

Response to my Reviewers

Dear Reviewers,

In the second version of this paper, my thesis is that youth in the immigrant community are uniquely positioned to encourage the immigrant community to participate in the 2020 census. Additionally, a hostile political climate has caused challenges in encouraging the immigrant community to participate in the census. My thesis has largely remained the same but, I have taken away the part that states that immigrant youth have historically played a crucial role in the immigrant rights movement. I have removed this as a part of my thesis because although this is an important point, I only emphasize this once in my literature review. I do not believe that my interviews necessarily touch on the historical role that youth have played. I believe that Maria had some great comments to my paper and I have adjusted almost all of the suggestions she gave. One of the most important changes I made due to her comments was the format of my paper. Before, I had positioned my information relating to the hostile political environment prior to my information about how youth are resisting this. I altered this to have examples of resistance before going into the hostile political environment. This is one of the things I like best about the current version as I believe it highlights the strengths of the community first. Additionally, in this version, I added another section in my findings about the likelihood of my interviewees' families participating in the census. I was hesitant to put this in the paper as it does acknowledge that some of their families may not be participating in the census. But, ultimately, I feel as though it speaks to a fuller truth by including the complexities of this issue within the paper. Although I like how I restructure my essay themes, I struggled with transitions and flow when moving my paragraphs around. I attempted to change some transitions and try out paragraphs in different places.

Thank you to Barbara for her patience and helpfulness with the creation of this paper and throughout this process. I am indebted with gratitude for my classmates for their help, especially Maria who peer edited my paper and Kristen who answered many of my questions via text. I appreciate Najayra for listening to my ideas and helping me formulate them. Thank you to my friends and boyfriend for listening to me talk about my struggles throughout this process. My mother also helped me think through some portions of this essay so I appreciate her help with that.

Thank you for reading!

With gratitude,
Callie Radecki

Youth Engagement in the Immigrant
Community and the 2020 Census

Callie Radecki

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Introduction

“So, I remember this one time when I was probably I was like 14... I remember there was a knock on the door... my parents were already kind of freaked out... they were like, ‘should we answer it?’ and I was like, ‘I don't know, because they're strangers and they look like business people.’ So you can still see the fear was there without citizen question. And that was 10 years ago.... By having the courage when I was young I said, ‘let me answer because I can actually communicate with them and see what they want.’ And then the lady was like ‘oh we're just here with the census’. And I was like, okay, and then I explained that to my parents. I understood a little bit but she was very like superficial about what the census was. She just kind of said it was needed to count people. Even at the time, I kind of outed myself in a way, I was like... what if we were not like from here? That's when I knew that even non citizens can do it. Even then my parents were unsure of even doing it, even when that person was in front of them. So I think at the time only my mom did the census, I don't think my dad, and because he was just like ‘I don't trust this individual.’”

With the 2020 Census approaching, every person in the country must decide if they will participate in this crucial task. For members of the undocumented community, another layer of complexity comes into play, as many people fear that their participation could lead to negative developments in their ability to stay living in this country. When asked about when she first learned about the census, Najayra Voldivaos recalled her interaction with 2010 census vividly. At the young age of 14, she took on the responsibility of getting necessary information for her family.

Youth within the immigrant rights movement have continually played a crucial role as agents of change. Starting with the movement for the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act) and for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), youth activists have been at the forefront of the immigrant rights movement. By sharing their own life stories to demonstrate the need for increased legal standing for immigrants across the

country, their dedication and passion led to the creation of DACA in 2012. DACA grants immigrants brought here as children to apply for temporary protection, allowing them to stay here, but it does not grant a pathway to citizenship (Dickerson, 2019). DACA has given undocumented youth a heightened platform as the protection it provides has allowed undocumented youth to speak out about their status. Hopeful to use this to further advance the immigrant rights movement, activists were faced with extreme setbacks upon the election of Donald Trump. His continual racist and anti-immigrant rhetoric led to increased fear within the undocumented and immigrant community, added on to existing mistrust held between many immigrants and the government. As the 2020 census drew closer, the Trump Administration continued this pattern by proposing to add a question of citizenship to the upcoming census. The immigrant community was deeply unsettled by this proposition and although it was deemed illegal by federal courts, this only added to the culture of fear and mistrust between the government and community. Despite these setbacks, there is hope for counting the immigrant community as immigrant youth still have the same passion and dedication as they did years ago. Organizations like the Inland Empire Immigrant Youth Collective, or IEIYC, are implementing a variety of strategies, centering around youth leadership and empowerment, to fight back.

The Inland Empire, lovingly referred to by many occupants as the IE, is home to approximately 1 million immigrants. This makes it one of the areas with the largest immigrant populations in the country ("State of Immigrants," n.d.). Among many other places in the country, the IE falls within 100 miles of the US border, giving Border Control extra powers in terms of ability to detain immigrants deemed "illegal". These powers include the usage immigration checkpoints throughout the IE ("The Constitution," n.d.). The Inland Empire

Immigrant Youth Collective (IEIYC) was started in 2010 by undocumented queer youth as a space to foster community and mobilize for their rights. One of the primary goals of IEIYC is to provide opportunities and resources for immigrant youth and their families from information about health care to DACA to scholarship opportunities for higher education. Furthermore, IEIYC views the family as a comprehensive unit and therefore provides resources for the entire family. This includes providing information to ensure that people know their rights and pushing legislation to provide healthcare for undocumented youth and elders. IEIYC does “teatro popular”, which is a play that helps teach people what rights they have as immigrants (“Inland Empire,” n.d.). One of their most prominent programs is the Undocumented Mentorship Academy (UMA). This program allows for youth in the immigrant community to be mentored, and many of the mentors are alumni of the UMA program. UMA allows youth to build skills in social activism and professional development. Moreover, by encouraging UMA alums to become mentors, students are empowered to take on leadership positions and build confidence. Youth from all over the Inland Empire engage in this program and also receive a \$500 scholarship to accompany the program (“Inland Empire,” n.d.). Historically, DACA workshops had been a major part of the organization’s work. However, as DACA has increasingly been attacked under the current administration, no new DACA applications are being accepted. Because of this, IEIYC does workshops to help with people who would like to renew their DACA application as this is still allowed but, they can not help people register for DACA who did not previously have it. IEIYC has two full time employees currently: the executive director Angel Fajardo and Youth Engagement Coordinator Najayra Valdovinos (“Inland Empire,” n.d.). Director Fajardo is currently on maternity leave so, as the only full time employee, Najayra is currently taking up a

lot of responsibility within the organization. In addition to that, IEIYC has several part time interns, including myself. IEIYC is currently housed in the Justice Hub, with several other organizations such as Warehouse Workers Resources Center (WWRC) and Inland Empire Coalition for Immigrant Justice (ICIJ).

During my time interning with IEIYC, I learned how the creation of IEIYC as a queer friendly space was essential to the inception of the organization. Many other immigrant rights groups were not as open to womxn and queer folks or did not do a good job of uplifting their voices. This led to the creation of IEIYC by womxn and queer folks, promoting what others viewed as their radical reputation. IEIYC was the organization that started using the phrase “undocuqueer”, a phrase that is now used by many more immigrant groups. While learning about the history of the IEIYC, I asked Najayra if political activism was still a large part of the work of the organization. She told me that over time, with changes in leadership as well as a shifting political environment within the United States, the organization has changed the ways in which they engage with the community. She explained how the organization was centered on the wants and needs of the youth and that civil disobediences, which had once been a key part of the organization's work, were less common for safety and demand reasons. I was very curious about this and the more I talked to Najayra, she suggested that my research question could relate to how, especially with the election of Donald Trump, the actions they have as an organization had changed.

I started to think about the techniques youth are using today in their work with IEIYC. I wondered, have these evolved and changed due to the current presidency? And, as I worked more with IEIYC, it became clear that the 2020 census would be one of the major things they

were dedicating their resources to in the coming months. Because Najayra had asked me to incorporate census related questions into my research, I decided to look at how youth are engaging with the 2020 census and how the political climate may affect participation in the 2020 census. The two are undoubtedly linked, as the youth must adjust to increasing threats to the immigrant community while they encourage folks to participate in the census. I aim to highlight how organizations such as IEIYC may be expanding their toolkit to react to new threats posed by the current political climate, especially in the case of immigrant participation in the 2020 census.

I begin through my literature review by introducing how immigrant youth have played a crucial role in the immigrant rights movement, explaining the unique positionality that allows immigrant youth to be agents of change in the immigrant community, extend this to apply to the 2020 census, and lastly explain the new challenges posed in encouraging immigrant participation in the census due hostile political climate. Next, I discuss my methods, where I discuss my interview and research style. I then discuss my findings, breaking them down into the categories of forms of resistance, what organizations are doing, hostile political environment, and likelihood of participation. Lastly, I conclude with a summary of my findings as well as a commentary on the failure of the Federal government to encourage all communities to participate in the census.

Literature Review

Immigrant youth have been leaders in the immigrant rights movement in the US for quite some time. Unfortunately, the legitimacy of their place in the movement has often been questioned because of their age. Yet, it is clear from the study done by Wong and Tseng, that

immigrant youth are essential agents of change within immigrant communities, often acting as language and information “brokers” for their parents and community (Wong & Tseng, 2008). Because youth may be quicker to learn English than their parents, they may be essential information deliverers. When immigrant youth activists emerged in large numbers to fight for the passage of the DREAM Act throughout the 2000s, they were often dismissed. Youth fought back against this and used storytelling and character building to establish themselves as points of authority on the issue of immigration (Cabaniss, 2019). By utilizing their stories and choosing their own narrative, immigrant youth were successfully able to recenter the narrative to accommodate their agenda and establish themselves as credible informants on immigrant issues (Cabaniss, 2019). IEIYC still uses these methods through various avenues today in their political engagement. Although the exact channels through which story telling is used have changed due to political climates, programs such as the Undocumented Mentorship Academy (UMA) still use this technique as they participate in activities such as “the story of self”, where youth are encouraged to share their own story (“Inland Empire,” n.d.). IEIYC also uses activities such as the “teatro popular”, which uses theater to engage in “know your rights” workshops, which is another avenue through which storytelling can be used (“Inland Empire,” n.d.).

The dominant narrative within American society is that parents socialize their children in terms of political knowledge and engagement but, for many immigrant families, this may not be the case. One study suggests that children in immigrant families are more likely to explain political issues within the United States to their parents (Wong & Tseng, 2008). Youth often end up doing things such as “language translation and explaining government documents, aspects of the US political system, and particular political issues” (Wong & Tseng, 2008). This study

suggests that *youth* are essential messengers for their families. This study suggests that the census would fall under the category of tasks where immigrant youth may offer help to their parents. Because of this, it is crucial to engage the immigrant youth population in the census for an accurate count of the Inland Empire.

Unfortunately, immigrant participation in the census faces challenges as the Trump Administration has implemented and pushed for policy in the United States that promotes a political climate hostile to immigrants. Under the Obama Administration, some progress occurred for the immigrants rights movement and groups had high hopes to expand this under a Clinton presidency, as she campaigned on promises of “pro-immigration policy” (Meyer & Tarrow, 2018, p. [Page 92]). These hopes were shattered upon the election of Donald Trump in 2016. Immigrant groups had to figure out what they were going to do for the following four years. Civil disobedience was once common among immigrant groups, such as the IEIYC, as undocumented folks of all ages began to speak out about their immigration status under the Obama Administration. This changed after the election of Donald Trump, as one organizer stated after 2016, “‘the vast majority’ of undocumented youth they work with ‘say that if there’s going to be media involved, their parents will not come out and try to defy this administration by being so outspoken about their status’” (Meyer & Tarrow, 2018, p. [Page 94]). Moreover, Trump has tried to shut down the DACA program, further promoting a message that undocumented folks are unwelcome here. Despite the fear and intimidation tactics, nonprofits are admirably resourceful. They have adjusted to these challenging times and found ways to continue to use similar effective techniques.

Intimidation tactics used by the Trump administration also aim to deter immigrants from participating in the census and therefore getting the resources that they should be allocated based on their population numbers. Access to adequate resources is one major barrier that immigrants face in hopes of advancing in the United States and ensuring a proper count in the census is key to achieving this. The census is a key tool that determines how much money goes to educational programs, housing development, health care services, lunch programs, and affects how districts are drawn ("These Are Our Numbers," 2019). Historically in California, Latinx populations have faced severe undercounting and therefore have not received the amount of funding they should. In the 2010 census, 47,000 Latinx youth were not counted in California (Wire, 2016). Immigrant youth organizations such as IEIYC are focusing on fighting back against this undercounting in the 2020 census through community outreach, asserting their place in this country to ensure that historically undercounted groups such as immigrants and Latinx folks receive the amount in social services and representation that they are entitled to.

With Census 2020 approaching at a rapid pace, nonprofits all over the Inland Empire that support disenfranchised communities are striving to ensure that the populations they serve are counted. The Inland Empire is a vastly diverse community, as African Americans, Latinx folks, and Native Americans make up 54% of Riverside County and 60% of San Bernardino County (Thorman, Hsieh, & Bohn, 2018). Unfortunately, these groups are often undercounted during the census, meaning there is a high likelihood for a disproportionate and lessened amount of resources to be allocated to the groups undercounted. Moreover, low-income housing in urban areas with “high shares of rentals, overcrowded rental units, and mobile homes” may contain difficult to count populations (Thorman, Hsieh, & Bohn, 2018). Due to societal barriers that

make it difficult for immigrants to climb the socioeconomic ladder, many immigrants live in such housing. Additionally, for the first time in history, respondents will be encouraged to complete the census online. This poses another challenge for adults who do not trust that it is safe to give out their information on the internet. These barriers, in addition to the anti-immigrant messaging, pose a severe threat for another undercount for the 2020 census.

Moreover, in March 2018, a citizenship question was added on to the 2020 census. This was immediately faced with legal opposition as people questioned the true motives for putting a question such as this on the census. After several courts had ruled on the legality of the question, the Supreme Court ultimately ruled against the addition of the citizenship question (Wines, 2019). Although there are many studies that looked at how the addition of a citizenship question would have affected undocumented people's participation in the 2020 census, little research has been done since this proposal was shut down by the Supreme Court. Because the question was ultimately removed, scholars seemed to have abandoned the topic and there has been little investigation into how the threat of that question impacted the levels at which immigrants now intend to participate. Studies done prior to the proposal of this question are still valuable as they provide insight into how a threatening political environment to immigrants may affect their decision to participate or not to participate in the 2020 census. In 2017, prior to Donald Trump's attempt to institute a citizenship question on the 2020 census, a study was conducted to gauge confidentiality concerns, particularly in Latinx and Muslim populations. Although the study recognizes they only studied a small group of people and are therefore unable to draw conclusions about these populations as a whole, "field representatives spontaneously brought up these concerns at a much higher rate than CSM [Center For Survey Measurement] researchers

have seen in previous pretesting projects, and as such, this information may have implications for nonresponse on U.S. Census Bureau studies and surveys” (Center For Survey Measurement, 2017). Many of the Spanish speaking respondents who had refused prior surveys expressed concerns about issues such as “news reports about changing immigration policy,” the “current political climate,” “immigration raids, fear of government, and fear of deportation,” and sentiments that “the Latino community will not sign up because they will think that Census will pass their information on and people can come looking for them” (Center For Survey Measurement, 2017). The suggestion of the citizenship question only increases the hesitation to participate. Furthermore, the study stated that “the greatest barriers to Latino participation are fear and mistrust” (Center For Survey Measurement, 2017). This study suggests that building trust within communities and finding ways to dispel fear within communities may help in efforts to increase Latinx participation for the 2020 Census.

The Inland Empire Immigrant Youth Collective is trying to do just this. The organization, as well as other non-profits in the IE, are working to encourage people from all groups to engage in the census. Immigrant youth activists, such as many of the folks who work with IEIYC, play a special role in the immigrant rights movement. As highlighted earlier, they have historically played substantial roles in advocating for their community and possess great potential to do the same now. For the census, they can play a role in their community by encouraging their parents and others to participate in the census. There is a striking lack of research that aims to highlight the unique role that youth play in the immigrant rights movement today. Although there is research regarding what youth engagement looked like in the movement prior to the election of Donald Trump, little has been done since to display how youth are continuing to resist.

Moreover, although there is research suggesting the unique role that immigrant youth have within their families, little is done to demonstrate how this can be used as a method for community mobilization in cases such as the 2020 census.

Methods

I formulated my research project with the intention of examining youth social engagement today under the Trump Administration and how the political environment affects the immigrant community for the 2020 census. I wanted to highlight the specific role that youth play in all of this. Because I am white and have citizen status, I wanted to focus my interviews on uplifting the voices of the people I was interviewing. To me, this means highlighting the achievements, strategies, and resilience demonstrated by youth activists. I strive to orient my ethnographic research around an asset-based approach, which focuses on the strengths of the community (Peterson, 2017, p. [Page 36]). I use Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz, Linda L. Shaw's work "Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes" to transpose my field notes into my work. In considering the effects of the racist rhetoric that Trump uses, I incorporate some critical race theory into my analysis (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011, 24-25). Additionally, I used archival research to get a picture of what immigrant youth have achieved through activism in the past.

For my research, I conducted a series of four in-depth, semi-structured interviews with three youth that have participated in the IEIYC's Undocumented Mentorship Academy and my supervisor at IEIYC, Najayra Valdovinos Soto, the Youth Engagement Coordinator. Interviews are essential to providing an individualized platform that allows the interviewees to speak their truth on a certain issue, helping to raise the voices of community members. It is important to note

that in the case of my research, all the people in my are involved with IEIYC and therefore all share a common mindset around immigrants rights and preexisting knowledge about the 2020 census. I draw from Svend Brinkmann's work *Qualitative Interviewing: Understanding Qualitative Research* when formulating, conducting, and analyzing my interviews. Furthermore, I admire Elizabeth McIsaac's piece "Oral Narratives as a Site of Resistance: Indegenious Knowledge, Colonialism, and Western Discourse" as she highlights the oral narrative tradition of indeginious groups as a form of resistance. I see oral narratives as a form of resistance used by immigrant youth groups work in the form of story-telling.

My interview questions were first formulated by thinking of questions that would draw out information about youth activism and the 2020 census. My supervisor at IEIYC, Najayra, reviewed these questions. Moreover, I received help in formulating and expanding my questions by my professor Barbara Junaisbai. One of my aims in formulating my interview questions was to center the narrative around what the youth wanted to talk about. I invited my interviewees to share anything that came to mind while asking my interview questions to allow freedom to stray from my designed questions.

Findings

I interviewed four people for this project. Three of the interviewees were former participants in the UMA program. For these youth, I use pseudonyms to protect their identity. I will use the names Mia (Melissa), Anna (Melanie), and Edgar (Oscar). My last interviewee was my supervisor Najayra. She has been involved as an activist in the immigrant rights movement for many years and is the youth coordinator at IEIYC. I believe it is important to note that all my

interviewees have been involved with IEIYC and are therefore more likely to know about the census or be involved with their community. My interviewees were able to confirm what I had theorized about youth involvement in the census based on my research as well as information I had learned while interning with IEIYC. I discuss my findings in four sections, beginning with highlighting the forms of resistance that youth activists use which can be applied to the 2020 census or other issues. Then, I discuss the role that organizations such as IEIYC play in terms of cultivating the strengths of youth to combat issues facing the immigrant community. Next, I discuss the challenges that the youth activists assert as aspects that pose challenges to immigrant participation in the 2020 census. Finally, I discuss the ways in which the interviewee's families' relationship to the 2020 census.

Forms of Resistance

Story-telling is one method that has historically been used by immigrant rights groups to cultivate a sense of purpose and place within the United States. Because immigrants are so often painted by anti-immigrant politicians and others as undeserving of a place in the United States, story-telling is used to combat hateful rhetoric. Although statistics about the essential role that immigrants play in the US can be helpful, story-telling allows for a more emotional connection to be formed. As Mia, a youth activist still involved with IEIYC, said when she discussed the power of storytelling, "There's a story behind that number, there's the person behind that number. You know what I mean? Like that's an actual person". This reminder appeals to humanity, asking for immigrants to be considered human just as their citizen counterparts are. This technique has been used for many years but is now more essential than ever to combat the strong rhetoric that attacks immigrants. Yet, it is hard for many to speak out as this may lead to their deportation.

This is one place where youth can help. Some people who are children of undocumented folks use their legal standing to advocate for their family. Other youth were able to apply for DACA and, Mia said, “People who have DACA are, to a certain point, safe”. For census 2020, youth protected by the law may use this power to speak publicly about the importance of the census.

Youth are also full of hope and passion, making them want to speak out more about these issues. One youth activist, Edgar, a college student at UCR, thought that the greatest asset that youth bring to the movement for the immigrant community to participate in the 2020 census was their passion, stating “the biggest advantage of having young people is that they have energy and passion and are willing to convince people, or just really try to reach out to others.” And reaching out is essential in encouraging folks to participate in the census. Youth have the opportunity to explain the census to their parents and other family members. As children of immigrants, they are often tasked with discussing American politics with their family because they often have increased exposure to it through schools and social networks. Edgar said “people with larger families, or also like other extended relatives that are also undocumented like they'll be able to make a difference, because they can reach more people that are relevant.” This extended network makes youth a valuable asset.

Moreover, youth have an advantage as the 2020 census will be completed online. Some of the youth activists discussed how because the 2020 census has been digitized, youth are essential brokers in helping their older family members with navigating it. Youth can explain that “it [their information] doesn't save or anything like that, they [youth] already know it,” “They already know how technology runs”. When discussing how she was planning to

encourage her family to participate in the census, this Mia said “I feel like me being informed and having all these answers I'll be able to put them at ease.”

Additionally, she discussed how educating youth on the importance of the census has the biggest impact because they will carry this knowledge for decades to come in future censuses. She stated that “if we failed them the next 10 years by giving them a really bad education system, they're going to fall through the cracks”. This emphasis on education is one often used as a necessity to encourage as many people to participate in the census as possible. Because marginalised groups are often undercounted the most, schools in areas where the majority of the population are part of minority groups often get underfunded. It is essential, if there is any hope of leveling the playing field for all young folks, to start at the bare minimum by providing the resources that should be going to these schools. Furthermore, youth who are told about the census now, will be able to carry that information in years to come. Youth will ultimately face the consequences or benefits of participating in the census because, “if they start young and volunteer with censuses, and they see the impact that this is done in the next 10 years by the time they're 30 the next census comes up, they'll be prepared. They'll be like okay, we need to, you know, participate, we need to go ahead and have more people get counted, because it impacted us. And that it is going to impact them whether it's a good way or a bad way and they're going to go ahead and see”. By educating youth, organizations are able to make a long term investment in encouraging people to participate in future censuses.

Youth can also act as informers to their parents about American society as they may be quicker to learn English and may be educated within American schools. Najayra, in her interview, said that “when you're undocumented as a kid, you have to help your parents navigate

the American system I guess you could say. Whenever there was any English, I was always there, even though like I was also learning English at the time like I wasn't fluent but I was there to be like the cultural mediator like for my parents". This ability to act as a "cultural mediator" to their parents makes youth a logical choice to convey information for things such as the census to their parents.

What Organizations Are Doing

Another portion of my interviews that I wanted to highlight was how people and organizations are going about mobilizing youth and others for the census 2020. My interviewees discussed both schools and churches as places where a majority of their outreach take places. Schools are a great place to target youth who can dispel the rest of the information to their families. They have gone to DREAMER clubs at various state colleges in the area, focusing on explaining the census and encouraging youth to get involved. Additionally, churches are a great place to target as they attract large groups of people and through youth church groups, they can reach motivated youth to contact them about census related issues. Although the current political climate is daunting, organizations like IEIYC bring hope into the conversation when asking youth to get involved with the movement. This is necessary as without hope, nothing can get done.

Hope is essential in cultivating social change. Any social movement can not operate without the presence of hope. For IEIYC, they place much of their hopes on the youth. Moreover, Mia emphasized the hope of engaging undocumented folks with the census, despite the hostile political climate. She states "But, if we show them, you know instances, and the right correct information I feel like this will gain trust." If organizations like IEIYC can talk to people

and explain that their information will be confidential and that the census will not ask them questions about their citizenship status, people may be more likely to listen. Furthermore, if this information is coming from trusted messengers, people are more likely to believe it and respond. For IEIYC, this is another advantage of having youth involved. Parents trust their children to provide them with correct information so if the youth are educated, their parents will trust them to know that the census is safe. Moreover, IEIYC is a trusted messenger. When the organization was created, many people involved saw it as their home. Because the organization has been around for so many years and has preexisting relationships with youth across the Inland Empire, youth trust IEIYC to provide them with accurate information and that the organization will not encourage them to participate in things that will place them or their families in harm's way.

Hostile Political Environment

Threats posed to the immigrant community by the Trump Administration and broader hostile political environment do lead to increased challenges in encouraging immigrants to participate in the 2020 census. The climate, culture, and its effects on the research being done are essential in understanding the way in which non-profits operate. All of the ways that immigrant youth are resisting have come out of this climate and it therefore must be addressed when understanding what techniques and resistance have emerged from said environment. The Trump Administration has promoted policies and rhetoric that directly target immigrants and paint them as an enemy of the state. Mia said that since Trump had been elected, she noticed “that more people, you know, were willing to be racist out in the open”. When asked about how Donald Trump’s presidency has affected her life, Anna, a daughter of undocumented immigrants, said “I feel more afraid to go out and do stuff that I used to do with like, for instance, the DREAMERS

program. And it's even harder on me because, you know, my parents hearing all this stuff about the news and Trump wanting to like, you know, get rid of quote on quote, people who are illegal and don't belong here, according to him. It gets difficult because then your parents are afraid and they don't want to, you know, go out, you know, say stuff about, you know, your family and it's, it's hard enough in that sense.” Moreover, when discussing the census, the threats of the Trump Administration to put a question on the 2020 census regarding the status of folks citizenship is essential to discussing how immigrant groups will go about community outreach. The overall climate, from racist rhetoric to citizenship question threats, “does break trust in the community, I do, I do see that, because, you know, like our community is constantly getting attacked by this administration. And so it's hard to trust again”. When people are asked to give their information, which may put them at risk of deportation and leaving the country they consider their home, to the government, an entity that has continually shown hostility towards immigrants, people are rightfully skeptical. The government has done nothing to build any trust. Although there is a longstanding culture of mistrust between the federal government and immigrants, this has only been increased by the current administration. The rebuilding of this trust then, becomes the responsibility of groups like IEIYC to encourage all folks to participate in the census.

Likelihood of Participation

Of the people I interviewed, Edgar and Najayra said they had already discussed the census with their parents and they intended on participating in the census. Edgar's family consists of only him and his mother, and he said that “I've talked to her about it, and she knows that it's not like something negative for us to fill out” and seemed to be confident that his mother would participate. Mia, however, despite being deeply involved with census work at IEIYC, said

that she has yet to discuss the census with her own family due to their busy lives. Her dad works two jobs, her mother is busy taking care of her kids, and she has a job and internship. She said, however, that “when the time comes, about the census I do hope, talking to them, and talking about it will help them fill out the census”. This highlights the fact that although youth activists may be very knowledgeable about things happening with the census, other people, especially adults, may just be trying to get through their daily tasks and do not have the time to contemplate issues such as the census. This again, highlights how youth, who may have more time to be educated on the census, can encourage their families to participate when the time actually arrives. Anna, on the other hand, after explaining about how she feels the census is important, did mention that her family did not intend on participating. She said that “They are afraid... because of the rumors about the citizen question and they just don't really have faith in it, and they don't think it's a really huge impact.” For some people, even if their children believe in the importance of the census, they may not participate. This highlights the need for increased resources by the federal government to be contributed to encouraging everyone to participate, in addition to the work already being done by youth and non-profit organizations.

Conclusion

Although the hostile political climate and historical undercounting of immigrant and undocumented communities in the census poses challenges for accurate counts in census 2020, youth provide a unique avenue through which to encourage the immigrant community to participate in the census. Youth bring several unique skills including passion, technology literacy, increased ability to speak out and tell their own stories due to increased protection

(DACA or being born in the US). Moreover, educating youth about the census will have far reaching benefits, allowing them to educate their family and provides a lasting impact for decades to come in future censuses. Yet, it is unfortunate that it falls on the responsibility of nonprofits such as IEIYC to ensure that every person is counted. The culture of mistrust created by the Trump Administration has led to an increased responsibility of non-profits focusing on immigrant groups to dedicate their own resources to ensuring that the immigrant community gets counted. This should be a job done by the federal government as it is the goal of the federal census to get every person counted. Moreover, the threat of the citizenship question added on to this more and little has been done to attempt to reverse the concerns raised by the proposal of this question, except by organizations such as IEIYC. Yet, it is unlikely that the federal government will allocate more resources towards cultivating trust between the government and historically marginalized communities. So, because the responsibility falls upon organizations like IEIYC, as they must do their best to combat this. Youth are a key tool in the fight against the underfunding of immigrant dense communities. Youth should be viewed as legitimate avenues through which to spread valuable information to their community as they have more advanced technology skills, can provide passion, and are able to reach a larger network of family members.

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