

The Political Incorporation of Undocumented Youth

Tom K. Wong¹, Angela S. García², and Carolina Valdivia³

¹University of California, San Diego, ²University of Chicago, ³Harvard University

ABSTRACT

This article develops and empirically tests a model of political incorporation for undocumented youth in the United States, focusing on nonvoting forms of political engagement. Using one of the first nationwide surveys of undocumented millennials between the ages of 18 and 35 ($n = 1,472$), we show that (1) undocumented youth express much higher levels of political efficacy and participation than the literature on immigrant political incorporation leads us to expect, (2) membership in organizations that work on immigration-related issues is a main determinant of this sense of political efficacy, and (3) through mediation analysis, that organizational membership (the mediator) influences how political efficacy affects political participation, and not the other way around. The literature on immigrant political incorporation is vast, but precedent studies too often focus on formal acts of political participation, such as naturalization and voting, by those with lawful immigration status. With an analytical focus on youth without lawful immigration status, this article contributes to theoretical and empirical knowledge about how and to what extent undocumented youth become politically active and engaged despite the many obstacles that exist to their formal participation in politics.

KEYWORDS: international migration; undocumented youth; DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals); political participation; organizational membership.

Lacking full political rights, undocumented immigrants are unable to participate in the formal political processes that dominate studies of immigrant political incorporation (see, e.g., [Albarracin and Valeva 2011](#); [Barreto et al. 2009](#); [Bean, Brown, and Rumbaut 2006](#); [Bueker 2005](#); [De la Garza 2004](#); [Gerstle and Mollenkopf 2001](#); [Hochschild and Mollenkopf 2009](#); [Jones-Correa 1998](#); [Pantoja and Gershon 2006](#); [Portes, Escobar, and Arana 2008](#); [Ramakrishnan 2005](#); [Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad 2008](#); [Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001](#); [Sierra et al. 2000](#); [Stepick and Stepick 2002](#); [Tam Cho 1999](#)). Yet within emerging studies, undocumented youth are highlighted as active participants in purposive political action, participating in protests, encouraging others to vote, contacting public officials, and working with campaigns (see, e.g., [Chávez, Lavariega-Monforti, and Michelson 2014](#); [Eisema, Fiorito, and Montero-Sieburth 2014](#); [Gonzales 2008](#); [Marrow 2005, 2009](#); [Nicholls 2013](#); [Perez 2012](#); [Perez et al. 2010](#); [Terriquez and Patler 2012](#); [Voss and Bloemraad 2011](#); [Wong and Valdivia 2014](#)). Importantly, this involvement has been consequential to both political processes and public policy

Direct correspondence to: Tom K. Wong, University of California San Diego, Department of Political Science, 9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla, CA 92093. Email: tomkwong@ucsd.edu.

formation. At the state level, for example, undocumented youth activism has critically advanced in-state university tuition policies that expand access to higher education (Abrego 2008; Nienhusser 2015). At the national level, undocumented young people have assumed a leading role in immigration policy debates (Nicholls 2013). Tellingly, when President Obama announced the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA), a 2012 memorandum of prosecutorial discretion offering limited immigration relief for eligible undocumented youth, he echoed the language and arguments of immigrant youth activists (Cebulko and Silver 2016).¹

Not all undocumented young people fit the “dreamer” model of political activism, however (Gonzales 2016). Serious socioeconomic and educational disadvantages serve as obstacles to their political participation (Abrego 2008; Abrego and Gonzales 2010; Gonzales 2016; Portes, Fernández-Kelly and Haller 2009). At the same time, undocumented youth are vulnerable to the recent rise in physical deportations (Golash-Boza 2015) and a wave of restrictive state and local immigration laws (García 2013; Hopkins 2010; Wong 2012), as well as anxiety over the potential of family separation (Dreby 2015; Hagan, Eschback, and Rodriguez 2008; Menjívar and Abrego 2012). Given such barriers, how and why do undocumented immigrant youth become engaged in U.S. politics?

Existing attempts to answer this question typically rely on in-depth qualitative studies to examine the various forms and extent of undocumented youth’s political participation. While this work offers critical depth and nuance, it remains unclear why some undocumented youth become engaged and others do not. Drawing on data from one of the largest surveys to date of undocumented youth, we address this question by evaluating the mechanisms through which undocumented young people become politically active. Our point of departure is that undocumented youth express higher levels of political efficacy than the traditional literature on immigrant political incorporation leads us to expect, and those who express a sense of political efficacy are more likely to be politically engaged across a range of nonvoting political activities. But what gives rise to this sense of political efficacy? Our core argument is that differences in the societal incorporation of undocumented youth—more specifically differential experiences that affect the development of social capital and knowledge of civic and political processes—lead some to feel a greater sense of political efficacy than others.

We first analyze survey respondents’ sense of political efficacy with items taken from the American National Election Study (ANES) and establish the relationship between political efficacy and political participation. Next, we examine the determinants of political efficacy in a multivariate framework. Here, we analyze how key indicators of societal incorporation—membership in organizations that work on immigration-related issues, education level, and the number of years youths have spent in the United States—affect feelings of political efficacy, while controlling for other demographic factors. Our last step, using mediation analysis, is to show that societal incorporation mediates the effects of political efficacy on political participation and not the other way around.

POLITICAL EFFICACY AND UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRATION STATUS

Political efficacy, as Angus Campbell, Gerald Gurin, and Warren Miller (1954) write, is “the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact on the political process . . . It is the feeling that political and social change is possible, and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change” (p. 187). Indeed, individuals who believe that they have the power to create change in their communities are more likely to become politically involved (see, e.g., Almond and Verba 1989; more recently, see Condon and Holleque 2013; Vecchione and Vittorio Caprara 2009).

1 For full details on DACA, see www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/consideration-deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-process (retrieved July 5, 2016). The program was rescinded by the Trump administration on September 5, 2017 (see www.dhs.gov/news/2017/09/05/memorandum-rescission-daca; retrieved April 24, 2018).

However, this literature has been mostly silent when it comes to immigrants, particularly those who are undocumented.²

The nascent literature on undocumented youth activism provides reason to believe that a strong sense of political efficacy is emerging among some of these young people, as evidenced by their mobilization around immigration reform (Nicholls 2013; Perez 2012; Perez et al. 2010; Terriquez and Patler 2012). The 2006 immigrant-rights marches likely served as a crystallizing moment in the political socialization of undocumented youth (see, e.g., Bloemraad and Trost 2008; Voss and Bloemraad 2011). Undocumented youth have also increasingly mobilized around immigration legislation and policy decisions, including comprehensive immigration reform legislation, the federal DREAM Act, and similar state-level legislation (Nicholls 2013). Not surprisingly, social media tools serve as a critical component to undocumented young people's organizing and political mobilization efforts (Costanza-Chock 2011; Delli Carpini 2000; Valdivia 2015). The use of social media, in combination with the increasingly frequent use of openly disclosing one's undocumented status as a political act, have made undocumented youth's political engagement highly visible and public (Galindo 2012; Nicholls 2013).

Membership in an Immigrant Rights Organization

Organizational membership has long been viewed as a reliable independent predictor of political participation (see, e.g., Putnam 2001; more recently, see LeRoux and Feeney 2014). Civic organizations, in particular, provide settings wherein members become acculturated into political processes by acquiring the knowledge and skills that are relevant to, and necessary for, political activity (see, e.g., Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). As Elizabeth Beaumont (2011) describes:

we are most likely to develop political confidence when our environments and relationships actively encourage political engagement, help us to care about the political realm and identify methods of influence, connect us to others 'like us' acting politically, and help us acquire the political skills and commitment to play a meaningful role ourselves (p. 217).

Civic organizations are also wellsprings for the development of one's own social capital, understood here as the social networks, relational norms, and mutual trust that accrue to an individual in her social interactions and relationships (Coleman 1988; Putnam 2001). Whereas civic engagement and political participation can evolve organically within these organizations, many organizations actively attempt to mobilize their members.³ This is important because civic volunteerism and organizational membership are not themselves sufficient for increased political engagement. As Joseph Kahne and Joel Westheimer (2006) argue, absent the political acculturation that civic organizations can provide, civic volunteerism and organizational membership can detrimentally "reinforce the assumption that if individual citizens would just help out where help is needed, these acts of kindness and charity (multiplied across the citizenry) will transform society and offer redress for complex social problems" (p. 290).

While scholars generally agree that membership in civic organizations can lead people to become politically active, those who become members may, in fact, already be more likely to be predisposed to such activity (Glanville 1999; McKenzie 2001). This question of self-selection into organizational membership is clearly significant to our study. Nonetheless, the balance of scholarship seems to

2 Scholars identify a strong and positive relationship between agency—meaning the “ability to play an assertive role in controlling resources in decisions in one’s community” (Zimmerman and Rappaport 1988:726)—and political participation. Other definitions of agency include “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn 2001:112), a process of social engagement wherein individuals have the “capacity to imagine alternative possibilities” (Emirbayer and Mische 1998:963), or belief systems that “enable people to play a part in their self-development, adaptation, and self-renewal in changing times” (Bandura 2001:2).

3 For example, in a national study of voluntary associations, Leighley (1996) shows that groups with lobbying, normative, or occupational incentives deliberately and strategically mobilize members.

conclude that the relationship between organizational membership and political participation holds net of potential selection factors when addressing potential endogeneity (see, e.g., Barrett and Bruton-Smith 2014; Fox and Lawless 2014; Glanville 1999; Wicks et al. 2014).⁴

This well-established literature leads us to expect that membership in an organization that works on immigration-related issues—organizations that generally share the common normative goal of comprehensive immigration reform, tend to be engaged in the political sphere, and are likely to embed undocumented youth in various aspects of the political acculturation processes described above—is likely to increase feelings of political efficacy among undocumented young people, which in turn may drive their political participation.

Not only can immigrant-serving organizations provide undocumented youth with the knowledge and skills necessary to be informed and engaged political actors—for example, knowledge about how the political process works and professional socialization, including participating in discussions and making presentations—but they can also provide critical support networks for undocumented youth. Being a part of an organization that works on immigration-related issues, for some, can mean being surrounded by people who share similar commitments, passions, and immigration experiences, perhaps even for the first time. Given that research suggests that knowing someone who has publicly “come out” as undocumented can motivate others to do the same (Escudero 2013), it may be that the support networks of immigrant rights organizations have transformative effects on undocumented youth. We thus hypothesize that membership in an organization that works on immigration-related issues will be positively and significantly related to feelings of political efficacy among undocumented youth, and that organizational membership will mediate the link between political efficacy and political participation—in other words, that organizational membership increases the political efficacy of undocumented young people, which in turn leads to their political participation.

Education

Along with organizational membership, one of the most consistently documented relationships in the study of political behavior is the positive association between educational attainment and political participation (Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry 1996; Perez et al. 2010; Rosenstone and Hansen 2002; Verba and Nie 1972; Verba et al. 1995; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Scholars generally interpret this relationship by noting that education—in particular, post-secondary education—helps develop civic orientations and a sense of civic responsibility, as well as other skills that facilitate political engagement (Kam and Palmer 2008). Of course, post-secondary education is also related to higher socioeconomic status, which itself is a strong predictor of political participation (Verba et al. 1995). The general conclusion of these studies is that education drives political participation because it enhances one’s human capital (Kam and Palmer 2008:614).

These studies make clear that educational attainment can play an important role in the political socialization of undocumented young people. It may thus also be the case that feelings of political efficacy increase with educational attainment, which leads to the political participation of undocumented immigrant youth. However, it is important to note that while the landmark case of *Plyler v. Doe* ensures that undocumented youth have access to public education through high school, undocumented youth face a gamut of economic barriers to post-secondary education (Abrego 2006; Abrego and Gonzales 2010; Gonzales 2011).⁵ For undocumented young people, obstacles to post-secondary education limit pathways to upward social mobility through education, which makes it especially difficult to transcend the typically low socioeconomic status of their parents (Perez 2012; Portes and

4 We further acknowledge that the type of organization that an individual becomes a part of may lead to differential outcomes in the process that we posit. However, the questionnaire did not unpack organizational membership beyond membership in an organization that works on immigration-related issues. At the same time, we feel that such membership—particularly for undocumented young people—is a compelling one to focus on.

5 The Supreme Court’s landmark 1982 *Plyler v. Doe* decision held that states cannot deny students access to public education because of their immigration status.

Rumbaut 2001). Undocumented students who do make it to college, however, often have access to resources and social networks that differently situated undocumented youth do not (Gonzales 2011, 2016).

Length of Time in the United States

Scholars broadly link the length of time individuals have lived in a place, and the roots that they establish as a result of residential stability, to higher levels of political participation. This “social connectedness” influences the likelihood of electoral turnout (Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001) in part because networks facilitate the exchange of political information while also creating audience costs for those who are not politically engaged (Rosenstone and Hansen 2002; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). It follows that for immigrants who are able to engage in formal political acts like voting, their length of time in the United States is an important determinant of their electoral participation (Hill and Moreno 1996; Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001; Uhlaner, Cain, and Kiewiet 1989), as well as identification with a political party (Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner 1991; cf. Hajnal and Lee 2011). We thus also hypothesize a path wherein feelings of political efficacy increase with length of time in the United States, which leads to the political participation of undocumented immigrant youth. For many undocumented young people, their socialization and education takes place primarily in the United States, as most are brought to the country at an early age (Gleeson and Gonzales 2012). For these young people, length of time in the United States can mean deeper socialization and more extensive social networks relative to recently arrived undocumented youth. It also likely means that they have had more opportunities to become politically engaged.

DATA AND METHOD

This article uses data collected from the *In Their Own Words: A National Survey of Undocumented Millennials* project (Wong and Valdivia 2014), which represents one of the largest surveys to date on any segment of the undocumented population in the United States. The survey provides a first-of-its-kind look at the civic engagement and political incorporation of undocumented youth, as well as insights into DACA, post-DACA incorporation experiences, and what it means to “come out” as undocumented, among several other topics. The survey attracted 3,139 responses nationwide. We have confidence that 1,472 respondents are, in fact, undocumented young people between the ages of 18 and 35. The survey was fielded online in two phases during late 2013 and early 2014 and is the only survey of the undocumented population that we are aware of that addresses the issue of potentially “spoiled ballots” (i.e., people who are not undocumented, but take the survey). It does so by including a validation test for undocumented status. This entails asking multiple questions about the migratory history of each respondent, but in different ways, and across different blocks in the questionnaire. If there is consistency in a respondent’s answers, the respondent remains in the sample. Moreover, the survey addresses the issue of “ballot stuffing” (i.e., one person taking the survey multiple times) by using an online survey platform that prevents any one IP address from submitting multiple responses.⁶

Survey respondents were recruited using a traditional snowball method, wherein immigrant-serving organizations such as United We Dream (UWD) referred individuals to take the survey. More specifically, United We Dream sent the survey link via email to its email list, which included both organizational members as well as nonmembers, such as those who signed up to an email list and those who received services from the organization. To address the bias that results from using a peer-to-peer recruitment strategy that relies on the social networks of immigrant-serving organizations, the survey also used Facebook ads to enlarge the respondent base. The Facebook ads were

6 Of course, tracking IP addresses is not immune from being “gamed.” However, utilizing the technology that exists to address ballot stuffing, combined with the intentional absence of an incentive to take the survey (which would have exacerbated the issue of ballot stuffing), makes us confident in the resulting sample.

targeted in geographic areas in which UWD does not have a strong presence. This approach sought to further expand the reach of the survey and to recruit respondents beyond UWD's network.

As a result of these efforts, only 35 percent of respondents reported that they were members of an organization that works on immigration-related issues. Moreover, as 42 states plus the District of Columbia are represented in the sample, the geographic coverage of the survey extends beyond the nationwide network of partner organizations within the United We Dream umbrella. Altogether, the large number of responses to the survey, the use of Facebook ads in the recruitment process, and the resultant diversity of the respondent pool, combined with the fact that no valid margin of error can be calculated using opt-in surveys (AAPOR n.d.), leads us to believe that these data are as strong as any survey data that currently exists on undocumented immigrants.⁷

RESULTS

The average age of respondents is 23 and the range is 18 to 35. With respect to race/ethnicity, 89.5 percent of respondents are Hispanic/Latino, 4.5 percent are Asian, 2.3 percent are black, 1.7 percent are white, and 1.9 percent identify as "other." Respondents come from 60 different countries of birth. Estimates of the DACA-eligible population exist by national origin, and the country of birth among survey respondents is largely consistent with these estimates. The large majority of survey respondents were born in Mexico (76.0 percent), followed by South America (10.3 percent), Central America (6.5 percent), Asia (4.4 percent), Europe (1.1 percent), and "other" (1.8 percent). A chi-squared test shows that the percentage distribution of places of birth among survey respondents and the percentage distribution of places of birth among the total DACA-eligible population are not statistically significantly different ($p = .365$). We note here, however, that survey respondents are more likely to be female than male (62.3 percent vs. 36.9 percent).⁸

Political Participation

As the data show, the undocumented young people surveyed are highly politically engaged. Regarding their "online activism," the data show that 66.0 percent have signed a petition on the Internet about a political or social issue and 59.9 percent have posted about a political or social issue on social media. Regarding their "offline activism," 40.7 percent have participated in a political rally or demonstration and 9.5 percent have engaged in civil disobedience. Comparing these results to the nationally representative sample of U.S. eligible voters in the American National Election Study (ANES) reveals striking differences.⁹ The undocumented young people surveyed are approximately three times more likely to have signed a petition on the Internet when compared to the entire sample of the ANES, approximately three times more likely to have posted about a political issue on social media, and despite the threat of deportation, are approximately seven times more likely to have participated in a politically rally or demonstration.¹⁰ The ANES does not ask about civil disobedience.

Political Efficacy and Political Participation

Our first step is to analyze the political efficacy of undocumented youth and establish a significant relationship between political efficacy and political participation. We use two survey items, borrowed from the ANES, to measure political efficacy: "How much do public officials care what people like

7 Because the survey is an online opt-in survey, we should take caution in attempting to generalize from the sample. As the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR n.d.) notes, because respondents self-select to take online surveys and are not selected based on a probability sample, no estimates of sampling error can be calculated (n/d).

8 See Table A1 in the Appendix for descriptive statistics for the factors used in our analysis.

9 We note that comparing results across the whole ANES sample and our *In Their Own Words: A National Survey of Undocumented Millennials* is merely a descriptive exercise (i.e., not an "apples to apples" comparison due to different target populations).

10 Compared to unweighted frequencies in the entire ANES sample. In the ANES, about 6 percent participated in a political rally or demonstration, about 21 percent sent a message on Facebook or Twitter about a political or social issue, and about 25 percent signed an Internet petition.

you think?” and “How much can people like you affect what the government does?” Of the undocumented young people surveyed, 11.2 percent, or 163 respondents, feel that public officials care “a lot” or “a great deal” about what they think. Over half of respondents (55.7 percent, or 811 respondents) feel that they can affect what the government does “a lot” or “a great deal.” Comparing these results to the ANES shows that the undocumented youth surveyed are similarly likely to feel that public officials care about what they think, but are approximately three times more likely to feel that they can affect what the government does.¹¹

Are those who express a sense of political efficacy more likely to be politically engaged? Youth respondents who feel that public officials care about what they think are not significantly more likely to sign an Internet petition ($p = .487$), but they are 10.6 percent more likely to post about a political issue on social media ($p = .010$), 15.8 percent more likely to participate in a political rally or demonstration ($p < .001$), and 5.4 percent more likely to engage in civil disobedience ($p = .029$). Those who think that they can affect what the government does are 9.5 percent more likely to sign an Internet petition ($p < .001$), 13.5 percent more likely to post about a political issue on social media ($p < .001$), 23.0 percent more likely to participate in a political rally or demonstration ($p < .001$), and 7.5 percent more likely to engage in civil disobedience ($p < .001$). Table 1 reports the results.

Ending the analysis here would leave us with a parsimonious yet overly simplistic account of the political incorporation of undocumented youth. That a significant relationship exists between political efficacy and political participation begs the question of why some of the undocumented young people surveyed feel a sense of political efficacy while others do not. Our next step is thus to examine the determinants of political efficacy.

The Determinants of Political Efficacy

We model feelings of political efficacy as follows:

$$\Pr(\text{efficacy}_i = 1 | X_i) = (\beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{membership in organization} + \beta_2 \text{education} + \beta_3 \text{years in U.S.} + \beta_4 \text{controls})$$

Efficacy is indexed over i to distinguish between “public officials care what people like you think” (y_1) and “people like you can affect what the government does” (y_2). *membership in organization*, *education*, and *years in United States* represent our three different indicators of societal incorporation wherein undocumented youth can develop social capital and learn about civic and political processes. *Membership in organization* is a dichotomous variable coded 1 if a person reports that he or she is a member of an organization that works on immigration-related issues. *Education* is a dichotomous variable coded 1 if a person has at least some college education. Undocumented youth were largely educated in the United States, and the requirements of DACA are such that those who receive college education will likely do so in the United States. *Years in the United States* represents the number of years that an undocumented young person has lived in the United States. *Controls* include whether a person is a member of a mixed-status family and basic demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and race/ethnicity.¹²

Table 2 reports the results of the analysis. As the table indicates, those who are members of organizations that work on immigration-related issues are significantly more likely to have a strong sense of political efficacy than those who are not members. This result is statistically significant for both indicators of political efficacy. Moreover, the results hold across each of our model specifications. Our two other indicators of societal incorporation, education and number of years in the United States,

11 Compared to unweighted frequencies in the ANES. In the ANES, just under 10 percent feel that public officials care what they think “a lot” or “a great deal” and 21 percent feel that they can affect what the government does “a lot” or “a great deal.”

12 We note here that we do not include having deferred action status as a control because nearly all respondents were “DACAmended” when surveyed.

Table 1. Political Efficacy and Political Participation

	Yes (percent)	No (percent)	Diff (percent)	p
“Public officials care what people like you think”				
Signed a petition on the Internet about a political or social issue	68.8 (n = 160)	65.9 (n = 1,285)	2.9	.487
Posted a social media message about a political or social issue	69.4 (n = 160)	58.8 (n = 1,284)	10.6	.010
Participated in a political rally or demonstration	55.0 (n = 160)	39.2 (n = 1,286)	15.8	< .001
Engaged in civil disobedience	14.4 (n = 160)	8.9 (n = 1,288)	5.4	.027
“Can affect what government does”				
Signed a petition on the Internet about a political or social issue	70.4 (n = 805)	60.9 (n = 639)	9.5	< .001
Posted a social media message about a political or social issue	65.9 (n = 803)	52.3 (n = 640)	13.5	< .001
Participated in a political rally or demonstration	50.9 (n = 804)	27.9 (n = 641)	23.0	< .001
Engaged in civil disobedience	12.8 (n = 806)	5.3 (n = 641)	7.5	< .001

are neither statistically significantly nor consistently positively related to political efficacy. This does not mean that education and number of years in the United States have no bearing on the political efficacy of undocumented young people. Rather, the statistically insignificant results here suggest that those with some college education and those without some college education express similar levels of political efficacy, and that those who have been in the United States for only a short period can feel a similar sense of political efficacy to those who have spent more time in this country.

Figure 1 graphically depicts the results. The figure plots the predicted probability of political efficacy, distinguishing between those who are and are not members of an organization. The solid circles represent the predicted probability of efficacy for those who report being a member of an organization that works on immigration-related issues. The hollow circles represent the predicted probability of efficacy for those who do not report being a member of an organization that works on immigration-related issues.¹³ Those who report organizational membership are 6.4 percent more likely to feel that public officials care “a lot” or “a great deal” about what they think (based on estimates from Model 1). More strikingly, those who report organizational membership are 25.9 percent more likely to feel that they can affect what the government does “a lot” or “a great deal” (based on Model 3). We note here that the confidence intervals around the estimates in Model 2 and Model 4 are large given the “noise” that arises when including factors that are theoretically important, but statistically insignificant in the models.

Membership, Political Efficacy, and Political Participation

We have thus far shown that undocumented youth who express a sense of political efficacy are more likely to be politically engaged and that organizational membership is a main determinant of political

13 Values are set at theoretically meaningful levels (e.g., an undocumented young person has some college education and has been in the United States for at least a decade), or modal values for dichotomous variables (e.g., a person is in a mixed-status family, is female, and is Hispanic/Latino), and means for continuous variables (e.g., age equals 23 years old).

Table 2. Determinants of Political Efficacy

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>
Membership in organization	.618*** (.172)	.622*** (.173)	1.113*** (.121)	1.119*** (.122)
Education	-.026 (.195)	-.057 (.198)	.061 (.122)	.112 (.125)
Years in United States	.029 [†] (.017)	.031 (.022)	.007 (.011)	.014 (.014)
Mixed-status family		-.154 (.183)		-.067 (.119)
Age		.015 (.029)		-.020 (.019)
Sex (female = 1)		-.059 (.174)		-.059 (.114)
Hispanic/Latino		-.157 (.262)		.567*** (.182)
Constant	-2.799*** (.329)	-2.896*** (.653)	-.299 (.206)	-.413 (.425)
Obs	1,454	1,454	1,453	1,453

Notes: Multivariate logistic regressions. Standard errors in parentheses. Models 1 and 2 model the response to the statement, "Public officials care what people like you think." Models 3 and 4 model the response to the statement, "People like you can affect what the government does."

[†] $p > .10$ * $p > .05$ ** $p > .01$ *** $p < .01$ (two-tailed tests)

efficacy. In other words, our argument suggests a link between organizational membership, political efficacy, and political participation. Our next step is to show the path that connects these factors. To do this, we perform mediation analysis focusing on participating in a political rally or demonstration. As [Raymond Hicks and Dustin Tingley \(2011\)](#) describe, "mediation analysis moves beyond calculation of average treatment effects and instead seeks to quantify the effect of a treatment that operates through a particular mechanism" (p. 606). For our purposes here, we use recent innovations in mediation analysis (see, e.g., [Imai et al. 2011](#)) to model the paths shown in [Figure 2](#). These recent innovations, as [Kosuke Imai and colleagues \(2011\)](#) write, can help researchers "systematically think about ways to make observational studies credible for identifying causal mechanisms" (p. 782). One of the main goals of mediation analysis is to identify the average causal mediation effect (ACME), which is denoted as follows:

$$\delta|(t) = Y_i(t, M_i(1)) - Y_i(t, M_i(0))$$

$\delta|(t)$ represents the ACME, which equals to the change in the outcome (i.e., political participation) that corresponds to a change in the mediator (i.e., organizational membership) from membership, $M_i(1)$, to nonmembership, $M_i(0)$, while holding the treatment t (i.e., political efficacy) constant. As [Hicks and Tingley \(2011\)](#) describe, if $M_i(1) = M_i(0)$, "then the treatment has no effect on the mediator and the causal mediation effect would be zero" (p. 602). For our purposes, we use mediation analysis to identify how much of the effect of political efficacy on political participation is transmitted through organizational membership. Given that our sample of undocumented youth are not drawn using random selection, we use mediation analysis as a heuristic to uncover additional insights about the process we posit that links organizational membership, political efficacy, and

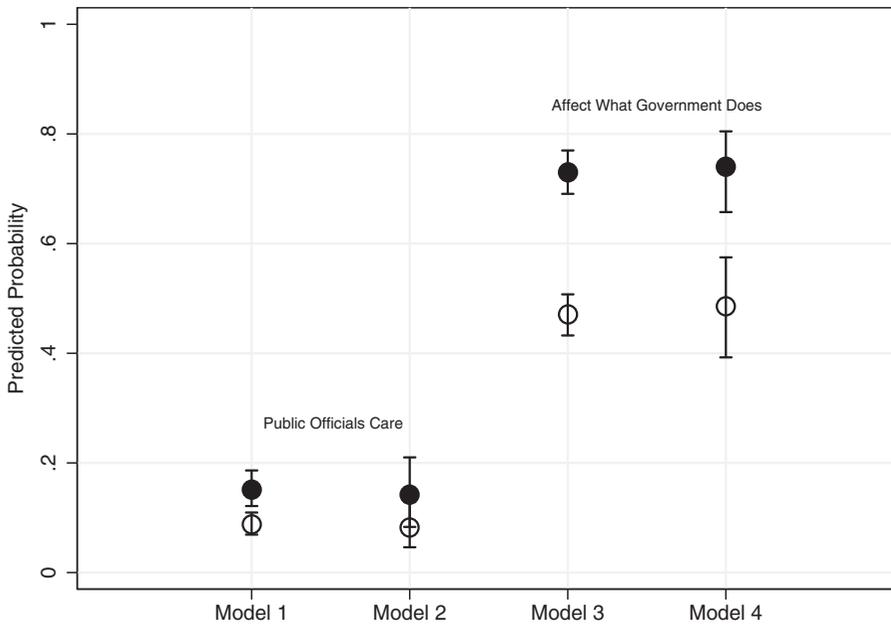


Figure 1. Predicted Probability of Efficacy by Organizational Membership

political participation. If organizational membership influences how political efficacy affects political participation, the findings in Panel A would show that organizational membership mediates a significant percentage of the direct effect of political efficacy on political participation—this would bolster our argument.

To be clear, our goal is not to show that either organizational membership or political efficacy matter for political participation in a mutually exclusive sense. As we have shown, both factors play a role. Moreover, as [Table A2](#) in the Appendix shows, a multivariate logistic regression that regresses participating in a political rally or demonstration on organizational membership, political efficacy,¹⁴ and the other covariates included in [Table 2](#), indicates that both organizational membership and political efficacy are positively and statistically significantly related to political participation. However, if the analysis ended here we would not be able to advance our understanding of the potential pathways or mechanisms that connect organizational membership and political efficacy to political participation. The interaction of organizational membership and political efficacy would also be insufficient. [Imai and colleagues \(2011\)](#) caution against relying only on interaction terms to identify mechanisms. As the authors write, “simply testing the significance of the interaction term is not recommended because such a procedure can only test whether either (1) or (0) is different from zero” (p. 784).

As Panel B in [Figure 2](#) shows, organizational membership mediates 45.6 percent of the effect of political efficacy, as measured by the response to the statement, “Public officials care what people like you think,” on political participation.¹⁵ Panel C in [Figure 2](#) shows that organizational membership mediates 54.9 percent of the effect of political efficacy, as measured by the response to the question, “People like you can affect what government does,” on political participation.¹⁶ Qualitatively similar

14 It is interesting to note here that the pairwise correlation between organizational membership and efficacy (“public officials care”) is just .094 and the pairwise correlation between organizational membership and efficacy (“can affect what government does”) is just .251.

15 The total effect is 13.9 percent, which is the average direct effect (ADE) of political efficacy on participation (7.5 percent) plus the ACME (6.4 percent). The percentage of the total effect mediated by organizational membership is thus 6.4 percent divided by 13.9 percent.

16 The total effect is 21.9 percent, which is the ADE of political efficacy on participation (9.8 percent) plus the ACME (12.1 percent). The percentage of the total effect mediated by organizational membership is thus 12.1 percent divided by 21.9 percent.

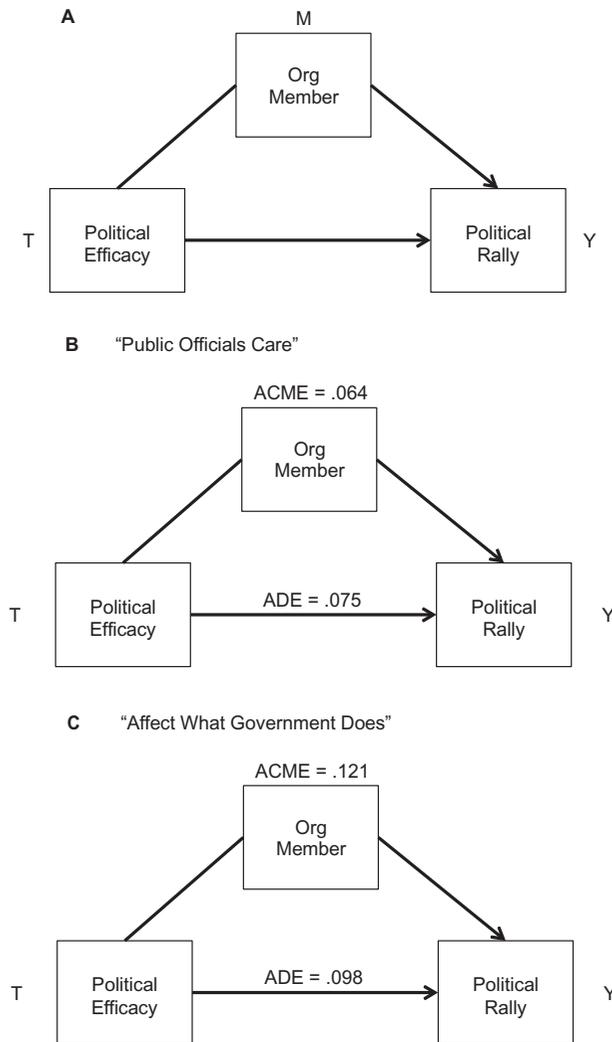


Figure 2. Membership, Efficacy, and Political Participation

results emerge when analyzing our other indicators of political participation. Lastly, we check our results against the alternative, wherein political efficacy mediates the effect of organizational membership on political participation. When measuring political efficacy by the response to the statement, “Public officials care what people like you think,” the results show that political efficacy mediates just .9 percent of the effect of organizational membership on political participation. When measuring political efficacy by the response to the statement, “People like you can affect what government does,” the results show that political efficacy mediates 4.6 percent of the effect of organizational membership on political participation.

To summarize, in analyzing the political incorporation of undocumented youth we find that both organizational membership and political efficacy “matter.” However, using mediation analysis to push our inquiry further reveals that roughly half of the effect of political efficacy on political participation is transmitted through organizational membership. On the other hand, less than 5 percent of the effect of organizational membership on political participation is transmitted through political efficacy. In other words, organizational membership mediates the effect of political efficacy on political participation, and not the other way around.

CONCLUSION

Civic engagement and political participation form part of the bedrock of liberal democratic society. Accordingly, as immigration has shifted the demographic and political landscape in the United States, scholars are increasingly interested in the determinants of immigrant political incorporation. Much of the existing scholarship, however, has focused on formal acts of political participation, such as naturalization and voting, which are the purview of lawful immigrants. Though some work has begun to explore the political incorporation of undocumented immigrants, particularly political activism among undocumented youth, it remains unclear why some become engaged in this arena while others do not.

This question is important both in terms of theory and application. Undocumented youth are increasingly at the forefront of the national political debate over comprehensive immigration reform (Nicholls 2013; Perez 2012; Perez et al. 2010; Terriquez and Patler 2012). Moreover, the Trump administration's September 2017 decision to rescind the DACA program makes understanding the political incorporation of undocumented young people and the mechanisms that influence such political engagement all the more critical. With one of the first and largest nationwide surveys of undocumented youth, this article suggests that the more integrated undocumented youth are, the more engaged they are politically. This makes the continuation of undocumented youth's political mobilization likely, especially in the face of recent federal retrenchment around DACA, immigrant rights, and comprehensive immigration reform.

In our analysis, we first show that undocumented youth express higher levels of political efficacy than the literature on immigration political incorporation and immigrant "illegality" leads us to expect. We then provide evidence of a significant relationship between political efficacy and political participation. Those who express the sense that "government officials care what people like you think," and those who express the sense that "people like you can affect what the government does," are not only more likely to engage in online activism, such as posting about political or social issues on Facebook or Twitter, but are also significantly more likely to participate in political rallies or demonstrations and engage in civil disobedience.

We then push the analysis further by examining the determinants of political efficacy among undocumented young people. We argue that differences in the societal incorporation of undocumented youth, more specifically, differential experiences in the types of activities wherein young people can develop social capital and learn information about civic and political processes, lead some to feel a greater sense of political efficacy than others. In testing three indicators of societal incorporation—membership in an organization that works on immigration-related issues, educational attainment, and length of time in the United States—we find a significant relationship between organizational membership and political efficacy. Membership in an organization that works on immigration-related issues not only can provide undocumented youth with the knowledge and skills that are necessary to be informed and engaged political actors, but because these organizations generally share the common goal of comprehensive immigration reform, they can also serve as critical support networks, among other potential benefits. Lastly, in arguing that organizational membership influences political efficacy, which in turn affects political participation, we take care to empirically examine whether this is, indeed, the case. We thus conclude the analysis by using recent innovations in mediation analysis to show evidence of this path. Consistent with our argument, the results of the mediation analysis indicate that organizational membership mediates roughly half of the effect of political efficacy on political participation.

We also acknowledge the limitations of our research. There is no data set that allows for representative sampling of undocumented youth. While the survey data we present here is not representative of all undocumented youth, it comprises one of the largest samples of undocumented youth nationwide as of this writing and takes care to account for known sources of potential bias. More work in this area is certainly necessary. Indeed, significant contributions are to be made should researchers

“crack the nut” of producing a fully blocked, randomly selected, nationally representative sample of undocumented immigrants, both youth and adults.

We end by discussing new avenues for research on the political incorporation of undocumented immigrants. As research in this area matures, so too should the quality of the available data. Representative surveys of undocumented immigrants remain elusive and our survey, as noted above, is not generalizable to the whole population of undocumented young people. Nonetheless, we see this as a challenge to overcome rather than a road block that stifles research. One such effort, the Administrative Relief Impact and Implementation Study, is currently underway. These well-trodden data availability issues notwithstanding, this study lays the groundwork for future research. For example, studies may fruitfully interrogate the causal path we posit, wherein organizational membership mediates how political efficacy affects political participation. Do other indicators of societal incorporation that we were unable to analyze here have similar mediating effects? Research may also posit rival hypotheses and simultaneously test our arguments with these alternatives. For example, while our analyses focused on individual-level determinants, broader contextual factors may also be at play. How do individual-level determinants and contextual factors interact to influence our outcomes of interest? These are just some of the questions that, to the extent that the pendulum continues to move away from the narrow view that undocumented immigrants uniformly lack political efficacy because of their “illegality,” are ripe for future study.

APPENDIX

Table A1. Summary Statistics

	<i>Obs</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Internet petition	1,452	.660	.474
Social media message	1,451	.599	.490
Political rally or demonstration	1,453	.407	.492
Civil disobedience	1,455	.095	.492
“Public officials care”	1,457	.112	.315
“Can affect what government does”	1,456	.557	.497
Organizational membership	1,457	.349	.477
Education	1,457	.712	.453
Years in United States	1,472	16.3	4.9
DACA	1,472	.885	.319
Mixed-status family	1,472	.531	.499
Age	1,472	23.4	3.5
Sex (female = 1)	1,472	.623	.485
Hispanic/Latino	1,472	.895	.306

Table A2. Determinants of Political Participation

	Model 1	Model 2
Political efficacy	.453* (.210)	.566*** (.136)
Membership in organization	2.606*** (.141)	2.511*** (.143)
Education	.938*** (.161)	.941*** (.161)
Years in United States	.056*** (.017)	.055*** (.017)
Mixed-status family	.055 (.144)	.074 (.145)
Age	-.048* (.023)	-.043 [†] (.023)
Sex (female = 1)	-.230 [†] (.137)	-.204 (.138)
Hispanic/Latino	.375 [†] (.219)	.287 (.222)
Constant	-2.087*** (.522)	-2.386*** (.529)
Obs	1,444	1,443

Notes: Multivariate logistic regressions. Standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is participating in a political rally or demonstration. Political efficacy in Model 1 is the response to the statement, "Public officials care what people like you think." Political efficacy in Model 2 is the response to the statement, "People like you can affect what the government does."

[†] $p > .10$ * $p > .05$ ** $p > .01$ *** $p < .01$ (two-tailed tests)

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