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## Mexican Migrant Civic and Political Participation in the U.S.: The Case of Hometown Associations in Los Angeles and Chicago

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### ABSTRACT

Mexican migration to the United States is increasingly debated in the public arena, mainly as a result of its sustained high-density flow and vast distribution nationwide. While this growing population has been negatively portrayed in several political and media campaigns, the grassroots organizations forged by these migrants have received less attention. This article examines the increasing civic and political participation of Mexican migrants organized through hometown associations (HTAs), the most prevalent form of voluntary-sector activity among first-generation Mexican migrants in the United States. It focuses on two metropolitan areas, Los Angeles and Chicago, the two major cities with the highest concentrations of Mexican migrants and HTAs in the United States. The article assesses Mexican migrant participation in U.S. politics and civic life through membership in HTAs, showing that these organizations have been a powerful force for social support for their members in the United States, as well as an important mechanism for philanthropic work in Mexico.

**Key words:** Mexican migration, hometown associations, political participation, Los Angeles, Chicago.

### INTRODUCTION

In recent months, the immigration debate in the United States has gained considerable centrality in the public and political arenas, polarizing the position of opponents and

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supporters. On the one hand, political representatives, media commentators, and even scholars have laid out their criticism on the size, extent, legal status, and impact of immigration (most notably undocumented migrants from Mexico and the rest of Latin America), invoking social, legal, cultural, and national security reasons. On the other hand, several social actors have joined forces to defend the migrants' cause, emphasizing their human rights and their contributions to the U.S. economy and society.

While this debate keeps being reshaped by the adherence and repositioning of critics and supporters, and will certainly shape politics and policies in the U.S. in the short and long run, the fact is that it falls short of providing an adequate assessment of the complexity and contributions of migrant communities. Indeed, if the portrayal of Mexican and other Latin American migrants as a "threat" to national security is far from accurate, their depiction as passive victims of the discriminatory conditions they face in the U.S. frequently raised by the opposite position offers an equally biased appraisal of migrants, their families, and their communities on both sides of the border.

Mexican migrants have consolidated their migratory circuits between the U.S. and Mexico after decades of continuous movement. In contrast with the recurrent public image of migration as an expanding and amorphous mass, this back and forth transit has led in turn to the development of extensive networks between both nations, making collective action possible either in their communities of origin, in the communities they have established along these circuits in the U.S., or in both. This set of ties and networks, gradually built by an emergent organized migrant population, has largely been unknown by many sectors in the U.S. Nevertheless, in recent years migrants have gained media presence as public, collective actors, displaying their ability to participate in policy making, civic activity, and binational collaboration. This complex binational fabric has been increasingly referred to as migrant civil society, a term referring to migrant-led institutions in the host society: public spaces, communications media, but specifically membership organizations.

Grassroots organizations created by Mexican migrants in the United States have proliferated since the early 1980s, especially in the metropolitan areas of Los Angeles and Chicago. More recently, Mexican migrant grassroots organizations have become more visible in rural areas such as the San Joaquin Valley in California and communities in the Midwest and the South, which are the new destinations of Mexican migration. Although migrants from different regions in Mexico have forged several kinds of organizations—including workers associations, community committees, fronts, and coalitions—through which to pursue their goals, by the end of the 1990s hometown associations (HTAs) and home state federations had become the most prevalent organizational form for Mexican migrant communities, as well as for mi-

grants from Central America (mainly from El Salvador and Guatemala). In fact, we find hometown associations (which appear under various names, including civic clubs, social clubs, and committees) and their federations among Mexican groups with a long migratory tradition, such as those from the western central Mexico, as well as from new sending regions from the southern, central, and eastern states.

This trend has produced two fundamental changes in the profiles of Mexican migrant organizations overall. On the one hand, in contrast to the relative informality and political isolation that characterized them in the mid-1990s,<sup>1</sup> these associations have now consolidated their organizational structures. Notably, the philanthropic activities they carry out for their communities of origin have changed significantly. While these projects were infrequent and haphazardly organized in the past, cross-border fund-raising and investments in home community infrastructure have grown substantially in scale and become much more formalized. This “scaling up” has increased the federations’ visibility, leading to their growing recognition in both the public and political spheres, which in turn has encouraged extended dialogue between them and all levels of the Mexican government: federal, state, and municipal. On the other hand, these changes are not limited to the associations’ internal structure but also involve their external relationships. In recent years, Mexican officials from all levels of government have forged important relationships with them.

In fact, one of the most important accomplishments of these associational forms in Mexico is their active role in the creation of new public policy initiatives in Mexico, something not very commonly credited to voluntary and charitable associations. Some theories of citizenship and civic engagement actually suggest that voluntary associations tend to shy away from formal politics precisely because they only want to fill the social service gaps produced by inefficient governments and politicians (Theiss-Morse and Hibbing, 2005). Therefore, it is not normally expected that charitable organizations pursue major changes in public policy. The fact that Mexican HTAS—mainly the organizations from Zacatecas—are indisputably credited as relevant actors in the creation of the federal Three-for-One Program for Migrants is an important avenue that opens up new theoretical perspectives for understanding the complexities of these new transnational actors.

Politicians, researchers, and activists in both Mexico and the United States have noted the growing importance of these migrant groups and highlighted their significance as bridges between the two nations. Indeed, for social scientists, HTAS illustrate the rise and consolidation of “transnational communities,” which in turn

<sup>1</sup> Zabin and Escala-Rabadán (2002) found a high level of political isolation among the federations and the more prominent Latino politicians in the Los Angeles area, especially with regard to their very limited participation in the movement against California’s Proposition 187 in 1994.

has opened the way for an expanding literature on transnational studies. But while this growing number of detailed studies on transnational networks has made it possible to gain renewed attention on migrants' associational life, several issues related to its form and content remain unclear. What is needed now is a better understanding of migrant organizations' internal dynamics, including their differences and similarities with other types of migrant-led organizations (e.g. labor, faith, and ethnic) and other Mexican-American organizations, in order to evaluate their effectiveness and binational impact on local political processes in their communities of origin and in their communities of settlement in the United States.

Our main argument regarding the prevalence of HTAs across broad segments of the Mexican migrant community is that their development cannot be limited to the social networking capabilities of home state federations. Instead, we argue that the explanation for their increased significance lies in the ability of Mexican migrants to become political actors and, in the process, adapt traditional and ethnic forms of social networks to a new social and political context.

This paper examines the basic characteristics of Mexican migrant civic and political participation binationally, through collective action organized around HTAs and home state federations. We focused on the main clusters of these groups in the United States: the Los Angeles and Chicago metropolitan areas. We analyze two main areas of Mexican migrant participation in the civic-political arena: public policy and advocacy for migrant rights. The paper has four main sections. In the first, we briefly discuss some theoretical and empirical considerations and then provide an overview of migrant associations in the United States and their trajectory in the two selected areas. In the second, we assess the binational civic and political participation achieved by these groups, namely in terms of public policy engagement and their increasing support of migrant rights initiatives. A third section focuses on the achievements in coalition building among Mexican HTAs as an effective means for carrying out their agendas. A final section provides a general reflection on their increasing concern about membership and citizenship.

#### **MIGRANTS' COLLECTIVE ACTION AND GRASSROOTS ASSOCIATIONS IN THE U.S.**

In recent years, critics of immigration reform in the U.S. have been gaining momentum in several spheres of American society. On the one hand, mainstream printed and broadcast media have significantly contributed to framing immigration and migrants in the U.S. as a problem. For example, a 2004 cover story in *Time* magazine

concluded that illegal migration was out of control, to the extent that “the number of illegal aliens flooding into the U.S. this year will total 3 million –enough to fill 22 000 Boeing 737-700 airliners, or 60 flights every day for a year.” (Barlett and Steele, 2004: 1). While the data and methodology of this alleged investigation have been soundly refuted,<sup>2</sup> the fact is that terms like “invaders” and “invasion” used in the story to refer to Mexican migrants and Mexican migration in the U.S. have prevailed and set a sensationalist tone of the public imagery on this issue.<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, these public images have also been paralleled in the political sphere. Stricter and harsher bills, like HR 4437, introduced and approved in December 2005 by the House of Representatives to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act, is an example of this anti-immigrant sentiment in the field of policymaking. Formally dubbed the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act, it once again depicts migration and migrants as a threat for the U.S., by putting them on the same level as terrorism and terrorists.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, this criticism has also had its expression in the academic arena. Harvard’s political scientist Samuel Huntington articulated this anti-immigrant ideology of conservative U.S. nationalists in his widely publicized *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity* (2004a). In his book, Huntington points out that “the single most immediate and most serious challenge to America’s traditional identity comes from the immense and continuing immigration from Latin America, especially from Mexico.” Based on anecdotal and some empirical evidence, he ponders the present dangers of “the forces of globalization,” namely “the doctrines of multiculturalism and diversity” for the American identity, and concludes that “many Mexican immigrants and their offspring simply do not appear to identify primarily with the United States,” warning his audience that “Mexicans and other Latinos have not assimilated into mainstream U.S. culture, forming instead their own political and linguistic enclaves –from Los Angeles to Miami– and rejecting the Anglo-Protestant values that built the American dream.” Thus, in Huntington’s view, the structurally determined and culturally fixed character of Mexican migrant insularity represents a threat to “the America we have known for more than three centuries.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See for example the report by the National Foundation for American Policy, September 2004, which points out that this story misses the double and even triple counting that goes on in reporting official apprehensions data, as well as the evident lack of more reliable data like the official estimates of illegal immigration from the Department of Homeland Security or from the INS.

<sup>3</sup> This position has had its counterpart in the broadcast media. For example, anchormen like Lou Dobbs have made use of his clout to emphasize the threatening character of migration in the U.S. nowadays. It is no accident that Donald Barlett and James Steele, the authors of the *Time* magazine story, were invited to present their investigation “results” at the *Lou Dobbs Tonight* show, on September 13, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> The full text of the bill can be seen on the Library of Congress web page.

<sup>5</sup> All quotes are from Huntington’s book summarized by *Foreign Policy* magazine (Huntington, 2004).

Certainly, anti-immigrant critics' saliency does not mean they are the only voices in the debate on immigration in the U.S. However, neither these critics nor even some supporters have properly assessed the migrants' competence as a collective actor. The public images of migrants as a threat to America's national security or as passive victims of the structural discrimination they face in the U.S. do not convey the complexity of ties and networks that migrants have forged for decades. Scholarly views on transnational communities have surely expanded the scope of migration theories, but to some extent have not properly assessed the form and contents of their organizational activity. For example, a significant part of the transnationalism literature has grouped the increasing number of studies of migrant transnational formations (like HTAs) as the embodiment of "transnationalism from below," in opposition to the state-driven process of "transnationalism from above" (Smith and Guarnizo, 1998), and often adopting a celebratory tone.

In this perspective, transnational migrant associations are usually presented, as Kaglar (2006: 17) has pointed out, as "the terrain of non-state, non-elite and the disenfranchised." Most importantly, these views have not adequately explained the processes underlying associational politics within these groups. Following Kaglar's perspective, most of this literature is based on assumptions like the state-civil society oppositions, merely equating HTAs with the latter and failing to examine the blurred boundaries, transfigurations, and entanglements between both spheres. Furthermore, as we will argue in the following pages, an additional gap in this literature is that it has left aside key questions on migrants' collective action, namely why, how, or under what circumstances the agendas of these actors emerge.

Mexican migrants have a long history of civic and social engagement through their collective action, most of the time in their communities of origin, some other times in their places of destination, and with increased frequency in both. As we mentioned before, this set of ties and networks has been mostly identified as "transnational communities." Nevertheless, scholars like Fox (2005a; 2005b; 2005c) have emphasized the importance of fleshing out the practices of "civic binationality" embedded in this web of relationships across borders. These practices have been thought of as components of an emerging "migrant civil society," which are "the building blocks for representative social and civic organizations of migrants themselves" (Fox 2005a: 4). As we will contend below, this perspective provides an analytical framework that makes it possible to overcome some of the gaps in the growing number of transnational studies, namely a closer analysis of why or how migrants' collective action takes place and all the different spheres in which it becomes tangible.

In principle, it is possible to dissect several arenas that reveal the rise of this migrant civil society. A first one refers to migrant-led communications media, which

ranges from local and binational printed media to radio programs, video and internet (Fox and Rivera-Salgado, 2004). A second consists of autonomous migrant-led public spaces, involving large public gatherings in which migrants come together, interact, and express themselves with relative freedom (Fox and Rivera-Salgado, 2004). But it is the third arena, the grassroots organizations controlled by and made up of migrants themselves, that constitutes its foundation. This arena comprises an extensive array of membership organizations that come together around broad, sometimes overlapping collective identities: ethnicity, work, faith, and region or town of origin. Given the large size, vast geographical distribution, and sectoral differences based on key variables of the Mexican migrant population, an adequate assessment of the differences among these organizational forms exceeds the scope of this paper. In this work, we select one slice from the migrant associational universe: the hometown associations and federations, which is one of the largest subsets within this universe. Our main purpose here is to disentangle some of their specific layers and practices of "civic binationality."

The consolidation of strong social networks between specific regions in Mexico and the United States has encouraged the emergence of *paisano* organizations that base themselves in their locality, municipality, ethnic group, or state of origin. These associations, which represent Mexican migrants' first attempts to formalize their organizations, can trace their origins to informal networks of migrant *paisanos* based on their respective hometowns.<sup>6</sup> From the 1970s onward, there was a proliferation of Mexican clubs and associations, with varied social and ethnic constituencies and distinct levels of organization.<sup>7</sup>

A key element in the emergence and development of these associations is the strengthening of ties between migrants and their towns in rural Mexico, which transform hometowns into powerful reference points for creating a collective identity among migrants from the same community or region. The "*paisano* connection" becomes an essential part of the migrants' social organization, akin to the ties that bind family and friends. Ties with the "little homeland," far from weakening or disappearing with distance, are strengthened and transformed into *paisano* networks that eventually lead to the construction of associations as a privileged way of "translocal" belonging. In this context, working together in the United States as an

<sup>6</sup> For a historical evolution of Mexican migrant associations, see, for example, Díaz de Cossío, Orozco, and González (1997). There is an extensive literature on the importance of social networks in the Mexico-U.S. migratory process; see, among others, Massey, Alarcón, Durand, and González (1987); Mines (1981); and Zabin *et al.* (1993).

<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the emergence of these migrant associations in the United States from several perspectives, see Bada (2003a); Espinosa (1999); Goldring (2002); Rivera (2003); Rivera-Salgado (1999a), and Smith (2001).

organized group allows migrants to promote and consolidate a feeling of shared cultural identity.<sup>8</sup>

A clear sign of the importance achieved by this type of organization among the different Mexican migrant communities is their steady growth during the last few years, as well as their expanding presence throughout the United States. Tables one and two illustrate this growth during the period of 1998-2003, as the total number of HTAS registered nationwide went from 441 to 623.

Although this data is limited, since it is based only on the number of organizations registered by the Mexican Consulates' Office of Community Affairs, there is a clear pattern of growth in the numbers of HTAS and their expanding presence in different parts of the United States, beyond the traditional migrant destinations. Table one highlights the expansion of this organizational form among Mexican migrants from practically all states, both from the traditional western central sending areas and the new, emergent sending regions. These figures illustrate the extent and success of HTAS as an increasingly visible organizational strategy of first generation Mexican migrants. Table two shows the general increase in the number of HTAS by state in the U.S. However, California and Illinois concentrated 80 percent of the total number of HTAS in 2003, a figure that is consistent with the increase and clustering of the Mexican migrant population. According to the 2000 Census, 70 percent of the 9.2 million Mexican migrants are concentrated in three states (California, Texas, and Illinois).<sup>9</sup> Despite these clusters, their distribution throughout the U.S. points not only to their growth but also to the expanded points of destination of this migrant influx. In addition, this table suggests that the recent increase in the migrant population has been paralleled by the growing number of their organizations. As we will elaborate below, this small in number but well organized set of organizations constituted the "critical mass" that has been pivotal in the promotion of a more defined binational civic and political participation among Mexican migrants.

Literally hundreds of these HTAS now exist in 17 states of the U.S. In many cases they are informal groups known only to their members and have little contact with other groups in either Mexico or the United States. This early structure is sometimes the first step toward organizational formalization, which then allows for the

<sup>8</sup> The importance of these Mexican migrant associations in constructing a local/national identity can also be found in the historical evidence. According to some historians, Mexican groups formed in California in the second half of the nineteenth century to promote celebrations of national events. In so doing, they also developed an ethnic consciousness among Mexicans in the United States. This organizational tradition extended into the early decades of the twentieth century with, for example, the founding of the "Independence Club" in Los Angeles and the Confederación de Sociedades Mexicanas de los Estados Unidos de América in Chicago in 1925. See García (1996); and Taylor (1997).

<sup>9</sup> According to the Current Population Survey (CPS) adjusted to March 2004, there were 11.2 million Mexican-born migrants living in the United States with different legal situations. See Passel (2005b).



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**Table 1**  
NUMBER OF MEXICAN HOMETOWN ASSOCIATIONS  
IN THE UNITED STATES BY STATE OF ORIGIN (1998-2003)

States of origin in Mexico	1998	2003
Aguascalientes	3	1
Baja California	1	1
Chihuahua	6	10
Coahuila	2	2
Colima	1	4
Federal District	3	6
Durango	19	20
State of Mexico	6	11
Guerrero	23	51
Guanajuato	40	48
Hidalgo	4	11
Jalisco	74	100
Michoacán	19	51
Morelos	0	5
Nayarit	22	27
Nuevo León	2	4
Oaxaca	22	36
Puebla	12	34
Querétaro	1	0
San Luis Potosí	39	23
Sinaloa	12	17
Sonora	2	5
Tamaulipas	2	3
Tlaxcala	7	13
Veracruz	2	12
Yucatán	4	2
Zacatecas	113	126
<b>Total</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>623</b>
<b>Source:</b> SRE, 1999; and SRE, 2003.		

integration of migrants' communities in the United States. These groups' main activities are fund-raising events to finance philanthropic projects in their towns in Mexico. They hold dances, dinners, raffles, *charreadas* (Mexican rodeos), beauty contests, and other cultural and social activities throughout the year. These events serve two important functions: they enable the associations to finance projects in their home communities in Mexico, and they create a sense of community by strengthening the ties among migrant *paisanos*. In this sense, the founding of these associations is an important element for the consolidation of relations among Mexican communities

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**Table 2**  
NUMBER OF MEXICAN HOMETOWN ASSOCIATIONS  
BY STATE OF DESTINATION IN THE UNITED STATES (1998-2003)

States of Destination	1998	2003
Arizona	5	9
California	240	329
Colorado	4	5
Florida	3	1
Georgia	2	2
Illinois	82	170
Indiana	-	2
Michigan	-	1
Nevada	-	1
New Mexico	-	3
New York	15	27
North Carolina	-	1
Oregon	3	4
Pennsylvania	5	11
Texas	73	48
Utah	2	2
Washington	77	
<b>Total</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>623</b>
<b>Source:</b> SRE, 1999; and SRE, 2003.		

on both sides of the border (Goldring, 2002; Rivera-Salgado, 1999a; and Zabin and Escala-Rabadán, 2002).

### HOMETOWN ASSOCIATIONS IN LOS ANGELES

The emergence and growth of these examples of formal organization among Mexican migrants led to the creation of an additional organizational level—the federation—that unites clubs or associations. The first was the Federation of United Mexican Clubs (*Federación de Clubes Mexicanos Unidos*) in Los Angeles, established in 1972 with eight migrant clubs from the Mexican states of Jalisco, Chihuahua, Michoacán, Guanajuato, and Zacatecas. Its main objective was to strengthen social ties among similar associations and to support their philanthropic projects.

The emergence of this organizational model of hometown clubs and unifying federations supported Mexican migrant communities in the United States throughout

the 1970s and 1980s as the migrant population became more numerous and more permanent, the latter largely as a result of the amnesty provisions in the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA). During this period, contact with Mexican government agencies—with the federal government through consulates in the United States and with Mexican state governments—was largely sporadic and informal.

By the second half of the 1980s, however, a number of factors led to a strengthening of these contacts. For example, with the gradual addition over time of more Zacatecan Clubs, the Federation of United Mexican Clubs became the Federation of Zacatecan Clubs of Southern California—and the model for federations based on state of origin in Mexico. At the same time, the Zacatecan state government was seeking increased contact with migrant communities in the United States, particularly with Zacatecan clubs in the Los Angeles area. These efforts evolved into a gradual formalization of the relationship between the migrant associations and the state government, which led, in turn, to the implementation of more social projects in Zacatecas. This coming together of the Zacatecas state government and Mexican migrant organizations was a seminal experience in the Mexican government's broader outreach strategy with Mexican communities in the United States (González Gutiérrez, 1993, 1995; Rivera-Salgado, 1999; and Zabin and Escala-Rabadán, 2002).

In the 1990s the growing presence of associations within Mexican migrant communities in California, along with the Mexican government's outreach campaign (led by the Program for Mexican Communities Abroad, or PCME), encouraged the further expansion of migrant associations via the organizational model of clubs and federations. Those communities that had a long migratory and organizational tradition managed to take advantage of this new circumstance to consolidate their organizational networks, especially those from Jalisco, Michoacán, Oaxaca, and Zacatecas (see table 3).<sup>10</sup>

It is not surprising that Jalisco is now the state with the largest numbers of HTAS in Los Angeles (103), surpassing Zacatecas (75), the long-term leader in numbers of clubs affiliated to its federation, by a rather large margin just in the last couple years, since Jalisco is the home state of the largest Mexican migrant community living in the United States. In the past, this western Mexican state has been the largest single source of Mexican migration to the United States, which explains the consolidation of Jalisco's migrant communities in different areas of northern and southern California, their main destinations in the U.S. Networks of Jalisco *paisanos* living in the Los

<sup>10</sup> Most of the literature on Mexican clubs and federations in the United States focuses on migrants from these regions. For seminal work on migrants from Zacatecas, see Goldring (1995); Moctezuma Longoria (2000a); and Mestries (1998). For the case of Jalisco, see Morán (1998). For the case of Oaxaca, see Rivera-Salgado (1999b). For the case of HTAS from Michoacán, see Espinosa (1999) and Bada (2003b).

Angeles area led to the emergence of their associations 40 years ago.<sup>11</sup> During the 1960s and 1970s, they began to form hometown sports teams and later decided to adopt the organizational model already common in other migrant communities.

By 1991 there were enough Jalisciense clubs to establish a federation. The Federation of Jalisciense Clubs (*Federación de Clubes Jaliscienses*) was created that year in Los Angeles. Through its collaboration with the Mexican consulate, it was able to increase the number of member clubs to about 50 by the end of the decade. The inclusion of so many associations within a single federation over such a short period represents a remarkable achievement on the part of the migrant community from Jalisco.

The Zacatecas migratory tradition also dates from the early twentieth century. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, Zacatecans had already created the Fresnillo, Zacatecano, Guadalupe Victoria, and Yahualica clubs in the Los Angeles area, so their

**Table 3**  
MEXICAN MIGRANT CLUBS AND FEDERATIONS IN LOS ANGELES, 1998-2005

State of Origin	Number of Clubs		Federation	
	1998	2005	1998	2005
Jalisco	49	103	Yes	Yes*
Zacatecas	51	75	Yes	Yes*
Oaxaca	8	41	No	Yes*
Michoacán	11	21	No	Yes*+
Nayarit	9	16	Yes	Yes*
Guanajuato	1	13	No	Yes*
Puebla	5	12	No	Yes*
Yucatán	0	10	No	Yes*+
Colima	0	8	No	Yes
Sinaloa	11	6	Yes	Yes*
Durango	4	3	Yes	Yes*
Baja California	0	2	No	Yes*
Veracruz	0	3	No	Yes*
Guerrero	1	2	No	No
Hidalgo	0	2	No	No
Other	20	49	—	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>13</b>

**Sources:** Zabin and Escala-Rabadán (2002); and authors' estimates based on information from the Mexican consulate in Los Angeles and from interviews with federation leaders, 1998, 2002 and 2005.

\* Indicates current members of the *Consejo de Presidentes de Federaciones de Los Ángeles*.

+ Indicates more than one federation.

<sup>11</sup> There are a significant number of studies on migration from Jalisco to the United States in general, and to California in particular. See, for example, Arroyo, De León Arias y Valenzuela (1991); Castillo and Ríos (1989); Davis (1990); Escobar (1987); and Fábregas (1986).

organizational structures have already been tested for decades. As with similar associations, these clubs were the starting point for the development of two central organizational aims: the creation and strengthening of ties among *paisanos* from the same community, and a philanthropic orientation with regard to their towns of origin.

### HOMETOWN ASSOCIATIONS IN CHICAGO

Mexican hometown clubs and federations are heirs of an older generation of Mexican organizations in the Midwest. In 1925, the *Círculo de Obreros Católicos San José* (the San José Circle of Catholic Workers) was formed by migrants from Jalisco and Guanajuato in the city of East Chicago. Many others followed this example such as the Benito Juárez, Cuauhtémoc, José María Morelos, and Ignacio Zaragoza Societies. During that same year, the *Confederación de Sociedades Mexicanas de los Estados Unidos de América* (Confederation of Mexican Societies in the United States) appeared to protect the legal rights of Mexican citizens in Chicago. This confederation was an umbrella organization of about 35 Mexican mutual aid societies. All these associations functioned as self-help groups, offering support in times of economic hardship due to unemployment, illness, injury, and burial expenses. They helped new migrants to adjust to the new environment, combat discrimination, and protect their members from the cultural and economic shock created by their uprooting (García, 1996). During and after the Depression years, many of these associations disappeared as a consequence of massive deportations of Mexican migrants and other organizational problems. It was not until the 1960s that the HTAs reappeared in the Chicago scene, filling the void left by the Mexican organizations of the early 1920s.

Thanks to the amnesty granted by IRCA in 1986, thousands of Mexican migrants living in the Chicago metropolitan area were able to legalize their status and obtained the opportunity to travel more easily between Mexico and the United States. They returned to their communities of origin more frequently and gradually became aware of the sheer economic disparities that many rural towns were facing due to economic restructuring. Each return trip to the U.S. meant to face the shocking reality that many of the comforts of modernity that they enjoyed on a daily basis, such as running water and electricity, were lacking in many of their communities. Many migrants still had family members living in Mexico and wanted to do something to improve those conditions. This is how many clubs started to gather on a weekly basis, to share a friendly soccer match, some home-made ethnic food, and to chat about their towns' most pressing needs. The telephone was introduced in many Mexican rural towns by the mid-1980s and information about collective needs spread faster.

This and other technological advances, such as cheaper air transportation, fax machines, the internet, and handheld video cameras helped to coordinate infrastructure development plans between physically absent financial sponsors and local collective remittance beneficiaries (Bada, 2003b).

In 1995, the Mexican consulate in Chicago recorded 35 Mexican HTAs in the metropolitan area. By that time, there were already 6 000 Mexican soccer leagues across the United States supported by the Program for the Mexican Communities Abroad, or PCME (Thelen, 1999). Today, the Mexican consulate in Chicago lists 270 HTAs in their database.<sup>12</sup> These associations are organized into 17 federations and one Confederation of Mexican Federations (see table 4). Mexican HTA numbers keep swelling and it is estimated that today there could be as many as 1 000 organizations registered in 46 Mexican consulates across 31 states in the U.S. (Gordon, 2006; Vázquez Mota, 2005). The vast majority of the leaders and board members of these associations are naturalized citizens or legal permanent residents.

In the last two decades, we have witnessed the vigorous development of these migrant-led associations. In contrast, membership in many conventional U.S. voluntary associations has simultaneously declined by roughly 25 to 50 percent since the 1970s (Putnam, 2000). At a time when the Elks fraternal organizations, Red Cross, PTAs, Lions Club, and Kiwanis are facing difficulties keeping their rosters alive, the Mexican HTAs in Chicago are spreading across the Midwest with great vitality and lots of expectations for civic, political, and binational social action. In a recent survey conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center, 4 000 Mexican migrants visiting several consulates to request a *matrícula consular* (consular registration) card were interviewed, and 14 percent declared they were members of HTAs (Suro, 2005).

If we consider the sharp decline in civic participation across all sectors of membership-based organizations, from labor unions to social clubs and political organizations, then the rate of participation of Mexicans in HTAs is very inspiring. According to a recent survey of Latinos in the Chicago metropolitan area, civic engagement in the United States is positively correlated to remittance behavior for both first and second generation Latinos, which is also related with engagement in binational social action (Chun, 2005).

In the last 10 years, the activities of Mexican HTAs in Chicago have become more diverse. Today, these groups are increasingly addressing rural development issues in Mexico and Latin America while also participating in domestic issues in the U.S. Moreover, their leaders have recently been performing salient roles in different institutions in Chicago such as local unions, the Illinois Government Office of New

<sup>12</sup> However, the consulate did not disaggregate the numbers by state of origin until April 2005, listing 251 HTAs representing 16 Mexican states of origin and the Federal District. See Barceló Monroy (2005).

MEXICAN MIGRANT CIVIC AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE U.S.  
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**Table 4**  
MEXICAN MIGRANT CLUBS AND FEDERATIONS IN CHICAGO, 1998–2005

State of Origin	Number of Clubs		Federation	
	1998	2005	1998	2005
Guerrero	36	59	Yes	Yes*+
Zacatecas	28	33	Yes	Yes*
Jalisco	21	26	Yes	Yes*
Guanajuato	22	30	Yes	Yes*+
Michoacán	14	37	Yes	Yes*+
San Luis Potosí	6	13	Yes	Yes
Durango	3	20	Yes	Yes*+
Hidalgo	0	7	No	Yes*
Oaxaca	4	6	No	Yes*
State of Mexico	1	4	No	Yes
Chihuahua	0	4	No	Yes*
Veracruz	0	4	No	No
Puebla	1	3	No	Yes
Federal District	2	2	No	Yes
Nuevo León	0	1	No	No
Other	2	2	—	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>17</b>

**Sources:** Barceló Monroy (2005); and authors' estimates based on information from the Mexican consulate in Chicago and from interviews with federation leaders, 1998, 2002 and 2005.

\* Indicates current members of the Confederation of Mexican Federations in the Midwest.

+ Indicates more than one federation.

Americans Policy and Advocacy, block clubs, neighborhood organizations, March of Dimes volunteering efforts, and PTAS, to name a few examples. Chicago's HTAS have also made alliances with prestigious Mexican-American organizations like the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) to establish leadership programs for their members, as well as with the Catholic Church to defend migrant rights.

#### MIGRANTS' ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR BINATIONAL PUBLIC POLICY ENGAGEMENT: THE CASE OF LOS ANGELES

The increasing importance of migrant clubs and federations, as well as the implementation of new policies pertaining to migrants, has led Mexican state and federal governments to implement a wide array of programs to facilitate relations between communities on both sides of the border and to optimize the material and financial resources provided by the different groups. Not only have these programs been use-

ful for channeling resources from organized migrants to their places of origin, but they have also created a predictable institutional framework through which migrant associations can interact with local, state, and federal governments in Mexico.

The result has been a sometimes comfortable, sometimes conflictive, relationship between these associations and the various levels of government. For example, for several years the state governments of Oaxaca, Zacatecas, Michoacán and Jalisco, among others, have operated liaison offices for their migrant communities. Migrant liaison agencies coordinate with the federations and other organizations to implement the "Three-for-One" co-investment program, to access emergency funds (mainly to transport home the bodies of migrants who die in the United States), to coordinate Mexican governors' visits to the United States, and to organize state government-sponsored cultural events such as the Oaxacans' Guelaguetza and, for Zacatecas, Jalisco, and Michoacán, the election of beauty queens and cultural weeks.

Although the migrant communities themselves laid the foundations for their new organizational structures, Mexican government involvement has been crucial in consolidating the federation of clubs as an organizational model.<sup>13</sup> Almost all Mexican migrant associations have adopted this model, probably because of the advantages it offers in the interaction between government influences and the migrant associations' assertion of political independence. On the one hand, federations are better able to interact with other agencies in Mexico, particularly with municipal and state governments, as well as with Mexican consulates in areas like Los Angeles, a fact that enables them to better support the objectives and initiatives of their member clubs. On the other hand, the various Mexican government agencies find it more productive to work with the federations, which can negotiate agreements and more easily overcome any obstacles that emerge.<sup>14</sup>

#### ZACATECAN ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE THREE-FOR-ONE PROGRAM FOR MIGRANTS

The case of the Zacatecas Federation is very illustrative of the relationship between migrant organizations and national government, since they have been able to build

<sup>13</sup> Extensive literature on "transnational communities" set the basis for "transnational studies" or, simply, "transnationalism." See, for example, the classic collection compiled by Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc (1994). A more recent work in this field is Levitt (2001). However, this perspective has also been subject to criticism; see for example Fitzgerald (2004); Morawska (2001); Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2004); and Weber (1999).

<sup>14</sup> Much of the literature on this issue has emphasized the Mexican government's role in this relationship and analyzed its importance. See, for example, Goldring (1995, 2002); Moctezuma Longoria (2000b); and Smith (1995). See also Guarnizo's (1998) comparative work on Mexican and Dominican migrants and the policies of their respective governments.



a solid relationship with Mexican government officials, particularly state and federal officials. These links, along with the federation's organizational history, have made it an important intermediary between its member clubs and Mexican government agencies. The Zacatecas clubs in California have taken extensive advantage of their effective intermediation to implement infrastructure projects in their communities of origin. Through the "Two-for-One" program, established in 1992, and the "Three-for-One" program created in 1999 (under the former program, federal and state governments match every dollar the clubs provide for social infrastructure projects; the latter adds a match from municipal governments), the Zacatecas Federation has generated more investment funding and implemented more infrastructure projects than any other federation. This program, that matches migrants' investments in their home communities, grew out of the relationship between this migrant organization and the Zacatecas state government, attesting to the federation's ability to create effective intermediation between its member associations and communities of origin in Mexico.<sup>15</sup>

In 2002 the program was officially "federalized" during a ceremony led by Mexican President Vicente Fox and with Guadalupe Gómez, then president of the federation, as a guest of honor and a signatory to the official document. Initially named as "Iniciativa Ciudadana 3 x 1" (Citizens' 3-for-1 Initiative), the official name of the program became "Programa 3 x 1 para Migrantes" (3-for-1 Program for Migrants) after Zacatecano migrants complained that the program should have a more explicit name. The program is housed in the office of the Ministry for Social Development (Sedesol). According to 2005 official figures, the program spent a total of U.S.\$66.5 million (a contribution of U.S.\$16.6 million for each of the four participating sectors) on projects supported by migrants organized in HTAs in the United States.<sup>16</sup> Initially federal officials had designated a share of U.S.\$2.7 million for the state of Zacatecas (a global investment of U.S.\$10.9 million). Then, in a very savvy move, this federation petitioned and obtained authorization for the first time in the history of the program to hold a meeting of the state's executive committee of the 3-for-1 Program for Migrants in Los Angeles at "Casa del Zacatecano."

This executive committee (called *Comité de Validación* or validation committee) oversees the allocation of funds through the 3-for-1 Program. It is composed of

<sup>15</sup> Practically all writings about the Zacatecas Federation and clubs in Los Angeles have underlined the achievements of cooperative mechanisms as an indicator of their solidity. In addition to the works already cited, see Esparza (2000); and García Zamora (2000, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> In 2006, Sedesol authorized a budget of U.S.\$12 million for this program, which meant a U.S.\$6 million reduction in comparison with the 2005 budget. This is the budget released during the first quarter, subject to restructuring. It will be interesting to see to what extent the HTAs can exercise effective pressure on the government to increase the budget.

eight members, two people per sector participating in the program (two representatives each from the federal, state and municipal governments, as well as two people representing the migrants' federations). In 2005, the Zacatecan Federation increased its share of the 3-for-1 Program by U.S.\$7.3 million to U.S.\$18.3 million and managed to adjust the program rules so that next year it can be used to fund productive projects. This level of access and the ability to shape important decision-making processes about the allocation of public funds illustrates how far along in terms of political weight this federation has come, shaping in a very decisive way not only important policies emanating from the Mexican governments at the state and federal level, but also taking leadership in their implementation and modification.

On October 12, 2005 the HTAS from Zacatecas became the pioneers in a milestone program, the new "Mexico 4-for-1 Program for Community Development." The Inter-American Dialogue, First Data Corporation, and the government of Zacatecas developed a partnership with Mexican HTAS to fund some basic infrastructure and economic development projects in states with high levels of migration and poverty. According to a press release, First Data, owner of the leading international money transfer company Western Union, earmarked U.S.\$250,000 (20 percent of the total contribution) exclusively for the state of Zacatecas (Inter-American Dialogue, 2005).

Ginger Thompson (2005) from the *New York Times* wrote in an article earlier this year that:

Southern California is the capital of the Mexican diaspora, and a hotbed of Mexican politics, led by the Federation of Zacatecan Clubs... The federation meets in a drab gray building in the City Terrace section of East Los Angeles [and] nearly everybody who wants to be anybody in Zacatecan politics has walked through its doors. Presidential agreements have been signed there. Political campaigns have been started. The federation proclaims that it is apolitical. But it is precisely its close ties to the government of Zacatecas that have helped it grow out of its members' garages into one of the most successful migrant fund-raising groups in the United States.

This quote eloquently captures the rising significance of the Zacatecan Federation as a transnational political institution. Its actions are no longer invisible and its increasing visibility also demands more clarity in terms of its plans and positions *vis-à-vis* the communities where its members now reside. This aspect of the HTAS' political agenda will be explored in a different section, when we address the emergence of new political actors on the California and Illinois political landscapes.

### **PARTICIPATION OF MICHOACANO HOMETOWN ASSOCIATIONS IN THE 3-FOR-1 PROGRAM FOR MIGRANTS**

The Michoacano HTAs are very active participants in social projects to improve the conditions of their communities of origin. Between the 1970s and the 1990s, Michoacano HTAs organized collective remittance projects for urbanization without systematic support from their local governments. More recently, they have been involved in the federal initiative called 3-for-1 Program for Migrants.<sup>17</sup> In fact, Michoacano HTAs have been pioneers in their campaign to convince the federal government to fund productive projects through the 3-for-1 Program for Migrants. For instance, the Francisco Villa Club from Chicago and some small migrant groups from California have established tomato greenhouses and poultry production projects in the municipalities of Zinapécuaro and Zamora. They are currently using a cooperative business model, including a minimum of 50 migrant partners for each project.

Through the collective remittance projects organized with the 3-for-1 Program, Michoacán municipalities were allocated an average 7 percent of the total share of this program for 2002 and 2003. Michoacano migrants have been quite successful in distributing the benefits of this program outside town centers. Historically, the majority of public investments were allocated to benefit the town center, thus leaving the most remote communities with scarce resources to fend for themselves. Thanks to this initiative, Michoacano migrants have allocated 75 percent of the projects outside the town centers in 2002 and 2003. In comparison, Zacatecano and Jalisciense HTAs have only allocated 71 percent and 60 percent, respectively, of the 3-for-1-sponsored projects outside the town centers during the same period (Burgess, 2005). The decision of HTAs to allocate funds for the most vulnerable communities has secured a more equitable distribution of benefits.

While some could argue that this matching funds program has contributed to letting state governments off the hook in their inherent responsibilities for public investment in development, it can not be denied that this program has empowered migrant communities, helping them to build more and better social capital networks as well as to restore the shattered social fabric of many communities of origin. Indeed, these funds have been able to provide the much needed spaces for many actors to promote social change in rural Mexico, such as dignified churches, main squares, public benches, community meeting rooms, and sports facilities. In some cases,

<sup>17</sup> In 2004, the combined investment for this program including migrant, federal, state, and municipal funds totaled U.S.\$66.2 million allocated for 1 263 projects, a negligible amount if we compared it with family remittances. The majority of the migrant contributions to the program (82 percent) came from California, Illinois, and Texas. See Vázquez Mota (2005). For a more detailed discussion on the different types of projects carried out in Michoacán by migrant associations, see Reynoso Acosta (2004).

civic participation can only start if there is a public and communal space to discuss the more pressing needs of rural towns. In the U.S. the matching fund programs sponsored by HTAS have also contributed to fostering a sense of place and belonging to migrants who often feel alienated from mainstream society. The infrastructure projects have provided a good reason to gather and reconnect with their roots many miles away from their birth places. The collectively shared experience of U.S. markers of modernity (impressive highways, clean and well supplied schools, elegant churches, paved streets and the like) have inspired them to bring these comforts to their *paisanos* in the towns and villages of Michoacán.

Michoacano HTAS have even been able to pursue projects that sometimes are outside the scope of municipal responsibilities, such as rodeo rings and churches, arguing that they have the power to prove the need and convince state and federal authorities to fund these projects through the 3-for-1 Program. This case reflects one of the many ways in which Michoacano migrants are altering the traditional hierarchies of the municipal governments.

#### **BINATIONAL CIVIC AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF MICHUACANO HTAS IN CHICAGO**

Although HTAS from Chicago are a more recent phenomenon—at least in their institutional consolidation—than their counterparts in Los Angeles, they have also been able to increase their binational activities and visibility. To offer an idea of the road traveled in the last 10 years, we will now focus on one case, the Michoacano HTAS, which are among the most successful in the Chicago metropolitan area.<sup>18</sup> The Federation of Michoacano Clubs in Illinois (Fedemci) is an example of leadership and civic participation on both sides of the border. The Michoacano HTAS in Illinois were established around the late 1960s and the first federation was formed more than three decades later. Throughout these years, these emerging Michoacano migrant organizations were able to fight corruption and disinterested governments as a scattered force in their municipalities, demanding more attention and resources for their communities from local government officials.

In the last two decades, Michoacano remittances and civic influence flew back and forth through the close circuits between the two countries. For example, migrants used transnational media to criticize the state governments, both for authoritarian

<sup>18</sup> The Federation of Guerrerenses is the oldest federation in Chicago (established in 1995) and offers an array of services for migrants from the Mexican state of Guerrero. This organization claims to have 30 000 members. See DeFour (2005).

politics and for forcing them to become exiles in search of jobs. The improvement in the communication channels between Michoacán and Illinois coincided with the political transition in Mexico, which opened the door to the first opposition government in the state of Michoacán in 2001. After more than two decades of hard work to get recognition, Michoacano migrants have been able to forge a strong network of more than 100 HTAS established mainly in California, Illinois, Nevada, Washington, and Texas (Reynoso Acosta, 2005). Since the creation of the first federation of 14 Michoacano HTAS in Illinois in 1997, the number of groups affiliated to it has doubled, and now there are two federations in California and two in Illinois.

In 2004, during the state congressional mid-term elections, several current and former migrant candidates ran for seats in the state legislature. The Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) agreed to include Jesús Martínez Saldaña, a former professor at the California State University at Fresno, and Reveriano Orozco, a migrant representative from Nevada, in its proportional representation list. Martínez Saldaña won a seat in Congress, with Orozco as his alternate, and now serves on the Migrant Affairs Commission in the legislature. He is not a lonely migrant in the state Congress, however. Among his colleagues are at least seven former migrant legislators who also won seats after returning to Michoacán to run their campaigns for in different local districts.<sup>19</sup>

Between 2001 and 2004, the Michoacán state government made increasing efforts to extend its presence beyond its borders in several domains, including health, education, and job training, especially in California and Illinois. Several government agencies are offering direct services for the Michoacano diaspora, such as job training, government-sponsored migrant medical insurance (i.e., a medical treatment service for returning migrants), and distance-learning high school education. Increasingly, more mayors are interested in visiting their transnational communities in the United States to invite them to cooperate in infrastructure projects.

In 2004, in order to increase the presence of Michoacanos in the Midwest, the state government made a donation to the Federation of Illinois to buy a building for the Michoacanos to have a headquarters. The house is located in Pilsen, one of the most important historical Mexican neighborhoods in the city of Chicago, and offers a space to hometown clubs and other types of Michoacano organizations interested in transnational activities such as the Michoacano Chamber of Commerce or the Association of Michoacano Artists. The building has a permanent staff member representing the General Coordinating Office for Michoacano Migrant Attention (Cogamin, its acronym in Spanish) and offers different services to the community in

<sup>19</sup> Personal communication with Jesús Martínez Saldaña in Morelia, Michoacán, 2005.

Chicago. During the recent wave of marches to protest anti-immigrant legislation in the U.S., Casa Michoacán has been one of the preferred locations for planning meetings among organizers of marches and protests in Chicago.

In recent years, many staff members of Michoacán government agencies have visited Michoacano HTAS in the United States to collaborate on several projects for hometown development, tourism, and regional economic investment. Information flows between Michoacán and Illinois have improved, with better coverage from local newspapers. In the capital city of Morelia, at least three leading newspapers publish daily special sections on migrant affairs. For example, *La Voz de Michoacán* (The Voice of Michoacán) has *Al Otro Lado*, *La Voz de los Migrantes* (On the Other Side, The Voice of the Migrants). In Chicago, many Spanish-language newspapers regularly report on HTAS meetings with government officials. The Michoacanos also have *La Diligencia Michoacana*, a weekly newspaper established in 1999 and distributed in Michoacán as well as in Minnesota, California, Illinois, Nevada, Texas, and Florida.

At the micro-level, the increasing involvement of HTAS in development projects for their communities has resulted in greater local awareness of migrant issues. For example, some municipalities have opened special migrant outreach offices to avoid their constituents' long trips to the capital city of Morelia in search of more information. Likewise, some new mayors have included a special chapter on migration and development in their three-year development plans. Increasingly, Michoacano citizens are reaching out to their mayors in search of name and addresses of HTAS, to appeal for help to address pressing needs. School teachers, agrarian leaders, students, and homemakers are asking the municipal authorities to share the contact information of HTA leaders in hopes of interesting them in a project to benefit their towns.

The level of rapprochement between Michoacano federations and their home state is steadily growing but this closeness sometimes puts the autonomy of the grassroots organizations at risk. The HTAS have mostly relied on the executive branch of the Michoacán government as their most important source of external funding. As a result, their ability to forge alliances with non-governmental associations independent from the government is compromised. However, at the municipal level, some HTAS have followed independent paths. In some cases, they have successfully mobilized their economic leverage to defend infrastructure projects for their *paisanos* against corrupt or uncooperative authorities. Through their privileged relations with higher levels of government, they have been able to effectively inform the appropriate authorities about problems. Thus, the information flows from Michoacán to the U.S. and back to Morelia are shaping new forms of transnational accountability. In fact, some community development project representatives living in Michoacán believe

that hometown leaders living in the United States have more direct access to government circles because the migrants are the ones who send the dollars for the projects.

#### THE FORMATION OF THE COUNCIL OF PRESIDENTS OF MEXICAN FEDERATIONS IN LOS ANGELES

As discussed in previous sections, the consolidation of migrant-led federations shows how Mexican migrants have responded creatively to the dilemma of participating in the decisions that affect their communities of origin by building effective grass-roots organizations that make political participation possible in Mexico even when they are not physically present. The other novel aspect of hometown Mexican migrant federations is their increasing participation in the U.S. civic and political arena, in the communities where they live. Indeed, these migrant organizations have leveraged their power as counterparts not only of political actors in Mexico, but increasingly here in the United States, thereby reinforcing their members' sense of identity and empowerment.

The creation in July 2002 of the Council of Presidents of Mexican Federations of Los Angeles (which includes the heads of 12 of the 13 Mexican federations in the region) has strengthened the migrant associations' public voice, claiming to represent almost 300 000 Mexican migrant families in California (Wides, 2004). In January 2004 the Council of Presidents of Mexican Federations participated in two key political events. First, responding to an invitation from the Bush administration, the council sent a member to the White House to attend the January 7 announcement of a new immigration reform initiative. Second, on January 20, at the Mexican consulate offices in Los Angeles, the council hosted a delegation of five Mexican governors (representing the Mexican Conference of Governors) who came to discuss the right to vote of Mexicans living abroad and President Bush's immigration proposal and its implications for the Mexican migrant community.

The council has also collaborated closely with unions and immigration advocates to lobby for driver's licences for undocumented workers. In addition, it sent six participants on the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride to Washington, D.C., which took place from September 20 to October 4, 2003. More recently the *Sacramento Bee* headline read "A drive for clout: Community groups representing Mexican immigrants form a confederation to influence public policy in California" (Hecht, 2005). This article reported the encounter between the Council of Presidents of Mexican Federations and Ann Marie Tallman, national president and general counsel for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF). According to this article,

Tallman proposed "a partnership, offering the *Consejo* presidents use of office space at the legal defense and education fund's Los Angeles headquarters, business leadership classes, and media training. She pledged to work with the hometown groups on legal and policy issues affecting immigrant communities." The punch line of the article was that "the presidents of Mexican hometown associations...are a powerful political and economic force in Mexico and a potentially potent social movement in California." In May 2005, MALDEF launched the MALDEF-Hometown Association Leadership Program ("Lider"), aimed at offering some 180 association officers a series of workshops on issues like how to build teams and coalitions, how to launch a non-profit organization, and best practices for accessing the mass media (MALDEF, 2005).

The Council of Presidents of Mexican Federations in Los Angeles is very explicit about playing an active role in regional and state politics and is clearly attempting to influence public policy on immigration, education and health care, issues that are of primary importance to their constituency. They have lobbied state official about driver's licenses for undocumented migrants and have appeared before the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to defending the use of the Consular Registration, issued by the Mexican consulate, as a legal ID for local law enforcement agencies. On August 19, 2005, the California Latino Legislative Caucus, the Senate Select Committee on California-Mexico Cooperation and the Assembly Select Committee on California Latin American Affairs held a joint informational hearing in Los Angeles entitled, "The Emergence of Immigrant Hometown Associations in California."

The invitation read in part:

As legislators across the state consider key factors that influence California, an emergent organized immigrant population and the impact they have on the State has largely been unexplored. Over the last decade, the emergence of hometown associations has reshaped the way that Latinos deal with organized immigrant communities. The joint informational hearing will serve as an avenue to assess and explore the present and future impact that hometown associations have in the areas of policy formulation, civic participation, and bi-national collaboration, among others.

The reasons for holding the hearing reflected the increasing visibility of Mexican HTAS in California to mainstream Latino political leaders. During the hearing, the message from the presidents of Mexican federations in Los Angeles was that, as leaders of a vast network of grassroots organizations, they can provide a crucial connection between the Latino political leadership and a dynamic Mexican migrant community in California.



This new political activism stands in sharp contrast to the general political disengagement of HTAs in the mid-1990s, when anti-immigrant Proposition 187 was being debated in California. These activities show how the consolidation of Mexican migrant organizations has permitted the emergence of a dense transnational communications network linking migrants with their communities and with Mexico's municipal, state, and federal governments. This expanding communications network has now come to incorporate political and social actors in the United States as well.

Despite their achievements, these associations now face a broad array of challenges. The first is the increasing competition between migrant-led organizations that claim to represent the Mexican migrant community. The Council of Presidents of Mexican Federations of Los Angeles has emerged as a very strong voice in this debate, but it is not the only one.<sup>20</sup> In the fall of 2003, the Mexican government created the Advisory Council to the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (a governmental body within the Foreign Ministry). This council includes one hundred Mexican migrants from different walks of life—from activists to lawyers and business owners (Cano, Molina, and Nájjar, 2002). Officially, Mexico's federal government created this council to serve as the main conduit for its relations with Mexican migrants in the United States. Clearly, the emergence and institutionalization of migrant-led organizations has allowed for the creation and strengthening of ties that link migrant communities in the United States to their home communities in Mexico and to the different levels of the Mexican government. We expect that this trend will not only continue but will expand dramatically in the near future.

#### THE CREATION OF THE CONFEDERATION OF MEXICAN FEDERATIONS IN THE MIDWEST

The majority of the HTAs and federations in Chicago have made great inroads in capacity building, both extending their network within and outside their traditional webs of relations. In the year 2000, several migrant-led Mexican organizations decided to form the Coalition of Mexican Migrant Organizations in the Midwest (COMMO), an umbrella organization including local branches of Mexican political parties, hometown federations, and civic associations. Three years later, many of the federations, under the leadership of the Michoacán Federation, created an specific structure to organize the increasing number of HTAs and established the Confederation of Mexican

<sup>20</sup> Other organizations vying to position themselves as representatives of Mexicans in the United States include the Coalition for the Political Rights of Mexicans Abroad (CDPME), the Zacatecano Civic Front (FCZ), the International Coalition of Mexicans Abroad (CIME), and the World Association of Mexicans Abroad (AMME).

Federations in the Midwest (Confemex), an umbrella organization representing 9 federations of Mexican migrants. In the Chicago metropolitan area, 179 HTAs belong to this confederation. The main difference with the Council of Presidents of Mexican Federations in Los Angeles is its organizational structure. The Board of Directors of Confemex is made up of elected hometown club representatives from within the federations, not necessarily the presidents. Confemex holds elections every two years and in April 2005 they elected a woman, Marcia Soto, a former President of Durango's federation as their president.<sup>21</sup> However, not all Chicago federation presidents have positions on the Board of Directors.

In 2004, Confemex became one of the founding members of the National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities (NALACC), a new network of 90 Latin American and Caribbean migrant-led organizations working to improve the quality of life in their communities, both in the United States and in their countries of origin (see <<http://www.nalacc.org/>>). Through this alliance, Confemex has actively participated in domestic issues such as immigration reform, driver's license bill SB67 (allowing migrants to obtain a driver's license in Illinois), consular identification card bill SB 1623 (to validate this document as an official identification in the state), education reform, day laborers' rights, civil rights, and economic development in Latin America. In fact, thanks to the overwhelming civic participation of many organized migrant groups, non-profit associations, and community based organizations, the state of Illinois approved the passage of a bi-partisan bill entitling undocumented youth to in-state tuition rates at Illinois universities and is now working on the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) and Students Adjustment Acts that would provide undocumented students a path to legalizing their status to become eligible for financial aid in order to attend the colleges and universities of their choice.

In only two and half years of existence, Confemex has been able to forge alliances with other organizations advocating migrant labor rights. For example, in 2003, Confemex formally endorsed and joined the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride Coalition and sent some representatives to participate (see <<http://www.iwfr.org/>>).<sup>22</sup> Many HTA leaders have also received valuable training in capacity building through special programs offered by the Heartland Alliance for Human Needs and Human Rights and *Enlaces América*. The Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

<sup>21</sup> Electing a woman as president of this confederation is an important milestone indicating the possibility of a more equitable gender balance for these historically male-dominated organizations. For more on gender issues related to leadership positions at HTAs and transnationalism and gender, see Goldring (2001) and Pessar and Mahler (2003).

<sup>22</sup> Other HTAs endorsing this march were the Federation of Colimense Clubs, the Southern California Federation of Zacatecano Clubs, Zacatecanos on the March USA, and the Sinaloa Active Club.

recently granted them funds to participate in The New Americans Initiative, a three year outreach campaign sponsored by the Illinois government aimed at helping 348 000 permanent legal residents currently eligible to become citizens. Confemex, through its network of 179 HTAs, has been mobilizing its constituents to advertise citizenship literacy classes to help many residents to overcome barriers and obstacles to obtaining citizenship (see <http://www.newamericans-il.org>).

This year, Confemex members attended the annual conference of the Rainbow/ Push Coalition and Citizenship Education Fund to discuss the ways in which immigration laws affect employment, citizenship, and overall human rights. After hurricane Katrina displaced thousands of undocumented migrants, NALACC immediately mobilized its network to demand a temporary protected status for all undocumented victims of the hurricane (see NALACC). In fact, Confemex was among the first organizations advising the Mexican Ministry of Social Development regarding fundraising strategies to help Mexican victims of Katrina through activities organized in Chicago by Mexican HTAs. This year, one representative of Confemex was invited by a non-governmental organization working on social development to visit El Salvador to advise local groups on strategies to improve the collective remittance infrastructure projects financed by Salvadoran migrants in the U.S. In addition, Marcia Soto, the president of Confemex, was invited to represent this organization at the II Ibero American Summit for State Decentralization and Local Development in San Salvador. However, the most visible achievement of a former Confemex member in domestic politics has been the decision of the governor of Illinois to name José Luis Gutiérrez, a former president of the Michoacano Federation, as the new director of the Office of New Americans Policy and Advocacy, a recently created state office that will deal with immigrant integration and provide opportunities for guiding eligible legal permanent residents into the citizenship process.

With these new coalitions among HTAs, several federations have built more legitimacy and credibility among local elected officials in Illinois. Local politicians attend the events and fundraisers organized by Mexican HTAs in Chicago more frequently now.

Confemex has increasing presence in metropolitan Chicago and other parts of the country. The spread of news about this organization through ethnic media and government-sponsored news broadcasts has created a trickle-down effect. Increasingly, more migrants are organizing from other states, following this model of town-by-town and state-by-state associations. Chicago-based federations are also recruiting HTAs from throughout the Midwest, and HTAs working in Ohio, Minnesota, Indiana, and Michigan have affiliated with them.

## RIGHTS, ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP, AND CITIZENSHIP AMONG MEXICAN HTAS

As we pointed out in previous pages, while hometown development activities of Mexican HTAs have gained considerable visibility in recent years, the fact is that much less attention has been paid to their civic and political engagement in the U.S. communities where they live. In this section we will examine some of the shifts in their organizational strategies, which have responded to changes in the regions where they have settled.

As we discussed earlier, these migrant groups traditionally focused on philanthropic and social infrastructure works they promoted in their hometowns and cities of origin in Mexico, as well as on the consolidation of their migrant communities in the U.S. Likewise, the eventual implementation of several cooperation programs with the Mexican government in the following years, with the aim of enabling a relationship (social, cultural, but mostly economic) between communities on both sides of the border, led to the strengthening of ties between these groups, their communities of origin and Mexico's different government levels. In contrast, their links with the political and community realms in the U.S. were very limited, and had little contact even with Latino representatives and organizations in the locations where they were active (Zabin and Escala-Rabadán, 2002).

However, during the 1990s we can observe several shifts within these associations regarding their scope of action. During those years these groups became increasingly engaged in civic and political issues in general, including the issue of rights and citizenship in the U.S. While this shift has to be examined in light of their regions of origin as well as of their inner dynamics, the fact is that a pivotal component for explaining these changes can be found where Mexican migrant communities live.

In the context of Mexico-U.S. migration, the Mexican diaspora grew significantly during the 1990s. While there had been a steady increase in Mexican migration ever since the 1970s, some estimates point out that during the 1990s, this population more than doubled, from 4.3 million in 1990 to 9.2 million in 2000. And according to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, this number had grown to 11.2 million Mexican-born in 2004, the largest migrant community in the U.S. (based on adjusted March 2004 cps).

In addition to this remarkable growth, the Mexican migrant population in the U.S. reveals other salient socio-demographic and socio-economic features as well. According to the U.S. Census Bureau analysis, and by comparing it with migrants from other regions of origin in the world (Europe; Asia; Africa; North, Central, and South America; and others), Mexican migrants are the youngest (32.6 years old on

average), with the shortest time of residence in the U.S. (12.8 years), and with the largest number of household members on average (4.2 members). In addition, they have the lowest educational levels (only 33.8 percent of those 25 years or older finished high school or the equivalent degree), the highest poverty level (25.8 percent of total population), and the lowest income per household on average (U.S.\$27 345 per year) (Schmidley, 2001).

Finally, this population's legal status adds to this disadvantaged profile. Mexican migrants have one of the lowest percentages of naturalization of the total foreign-born population (14 percent) (Passel, 2005b). But the most revealing sign is their legal status. According to some estimates, there are 10.3 million undocumented migrants in the U.S., of which 5.9 million (57 percent) are of Mexican origin. In addition, slightly more than half this population is clustered in the states of California (24 percent), Texas (14 percent), Florida (9 percent), and New York (7 percent) (Passel, 2005b). The resulting profile indicates a remarkable growth of the Mexican migrant population during the last decade of the twentieth century, but with major challenges in terms of their structural and cultural vulnerability and lack of rights (Bustamante, 2001).

The most revealing case of this vulnerability among Mexican migrants in the U.S. occurred in California within the last decade. Their high concentration in this state, the 1990-1991 economic recession, the negative impact of military budget reductions, and electoral agendas led to the rise of a marked anti-immigrant climate, manifested through an orthodox sense of citizenship. The prevailing notion of citizenship was restricted to those who had full access to rights as members of the political community, in contrast with those who did not. A considerable sector of California's political discourse in those years recurrently opposed "citizens" and "aliens," through which the latter were equated with "illegal aliens," especially if they came from Latin America. As a result, this dichotomy revealed the existence of two different types of membership in American society, and with it, two communities in terms of access to rights (Bustamante, 2001; Maher, 2002).

The most palpable case in point of this anti-immigrant climate in California was Proposition 187, submitted to popular vote on November 1994, and whose main goal was the prohibition of public services—namely education and health—to undocumented migrants. The discriminatory character of this initiative has been the subject of several studies (Bustamante, 2001; Mailman, 1995; Martin, 1995; Santa Ana, 2002; Ono and Sloop, 2002). But the most important aspect for our argument is that this proposal had a decisive impact in terms of sparking active participation among Mexican HTAs, as well as encouraging more collaboration between them and the Mexican-American organizations that led the campaign against it.

For the first time, these migrant groups decided to participate in a clearly political event that involved the open defense of migrants' rights in the U.S. This involvement adopted several forms: the direct donation of funds to the campaign against this proposition; their participation in public rallies against it; or by promoting their members' vote against the initiative. But equally noteworthy was their willingness to participate in California's public sphere. In contrast with their traditional low profile, Mexican HTAS in Southern California decided to go public with their opposition to Proposition 187. In an unprecedented move, in September 1993, these associations decided to publish a paid open letter to then-Governor Peter Wilson in *La Opinión*, the oldest and most influential Spanish-language newspaper in the U.S.

This action was revealing for several reasons. First, it is worth emphasizing the chosen format used by these groups, an "open letter," exhibiting a clear willingness to place their criticism in the public sphere. Second, the number of signing associations from 13 states of origin in Mexico, as well as other Mexican migrant groups should also be pointed out. Third, the tone adopted by these groups to address California's highest political authorities is also unparalleled. In contrast with the reverence these groups traditionally used to address political authorities in general, in this letter they did not hesitate to censure "the racist attitude," "ignorance," and "xenophobic prejudices" of Governor Wilson, as well as Senators Feinstein and Boxer, who also supported Proposition 187. Finally, the closing of this document is noteworthy as well, when it exhorts "all our brothers and sisters from Mexico and Latin America and ...all the people to defend the human rights of the weakest sector of this society: the undocumented migrants (emphasis added)." Here, Proposition 187 and its supporters are depicted as a sign of "those old nationalist and ethnic traumas that do little in favor of the integration of our America," while undocumented migrants are presented as vulnerable victims of the former. But most importantly, Mexican HTAS decided to display their open support for the latter, through the defense of their human rights.

What had happened? And how can we explain this shift in the scope of Mexican HTAS? As we pointed out above, these groups traditionally focused mostly on their philanthropic and social infrastructure works in their hometowns and states of origin in Mexico, and had kept a low profile in their places of destination. And while they had forged some ties with political and community organizations in California, these links were limited and mostly formal. In addition, other groups with which they might have cultural affinities, like the Mexican-American organizations, had not reached out to them. Nevertheless, despite the fact that Proposition 187 was supported by the California electorate on November 1994, and eventually

declared unconstitutional in 1997, it was the watershed event that triggered the creation of more durable relationships not only among Mexican migrant groups, but also between them and other political and community organizations and representatives.

While this shift in the scope of action did not occur homogeneously among all Mexican HTAs, and does not convey either a linear or simplistic path (from “philanthropy” in the places of origin toward “civic-mindedness” in the communities of settlement), we want to highlight the importance of this transformation in the organizational scope of these migrant groups, by showing their concern and willingness to participate in debates over issues regarding rights, citizenship, and membership in the U.S. Indeed, the leaders of some of these groups depict this transformation by adopting a new language, which underscores the issue of rights and civic participation in the U.S.:

Proposition 187 opened our eyes to the necessity of getting involved in issues that affect the community here. At least in my opinion, we need to be even more united here in political questions; we need to be involved, because our existence depends on it.

I have my life here, my work is here, my house is here, my children were born here, and they feel like Americans. So we have to worry about what’s affecting us here and about those of us who are here.

We have to confront politics here. The fact that we’re from Mexico has nothing to do with it; I still have the right to defend my community. We have the right to be heard and to be respected, and not treated like a door mat (Zabin and Escala-Rabadán, 2002: 26-27).

This transformation (which in these excerpts is illustrated by a noticeable contrast between “here” and “there”) became more visible during the first years of the twenty-first century, when several Mexican HTAs and their federations in California kept participating in initiatives focused on migrants’ rights. Gradually, these groups displayed an increasing concern for the issue of membership in their new societies, which they identified as a matter of equal rights. As a result, this redefinition of their collective identity led to an expanded range of their actions as groups. For example, during these years we may observe the increasing participation of Mexican HTAs in several initiatives based on the defense of migrants’ rights, like the different actions in favor of an amnesty (the “Amnesty Campaign”), or their participation in different rallies and campaigns in favor of initiatives before the California House of Representatives, like the Assembly Bill 60 (supporting granting driver’s licenses to undocumented migrants), or AB 40 (supporting facilitating college access to undocumented migrant students).

The gradual weaving of ties with other groups –migrant associations, political representatives, community organizations, NGOs, scholars, and foundations– thus suggests an important shift in the organizational scope of Mexican HTAS. Traditionally, these Mexican migrant clubs had not forged links, even with those organizations with which they may have cultural affinities, like the Latino civil rights organizations (for example, the National Council of La Raza [NCLR], the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund [MALDEF], or the League of United Latin American Citizens [LULAC], to mention some of the best known). By the same token, these Mexican-American organizations did not focus on Mexican HTAS, in light of their low profile. However, the ongoing relationship has exposed these groups to key issues like human rights and migrant rights in the U.S., thus explaining their gradual incorporation in their agendas. For example, a representative of one of these federations pointed out the following in his yearly message:

I was appointed representative [of the Zacatecan Federation in Southern California] of an organization that fights for the rights of all migrants in the United States, and it has made me proud to be able to support the poor and working people, the underprivileged that struggle every day to survive in this great nation .... *We fully believe in human rights*, the times of unfairness have been left behind. We're in the times of justice. That's the reason why we'll keep fighting wherever we are, so that *all human migrants, documented and undocumented*, receive the same fair and decent treatment in our daily lives, and that our children get education without distinction of race or legal status (FCZSC, 2003: 44, emphasis added).

As we see, the strong ethnic identities that these organizations display through their multiple activities are a positive sign of a trend toward integration into American society. Indeed, having a strong ethnic identity has been found to be a good predictor of civic participation behavior among non-citizen Latinos (Leal, 2002). Likewise, some analysts have observed that "past studies have underestimated civic participation among Latinos by failing to acknowledge the role of migration-related factors in depressing Latino's involvement in civic organizations." These analysts conclude that once migration factors are accounted for, Latinos are more likely to participate in civic organizations than whites (Stoll and Wong, 2003).

During the recent wave of protests against the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 (a.k.a. H.R. 4437), Mexican HTAS were presented with another opportunity to display their newly acquired strength in mobilizing their constituencies for domestic issues. In February, March, and April 2006, many marches were staged in big cities like Chicago, Dallas, Houston,



and Los Angeles, where the majority of HTAs are concentrated. Millions of Mexican migrants marched through the streets and downtowns of more than 158 cities across the United States, carrying the important message that civic participation is not only exercised in the polling booth. In these marches, one of the most popular slogans read, "Today we march, tomorrow we vote." This is how these seemingly disenfranchised residents expressed themselves and demanded respect for their human and worker rights.

The cities of Chicago and Los Angeles set important records of attendance with estimated crowds ranging from 400 000 to 750 000 marchers in their two biggest events. In these and other cities, such as San Jose and Fresno, California, the pro-immigrant marches were historic, becoming the largest demonstrations staged in a very long time. The total combined estimate for 259 separate protests organized in 43 states during the spring of 2006 ranged between 3.3 and 5 million participants, depending on the source that recorded the event.<sup>23</sup>

Although this emerging social movement was initially organized by a diverse group of Mexican and Latino organizations, it was quickly supported and endorsed by many migrant organizations from other countries. Indeed, the first wave of protests in February and March was clearly marked by the overwhelming presence of Mexican and Latin American flags. However, by April 10, the date of the second massive organized protest, the scenery had significantly changed. The sea of Latin American flags was gradually accompanied by flags of dozens of other countries and the presence of the U.S. flag became more ubiquitous, even surpassing the display of foreign flags. Through these changing symbols, it is rather clear that the marchers wanted to stress a sense of belonging to this country, despite their different national origins.

In the case of Chicago, Mexican HTAs for the first time had the opportunity to participate as organizers and not only as participants in the March 10 march. During Chicago's last pro-legalization march in September 2000, few HTAs participated and none played any role as organizers. They were merely part of the network coordinated by the Illinois Coalition of Immigrant and Refugee Rights. Six years later, a leader from the Michoacano Federation had a very important role as one of the march coordinators, making sure to distribute messages and invitations two weeks in advance of the demonstration. He invited many HTAs to sign as individual sponsors in a specially designated website (<[www.huelgageneral.com](http://www.huelgageneral.com)>). After the march, it was common to see the names of HTA leaders making statements to both English

<sup>23</sup> All these figures are authors' computations based on the lower and upper boundary of participant estimates done by local and national newspaper sources for 259 separate protests across the United States during the months of February, March, April, and May 2006. We are grateful for the contributions made to this database by Jonathan Fox, Elvia Zazueta, Ingrid García, Eduardo Stanley, Jesús Martínez Saldaña, David Brooks, and Raúl Caballero.

and Spanish media outlets. HTA leaders were very good at collecting and spreading through e-mails all the media attention that they got on TV, and in Mexican and U.S. newspapers.

The first demonstration was so encouraging that the Latino labor coalitions in Chicago and immigrant-led labor organizations decided to have their organizational meetings at Casa Michoacán in order to discuss the planning strategy for the May 1 march and economic boycott. Offering their space for this important meeting is a sign that HTAS' visibility will probably increase in the near future.

Finally, it is also worth pointing out that in addition to the changing context in which Mexican migrants live, there have been several important changes within these groups. Probably the most significant factor has been the rise of new leadership, which has been more attuned to the U.S. context and has promoted more active engagement (Rivera-Salgado and Escala-Rabadán, 2004).

## CONCLUSIONS

The formation of migrant-led federations shows how Mexican migrants, far from being passive victims of the discriminatory and exploitative conditions they face in the United States, have responded creatively, building grassroots organizations that make collective action possible in their communities of origin and in the communities they have established along their migratory circuit in the United States. These HTAS and federations demonstrate Mexican migrants' capacity to build transnational organizations and social spaces over the long term; their efforts even predate the Mexican government's various attempts to incorporate Mexicans abroad. Indeed, these migrant organizations, based on their states of origin, have leveraged their power as counterparts of political authorities in Mexico and the United States, thereby reinforcing their members' sense of identity and empowerment.

By comparing the organizational experiences of migrants in different parts of the United States we can further our understanding of how ethnicity shapes the migratory experience and incorporation patterns of Mexican migrants. It also sheds light on the intensification of ethnicity in the form of "a topophilic *paisano* identity"<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Topophilic identities refer to attachments to geographical spaces, such as the local countryside in Mexico. The ethnic identity of many Mexican migrants is not only manifested through a nation-state allegiance but also as a sense of belonging that primarily resides in their *oriundez* (attachment to birth place). Thus, Mexican topophilic identities have a historic resemblance with late nineteenth-century arrivals to United States. According to Morawska, "the overwhelming majority of turn-of-the-twentieth century Slavic and Italian arrivals in the United States, more than 90 percent of whom were of rural backgrounds, came to this country with a group identity and a sense of belonging that extended no further than the *okolica* (local countryside)." See Morawska (1999: 8).

among these migrants, which leads to the counterintuitive proposition that long-term transnational migration is increasing, not reducing, self-identification by ethnicity. This new identity is an important force in the formation of hometown associations and federations among Mexican migrants.

While it is true that the HTAs based on hometowns and regions of origin are not the only kind of association among Mexican migrants in the U.S., they have achieved a growing centrality within their communities on both sides of the border. Indeed, during recent years we have witnessed increasing interest among both political leaders and scholars in these groups. On the one hand, these associations provide a privileged standpoint from which it is possible to examine in detail the inner organizational dynamics of Mexican migrant communities in the U.S. On the other hand, most of this interest focuses on these groups' traditional role in the promotion of local and regional development in their places of origin through their collective remittances. However, these groups have expanded their scope of action in recent years, aiming to strengthen their civic and political participation on both sides of the border.

An important transformation in the organizational scope of these groups has been the adoption of new agendas, like their involvement in the defense of migrants' rights in the U.S. As we pointed out, this shift is related to important changes in their states and cities of destination. The remarkable growth of Mexican migration during the 1990s, its concentration in specific states, as well as this population's demographic, socio-economic, and legal profile, reveal not only its increasing density but also a clear vulnerability. In turn, this has led to the rise of an anti-immigrant sentiment in some of these states, targeting Mexican undocumented migrants. Different cities have responded in different ways toward the undocumented migrants' plight. Some local and state governments have steadily increased their anti-immigrant climate, as in the case of California, while others have adopted a more nuanced response as the case of Chicago illustrates. This difference in public policies toward non-citizens can partially explain the difference in the consolidation and scope of activities of HTAs in Los Angeles and Chicago.

In light of this new context, the increasing civic and political participation among Mexican HTAs is revealing in several ways. The groups' incorporation of concepts like human rights, migrants' rights, membership, and citizenship onto their agendas, indicates that they have gradually increased and consolidated their ties with other groups based on shared goals, which reveals in turn an expansion of their networks and their organizational sphere. Nevertheless, despite the strengthening of these links, we do not want to suggest that this convergence implies an inexorable path toward the traditional assimilationist approach. Rather, this participation suggests the possible confluence of different groups, organizations, and identities in the

strengthening of their new nation's civil and political life. But despite their possible cultural resemblance to and differences with other groups and communities, HTAS can sustain and reinforce their own identities. The following example illustrates this point. By the end of 2002, in his yearly welcome message, the president of the Zacatecan Federation in Southern California, Mr. Guadalupe Gómez, pointed out the importance of Mexican HTAS "to make *our* communities a better place to live on *both* sides of the border." He underscored the fact that he had been invited to the White House in October of that year to "an event with *our* president of the United States," where he also had the chance to meet "with *our* beloved congresswomen;" but by the same token, he also "thank *our* government of Mexico," and closed this message by saying "We hope that your participation will help you in your personal lives and *feel proud to be from Zacatecas*, as I am. God Bless You, *God Bless America*." (FCZSC, 2003, emphasis added)

In fact, the display of strong regional identities must be understood as prior to national identities because the manifestation of local patriotism existed well before the creation of the modern nation-state. In the near future, it is possible that these contemporary types of transnational ties may work against melting into the dominant Protestant Anglo-Saxon culture, thus leading to different forms of integration. Mexican-born migrants have demonstrated a great capacity to participate in both communities of origin and residence, while taking care of their U.S.-born children. In fact, the second generation is not showing strong signs of following in their parents' footsteps regarding transnational connections, at least not with the same intensity (Levitt and Waters, eds., 2002). This suggests that full integration into U.S. society is happening, though with different paths than those followed by the linear assimilation approach. If we are to believe that migrant integration no longer means assimilating into mainstream culture, then we have grounds to expect that first and second generations of Mexican migrants will integrate into more pluralistic and multicultural social spaces, as the previous example illustrates.

In addition, the link between HTAS and migrants' rights can be seen as an important transformation of the *nature* of these groups *vis-à-vis* the Mexican migrant community as a whole. As we have pointed out, these groups' activities in promoting local development in their regions of origin in Mexico by sending collective remittances are based upon their concern for their own communities. Nevertheless, their increasing participation in the broader issues, such as the defense of migrants' rights, suggests a departure from their traditional *translocal* character.

Finally, we are aware that the relationship between Mexican HTAS and civic and political participation in the U.S. is a process in its initial stages and is far from being homogeneous and unidirectional among all Mexican migrants. Nevertheless, we

believe that this increasing participation is an expanded sign of what has been called the "claims of substantive membership" (Goldring, 2002: 64) among Mexican migrant communities both in Mexico and in the U.S. In this regard, the development of new ways and strategies of participation by the Mexican migrant clubs suggest not only their willingness to intervene both "here" and "there," but, most of all, the consolidation of what has been called a real "migrant civil society" between Mexico and the United States.

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