidate emergence, but increased minority residents and voters should positively predict the presence of minority candidates (Ibid).

Alternatively, a similarly structured study investigated the personal factors that may shape qualified minorities' candidacy decisions (Gallagher, 2009). By comparing minority survey responses in the 1990 Citizen Participation Study with those individuals who actually run for office, the author found that there was a positive correlation between having experienced discrimination and likelihood of running for office. Counter to

findings for the general population, she observed lower levels of political ambition for minority women that had higher education levels and/or higher incomes (Ibid).

However, a drawback of these two studies is that they use quantitative data to evaluate the candidates in office, potentially missing the subtle nuances and contradictions of individuals' perceptions and attitudes. Also, the latter study does not disaggregate the data, which makes it difficult to tease out the differences across diverse racial and ethnic minorities. Without in-depth interviewing, the authors are only able to make inferences about how the demographics and institutional factors of a particular political district could be affecting minority candidates' assessment of whether or not to run for office.

A qualitative study of politically qualified Latina women in San Antonio (a majority Hispanic county) is the most relevant academic attempt to dig deeper into the complexities of ethnic minorities own perceptions of political races while also taking into consideration the unique local political context in which they are situated (Jaramillo, 2009). The author contends that there could be different "personal, institutional, and structural patterns" for Latinas considering to run for office than for others who have been studied under the guise of rational actor or political opportunity structure theories (p.10). Jaramillo's theoretical outline encompasses rich literature on the multi-faceted, overlapping nature of gender, ethnic identity, and group consciousness, and she uses these concepts to provide explanations for Latina's presence or absence in the formal political realm (Ibid). However, the theoretical intricacy introduced in the literature review is abandoned in the analysis, which modifies a dichotomous push/pull migration theory and applies it to the Latina candidate emergence process: some elements "push"

Latinas into politics while others “pull” them away. The problem with this deterministic approach is that it obscures the Janus nature of many of the factors she describes as either promoting or discouraging Hispanics from running for office. For example, familial obligations are said to deter Latinas from entering electoral politics (Ibid), but these familial ties could also propel Latinas into politics if they perceive themselves as needing to create a better community for their children or other family members through serving in an elected office. Jaramillo also creates strict gender divisions that assume a culture of *machismo* among Hispanics living in the United States and ignores what could possibly be shared familial experiences in the Hispanic community across gender lines.

FORMAL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: AFFORDANCES, LIMITS, AND ALTERNATIVES

There is ample sociological literature that studies the various economic, social, and political trajectories of immigrants and their families in America, within the overall theoretical rubric of immigrant assimilation or incorporation. Samuel P. Huntington (2004) was notable and continues to be highly-cited for his account of Hispanics, particularly Mexican Americans, as permanent sojourners in the United States who are either incapable or unwilling to become a part of the mainstream American society, which he predicts could ultimately end in a “bifurcated America...with two languages...and two cultures” (p.xvi). Despite his inflammatory claims, not to mention myopic assertions of the existence of a singular American culture, most academic scholars are neither as apocalyptic in their analyses of Hispanic incorporation, nor do they find the strict anti-assimilation that Huntington purports is the overwhelming case among Hispanics. Rather, the literature presents a nuanced perspective of the adaptation

of Hispanic immigrants and their adult children to life in America, in general, and their participation in the political realm specifically.

The following section summarizes literature on the presence or absence of political activity among immigrants and their adult children. However, since scholars have not approached the specific topic of immigrants and/or their children running for political office, the references to literature are limited to their engagement in other forms of politics, primarily voting.

The section is divided into two main categories: factors that encourage political participation among immigrants and/or their adult children, and those that deter them from participating in politics. In actuality, the literature is far too complex to be clearly cut across such decisive lines. Nevertheless, this section endeavors to comprehend the most prevalent theories in the literature in order to outline hypothesized factors for the individual and institutional factors at play in the lack of Hispanics running for political office in Colusa County.

Formal Political Participation: Factors that Encourage

Most political participation studies of immigrants and their adult children have focused on the individual determinants of voting patterns. From these studies on immigrants and electoral politics, there are five main factors that tend to correlate with increased voting rates among immigrants: 1) advanced language capacity (Uhlener et al., 1989; Barreto and Muñoz, 2003); 2) increased time spent in the U.S. (Barreto and Muñoz, 2003; Hill and Moreno, 1996; and Portes and Rumbaut, 2006); 3) higher income levels (DeSipio, 2001; Jones-Correa, 1998); 4) higher educational attainment (Portes and

Rumbaut, 2006; DeSipio, 2001), and 5) older age (Ramakrishnan and Espenshade, 2001). Not surprisingly, the latter three factors are also associated with higher levels of political participation—including voting and non-electoral politics—among the general American population (Verba and Nie, 1972; Verba et al., 1993; Verba et al., 1995). Confounding the findings of language capacity and increased time spent in the U.S., there is evidence that second generation Hispanics are less likely to vote than first generation Hispanic immigrants—accounting for similar levels of the aforementioned socioeconomic characteristics—and voting tendencies do not appear to improve for the third generation (Ramakrishnan and Espenshade, 2001). Hence, there is no straight path to follow in predicting what factors translate into increased political participation (in this case, voting), but the literature provides these general guideposts to consider when researching potential explanations for lack of political engagement.

In addition to the factors above, another consideration is the presence of a group consciousness among the immigrant or co-ethnic population. Group consciousness is the identification with people of the same race and/or ethnicity, but for this group consciousness to compel residents into collective action it must be accompanied with “a conscious commitment to the goals and betterment of the group” (Stokes, 2003: 363). Jones-Correa (1995) has found comparable evidence to contend that the experiences of discrimination “must not only be similarly experienced, but also similarly interpreted” if they are to result in organized political action among the immigrant and/or co-ethnic group (p.86). He goes further to state that it is often difficult for immigrants to unite around similar experiences of discrimination because the source, form, and cause of the

discrimination is often not apparent, and therefore the opponent or target for action is similarly concealed (Ibid).

Notably, Stokes (2003) found that *polar power*, or the dissatisfaction with resources and opportunities for the co-ethnic group, was more likely to compel Mexican Americans in particular to participate in politics (including electoral politics, campaign contributions in the form of time and money, attendance at meetings, and displaying a bumper sticker). Regrettably, neither of these studies on group consciousness indicates the immigrant generation of the sample population, which is important since motivation to form solidarity across ethnic and/or host country lines could diminish with each generation.

Connected to the effects of this type of group consciousness, the reaction to unfavorable legislation, particularly anti-immigrant proposals, have been shown to promote political participation among immigrants, but this impetus is strongest among the first and second generation and wanes by the third generation (Ramakrishnan and Espenshade, 2001). Uhlaner et al. (1989) note that this response may not be as salient among Hispanic immigrants and co-ethnics as it is for black Americans, citing the continued solidarity of black Americans after the civil rights era and the lack of a similarly cohesive movement for Hispanics in the United States.

Sociologists have also found that local identities with a specific place promote political engagement. Castells (1997) contends that identities are a vital analytical component because they “refuse to dissolve by establishing specific connection between nature, history, geography and culture. Identities anchor power in some areas of the social structure, and build from there resistance or their offensives” (p.425). Further, he

considers the way individuals tie themselves to the local scale and create place-based identities to be a critical precursor to political mobilization and resistance to various forms of oppression (Ibid).

Other sociologists have built on Castell's work to show that identity formation crosses "social, psychological, political and spatial dimensions" and that identity is "neither spatially nor socially uniform" (Cherni, 2001: 62). Therefore, identity is an important factor in studying individuals' political actions. Similarly, the multiple dimensions of individuals' identities must be explored in order to understand the underlying links between their complex identities and their political decisions.

Finally, transnational political activity—the participation in politics across nation-state borders—has been shown to be a positive predictor of political participation in the receiving country. Guarnizo et al. (2003) showed that immigrants who were politically active in their home countries tended to also be active in the politics of the receiving country.

In sum, the literature suggests that the investigation of the lack of Hispanics running for political office can start by establishing the age, education, and employment for the first and second generation of Hispanic leaders; and, for the first generation, their language capacity and time in the United States. Similarly, the existence of group consciousness and the multiple modes of individuals' identities are important components in evaluating the political involvement of Hispanic leaders.

Alternatives to Formal Political Participation

There are many factors that deter immigrants and their adult children from taking part in formal politics. This sub-section looks discusses the participation in informal political activities as an alternative to formal political engagement for immigrants, their adult children, and ethnic minorities.

From an economic standpoint, unemployment is significantly correlated with lower levels of voting (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993). Previous studies have also shown that lower incomes tend to reduce political engagement (DeSipio, 2001; Jones-Correa, 1998). Similarly, immigrants employed in manual labor positions are less engaged than their counterparts in more professionalized, better paying jobs, with the exception of instances where they were reacting to incendiary, anti-immigrant policies (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006).

The literature on alternative immigrant and co-ethnic economic communities that thrive financially on shared cultural and social ties serve as an example of how the economic factors weaken the inclination of Hispanics to participate in politics: middleman minorities and ethnic enclaves.

Middleman minorities are located somewhere in the middle of the social stratification system, in-between the capitalist class and the working class (Bonacich and Modell, 1980). Since Edna Bonacich (1973) revitalized and redefined the term in the 1970s, there have been varying definitions of the concept, but, in general, middleman minorities are considered to be entrepreneurs that capitalize on ethnic similarities and resources to “act as middlemen between producers and consumers” and serve as “buffers between elites and masses” (Bonacich and Modell, 1980: 13-14). They are rarely

producers themselves; and typically form small businesses or work for business owners that put them at odds with the most subordinate groups in a community, while maintaining a subordinate position themselves to the dominate, economic elites (Portes, 2010). These “middleman” economic positions include rent collectors, labor contractors, and bureaucrats (Bonacich and Modell, 1980).

Ethnic enclaves are “assemblages of enterprises owned and operated by members of the same cultural/linguistic groups that concentrate in an identifiable geographic area, maintaining intense relations with one another, and hire significant numbers of their co-ethnics” (Portes, 2010: 162). Ethnic enclaves flourish in areas where they have access to a co-ethnic labor force and a steady supply of consumers for ethnic goods and services (Ibid). Unlike middleman minorities, the business owners and professionals in ethnic enclaves are not buffers for economic elites—even sometimes competing directly with the dominant class—and also tend to have a productive sector (Portes and Manning, 1986). Still, they have a peripheral, not lateral, socioeconomic position to the elite class, since their clients are primarily, if not exclusively, co-ethnics with lower wages and social status than the dominant class (Ibid). Related, other studies have indicated that lower participation among immigrants is common in areas with higher populations of co-ethnics due to the prevalence of socioeconomic factors that are linked to lower participation, such as low wages and limited English ability (de la Garza, 1996; DeSipio, 1996).

The deterrents to formal political engagement for immigrants and their children go beyond socioeconomic and demographic factors and extend into the complex, entangled realm of national allegiances and cultural differences. Jones-Correa (1998)

referred to a “politics of in-between” in which immigrants intentionally distance themselves from national formal politics in order to balance their dual loyalties to their host country and their country of origin.

In cultural terms, this “in-between” location has been described as a negotiative space where immigrants and their adult children struggle to maintain ownership over their unique cultural and political identities while simultaneously grappling with the social, economic, and cultural demands of life in the United States (Camacho, 2008). Anthropologist Renato Rosaldo (1989) called this space the “cultural borderlands,” and coined the term ‘cultural citizenship,’ which signifies how individuals’ cultural identities influence their political choices and actions (Rosaldo, 1994). Alternatively, the term has been used to emphasize how the nation’s political landscape “subjectifies” individuals and shapes their cultural identities (Ong, 1996). Emerging from the cultural citizenship literature are two key political trajectories for immigrants and minority ethnic groups: 1) the use of distinct cultural practices to claim substantive or symbolic rights and/or challenge governmental policies and practices (Rosaldo, 1994; Flores, 1997; Benmayor, 1997), or 2) the retreat from the political sphere altogether (Ong, 1996).

For the first case, where cultural citizenship is defined as a way to make political, legal and spatial claims, the physical locations of the claims-making is typically still outside of the formal political realm: at a cultural festival, at a protest demonstration, during a labor strike, etc. This form of claims-making may lead to formal recognition of participating community members and even substantive legal or political concessions, but the site of struggle is adjacent to and not inside the formal political arena (e.g., city council meetings). Whether by choice or reacting to exclusionary political practices,

these practices create alternative political spaces outside of the formal political sphere (Rosaldo, 1994b; Rosaldo and Flores, 1997). The literature does not indicate that involvement in this alternative space deters community members from formal political participation. Rather, it is a substitute for formal political participation initiated by community members distinct perceptions of their cultural and political power, or as an effect of the exclusion members encounter from formal political institutions that are “inadequate to the task of recognizing and protecting their rights” (Camacho, 2008: 10). In short, acts of cultural citizenship are located away from the formal political sphere and provide insight into where Hispanic leaders are situating themselves within alternative political structures.

If cultural citizenship is understood as a process that perpetuates cultural and political subordination by reinscribing cultural and racial stereotypes onto marginalized ethnic communities, as Aiwa Ong (1996) describes it, then the resulting political implications can be a “subjectified” member completely retreating from the informal and formal political sphere. In this modified account of ‘othering,’ the marginalized subjects are limited in their ability to realize full external political efficacy, or the extent to which they perceive they are able to influence the political system (Ramakrishnan and Espenshade, 2001). Instead of being overtly kept out of the political process (i.e., via the stripping of legal rights), marginalized community members (particularly immigrants and racialized minorities) are covertly excluded from the political system through both a national social discourse that distinguishes and undervalues them as permanent ‘Others,’ and the direct, local-level exclusionary and discriminatory experiences that discourage their continued engagement with the political system (Ong, 1996). From this perspective,

community members interpret the political system as either off bounds or as unresponsive to them and recalcitrant to their needs and claims; and they therefore withdraw from political activity.

Beneath the discussion of both forms of cultural citizenship are notions of ‘belonging,’ defined by Renato Rosaldo (1994) as “full membership in a group and the ability to influence one’s destiny by having a significant voice in basic decisions” (p.402). From the cultural citizenship perspective, lacking a sense of belonging in the political and social realm is linked to community members withdrawing from formal politics. At the same time, cultural belonging unifies individuals around common struggles and translates into the creation of alternative political spaces. Therefore, the presence or absence of a sense of cultural, community, or political belonging is an important baseline consideration that provides insight into how, when, and if marginalized individuals participate in politics.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

This case study investigates the lack of Hispanic political representation in Colusa County, a California county with a predominately Hispanic population (55 percent of the total population). In the majority Hispanic County of Colusa, why are more traditionally qualified Hispanic candidates not running for political office? Qualitative data from interviews with 18 Hispanic leaders in Colusa County form the backbone of the study and the analysis of the research question.

As of March 2012, there were currently 14 majority-minority cities in California with all non-Hispanic white city councils, and there were 20 majority-minority California cities with only one minority member on the city council (Evans, 2012). With similar situations arising in political districts across the United States, the study of the potential causes for this phenomenon is timely.

The media and legal advocates tend to focus on both the injustice of this phenomenon and the need to localize voting power within specific districts as opposed to citywide elections.⁵ What is often overlooked in regards to the situation is the lack of Hispanic candidates running for office and the explanations for this absence of Hispanics on the ballot.

This case study approaches the subject of why more qualified Hispanics are not running for office in this majority Hispanic county by conducting 18 in-depth interviews with potential Hispanic political candidates in Colusa County, Northern California. The case study method “is a research strategy that focuses on understanding the dynamics

⁵ The rationale behind district voting is that pockets of ethnic voting majorities could swing the election and elect an ethnic or racial minority in specific districts, as opposed to city-wide voting, which takes the top choices from the city-wide electorate and potentially negates the majority-minority effect in specific districts.

present within single settings” (Eisenhardt, 2002: 8). Although it is limited in scope, the case study method can still be utilized to extend theory, test theory and even to develop theory “in the early stages of research on a topic” (Ibid: 31).

First, the case study setting of Colusa County is introduced and the demographic and socio-historical contextual factors of the county are provided. Next, the initial investigations that helped frame the study’s research question are outlined. This initial investigation included: 1) gathering voter registration information, to determine the Hispanic percentage of the voting population; 2) past election results, to see when and in what elections Hispanic candidates ran for political office; and 3) archival materials such as historical texts, newspapers, and county pamphlets, to become familiar with the county’s history. The chapter then gives an overview of the approach to conducting the interviews with Hispanic leaders and the description of the sample population.

COLUSA COUNTY: THE SETTING

Colusa County is located less than 100 miles northwest of Sacramento, with a small population of roughly 21,000 people (US Census, 2010). Figure 1 shows a map of where Colusa County is located in California.

From the interviews and census data, it appears that the majority of Hispanic (particularly Mexican) immigration to Colusa County occurred in the 1960s (US Census, 2010). Therefore, it is not surprising that texts published prior to this wave of immigration do not mention Hispanics or Mexican immigration to Colusa County. Yet, the Wagon Wheels Index, with more recent publications, also does not include articles on the Hispanic members of Colusa County or information on the increased Hispanic

(Ueda, 2001: 318). Even though many “braceros” eventually obtained permanent legal status or citizenship, their social and political incorporation in the country remained outside of the State’s agenda (Calavita, 1992).

The U.S. Census data shows that the Hispanic population growth in Colusa County has steadily increased since the 1970 U.S. Census. Table 1 shows the race and ethnicity data in Colusa County over time from 1970 to 2010. The 1970 U.S. Census was the first time that the census included non-white Hispanic as an ethnic option for census respondents. As of the 2010 Census, Hispanic residents accounted for 55 percent of the total population. Also, approximately 25 percent of the population in Colusa County is foreign-born, with 95 percent of the total foreign-born population originating from Hispanic, or Spanish-speaking countries, and 96 percent of the Hispanic foreign-born population coming from Mexico (Ibid; ACS, 2005-2010).

Table 1: Hispanic Percentage of Population in Colusa County (1970-2010)

U.S. Census Year	Hispanic Population	Total Population	Hispanic Percentage of Total Population
1970	2,133	12,430	17%
1980	2,493	12,791	20%
1990	5,424	16,275	33%
2000	8,752	18,804	47%
2010	11,804	21,419	55%

Source: U.S. Census Data (1970-2010)

Colusa County consistently has the highest unemployment rate in California. As of June 2012, it was at 26 percent, far greater than the average California unemployment rate of 11 percent (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). The largest employers in

Colusa County are in agricultural industries, primarily in harvesting, processing, and packaging positions (Ibid).

PRELIMINARY RESEARCH: FRAMING THE QUESTION

The most recent voter registration data was obtained from the Colusa County Clerk's Office in order to find out the Hispanic percentage of the county's registered voters.⁶ A Spanish surname analysis was conducted with the voter registration information to determine the size of the county's Hispanic voting population. The Spanish surname analysis was modeled after the analysis realized by the California Civic Engagement Project of the UC Davis, Center for Regional Change (2012).

From the 7,233 registered voters, the voters who have common Spanish surnames were counted. The surnames with traditional Italian or Portuguese spellings were skipped, since there are a few families in the region with Italian and Portuguese ancestry. The interviews helped identify some of these common surnames that closely resemble Spanish surnames (such as the Portuguese-derived 'Azevedo' as opposed to the Spanish-derived 'Acevedo').

The analysis determined that approximately 31 percent of the total registered voters are Hispanic. Thus, the low voting registration among Hispanics could be perceived as an impediment to gaining more political representation (i.e., fewer co-ethnic voters to support a co-ethnic candidate). However, the study of the election results in Colusa County for the past 14 years indicates that despite the low voting registration among

⁶ The voter registration records were current as of March, 2012.

Hispanics, there was still a 33 percent success rate for Hispanic candidates in local Colusa County elections.

The success rate for Hispanic candidates was discovered by obtaining electronic copies of the election results in Colusa County for the past 14 years from the Colusa County Clerk's website. The results were assessed to see how many Hispanics had run in elections, which positions they were campaigning for, and how they fared against their opponents. A Spanish surname analysis was used to determine which candidates were potentially Hispanic, and the surname analysis results were later corroborated with insider information from interviewees.

In the past 14 years, there were only 12 Hispanic candidates that ran for political office in the county, out of more than 80 possible opportunities to run for office. Four of those candidates (33 percent success rate) ultimately won their elections, dispelling the idea that Hispanic candidates cannot win without a majority Hispanic electorate.

Clearly, voter registration (and potentially, the precursor: naturalization) could increase among Hispanic Colusa County residents, but the election results pose a more interesting question: Why are more Hispanic candidates not running for political office in this majority Hispanic county? The preliminary research outlined here was crucial in forming this more focused question that helps to explain why there are not more Hispanic elected officials in the majority-minority Colusa County.

ARCHIVAL MATERIAL

This study incorporates elements of family history and the potential effects on subsequent generations of the historical context and mode of incorporation of immigrants

in a particular place. Therefore, the study's analysis relies, in part, on historical-comparative methods, defined as looking at "what events in the past shaped how this turned out in the present" (Luker, 2008: 191). In order to incorporate historical texts specific to Colusa County in analyzing the "events in the past," archival materials were reviewed at the county's main library. These materials included the Wagon Wheels Index (1930-2010), produced by the Colusa Historical Society; the *History of Colusa County* (Green, 1950); *Colusa County*, (Rogers, 1891) and *History of Colusa and Glenn Counties* (1918). Hispanic residents of Colusa County were not referenced in any of these archival materials.

More recent information was also searched for in newspaper stories in the county's paper. Election campaign articles from 2006 to 2012 were reviewed in the *Colusa Sun Herald* to see how candidate races were being framed.⁷ However, there were no articles pertaining to races in which Hispanic candidates had run. Also, there are no newspapers in Colusa County for review that are geared specifically towards the Hispanic community or the Spanish-speaking population.

INTERVIEWS

The study employed an interview approach similar to that of Lawless and Fox (2005; 2010) and Jaramillo (2008), in identifying Hispanic members of the community that were in jobs or positions that are traditional "pipelines" to political positions: law, business, education, and politics. For this study, community members who were in non-profit positions were also included, since a few people in these roles were highly

⁷ The Colusa Sun Herald started publishing articles online in 2006, and there are no online archives available before this year.

recommended by other interviewees. Traditionally qualified as well as recommended individuals are referred to in the study as “Hispanic leaders.” The rationale for this sampling is that these individuals are in roles that tend to fit candidates for political office. Therefore, based on their professional backgrounds, civic recognition, and/or visibility in the community, they have the potential to launch political campaigns, but they are either not considering it or choosing against it. Identifying underlying reasons for their decision not to run for political office is at the heart of this study.

Standard open-ended interviews were conducted with 18 Hispanic leaders in Colusa County from December 2011 to March 2012. The “standard open-ended approach” entails writing detailed questions in an interview protocol before conducting interviews and asking the same questions of each interviewee (Patton, 1980). The method is used to ensure that the researcher has comparable data across all the topics to be considered, but probing can still be utilized. The interviews were conducted in the interviewees’ personal offices, with the exception of three interviews that were conducted in quiet sections of public places.⁸ The average duration of the interviews was one hour and a half, but overall they lasted anywhere between one hour and two hours. All interviews were recorded with a digital recorder and later transcribed in their entirety.

The data from the interview transcripts was manually coded and separated by themes that emerged from the interviews, transcribing, and subsequent reading of the transcripts. The data was then categorized into meta-themes and sub-themes with quotes from the interview transcripts included to support the themes. Memos (i.e., one-page reflections on the findings and their meanings) were written on the meta-themes and sub-

⁸ Exact locations of the public places are not included to maintain the confidentiality of the interviewees.

themes in order to organize the concepts and provide direction for writing the findings and discussion (Emerson et al., 1995).

Hispanic leaders were identified through the snowball method. The first interviewee was identified as a Hispanic community leader by the Mexican Consulate-General in Sacramento and subsequently contacted for an interview. After this initial interview, the interviewee was asked who else could be considered a Hispanic leader in the community or who might be a good Hispanic elected official. The same question was asked of each subsequent interviewee. This method served to connect with 12 of the 18 interviewees.

For the other six interviewees, the first person in this branch of the snowball sampling was met through networking at a flea market in the county that primarily serves the Hispanic population. The connection with this individual (a small business owner) eventually led to five other interviews. Table 2 gives key characteristics of the 18 interviewees.⁹

⁹ There was one interviewee who was not in a position to become a U.S. citizen. Since citizenship is a pre-requisite for running for office, I chose not to include this interview as part of the analysis of this study.

Table 2: Profile of Interviewees

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Legal Status	Job Affiliation
Barbara	F	35-40	U.S. Born Citizen	Business Owner
Susana	F	40-45	U.S. Born Citizen	Local Government
Nadia	F	35-40	U.S. Born Citizen	Non-Profit
Veronica	F	35-40	U.S. Born Citizen	Business Owner
Cecilia	F	55-60	U.S. Born Citizen	Non-Profit
Francisca	F	35-40	U.S. Born Citizen	Business Owner
Olivia	F	55-60	U.S. Born Citizen	Local Government
Juliana	F	60-65	U.S. Born Citizen	Local Government
Laura	F	30-35	U.S. Born Citizen	Local Government
Doris	F	40-45	Naturalized Citizen	Local Government
Cristian	M	30-35	Naturalized Citizen	Non-Profit
Eliana	F	40-45	Naturalized Citizen	Business Owner
David	M	55-60	Naturalized Citizen	Local Government
Paula	F	55-60	Naturalized Citizen	Local Government
Daniel	M	35-40	Naturalized Citizen	Business Owner
Marcos	M	40-45	Naturalized Citizen	Local Government
Carla	F	25-30	Permanent Resident	Local Government
Patricio	M	35-40	Permanent Resident	Non-Profit

The interviewees ranged in age from mid-20s to early 60s. All of the interviewees were either born in Mexico, or they had at least one parent who was born in Mexico. The interviewees' Mexican heritage reflected the fact that Mexico is the primary country of origin for immigrants in Colusa County, representing over 96 percent of all foreign-born Hispanic immigrants (ACS, 2005-2009). The majority of the interviewees (15 of the 18 total) had family members who migrated to the United States during the Bracero program, and whose families settled in Colusa County shortly after the end of the program in 1964. Only three interviewees had migrated to the United States more recently in the early to late 1990's, including the two permanent residents. The majority of the interviewees were female (13), and less than half of the interviewees were male (5).

The interview questions sought to obtain an understanding of the interviewees' family migration history; their participation in local politics and civic life; and their perspective on local politics, culture, community, and belonging. Additionally, the questions probed how they viewed the formal political power structure of Colusa County, and how they conceptualized their own role within that power structure. With this in mind, questions were asked that touched on the following subjects: what brought interviewees or their families to Colusa County and why they settled there; their educational background; their present and past participation in politics and community life; their views on the current elected officials; their potential ambition for political office; and their own sense of belonging in Colusa County and also to Mexico. Appendix 1 shows the full interview protocol that was used.

POTENTIAL RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

This case study is limited in scope to one particular political context and cannot be readily extended to explain the political situation in other locales. The main emphasis of this study is to tease out socioeconomic and political factors at work in the context of Colusa County and to shed light on issues that can be further examined in other majority-minority jurisdictions. Also, it is important to recognize that I, the researcher, am a non-Hispanic white woman, which could have influenced the responses of the Hispanic interviewees, especially around topics of ethnicity and marginalization. Yet, my married surname is Spanish, which could have afforded some comfort, or perhaps a sense of solidarity, to the interviewees. I also have the cultural assets of speaking fluent Spanish and having lived and conducted research in Latin America. In spite of its limitations, the

account that follows is an attempt to honestly represent the interviewees and the “complexity of their lived experiences” (Warren and Karner, 2009: 219).

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this research is to understand why more traditionally qualified Hispanics in Colusa County are not running for political office. The chapter begins with a short section on how the Hispanic leaders themselves value the prospect of having more Hispanic representation in the county. They make clear that they do indeed see the need for more Hispanic elected officials. Ironically, they are still not running for political office themselves. If Hispanic political representation is important to them, then why are they not making the decision to run for office? Are there individual factors that explain this paradox or are there structural issues in the county's social and political environment that discourage their interest in local elected offices?

This chapter is divided into four sections: individual perceptions of Hispanic representation, perceptions of belonging, historical farm labor relations, and everyday civic practices. The first section describes the desire among interviews for representation in formal politics. The second section identifies personal elements of the interviewees' lives such as how they identify with geographic, cultural, and ethnic modes of belonging; and their sense of family obligation. The third section looks at historical factors that influence the interviewees' perceptions of power and political exclusion that center on labor relations between farmers and farm workers. Finally, the last section describes everyday civic practices as an alternative to participation in formal politics.

These findings provide insight into the personal and structural influences as to how these Hispanic leaders conceive of their political roles in the county and why they may be choosing not to run for political office. Although these findings are limited to

Colusa County, they offer personal accounts of political dynamics relevant to other majority-minority communities in rural California.

HISPANIC REPRESENTATION: VALUED AND NEEDED

Every Hispanic leader interviewed thought that having more Hispanic elected officials in Colusa County was important. Even though I never asked this question directly, the interviewees addressed the subject on their own. For instance, Cecilia, an employee at a local social services non-profit organization, is very clear about her own frustrations with the lack of Hispanic political representation in the county:

One of my biggest peeves with the city council is that it doesn't represent the diversity of Colusa. The board of supervisors doesn't represent the diversity of Colusa. We're almost 45% Hispanic, we're beyond it. Yet city council, Colusa has none. The board of supervisors, none. They're not really...the politics doesn't really represent the town.

Cecilia was the only one of her siblings who was born in the United States, and she grew up all her life in Colusa County. She remembers when there were few Hispanic families in the area, but she does not sense that the growth in the population has had a similar effect on the political power of the county. Her hope for more Hispanic political representation stems, in part, from her frustration with the current non-Hispanic white political officials. She related stories of the discrimination her children faced from the “homegrown” older farmers and families that “would look at the...Hispanic kids as troublemakers or causing problems. When the gangs started, that’s who they would look at. Oh, the Hispanic kids are bullying.” More recently, she has been asked to sit on committees that report to elected bodies in the county, but she does not feel that the other

members of the committee, or the elected officials, respect her opinions or the elected officials themselves respect her opinions.

Paula, a local government employee for almost two decades, shares Cecilia's desire for a Hispanic community member to run for office:

I wish we had a Hispanic person. We had one Hispanic run once. She didn't have the majority of votes. And last time we had an election, none of the candidates were Hispanic. But I'm still hoping that some day, somebody might win.

However, Paula differs from Cecilia in that she has had mostly positive experiences with local government, even though she herself tries to remain out of controversial conversations in the political arena. Her role in the local government is primarily as a liaison between the monolingual Spanish speakers and an elected body. Yet, she does not see herself as a political figure but more as a medium by which the Spanish speaking community can communicate their needs to the elected officials.

Cristian, a non-profit worker who has worked as a local campaign volunteer, conceded that he thought the current elected officials were doing a "good job," but that a Hispanic representative was still needed:

I think they're doing a good job, but they only hear from the Anglo point of view. I think if we had more people like Catalina, if we had more people like Merced, like Rosalba. There could be a lot of good changes in the county.

Cristian, who came with his family to Colusa County from Mexico as a young boy, was perhaps the one most heavily involved in the county's formal political arena. He had worked on local campaigns for non-Hispanic white candidates to garner more votes in the Hispanic community. Additionally, he took pride in his close relationship with several current elected officials that donated to his causes and regularly had informal

conversations with him about political issues. Yet, he also related stories of discrimination against the Hispanic community, such as the allocation of time for park activities and heightened police scrutiny of predominately Hispanic events.

He saw the potential for a Hispanic elected official to right some of these perceived wrongs, but he was also critical of the Hispanic community. Cristian placed at least some of the blame for the discrimination and imbalance in power on what he saw as the Hispanic community's lack of political participation. He stated that political "things get done, but you have to be after the politicians. We still think as *Mexicanos*. We're always going to go back to Mexico. But nobody goes back." Interestingly, Cristian both distinguishes himself from the "*Mexicanos*" that he does not think are getting involved in politics, but he uses the inclusive term "we" to show his solidarity to the Hispanic community in the county.

In regards to how increased Hispanic representation could benefit the community, Juliana, a local government employee, relates it to an issue of equity:

I would like to see definitely more Hispanic people in those positions that I think will work more in favor of Hispanics being equal.

Juliana is a U.S. born citizen in her early 60s, who works for the local government primarily in providing social services to Hispanic community members. She has been in the position for over two decades, but she does not have any direct experience with formal politics. Juliana votes in every presidential election, but she does not tend to follow local politics. When her kids were in school, she stated that she could have done more or gotten more involved with the school board or other committees but that she did the best she could. Juliana's had to overcome numerous health issues with her family, and she is currently the sole caretaker of an ailing parent. From her perspective, her time has

been consumed with work and family. She relayed that does what she can for the Hispanic community through her job position, but she could not imagine taking on more responsibility.

Susana, another local government employee, indicated that Hispanic representatives might be more well-suited to respond to the needs of the majority Hispanic population. She compared her own familiarity with the struggle of Hispanics in Colusa County to her potential suitability to represent their interests:

I can see our population growing as Hispanics, and you're right, we don't have representation that is of the same culture. Therefore, how do they know how it works? I lived it. I know it.

Susana works part-time for the local government, and she spends a lot of her other time with her young children. She was born in California, but her family spent most winters and many summers in their hometown in Mexico. Despite her own family's immigrant background, she drew a clear division between her experience and the newer immigrant families in the county:

We're always getting new people. They don't have the same values. I'm not saying they have bad values...Like my parents were very driven that we had to go to school. A lot of the population, they didn't go to school. They didn't even learn how to read or write. We have a lot of that still coming here.

From Susana's perspective, Hispanic community members that have lived through the immigrant experience have particular insight into the community and could therefore be more effective political representatives for the Hispanic community. Yet, she clearly distinguishes herself from the "new people" that have immigrated to Colusa County, which reveals the complexity in discussing the Hispanic community as a concrete political group. On the one hand, Susana wants a Hispanic representative that understands and identifies with the Hispanic experience in Colusa County; but, on the

other hand, she seems to recognize, at least implicitly, that the Hispanic community is not homogenous.

The interviewees showed consensus (with varied underlying reasons) that having more Hispanic representation in the county would be beneficial for the Hispanic community and is something that is currently lacking in the local political system. Even so, the interviewees themselves are not making the decision to run for political office and fill the void between the majority Hispanic population and the almost exclusively non-Hispanic white elected officials. Why are they not running? The next sections take a closer look at the potential answers to that question.

MODES OF BELONGING: CULTURAL AFFINITY AND PLACE ATTACHMENT

I'm still connected to Mexico no matter what. I think if I wanted to disconnect myself from Mexico, I would have done it a long time ago. I still have the language. I still have the culture. I still have the customs. I do the cooking. Everything. Everyday I'm Mexico. Every single day. There's not a day that I don't speak Spanish. Attached to Colusa? Yes. Red Hog. We were Red Skins, now we're Red Hogs. I feel connected to Colusa. It's nice when I go to the city and visit my daughter in [San Francisco]. But as soon as I get to the fairgrounds when I'm coming back I feel like I'm home. Oh my gosh. Everytime I leave, when I go out of town. When I'm coming in to Lonestar Road and coming into the city limits. Oh my gosh. It's home. This is home.

- Paula, local government employee

The Hispanic leaders in this study felt a strong sense of local belonging to Colusa County as a physical place and a regional community, while simultaneously holding on to feelings of belonging to Mexican culture and to the Mexican immigrant community within the county. Their feelings of connection to Mexican culture and Mexican or Mexican American people did not inhibit their ties to Colusa County as a geographic space and a bound community. Yet, the feelings of local belonging and/or cultural

belonging did not typically translate into interviewees' having a sense of political belonging within the county's political system. These varying forms of belonging tell a story of how these Hispanic leaders often conceptualize the formal political arena as a separate and distinct sphere from local, cultural, ethnic, and civic communities, of which they see themselves as a valued member. This section illustrates these discrete and often overlapping notions of belonging and how they shape the political candidacy decision-making process for these Hispanic leaders.

Cultural and Ethnic Belonging

VM: Where do you feel like you have the strongest roots or feelings of attachment?

Laura: *With my Hispanic people. I mean, I put myself in their shoes. Sometimes my boss tells me, "Don't do that." But it's hard not to... Because I know what it feels like. I know that they don't...they get paid like minimum wage, if that. You know what I mean? I know the struggles they have to go through. Not because I went through them, but because my parents went through them to give us the most they could.*

- Laura, local government employee

Whether or not the interviewees' were born in Mexico or in the United States, they all have spent the majority of their adult lives in Colusa County. Yet, all these Hispanic leaders continue to intertwine feelings of Mexican cultural and ethnic belonging despite geographic ties that are more bound to Colusa County. As will be described later in the chapter, these cultural and ethnic attachments do not impede their sense of local belonging within Colusa County. Similarly, these feelings are detached from Mexico as a physical territory from which they obtain a national identity. Instead, their ethnic and cultural feelings of belonging are rooted in co-ethnic identification—or identifying with others of the same ethnicity—with Mexican immigrants and their descendants in this

specific region. This co-ethnic identification arises from the Hispanic leaders' perceptions' of a shared struggle and common cultural practices with Mexican immigrants and their descendants in the county, and, again, it is not spatially tied to Mexico itself.

The Hispanics in this study all currently have professional positions, but they also all came from families where at least one parent worked as a farmworker. Many of them mentioned having grown up in poverty, like Cecilia, a non-profit employee, who from the very beginning of our interview asserted that she “came from poverty, the same thing. We were farmworkers.” She called her particular family history “the same thing,” meaning that her family was similar to so many of the Mexican immigrants and their descendants in Colusa County that come to find work in agricultural labor. Cecilia later mentioned that Mexicans “keep showing up” and, similarly, Susana describes current Mexican migration to the county as getting “a whole new population of Mexican people...every year.” Susana, a local government employee, depicts this new Mexican immigrant population in the following way:

You see the very new people that are here. They don't speak English. They're very young. They're working. They have little kids. Everybody has little kids. If you're Mexican, you have a lot of little kids. At least two or three, and then some. There's always a whole new group of people. Here in Colusa it's like that. It's been like that since I was a little kid.

The Hispanic leaders clearly distinguish themselves from the Mexican immigrants that arrive in the county “every year,” but this delineation does not deter them from also identifying with Mexican immigrants and immigrant families. They feel deep ties to the people within this specific location with whom they share a common history of struggle despite having overcome—financially, if not emotionally—the poverty and dependence

on farm labor of their families' past. For example, Cecilia relates her continued connection to farmworkers in the following way:

I have a real deep respect for farmworkers. I go by and I see the farmworkers still out there. I have a very deep respect for them because I've been there. I know what it's like. I did it not as a choice, because it was a need, a necessity.

Their shared struggle of farm labor in Colusa County confers enduring meaning to these Hispanic leaders, and continues to unite them to a specific ethnic belonging within the region. One could argue that the belonging based on this shared struggle in a low-paid labor position could be construed as a sense of belonging linked to class. Undoubtedly, class intersects with the ethnic ties that are tethered to the shared struggle of current and former farmworkers and their families. However, the Hispanic leaders cite ethnic similarity over the class commonality when referring to their identification with Mexican and Mexican Americans, particularly farmworkers, in the region.

At the same time, they recognize that this shared struggle, as current or former Mexican and/or Mexican American farmworker families, is located in a subordinate and vulnerable position within the economic system of the country, and specifically Colusa County. In effect, farmworkers' hard work and poor pay is the basis for their shared struggle, but their sense of belonging is primarily tied to having common ethnic origins and labor histories within the county rather than sharing in the same economic and social status.

A few of the interviewees make the trip to Mexico to visit relatives and friends on an annual basis for short periods of time (two weeks to a month). Others only travel to Mexico for special occasions or sporadic vacations. However, most of the interviewees never make regular trips to Mexico or have stopped visiting because of family

circumstances or apprehension of the crime reports from the country. Likewise, most of the interviewees did not grow up in Mexico. Regardless of their tenuous or completely absent relationship with Mexico as a physical place, the Hispanic leaders retain many Mexican cultural practices. Veronica, a small business owner, describes a continued expression of Mexican culture, in spite of being a U.S. born American citizen with limited physical ties to Mexico:

We still feel our culture in the food, in the religion, Catholic, even though I don't go to Spanish mass, but I still know the santos, the different saints. That's because I carried a respect for my mom, and she gave that to me. My connection would have been my mom and my dad's stories from Mexico. Not necessarily, it doesn't go as far as us coming from there.

Veronica remembers spending her early childhood migrating between farm towns with her own family and a few other migrant families that followed agricultural work from Arizona to the California Central Valley. She looks back at that time with mixed feelings since she realized then that her family was struggling financially—eating a diet primarily of bologna sandwiches and sleeping in abandoned motels. Then again, she felt lucky because everyone else was going to school, and she was playing with the other children in the orchards. Her family eventually settled down permanently in Colusa County when she was elementary school age, and they started a small business operation that has since gone out of business. Veronica had aspirations of going to college after high school, but instead she ended up working with her parents before the business went under. She hopes that her three children make it to college and find professional jobs afterwards.

Previously, she spent a lot of energy attending local city meetings and working to organize her friends and family around community issues, but she stopped her efforts two

years ago because she felt that the elected officials did not listen to them and that her opinion did not count to them. She continues to be frustrated by local government, particularly around what she perceives as their indifference to “Latinos’ opinions, ideas, or complaints.”

Nadia, a U.S. born citizen in her mid-30’s who has visited Mexico five times, shares Veronica’s sentiment about maintaining a connection to Mexican culture:

And the culture is always there. The food is always there. The language is definitely there. I still talk Spanish to my mom. I still watch Mexican soap operas on t.v. I practice my Spanish at work all the time. If and when I were to have kids, I want that still in them. I want that language and the culture and the food to still be in them. I don't want that to go away, because we don't go to Mexico.

She also firmly asserts that her affiliation and commitment to Mexican culture has nothing to do with a longing for Mexico as a geographical place:

I don't think I have roots in Mexico because we never migrated back and forth. I do have family there [Mexico]. But I don't see them and they don't come and see me. My life is here. This is what I was raised and what I'm used to... We're here to stay and that's it.

Nadia has worked in her current position for over a decade, providing social services to low income and disadvantaged families in the county. She has an associate’s degree, but she would like to go back to school and get her bachelor’s eventually, even though she currently does not have plans to do so. Her family came to California from Mexico in the 1950’s, and her mom and father worked as migrant workers for many years before settling down permanently in Colusa County. Nadia spoke passionately about her work and the families that she has supported through the programs she runs. The main

community issues that concern her—jobs, education, and youth training programs—revolve around helping those families.

The majority of the interviewees also described a commitment to family as another aspect of their Mexican culture. Barbara, a small business owner, linked Mexican culture to familial responsibility when she stated, “I agree with Mexican culture. In my opinion, being together as a family is very important.”

Barbara earned an associate’s degree and then went on to take specialized courses for her current profession. She would have liked to go to a four-year university, but she gave in to her parent’s wish that she stay close to them in the county. Now, she spends a lot of time at her business, but makes time to support her young children in school and after school activities. Barbara self-identifies as a passive person and has never attended a local government meeting, but she takes a leadership role as a parent organizer for her children’s school. Although she agrees with a lot of family traditions tied to Mexican culture, Barbara also wants her children to be and feel more independent than she was and make their own decisions.

Susana is also “big on [her] family,” and relates that they “are very united.” Laura relates that her “kids come first,” and Cecilia agrees that for her “family always comes first.” Cristian more clearly attaches his family obligation to his culture and how it differs from other American families:

Families get together a lot. One of the things I love, it's hard for me to believe that someone here gets old and they send them to a rest home. If you do that in the Latino community, you're through. You do that and you're like the worst person in the world...People don't understand that. There are a couple of Latino people in rest homes. But rarely that happens. That's a big value to me.

Cristian indicates that family obligation means taking care of aging relatives, but he also identifies obligations to children as a component of family obligation:

Graciela [his daughter] is in 7th grade, so she'll be playing soccer in about a month. I'll probably coach her team...I want to be involved in sports and with her.

Nadia responds to the question on the most important values in the following way:

Being very family oriented. We're together all the time, as far as holidays, as far as for our parents. It would be to have a relationship with our siblings. And having that close knit family. We've had divorces in our family. We've had...and that's helped us make us stronger in a sense because we realize even though you want this perfect...I don't know... You want a perfect life, it doesn't mean that you don't...you can't go wrong with family. We're there for the kids. We're close in that sense. To be there for each other... We're a very close knit family.

Some interviewees listed these family obligations as barriers to taking on political campaigns or to being in political office. For example, Juliana, upon being asked if she would ever run for political office, shows that she is overwhelmed by the thought because of her current family responsibilities:

I really don't...I just...I've been more under a lot of stress with my family. To think of myself in a leadership position, not right now. I'm not thinking...

VM: You're taking care of a lot of people as it is?

Juliana: Oh yeah. It's been very stressful with my family. My mom passed away unexpectedly. Things have happened...The family's been divided. It's been very stressful for me. I'm not feeling in a leadership position right now.

While Juliana, a local government employee in her 60s, saw her family obligations as a factor that deterred her from political involvement altogether, Francisca, a small business owner in her mid-30s, recognizes both the limits to participation in formal political

bodies and also the possibilities in alternatives to the formal political forum, such as a parents' club:

Francisca: You've gotta be honest with yourself. Anything as big as a school board is going to take nights. It's going to take time away from your family. Just like anything else.

VM: The parent club doesn't take as much time?

Francisca: No. Cause it's during the day.

Francisca describes the parents' club, a non-formal decision-making group, as being more accessible to parents with potential family conflicts since it is in the afternoon and not in the evening. She finds a way to get involved in decision making without attending school board meetings, which she regards as conflicting with family demands and responsibilities.

Francisca's parents moved to California from Mexico when they were school age. Her grandparents were in the Bracero program, but her parents found work outside of agriculture and eventually set up a small business in Colusa County. Growing up she was not very interested in school, but her parents encouraged her to take a professional skills training course that eventually led to her starting her own business as well. Francisca provides professional services through her business, but she also supports her primarily Hispanic clientele with various administrative issues they have with local government agencies, such as submitting permit applications. She related that she had never really been involved with community issues until her kids started school. After that, Francisca became a leader among her fellow parents and focused her civic energy on organizing projects for her children's school.

Other interviewees had more nuanced perspectives on how their familial responsibilities affected their political ambition. Take for instance Marcos, a local government employee in his early 40s, who initially states the following when asked if he would ever run for political office:

I also have my family. I have a young family...They keep me busy. It's also kind of hard to say I'm going to commit myself to this when I have my family to take care of.

Marcos has worked in his current position with the county for over 20 years. Growing up he migrated back and forth between California and Mexico with his family and worked with them in farm labor. He went on to study at a state college in California and graduated with the expectation that he would come back to Colusa County to work in a field that allowed him to give back to other migrant youth. His interface with local elected bodies comes almost exclusively from his work with the county, but he imagines that he will become more involved with local government when his kids start to grow up.

Despite his response that family responsibility takes him away from politics, Marcos recognizes that he currently sacrifices time with his family to give back to the community in ways that involve him participating in local meetings:

Just going to the meetings or being present at some committee or town hall meeting, a lot of times just by me being there, know that I care about the town, the City of Colusa, or the County of Colusa, because I participate. They know that I'm here, that I care about Colusa, because I could just not go to those meetings, just go home and spend the time with my family.

Further complicating his views on running for political office, Marcos affirms that he tries to remain “neutral” on politics but that he does support school activities as much as possible:

I try not to get involved like I said. I'm neutral. But I like to help out and participate in school functions, if they need me. I've been a senior project mentor. I'm always available if kids need sponsors for something. I get involved as much as I can.

The interviewees' sense of family obligation was sometimes spoken of as a barrier to political engagement, but that responsibility to their families was also seen as a reason to be more involved with politics. Hence, family obligation is not an either/or factor that strictly determines whether or not Hispanic leaders consider running for political office.

Aside from the commitment to family, the next most prominent element of cultural belonging for these Hispanic leaders is derived from cooking and eating traditional Mexican food. In describing how she maintains her Mexican culture through culinary means, Barbara emphasizes that, "I believe in eating beans. I grew up cooking Mexican food." The preparation and consumption of Mexican food is a central way by which these Hispanic leaders sustain a sense of cultural belonging.

Cultural belonging among the interviewees also encompassed the celebration of religious events they associate with Mexico, such as *el Dia de los Reyes*; traditional interpretations of religious events, such as Easter and Christmas; social events, such as *quinceaneras* and Mexican music festivals; and national events, such as Mexican Independence Day. Laura's description of how she and her family maintain Mexican cultural traditions is representative of these various ways of expressing and drawing meaning from cultural practices:

Oh yeah. We watch novelas every day. Food, we cook Mexican food. Not all the time, but most of the time. Then my little one, she watches cartoons in Spanish. She likes the Spanish ones better than the English ones. I don't go every Sunday, but we try to go to church every Sunday. Soccer on Sundays. It's like little things like that. We don't eat meat on Fridays during Lent. We go to Ash Wednesday. We have Palm Sunday, Dia de

Ramos, Dia de la Virgen. *My kids dress up like indias, in their skirts and braids, their dresses. We do some traditional stuff.*

Almost all the interviewees spoke Spanish on a daily basis, with their families, clients or other community members, and their linguistic ties were regarded as a fundamental element reflecting their continued cultural belonging. The one interviewee that did not speak fluent Spanish considered it to be a disadvantage to her career opportunities within the county, and she also acknowledged that she felt some separation from those Mexican descendants that speak Spanish, but she did not see it as limiting her own sense of cultural identification. Thus, linguistic ties are very important for the cultural identity and sense of belonging for those Hispanic leaders that have the language, but the absence of Spanish language skills does not necessarily minimize their ability to draw cultural significance from other practices.

In closing the discussion on cultural and ethnic belonging, it is important to note that the Hispanic leaders obtain pride from their ethnic and cultural belonging, as stated by Juliana: “I’m so glad myself to be Hispanic. Proud to be Hispanic in the USA.” As described above, the source of their ethnic and cultural belonging, which feeds into their feelings of pride, is the hard work ethic and shared struggle they identify with other Mexicans or Mexican Americans in the area, and their continued value of family life, the Spanish language, and/or other cultural practices. Yet, neither their pride, nor the belonging from which it is derived, limits their similarly strong ties to Colusa County.

Local Belonging

All the interviewees felt like they ‘belonged’ in Colusa County and were a key part of the region’s social fabric (even if some felt they were not recognized as such by

all community members). Despite the fact that only 7 of the 18 Hispanic leaders were born within the county limits, the interviewees consistently mentioned being “born and raised” in the county, and for most of them, their earliest childhood memories are here: picking prunes or walnuts with their families and other farmworkers in the fields, or playing on a deserted rural street.

Juliana, a local government employee in her early sixties, describes her attachment to both “the land and the people” in Colusa County:

I definitely have a connection with the agricultural community. Having been raised picking prunes and walnuts all my life. I'm very connected to the agricultural community. And the Hispanics in the community that I've known almost all my life. My job is mostly geared towards interpreting and helping the Hispanic community. I definitely feel very connected to the land and to the people in this community.

The interviewees’ memories of ‘place’—whether fond or painful—produced an underlying layer of geographic belonging for the interviewees, but their adult lives in the community concretized for them that Colusa County is home and the people within its boundaries are a part of this home. As quoted at the beginning of this section, Alma describes feeling very connected “to the land and to the people in this community” because she has both worked the land as a young farmworker and has given back to the community, specifically the Hispanic community, through her decades of work in social service. Also, the interviewees’ profound affection for the simple aspects of rural life—safety, knowing most of their neighbors, peacefulness, lack of traffic—played a prominent role in their descriptions of why they felt attached to Colusa County as both a physical space and a local community. Finally, the fact that they and their families were physically located within the boundaries of Colusa County greatly influenced their attachments to the area.

These four strands of the interviewees' lives—childhood memories, civic and community service, affection for rural life, and physical presence—shaped their geographic belonging to Colusa County.

All the interviewees' families, with one exception¹⁰, migrated to the United States, or Colusa County, specifically, for work in agricultural fields—primarily rice, tomatoes, prunes and walnuts. For these Hispanic leaders, their childhood memories in Colusa County are a combination of images of farm work, sacrifice, and setting down roots.

For those that worked in the fields as children, their memories were vivid and conjured up feelings of nostalgia for some interviewees, like Juliana, who reminisces about her days in the fields: “We had fun out there. We’d see other families and a lot of us were related. And we had prune fights. Yeah. I remember it being fun. We were young. We were kids and we made it fun.” However, those memories were painful for others, especially Olivia who describes starting to work as soon as she could “walk and talk” and recalls having to pick up “hot squishy prunes” on her hands and knees. She remembers dreading those mornings where her mother would tell her, “‘Get up. You’re not going to school today, you’re going to work.’ I remember I hated that.”

Regardless of whether their memories of farm work were painful or pleasant, they were perceived as a source of pride for the Hispanic leaders. They derived pride from their ability to endure strenuous labor as children and help their families, and then, as adults, they were able to move on to jobs outside of agriculture, while still maintaining the work ethic they had learned in the fields. They felt that the work in Colusa County helped bring

¹⁰ One interviewee came to the United States after marrying a U.S. citizen whose family was originally from her hometown.

their families to the United States, and for that, they were grateful because of what they perceived as greater job and educational opportunities here than in Mexico. These feelings of gratitude and pride were connected to Colusa County, and they asserted their status of belonging because of the hard labor and sacrifice that had been made by them and/or their parents to this rural community.

Even interviewees who did not grow up working in agriculture recognized the sacrifice their parents had made for them and for the broader agricultural community in Colusa County, by their work in the fields. Nadia explains that her parents' dedication to her family was exhibited through their tireless commitment to providing for them:

I feel very grateful for their decisions. I know my parents worked the fields. My mom worked in hoeing tomatoes, tomato fields, up until she was seven months pregnant with me. She stopped working in June when my brothers finished school and they took her place, so she could go home and get ready to have me. She had me in August. To know that my mom did all that, wow, she did it. She had that drive and she had that dream. I'm going to do for my kids. I will work. I will provide and give them a life that they deserve.

Likewise, when asked if he could choose to live anywhere, Christian articulates the link he associates between his belonging in Colusa County and his family's labor history in the area:

VM: If you could choose anywhere to live, where would it be?

Cristian: *Colusa. I love the work I do. I love to see the smile on people. They work so hard. My parents worked hard in the fields. My mom worked hard in the fields. My uncles worked hard in the fields. I see them and recognize how hard they worked. It's amazing. It's hard labor.*

Even though farm labor may have positioned the Hispanic leaders in a particular class hierarchy (which will be discussed later in this chapter), the interviewees' own sense of belonging appears to be drawn, in part, by their families' ties to farm labor in the

county. In fact, many of the interviewees still remembered the farm families with which they or their parents worked. These relationships to a particular farmer reinforced a confidence that they and their families belonged in Colusa County since they had been ‘chosen’ to work in the region because of their reliability and work ethic.

In many of these Hispanic leaders’ eyes, their current place of belonging in the community is an *earned belonging*, or a type of belonging that has been attained through their work or service in Colusa County. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg developed an ‘earned belonging’ theory that was primarily used as a legal argument in family disputes. This theory asserts that a parent’s or spouse’s familial rights can be earned through concrete displays of contributing to the family unit, including financial and emotional support and domestic labor efforts (Tait, 2012). For the Hispanic leaders in this study, their earned belonging is distinct from that developed by Ginsburg and is not seen as conferring legal rights, but, rather, as a personal conviction of belonging. When asked to describe their feelings of belonging in Colusa County, they tended to discuss the service they provide through their jobs or through community service. In response to what he sees as his feelings of belonging in the county, Patricio, a non-profit employee and permanent resident, responded in the following way:

I know a lot of people in the community. A lot of people in the community know me. They have respect for me. They see me out on the street and wave. All kinds of people. Not just clients.

VM: How does that make you feel to be respected and well known within the community?

Patricio: *It just makes you enjoy living here. And that's important. When I first came here it was different. It was like we were outcasts. But now it's changed.*

Patricio not only mentions how people respect him for the works he does in the community, but he also asserts that this work has allowed him to obtain that sense of belonging in the county that he did not feel when he first arrived. Paula, a naturalized U.S. citizen who came to Colusa in her teens and has worked as a local government employee for 15 years, had a similar response:

I feel like I belong here. You know what, I have a really good relationship with my [clients]. That I feel like just knowing that I'm appreciated by them and I'm respected by them makes me feel like I've done something. I've made a change in their lives... I see my results with what I have done.

Other Hispanic leaders indicated that they had ‘earned’ a feeling of belonging in Colusa County through their position as business owners—contributing to the economic development of the region—or by playing leadership roles in planning activities or fundraisers for their own children and other Colusa County youth. At least one interviewee’s ‘earned’ belonging originated from being supported as a promising student when she was growing up. Susana states that, “As we grew up here, I always felt that this community was very supportive *to me*. We were good students... We were kids that were on a straight track. We were involved. We weren’t running around.” Susana was a deserving, academically-promising, and civic-minded child who attained attention and academic cultivation through her efforts, and, in return, she earned a firm sense of belonging in the Colusa County community.

Most of the interviewees also described their connection to Colusa County as arising from their affection for small town rural life. The most common pleasure from rural living was the fact that they feel that “everybody knows each other,” and they “know the families of the kids [their] children are dating.” Similarly, David states, “I like rural counties. It’s a good place to raise a family.” Those personal relationships that they

see as part of the small town life in Colusa County were a key source of their belonging in the community.

The natural landscape of the region also influenced a few of the interviewees' affection for rural life, and interviewees related a love for the "outdoors and the mountains" and the "beautiful areas" that they were familiar with from driving on the county's backroads. Their personal familiarity and experience with these special places in the outskirts of town reinforced their sense of belonging in the region. In other words, an aspect of their belonging in the county stemmed from this insider's knowledge of the area and confirmed for them that they were 'locals' and true members of the geographic region.

Although the majority of the interviewees admired and enjoyed their rural lifestyle in Colusa County, there were three Hispanic leaders that had come to adamantly resent small town life. For two of these interviewees, this resentment originated from earlier childhood experiences in larger cities, and they missed some of the conveniences of living in bigger cities, such as access to shopping or cultural centers. The other interviewee had recently begun to feel targeted because of her outspokenness on issues in the community. She sees living in a small town and knowing everyone as a disadvantage to being candid, since everyone's lives are interconnected and it is hard to avoid people that one might have potentially offended. These interviewees still felt a sense of belonging in Colusa County, but it was not directly connected to an affection for rural life.

A related finding was that many of the Hispanic leaders felt connected to Colusa County by the sheer fact that they and their families were physically present in the area,

as illustrated by Carla, a permanent resident who came to the county when she was in high school:

My feelings for Mexico, that's my homeland, I was born there. But my life is here in Colusa now. It matters more to me what happens to Colusa. Cause I'm going to live here. My family's going to live here. My family lives here.

Carla's sentiments were shared by all the interviewees that still had family ties in Mexico. These interviewees do engage in transnational activities, most notably social networking with relatives in Mexico; and conducting and/or participating in holiday, wedding, and *quinceañera* events in Mexico. Yet, these intermittent activities do not trump their sense of belonging to the place where their immediate family members live and work; where their kids went or go to school; and where they have spent the majority of their lives. This physical place is Colusa County, but, at the same time, their sense of belonging is attached to the fact that their immediate family is also physically present in the region. In this way, their geographic belonging to Colusa County could possibly be believed to be ephemeral; if close family members—such as children or spouses—were to leave the county, that bond with the region based on physical presence could conceivably be broken, diminishing their sense of belonging in the county. Indeed, some interviewees with children relayed this willingness to relocate based on their children's possible adult trajectories, such as Doris who stated that once her son moved away, she would “probably move where his college is.”

Doris's family migrated between Mexico and various Southern states, but they settled in the United States permanently when she was very young. Most of her husband's family is still in Mexico, but all of her close family is in California and she has no interest in visiting Mexico. When Doris grew up, she decided to take steps to become

a U.S. citizen, and she derives pride in the fact that she worked to become a citizen through the naturalization process instead of simply being born with it. She took coursework at the local community college and hopes to one day go back and take the few classes that she needs in order to complete her degree. Doris's work is focused on locating social services for primarily Hispanic families in the community, and her civic interests are divided between services that she thinks should increase for the families she works with and activities for her own children.

Marcos also thought he might move with his kids once they "are older and they move away to college or they get married." Nevertheless, when asked where they would choose to live if they could live anywhere, each interviewee, save one, stated that Colusa County was the place.

In summary, there are multiple underlying factors that establish a sense of geographic belonging for these Hispanics leaders. If they have a strong sense of belonging to this region, which is not inhibited by their Mexican cultural or ethnic ties, then why does that belonging not manifest itself in the political realm through running for political office? The next section explains why political belonging is more difficult to attain for the Hispanic leaders in this study.

HISTORY OF LABOR RELATIONS: PERCEPTIONS OF FARMER POWER

It [is] still political. The farmers are like all white and we're keeping it like this, the old way and it's gonna be like this.

- Doris, local government employee

Colusa County is decidedly an agricultural community, with the majority of jobs in the county being located in the production, harvesting, processing or packaging of

agricultural goods. Reflecting that economic interest in the county, the perception of many of the Hispanic leaders was that the “rich farmers” who “have always lived here” are the main political players in the county and that they are the ‘type’ of people that run for office and ultimately get elected. Just as the political arena is constructed as a separate, unapproachable space for many of the interviewees, they view non-Hispanic white farmers and farming families as being both at ease in formal political forums and the people most apt or likely to be in political decision-making roles in Colusa County.

As they perceive non-Hispanic white, wealthy farmers to have utmost formal political power, they are cautious or resolutely opposed to the possibility of challenging them in a political campaign. Moreover, despite these Hispanic leaders having attained professional positions outside of farm labor, the perception of non-Hispanic white Colusa County farmers as ‘bosses’ continues to influence the way they see their own position in the county, and typically translates into them seeing themselves and/or potential Hispanic voters in Colusa County in a subordinate position within the overall political structure of the county, with non-Hispanic white farm families seen as a dominate, elite political class.

This section explores Hispanic leaders’ perceptions of power dynamics in Colusa County politics, and how those perceived dynamics—whether or not they are factually verifiable—thwart Hispanics leaders’ penetration into formal politics in the county.

“We Work for Them”: Farmers, Bosses and Treading Lightly

Nadia: You really can't run against a white guy. You can't. You're going to lose, regardless whether the population, whether we outnumber them. I think they'll still win.

VM: Why do you think that?

Nadia: *I think they can brainwash us, because we work for them. In farm labors. We work for them in the rice fields. We work for them in the orchards. We work for them.*

The Hispanic leaders' thoughts and perceptions are influenced by the specific socio-historical context in which their lives are embedded. In Colusa County, this context is a local economy heavily dependent upon agriculture, and the farmers (bosses) and farm laborers (employees) that form a part of this agricultural system. As mentioned previously, all of the interviewees have family ties to farm laborers, and their memories of the sacrifice, economic disadvantage, and hard labor wrapped up within this work are palpable, whether or not they themselves worked in the fields. Currently, 16 of the 18 interviewees work in positions where Hispanics, chiefly Mexican immigrants and their families, are their main clients. Hence, their pasts are mingled with their present positions in a way that creates a semi-collective identity with those that are still in farm labor. The relationship is 'semi-collective,' or only partially collective, because their identities have moved beyond being strictly part of a farmworker family, and now encompass success in business, educational accomplishments, and/or giving back to the farmworker communities from which they came. Nevertheless, this 'semi-collective' identity shapes the way they see themselves situated in the political hierarchy in Colusa County. In this hierarchal political vision, the farmers are still the 'bosses' and maintain control, influence, and power over their 'employees,' both the concrete employees (current Hispanic farmworkers) and the symbolic employees (former Hispanic farmworkers and their families).

For 10 of the 18 Hispanic leaders, their ability to conceive of themselves as equal political members is further impeded by their roles as city and/or county employees. Their political proximity gives them first-hand knowledge of the local political process, which tends to simultaneously increase their understanding of the system and their political ambition. Yet, their political ambition is hindered by their positions as employees to the current elected officials, since their bosses would be their opponents if they were to run for political office. Given that farmers are perceived as both the bosses and the elected officials, and the city and/or county's bosses are realistically the current elected officials; then the Hispanic leaders who are local government employees encounter an even more complicated negotiation of their position within the political hierarchy of Colusa County.

Moreover, at least four of the nine local government employees thought that they could not run for political office because they are government employees. However, according to the Colusa County Clerk, government employees are not prohibited from running for any local elected office. Upon being elected to office, they must simply recuse themselves from votes that might affect their specific positions.

The Hispanic leaders in this study consider farmers and farm families to be the community members who are most likely to be in political office and hold formal political power. Susana compares the formal political setting to a pool, where she is a small fish and the elected officials from farm families are big fish:

Yeah. I have to be very selective how I present my ideas, what I think. Because I'm just like...I feel like a small fish in a pool. And some of the fish that are in the pool are a lot bigger. And let me explain why. They're the wife of a farmer. They're a farmer. A farmer. You know what I'm saying? As a...as a small fish, or smaller kind of fish, I have to be very careful.

Not only does Susana feel that she is in a subordinate position within the formal political system, but she also believes that she has to be extremely cautious and circumspect in how she interacts with the elected officials who are from farm families and therefore wield more political power and influence. It is important to mention here that throughout our conversation Susana reiterated over and over again how she felt like she belonged in the Colusa County community and how she was well-liked and respected by farm families and Hispanic families alike. In fact, she asserted her sense of purpose and belonging in the community more strongly than most of the other interviewees. Still, when it comes to the political realm specifically, there are boundaries drawn that pit her in a marginalized, subordinate position to the farmers and farm families, and these boundaries cause her to limit her political action.

Other interviewees were more explicit about how they saw their political roles within the county. Daniel directly identifies the continued political and economic division in Colusa County:

Our population as far as Mexicans: We're still those ones that do the work. Our masters are the landowners. That's just a reality. We're not trying to overthrow the government.

SEEKING POLITICAL ALTERNATIVES THROUGH EVERYDAY CIVIC PRACTICES

I think I like to stay neutral in all those politics. You just never know. I don't get involved with a lot of the politics. I help out the community a lot in different ways.

- Marcos, local government employee

For many of the Hispanic leaders, the formal political realm is not perceived as a site of struggle for common community members' rights and redistribution of resources,

but rather a site where farmers and their political allies debate either self-serving or inconsequential matters. Therefore, the Hispanic leaders tend to choose to engage in spheres outside of this almost farcical formal political realm and work to take actions and make claims that bypass elected officials and formal political bodies.

Cristian, the non-profit employee that has worked on local political representatives' campaigns, does not question the elected officials' motives. However, he admits Colusa County politics is primarily an arena for promoting farming interests:

It's a farming community. So a lot of them [elected officials] are farmers themselves. They're representing those interests, and I don't see nothing wrong with that.

Still, other interviewees not only feel that the decisions of the local elected officials do not pertain to them, but they also feel that when they do speak up in public forums, that they're decisions do not matter. Veronica, a small business owner, relates her frustration with the local city council meetings:

I was like, okay, I'm going to go and I'm going to be heard. Nope. It didn't happen that way. It didn't happen that way...If they're not giving any attention to what you're saying then you're just going to give up. Whatever we say in your meetings doesn't count anyways. Do what you want. It's just a waste of time or energy. You're just going to get stressed out.

Cecilia also senses that her input and participation at local political meetings is discounted. She describes the exclusion she experienced at a local committee meeting that reports to the city council:

I went to a meeting. To me I felt like the token Mexican because they're asking us to put in our suggestions. It was more focused on the senior citizens. Although I do respect the senior citizens in Colusa because they've been here. They were focusing more on things for older people...None of the suggestions I've made or said in the little groups ever got a second thought. They had like a book of the meetings that they were trying to show

the State, to show 'these are the people in the meetings.' I was in almost every picture that they were presenting to the State. I thought that was odd. Oh, I'm real popular, but they didn't listen to a damn thing I said.

Cecilia feels both excluded and exploited by her efforts to contribute to local politics. The experience sours her impression of the local political system in Colusa County.

Other interviewees, such as Doris, have formed the impression that Hispanic community members have difficulty in obtaining political influence, owing to their minority position in the political realm, even when they have been elected to a political position. Doris explains:

According to Alvaro [an elected official], even though he was the first Hispanic [school board member], because it's that political section and he was still outvoted, he could only say so much. If you don't have the support of the others, you can't really do a big huge difference. Even though I worked there, I could tell the difference when they had their meetings and all that. The discussing they would always mention that the Hispanics were this, he still didn't have the support cause it was still political.

Confronted with the impenetrability of the formal political realm, many of the Hispanic leaders, like Doris, focus their energy outside of electoral politics and the formal political arena. Organizing youth activities is one primary area where the Hispanic leaders put their efforts, particularly around the recent formation of a county youth soccer league. At least five of the interviewees were influential in forming a new soccer league in Colusa County, when formerly Colusa County youth had to join a league in another county and drive to games outside the county. With the move, they were able to form a new playing schedule (moving games to Sunday, so more farmworker parents would be able to attend games), board of directors, and other modified protocol. The interviewees

sought the support of the city council, and ultimately attained it, but the league is outside of formal politics and does not report or receive directives from elected officials.

Paula, a local government employee, clearly expresses the aforementioned concentration on children's activities and how this focus can be separated from the political decision making forum:

I'm really not involved in all that, the city council and all that. I'm really involved in the school district. I don't really go to the city meetings. I should, but I don't. My life revolves around the community, the parents, the students. That's where my focus is, being there for them. The other, no.

Along those lines, Francisca has found a way to circumvent her city's school board in order to have more impact on the decisions in her child's school. She is a leader in the school's parents' club. As such, she is able to work with other parent leaders, almost entirely Hispanic parents, in making decisions that affect their children's educational experience:

VM: You all are able to make decisions on your own, outside of the school board?

Francisca: Uh-hunh. The parents' club, it's not...it's not school board. What kind of things do we vote on there? For the parents' club, we'll basically vote on ideas, there's field trips coming up. How much can [we] pay for those field trips so the kids don't have to pay so much to go on the field trip. That kind of goes to the fact that the parents usually work in the fields, so it's a little bit more low income, or they don't have just one kid at school. They have five kids. So if they have five kids going on five field trips that can get kind of expensive for a family. We make decisions on that.

VM: You're able to kind of get around the school board in some way?

Francisca: Uh- hunh.

She went on to describe parents' club fundraisers, organized with no input from the school board, that had raised thousands of dollars in just a few years, with the money allocated as the club members themselves deemed most beneficial for the students (e.g., park equipment, art, supplies, field trip funds). However, their decisions seem to pertain only to issues outside of the classroom, while the school board, the formal elected body, still has more power and control over decisions relating to the children's academic experience.

CHAPTER 5: Analysis and Conclusion

I was talking to some of the bigger...the [community] contributors. I was talking to the contributors. I said, 'it's good that Merced is running, right?' And they said, 'yeah, but he's not gonna win. He's just another Mexican.' I'll never forget that's what he said...This guy won't be elected if he doesn't obey. It's harder for Mexicans, because they don't have the backing. They don't know who to go to. I really, really appreciate what Merced did.

Daniel, local business owner

A number of the interviews mentioned Merced Corona as a Hispanic resident that would be a good elected official and political representative for Hispanics in the county as he was a deputy sheriff and had a lot of experience in Colusa County. Merced is admired within the Hispanic community given his work with youth at a local boxing gym and is perceived as a potential leader that could benefit the Hispanic community in particular. Merced ran for county sheriff, but lost to the incumbent sheriff who also happened to be his boss at the time.

Interviewees' perspective of Merced's run for office, and the aftermath, illuminate the hopes and fears about Hispanics running for office in the county. Specifically, they related their hopes for a Hispanic leader such as Merced; their perception of the Hispanic voters in the county; and their fears about the price Merced paid for running in and losing the election. However, many of the interviewees saw Merced's political campaign as an example of how a viable Hispanic candidate would almost inevitably lose because of the lack of support from not just the non-Hispanic white members of the community, but also Hispanic voters given a common perceptions that "he was brainwashed being white" and would be just "another corrupted, typical, Latino politician."

At the same time, the interviewees did not see Merced as a realistic candidate because of racism among the county's non-Hispanic whites and the perception he was

“just another Mexican.” Compounding this issue was the perceived risk Merced took in running against his boss, and losing, and the negative consequences to his professional career. After Merced lost the election, one interviewee stated that Merced was re-assigned to a different and less desirable section of the county to patrol. Also, prior to the election, Merced had been on top of a promotion list. After the election, he learned that he was suddenly off the list.

In the end, the interviewees all thought that having more Hispanic political representation in the county would be beneficial for the Hispanic community. However, both historical structural barriers *and* individual perceptions are preventing them from envisioning themselves in a formal political role. All of the interviewees want more Hispanic leaders to run for political office in the county. However, they do not want to be the ones in that position since, among other things, they doubt Hispanic candidates would have the support of either non-Hispanic white or Hispanic voters. Furthermore, running for office is seen as a substantial risk to their professional careers.

On the surface, the findings from the interviews paint a picture of Hispanic leaders who feel a tight bond to fellow Hispanic residents and a similarly strong pull to Colusa County as a physical place and community. Digging deeper, however, the Hispanic leaders reveal that the formal political domain—as opposed to their professional and personal spheres—is viewed as off limits to them. Many of the interviewees react to the exclusion they perceive in the formal political realm by engaging in activities that are tangential to the formal political bodies (e.g., soccer club and parents’ club). Also, their cultural belonging hinges primarily on a shared history of struggle in farm labor and the cultural similarities from Mexican ancestry.

Their cultural belonging engenders empathy and, at times, outrage for the difficult circumstances of Hispanic residents in Colusa County. Yet, the Hispanic leaders distinguished themselves from other Hispanic residents along class lines. The Hispanic leaders distinguished themselves because of their English language ability, extended period of time spent in the community, and professional positions. Laura states that she feels bad for her Hispanic community because she “knows where they’re coming from.” Still, she reluctantly admits that decisions that negatively affect the Hispanic community, particularly farm laborers, often must be made, such as raising utility rates. She related that without raising rates the services cannot be improved, but many fellow Hispanic community members do not see it that way. Her statement is emblematic of how the interviewees’ ethnic solidarity seems to be in tension with their professional identity. They remain linked to the lower wage Hispanic workers through their past struggles, but their present positions in the county pull them in the opposite direction at times.

Larger structural issues of race, class, and labor history loom over the Hispanic leaders’ perceptions of political power in Colusa County. They distinguish themselves from the farm laborers still laboring the fields, but they also see themselves as in a lower status than the non-Hispanic white farm families in the county who are still seen as the “bosses.” Furthermore, the government employees that report to the elected political bodies quite literally would be running against their bosses if they decided to run for political office.

ENTANGLEMENTS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The aim of this research was to identify the individual and structural factors that influence traditionally qualified Hispanic leaders' decisions around running for political office in Colusa County, a majority Hispanic jurisdiction. The findings from the interviews reveal both the complexity of the leaders' lives and the difficulties in disentangling the social, economic, cultural, and historical facets involved in answering the question. Many of the explanatory factors employed to understand candidate emergence in the general population are not sufficient to explain the lack of political ambition with the Hispanic leaders in this study. The Hispanic leaders share many of the attributes that typically correlate with political candidates. They are in professional positions (Lawless and Fox, 2010); fall within the most likely age range for political participation (Fox and Lawless, 2005; Ramakrishnan and Espenshade, 2001); and are in a jurisdiction with a large co-ethnic population (Shah and Marschall, 2011).

Following the political participation literature on immigrants and their families would also have predicted that the Hispanic leaders would be likely political candidates. The Hispanic leaders are fluent in English, with only one exception (Uhlener et al., 1989; Barreto and Muñoz, 2003); have spent all or most of their lives in the United States (Barreto and Muñoz, 2003; Hill and Moreno, 1996; and Portes and Rumbaut, 2006); and are in high income positions for the region (DeSipio, 2001; Jones-Correa, 1998). Also, most of the Hispanic leaders have at least some college experience (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006; DeSipio, 2001).

If these considerations are not applicable in understanding why the Hispanic leaders in this study are not running for office, then what does explain this situation? The

findings from the interviews offer multiple paradoxical explanations that intersect across notions of cultural, geographical, and familial belonging; class, economic and social status; and perceptions of relative power.

The interviewees demonstrate multiple levels of belonging, specifically a sense of belonging to Colusa County as a geographical place and a social community. The interviewees are not only ‘attached’ to Colusa County as a place, but their identities are embedded in their sense of belonging with the county. Yet, the majority still feel like outsiders in the county’s political realm, which leads to being discouraged from political engagement altogether or motivating them to find alternatives to the formal political sphere. This finding fits in with the cultural citizenship literature that describes it as both a subjectifying and discriminating political experience (Ong, 1996) and an alternative mode of political action (Rosaldo, 1994).

By contrast, Castells (2010) argues that a local identity, such as that constructed by the Hispanic leaders, propels individuals into the political sphere. However, within the context of Colusa County, the study suggests strong local identities are not enough to overcome the other barriers to running for political office that individuals encounter in their daily and professional lives. The Hispanic leaders consider the political sphere to be a space for non-Hispanic white farmers and their interests, and the formal political bodies are deemed recalcitrant to their own needs and claims. At the same time, their devotion to their community—particularly their immediate and extended family and their co-ethnic clients—instills a strong desire to provide services and give their time to community needs.

Despite their commitment to the community, the Hispanic leaders are forced to find political alternatives because of the exclusion felt in the formal political realm. These alternative political actions (e.g., parents' clubs and community soccer league organizing) confer visibility to the Hispanic leaders and garner gratitude from the co-ethnic community. Unfortunately, these alternative civic spheres are limited in their material impact on the community in comparison to the decisions of the formal political bodies. The elected officials in the formal political arena draw on an annual budget to authorize planning projects, set utility and water rates, and make decisions on the academic experience of children in public schools. The alternative political realm allows the Hispanic leaders to plan projects without the approval of formal political officials, but they are limited to extracurricular activities and require fundraising efforts prior to implementation.

If they feel excluded from the political realm, then why are they not challenging that environment by running for political office and gaining access to the formal decision making bodies themselves? The remaining explanations elucidate the varying answers to that puzzle.

The interviewees exhibit solidarity with co-ethnics in Colusa County, through relations of shared struggle and cultural camaraderie. However, the solidarity does not appear to take the form of 'group consciousness' that elevates cultural belonging and solidarity into political action in the form of running for office. Jones-Correa (1995) contends that experiences which form group consciousness "must not only be similarly experienced, but also similarly interpreted" if it is to result in organized political action among the immigrant and/or co-ethnic group (p.86). The Hispanic leaders are empathetic

towards the co-ethnics in the community still working in the fields, described by them as gaining poor wages and struggling to provide a good life for their families. Still, they distinguish themselves from this type of labor and the new wave of immigrants that continue to arrive to the county. With this identity delineation, they are drawing the lines of what type of collective action and political risk they are willing to take on behalf of the co-ethnic group.

Similar to Jaramillo's (2008) study of traditionally qualified Hispanic women in San Antonio, family obligations were also cited in this study as a deterrent to running for an elected position. The Hispanic leaders referred to caring for an elderly relative and spending nights with family as specific conflicting family obligations to running for political office. However, contrary to Jaramillo's study, the importance placed on families compels some of the Hispanic leaders in this study to contemplate running for political office, particularly the school board. Hence, the family obligations felt by Hispanic leaders both motivate and deter their candidacy decisions, depending on the specific situation. From this study, Hispanic leaders with school age children were more likely to see serving on a political body as a benefit to their families, while those with small children or adult children were more likely to see it as taking away from family responsibilities.

Another confounding question is whether or not the Hispanic leaders in the study are power brokers in the community (able to mobilize co-ethnic and broader support) or if their political power is limited by their positionality. Specifically, the "in-between" economic positions of the Hispanic leaders in the study influence their perceptions of

their own social status within the community and their connection to other Hispanic community members.

The majority of the Hispanic leaders from the study fall within a middleman minority (e.g., government employees and non-profit workers) or ethnic enclave category (e.g., small business owners). The leaders in the middleman minority position, although not self-identified “entrepreneurs” acting between producers and consumers, are advocates for the Hispanic community, and often have their best interests in mind in their work. Yet, their livelihoods are maintained through a balancing act between professional positions subordinate to economic elites and their efforts to support the Hispanic working class. As such, they are bound by an “in-between” economic state that constrains their political flexibility. Thus, running for an elected office could put them in political competition with the elite class on which their livelihood depends; a risk they may not be willing to take. By contrast, business owners and professionals are not subject to the same economic constraints and responsibilities to elites as middleman minorities in Colusa County. Nevertheless, their daily business interactions are predominantly with co-ethnics in the county’s Hispanic enclave. For example, clients include individuals without legal or citizenship status who are excluded from the formal political realm (i.e., ineligible to vote, specifically ineligible to cast votes in their co-ethnics’ favor).

Similarly, only 31 percent of the voting population is Hispanic. The low Hispanic voting registration rate in the county does not prevent Hispanic candidates from winning. Indeed, one out of every three Hispanic candidates has won in local Colusa County elections in the last 12 years. Yet, the Hispanic leaders in the both the ethnic enclave and the modified middleman position have the sense that there could be difficulty in entering

the formal political realm and competing for votes both within and outside their co-ethnic base. The revealing aspect of the study is that there is a widespread perception that non-Hispanic white voters are not willing to vote for a Hispanic candidate, and also that co-ethnic voters would not support a Hispanic candidate. As the analysis of Merced Corona demonstrates, a foray into politics does not fit neatly within the Hispanic leaders' own perceptions of how to achieve professional success and obtain community goals. For most of them, it is better to work in the political margins (i.e., the school clubs and the advisory committees), rather than taking the risky move to run for office.

Another important element of the findings was how the perceptions of political power in Colusa County are shaped and constrained by historical labor relations. The Hispanic leaders have moved beyond farm labor into professional positions, but a dominant ideology persists that positions them and their potential co-ethnic voters into subordinate positions in relation to the non-Hispanic white farm families seen as a dominant, elite class. Gramsci's theorization of hegemony explains how farmers and landowners (the elite class) are able to maintain the subordination of the Hispanic leaders through the elite class's role in agriculture, the main mode of production in Colusa County. The Hispanic leaders may not work directly under the non-Hispanic white farmers, but they still conceptualize the farmers as their "bosses" and even their "masters" suggesting that consensual agreement does exist between the two groups. The division of labor and economic power is so heavily entrenched within the county that the farmers are constructed not only as the bosses and masters but also as the most apt political actors.

Since farm labor has been racialized over time and inextricably linked with Hispanic residents, the Hispanic leaders face the conundrum of being respected professionals (at least within the co-ethnic community) and simultaneously part of a racialized minority associated with marginalized labor (Mitchell, 1996). The formal political sphere is where their “in-between” status in the community (marginalized and revered) appears the most obvious to them. Their retreat from the formal political realm and insertion in alternative political endeavors circumvents the exclusionary political environment, but it is also a form of consent that ensures the persistence of the unbalanced political structure.

This unequal relationship is reinforced by the self-perception of Hispanic interviewees in accepting their precarious social position. They want more Hispanics to run for political office, but, at the same time, most of them see a political future for themselves as a virtual impossibility and minimize their professional success in comparison to the political influence of the non-Hispanic white elected officials. Governmentality works in this way: the idea of subordination, rather than simply the expression of subordination, is reinforced in Hispanic leaders’ minds and diminishes their ability to imagine an alternative political environment in the county or a heightened role within existing political spaces.

The unbalanced political representation in Colusa County reveals the complex intersection between exclusion, subordination, and racialization. Aside from family obligations, the Hispanic leaders’ individual circumstances do not precisely explain why more traditionally qualified Hispanic residents are not running for political office. The

structural barriers in Colusa County more clearly indicate the reasons why the Hispanic leaders in this study lack political ambition or choose not to run for political office.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study analyzed the lack of Hispanic political representation in only one majority Hispanic county. With similar circumstances in 14 cities in California, there are ample opportunities for comparative studies to build upon and broaden the scope of these findings. Also, the sample size was limited to 18 interviewees and further research could include a more statistically representative sample population. The interviewees in this study were also primarily women with only five male interviewees. The small sample size did not allow for analysis of the gender differences among the interviewees, which could be corrected in a larger study.

Future research on the lack of political representation in majority-minority jurisdictions should also compare the political ambition of non-minority residents in similar professional positions. The results could provide further insight into how the process by which individuals decide to run, or not to run, for office differs for Hispanic candidates.

Further research could analyze the political possibilities of informal civic practices. The interviewees channeled their civic energy into the informal political realm (e.g., soccer leagues and parents' clubs), which serves in some ways as an escape valve for their frustrations with the community, but can also build capacities needed in the formal political realm. Some of this work includes skills in negotiating support from elected officials or other county decisionmakers (albeit outside of the formal

decisionmaking meetings), which can lead to community recognition and political influence. More research is needed to identify the negotiations found in everyday civic practices as well as the policy outcomes that are derived from these practices and other expressions of cultural citizenship.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The findings reveal that accomplished and admired Hispanic community leaders shy away from formal politics due to a combination of political exclusion and the fear of the repercussions of running against candidates that are literally, or figuratively, their bosses. The first step in addressing these concerns would be to make the political realm more amenable to the Hispanic community in general. This does not mean simply providing Spanish translators (although that would also be a useful addition to all local government meetings in the county). The Hispanic leaders in this study are all fluent in English, and many have even grown up in the county. It is more than simply understanding the meetings; rather, it is about creating an environment that acknowledges and embraces the shifting demographics in the county.

Nominal efforts at inclusiveness are transparent, including inviting Hispanic leaders to sit on an advisory committee and then, as Cecilia put it, “not listening to a damn thing” they say. The focus must first be on listening to the needs of the community that are communicated by the people that do show up to meetings. If the Hispanic leaders already feel ostracized by the current political representatives, then it is hard to imagine them wanting to serve as the single Hispanic official alongside a sea of non-Hispanic white established representatives.

Next, there need to be more systematic efforts to encourage naturalization and register Hispanic voters. Currently, the Colusa County Clerk's office has the only formal outreach program to register voters. However, a government program may not be the most effective means of registering new voters that may already feel disenfranchised by the formal political arena in the county. Also, a local non-profit is has begun a new program to offer citizenship classes to the community. Yet, there are only a few dozen spots available at a time. There are potentially hundreds or thousands of Colusa County residents that are eligible to naturalize and gain the right to vote. The non-profit's program may expand and reach out to more people, but more funding is needed for this purpose.

Further, there is the common misconception that there are few Hispanics registered to vote in the county, or that Hispanic candidates cannot win. This fictitious information should be corrected, and the real statistics should be disseminated widely to the community. Hispanics are already one-third of the voting population, and when Hispanic candidates have run for office, they have won one out of every three times. These statistics defy the mistaken belief that a Hispanic candidate cannot beat a non-Hispanic white candidate in Colusa County, and that Hispanics in Colusa County do not vote. Once more people recognize the potential for success, it may encourage more Hispanic leaders to take the risk of running for political office.

There is also a need for more education on the eligibility requirements for running for office. Many of the interviewees had misconceptions about the qualifications a political candidate needed, including the idea that one needed formal political training or higher education. The informal groups that are already organized in the community could

take the lead in providing this type of information and encouraging community leaders to overcome the doubts about their educational and political background. This outreach could include details about the campaign and election process in general. The current Hispanic elected officials could also share their stories about serving as a political representative and the process they followed to get elected. Hearing success stories may dispel some of the myths about Hispanics' inability to be elected in the county.

Finally, it is important to note that having greater Hispanic representation is not a panacea that will immediately or inevitably bring benefits to Hispanic residents in the county. As this study demonstrates, the Hispanic population of the county is highly diverse and divided across both political and class lines. Still, Hispanic representation will at the very minimum provide the community with symbolic representation, and allow the diversity of the community to be more fully represented among the formal political bodies. Beyond that, there is at least the opportunity for representation that more fully embodies the shared experiences and unique perspectives of Hispanic residents in the county.

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Appendix 1 - Interview Protocol

Background Information

- Where do you work? What is your position there?
- What is your educational background?
- Where are you from originally?
- How long have you and/or your family lived in Colusa County? What town?
- What brought you to Colusa County?

Political Consciousness

- How do you think local politics affect your personal and/or professional life (such as the city council, board of supervisors, and the board of education)?
- What are some of the major local events that have captured your attention?
- What are some of the most important issues for you and your family?
- How are the currently elected/appointed officials doing from your perspective?
 - Are they representing your interests? In what way?
 - What are some of the specific issues that they have supported/opposed that you admired?
 - Alternatively, what are some of the specific issues that they have supported/opposed that you were against?
- Are there Latino community members that you think would be good political representatives? Why?
- Would you consider running for a local political office?

Political Participation

- Do you vote?
- If so, in which elections (local, state, or federal)? Did you vote in the local elections last year? Why do you choose those over others?
- What are ways in which you contribute to local politics?
 - Are you involved in your children's school?
 - If you attend school board or PTA meetings, what are some of the roles that you take at those meetings?
 - Have you been involved in county or city gatherings or planning events?
- Are there ways that you are involved in local community life (e.g., festivals, neighborhood watch program, block parties, church attendance, volunteering, fundraising, etc.)?
- What are the main community values that you hold?

Belonging

- How would you describe your national identity (not necessarily where you have legal residency or citizenship)?

- What are your feelings of connection to your country of origin or your family's country of origin?
 - How have these ties been maintained (e.g., remittances, phone calls, cooking, vacations, voting, emails, mail, business ventures)
- How would you describe your feelings of connection/belonging to Colusa County? The United States?
 - What are reasons for these feelings of connection/belonging?
- Do your feelings towards your (or your family's) country of origin affect your feelings of belonging to Colusa County? The United States?
- Do your feelings of belonging to Colusa County affect your participation in local politics?
- If you are not a naturalized citizen, are you considering applying for citizenship?
 - What were some of your reasons for choosing this?