

**GoodWork® Project Report Series, Number 93**

**Trust & Civic Engagement Among Immigrant Young Adults**  
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September 25, 2014

## Abstract

There is little doubt that immigration reform in the U.S. is urgently needed at this historical moment. However, legislation continues to stall amid divisive discussions, distrust, and a deeply divided political landscape. How does such a climate and context affect the perspectives of young immigrants, their basic sense of trust in the world, and their inclinations to participate in civic life in a new land? In this paper, we report findings from a study of first- and second-generation Latino and Asian immigrant youth in which we explored their trust in four important sectors of U.S. society—education, religion, justice, and the news media—and the extent to which, and how, they were engaged in civic activities. Understanding how immigrant youth forge trust in key institutions is vital given the recognized association with civic engagement and participation in democracy.

We found that immigrant youth in our study are most trusting of the education sector and least trusting of the news media sector. Relationships with key targets in the education sector—specifically teachers—are a key foundation for trust in the sector. Yet, not all school figures are trusted: a lack of trust in school counselors means an important support is missing for many immigrant youth. A lack of trust in the news media sector was based on perceptions that journalists and news outlets were biased. Religious affiliation and trust in the religion sector is found among less than half of our study participants. Trust in the justice sector is somewhat mixed and built on direct experiences or reports from trusted individuals.

Our study also shows that traditional measures of civic engagement focused on political activities alone (such as volunteering for a political candidate or group) do not capture the important ways in which many immigrant origin youth are engaging in their communities. The youth in our study reported high levels of community engagement (e.g., volunteer work, fundraising, caring for a neighbor, helping others), and expressive engagement (such as displaying a flag or wearing a t-shirt about a cause, signing an email or paper petition, or writing an op-ed). Our interviews show that their engagement is motivated by a sense of responsibility to help fellow immigrants, a sense of obligation to their parents for the sacrifices they made, and/or out of a desire for positive social change in their communities. Somewhat counter-intuitively, we found that, controlling for gender, and generation status, overall trust in the aggregated U.S. sectors, and the U.S. justice sector alone, significantly *negatively* predicted political, community, and expressive engagement. This complicated relationship between trust and civic engagement points both to the different pathways for civic participation and a real desire on the part of young immigrants to be citizens in more than a legalistic sense.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Geri Mannion and the Carnegie Corporation of New York for supporting the research that is reported in this paper. We would also like to thank colleagues on our Harvard research team, including Laurel Cadwallader Stolte and Russell Carlock for the many hours spent conducting interviews; Yael Karakowsky for her heroic persistence in recruiting participants for the study; Lindsay Pettingill and Saskias Casanova who joined the team for coding and analysis of the data; Katie Davis for help with framing the study and developing protocols; and Hanna Evensen for her careful proof reading. Finally, we are grateful to all participants who generously gave their time and shared their stories with us.

Portions of this data will appear in Ballard, P. J., Damon, W., Pavlova, M.K., and Silbereisen, R., K. (Eds.), *Diverse Routes to Civic Participation Across Ages and Cultures* *Special Issue of Research in Human Development*, forthcoming.

## **Introduction**

Debates about immigration are a constant in the news today. In search of a better life, growing numbers of immigrants from Latin America seek to cross the U.S.-Mexico border – many of them children on their own (Preston, 2014) – creating a “humanitarian crisis” that requires immediate attention. Yet, efforts to pass immigration reform legislation have been stymied by a deeply divided political landscape. Pro-immigration advocates seek to define a legitimate path to citizenship for immigrants and, in the interim, halt deportations of those who arrived as children. Anti-immigration groups argue that relaxed borders will pose various harms. Importantly, the volatile discourse about immigration suggests a pervasive distrust of immigrants, especially on the part of those who are most vocal about it. Yet, amidst the din of policymakers, pundits, and activists on both sides of the issue, the ideas and voices of the immigrants themselves are difficult to discern.

Relatively little is known about how this climate and context affects the perspectives of young immigrants, their basic sense of trust in the world, and their inclinations to participate in civic life in a new nation that seems not to trust them. In this paper, we report findings from a study of first- and second-generation Latino and Asian immigrant youth in which we explored their trust in four important sectors of U.S. society—education, religion, justice, and the news media—and the extent to which, and how, they were engaged in civic activities.

## **Context**

Trust is arguably a scarce commodity in the U.S. in general, according to recent studies. Levels of trust in other people, in elected officials, and in major institutions—including government, media, and business—have been declining for decades and are reported to be at a historic low among the U.S. population in general (Edelman, 2013; Gallup Politics, 2012; National Opinion Research Center, 2009; Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2010, 2013). With particular relevance to the current study trust has waned among those who live in demographically diverse communities (Putnam, 2007).

These trends are troubling given the vital role trust plays in the functioning of a healthy democracy; that is, in order to ensure the smooth operation of civic life, citizens must be willing to extend some level of trust to their elected officials, public institutions, and fellow citizens (Luhmann, 1979; Putnam, 2000; Uslaner, 2000). Additionally, lacking trust in one’s fellow citizens, social institutions, or the broader political system, it is unlikely that citizens will feel empowered to participate in the public sphere. Yet, notions of trust and modes of civic engagement may vary considerably across population groups (Putnam, 2007; Stepick, Stepick, & Labiessere, 2008). For example, in some cases distrust of political institutions results in citizens’ non-participation in traditional political activities (e.g., voting, working on campaigns) but in other cases political discontent may lead to other forms of participation (e.g., protesting) (Craig, 1984; Moisés, 2011). Therefore, probing what the concepts of trust and civic participation mean to individuals, and what they look like in their lives, is critical.

Investigating the trust approaches and civic inclinations of migrant youth in particular is important for several reasons. First, the U.S. faces a major demographic transition stemming from migration as immigrants largely from Latin America and Asia make up 13 percent of the total population—rivaling the historic highs of the early 20th century migration boom (Greico et al., 2012). As a consequence of this migration, children of migrants—born here and abroad—are now the fastest growing sector of the child and emerging adult population. Nationally, approximately 25 percent of school-age children in our country are the children of immigrants

with the majority (77%) being second-generation citizen children and the rest (23%) foreign-born. Given the demographic significance of migration, understanding the perspectives and commitments of migrant youth is essential to anticipating the future direction of American society.

Further, while much is known about the role of trust in democratic society (Fukuyama, 1995; Gambetta, 1988; Hardin, 2002, 2006; Portes, 1994, 1998; Sztompka, 1999), little is known about how migrant youth make trust decisions, excepting for some noteworthy studies on how mutual trust and caring positively affect Latino youths' educational outcomes (Rolon-Dow, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Prior research exploring how non-migrant youth generally make trust decisions suggests that youth largely make trust decisions based on the particular actions of trust targets (e.g., teachers, police officers, etc.) and their direct interactions with youth (Rundle et al., 2012). However, migrant youths' interactions with such trust targets—and the ways in which they assess their trustworthiness—are likely to be complicated by linguistic barriers and unique social, geographic, and economic circumstances of their lives.

Given that scholars have suggested a relationship between trust and civic engagement, understanding migrant youths' trust models may begin to explicate the underpinnings of their patterns of civic engagement, which, some studies indicate, may be distinctive (Callan, 1997; Flanagan, 2003; Kelly, 2009). For instance, Stepick, et al. (2008) state that migrant youth engage in unique modes of civic participation linked to their linguistic communities and religious backgrounds. Local trust in one's ethnic and faith communities, the authors suggest, can translate to civic good in unexpected ways. Further, a recent study of young "Dream Activists" finds creative use of social media and online communities to mobilize support for the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (Dream) Act (Zimmerman, 2012). Some authorities (e.g., Huntington, 2004) have claimed that because of their alleged divided loyalties, immigrants represent a threat to American civil society. Yet, the few existing studies on migrant youths' civic lives suggest that such fears may be misplaced, as migrant youth appear to be as involved as their non-migrant peers (Lopez & Marcelo, 2008; Stepick et al., 2008).

## **The Study**

In this context of scarce trust and demographically significant migration it is imperative to understand how young immigrants, who are poised to help shape the future of America, build sufficient trust to navigate their way in society, interact with other people and institutions, and develop into engaged and productive citizens. Our research attempts to address this problem space by examining Latino and Asian immigrant youths' "trust conceptions" with respect to four important civic spheres—education, religion, justice, and the news media—and to begin to explore the relationship between their trust (or lack of trust) and their civic activities. We chose to study trust in these spheres given that each in its own way is likely to affect the life chances, experiences, and civic participation of immigrants.

To begin with, education lays the essential groundwork for youth to contribute economically and civically to the nation (Bloom, 2004; Smith, 2010; Ueda, 1999). Yet, studies show that Latino and Southeast Asian youth are often underserved by the U.S. educational system (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Suárez-Orozco, Gaytan, & Kim, 2010; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2010). Therefore, it is important to explore the nature of migrant youths' educational experiences, and the extent to which these young people develop trust in teachers, school counselors, and other educational figures.

Religious institutions can provide ready-made networks for newly arriving immigrants; accordingly, new arrivals tend to display higher rates of religiosity (Hirschman, 2004; Levitt, 2008; Stepick, 2005). This is true today just as it was true during the last mass migration wave. The history of American Catholicism is the history of immigration. The Irish, the Italians, the Poles built the Church and, paraphrasing Winston Churchill, the Church built them – into Americans. Research suggests positive links between religious and civic engagement (Levitt 2008). Indeed, churches have been powerful allies in immigration reform and activist efforts (Capps, Castaneda, Chaudry, & Santos, 2007; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2008). The place of religion in the ways migrant youth navigate their lives and participate in their communities is thus another essential piece of the puzzle.

To migrate into America in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century means entering a complex, at times Kafkaesque, judicial-administrative complex. The justice sector is clearly implicated in the lived experiences of immigrants, especially where restrictive state laws exist that affect the rights of immigrants (such as in Arizona) and where—in accordance with the law or not—authorities monitor individuals whom they suspect to be undocumented immigrants. Recent media and scholarly attention to racial profiling in policing suggests that migrants and minority youth are often at risk for increased surveillance. Understanding youths’ experiences with, and perceptions of, the justice sector can shed light on whether a sense of trust in government is possible for youth who may often be unfairly subjected to the long arm of the law.

Finally, the news media sector—the so-called fourth branch of government—is poised to inform, and perhaps misinform, youth about immigration and other issues, as well as to play an essential role as a check on government. Certainly, the media landscape is complex today, as the advent of digital and social media create opportunities for anyone with the requisite technology to contribute to news gathering, reporting, and dissemination. Yet, traditional journalistic outlets that seek to provide in depth information and balanced accounts arguably still have an important role to play in informing the public. However, low levels of trust in news media persist among the U.S. population in general and among youth in particular (Davis et al., 2012; Gallup Politics, 2012). Understanding the extent to which and the manner in which migrant youth, a sizeable and growing audience, consult and trust different media sources is important, especially given that quality civic participation is ideally built on knowledge and credible information (Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, 2011).

In sum, the four sectors we explored in this study—education, religion, justice, and the news media—are poised to be central forces in young immigrants’ lives. Additionally, they (to varying degrees) represent stalwarts - perhaps ‘fundamentals,’ of American democracy.

In what follows, we present our findings regarding migrant youths’ trust dispositions with respect to the four civic spheres and the extent and nature of their civic involvements. We begin by briefly discussing our methods and introducing our general findings. We then describe the sector-specific findings in turn, beginning with the most trusted sector (education) and ending with that which is least trusted (the news media) by youth in our study. Within each sector, we provide a brief review of relevant literature regarding the trust, migrant youth, and the sector under discussion. Based on this cited literature, we delineate the extent to which our specific findings are expected or unexpected. Our preliminary findings regarding trust and civic engagement are presented. We conclude with discussions of the overarching takeaways from our findings and limitations of this study, and questions for further research.

## Methods

### Sample

In this exploratory study, we elected to focus on the largest, fastest growing segments of the population: Latino and Asian immigrants. Our sample consists of 68 young people (60 Latino youth and 8 Asian youth) between the ages of 18 and 25. At the time of recruitment into the study, i.e. the period October 2011 to May 2012, Latino immigrants were the leading immigrant group and as such constitute the majority of participants in our study. Asian immigrants, who have since surpassed Latinos as the fastest growing racial group, were included as a small comparison group.

Latino and Asian communities are comprised of many different ethnic groups and accordingly we recruited from the dominant groups in our study site region. The States of Massachusetts and New York have large populations of immigrants from the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador. The smaller Asian youth sample was recruited from the dominant groups of immigrants from China, Taiwan, and Korea in New York State alone. Our study participants represent a diverse sample in terms of country of origin, immigration generation (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>), gender, and level of education. We did not recruit explicitly for documentation status or levels of civic engagement in our sample but anticipated we would find a range in our sample. The demographics of our sample are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Demographics of sample**

Gender	Generation	Education	Dominican	Guatemalan	Salvadoran	Mexican	Chinese	Korean	Taiwanese	Total
Male	1st	College	5	0	0	3	0	2	0	10
Male	1st	Non	1	0	0	4	0	0	0	5
Male	2nd	College	5	2	1	1	0	0	0	9
Male	2nd	Non	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
Subtotal			12	2	2	8	0	2	0	26
Female	1st	College	7	2	1	4	1	0	0	15
Female	1st	Non	2	3	1	0	0	0	0	6
Female	2nd	College	7	1	2	4	1	3	1	19
Female	2nd	Non	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Subtotal			16	7	5	8	2	3	1	42
Total			28	9	7	16	2	5	1	68

We recruited participants using a variety of strategies, including recommendations and outreach from key gatekeepers (e.g., staff at community immigrant groups or local schools and

colleges); snowballing from participants; posting fliers in high traffic areas (e.g., local shops, community boards); and online sites (e.g., Craigslist).

### *Research Instruments*

Participants completed a pre-interview survey (either online or hard copy, in English or native language) prior to taking part in an in-depth, in person interview. The survey captured baseline data about levels of trust in sector roles (e.g., teachers in the education sector, police in the justice sector) in the US and country of origin context; perceptions of the purpose of the four sectors; trusted sources of information (e.g., people, newspapers, online sites); and levels of civic engagement (e.g., volunteering, helping neighbors, campaigning). Our research team confirmed survey responses in person-centered interviews and probed for further information. For example, interviewers asked participants why they had indicated in the survey that they trusted or distrusted a certain information source or target (e.g., teachers, police officers). Through the survey, we also collected demographic information, which provided a screening mechanism to ensure sample diversity.

During October 2011 and May 2012, we conducted semi-structured individual interviews, which lasted an average of two and half hours, in English or the participant's native language (see Appendix A for interview protocol). We designed the interview with a variety of question formats, including structured and open-ended questions; ranking and sorting exercises; and hypothetical dilemmas. Through these questions, we aimed to gather information about a participant's background; current school or work situation; family story of immigration; beliefs, personal experiences, and levels of trust and experiences in the four civic sectors.

The hypothetical dilemmas provided participants with the opportunity to describe their likely responses to particular situations that might invoke civic action. The first dilemma featured a local company accused of dumping harmful chemicals into the river that feeds the city's water supply. The second dilemma involved ICE officials who raid a local restaurant and detain workers who live in the neighborhood. Guiding questions allowed participants to consider how they would respond and to indicate to whom (in the four civic sectors) they would turn for help in the given situation. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and then de-identified. Pseudonyms are used to refer to participants throughout this paper.

### *Coding and Analysis*

Both the quantitative data (survey) and the qualitative data (interview) were analyzed and selections of the analyses are reported here. Two coding teams of 2-3 researchers were established: one team coded data related to trust, the other team coded data related to civic engagement. Each team developed a coding scheme related to its focus, building on themes anticipated from existing literature as well as codes from our own prior research. As further salient themes emerged in the reliability process, we created additional codes. In order to test inter-rater reliability, the coding team members independently coded a transcript in N'Vivo (a qualitative software program), which produced reliability statistics. For instance, when particular codes had a Cohen's Kappa coefficient less than 0.7, the coding team discussed specific areas of disagreement, reached consensus, and added further details to the coding scheme. The same procedure was carried out with a new transcript until reliability was reached (see Appendix B for coding schemes). The transcripts were then divided among the coders and coded in Dedoose (an online qualitative software platform) and a shadow coding system was implemented for a third of

the transcripts. The shadow coding, as well as ongoing conversations in response to new examples arising, or as a result of coding reports, all served to maintain reliability.

In brief, the trust coding scheme was comprised of targets of trust (i.e., individual roles, groups, and institutions within each sector), trust stances towards each target, and the evidence used in making a trust decision. For example, the education sector targets included teachers, school counselors, and principals. In the religious sector we coded for religious leaders, religious staff and attendees. The news media sector includes a variety of targets both in traditional media (TV, radio, newspapers) and new digital media (blogs). Finally, the justice sector comprised of police, ICE officials, lawyers, and judges. We created five codes for trust stances towards a target – including trust, distrust, withhold (where a participant had not made a decision about trust), unclear (where the subject may have a trust stance but we were unable to discern it from her narrative), and mixed (where a participant had different trust stances for key targets within a sector—e.g., when teachers were trusted but principals were not). Participants drew on a number of evidence types when making a trust decision about a target, including performance (actions of the target), interactions (ongoing relationship), role (the position a target occupies), and reputation (credentials, or hearsay).

The civic engagement coding scheme included levels of civic engagement, types of civic engagement, and the motivations behind such participation. Participants' civic engagement fell into one of five categories: no engagement, minimal engagement, average engagement, active engagement, and leader engagement. The types of engagement participants described were characterized as political (volunteering for a political campaign), community (volunteering for a community group), and expressive (signing a petition). Motivations for civic engagement ranged from self-focused (keeping busy, being seen as a role model, or meeting people similar to you) to other-focused (helping others, raising awareness of an issue, or making a difference in the community).

After coding each transcript, coders created a global memo to summarize the participant's trust in each sector and in the key roles within the sector; the evidence types used to arrive at the trust stance; and the civic engagement of the participant, including types, level of engagement, and motivations. We recorded high-level summaries of trust stances and civic engagement levels into a spreadsheet and assigned a rating to give a basic quantitative snapshot of the data.

To complement the analysis described above and provide a preliminary exploration of the intersection of trust and civic engagement, we conducted regression analyses of the trust and civic engagement data of the survey responses.

## **Overall Findings**

Our findings suggest that immigrant youth in our study are most trusting of the education sector and least trusting of the news media sector. Relationships with key targets in the education sector—specifically teachers—are the foundation for trust in the sector. Yet, not all school figures are trusted. The lack of trust in the news media sector is based on perceptions of bias. Religious affiliation and trust in the religion sector is found among less than half of our study participants. Trust in the justice sector is somewhat mixed and built on direct experiences or reports from trusted individuals. The youth in our study reported high levels of civic engagement, although their activities largely took the form of support for their local communities composed of immigrants from countries similar to that of origin. Engagement in political activities was less frequent and, counter-intuitively, was associated with low trust in the justice

sector and in the four sectors overall. Below, we report detailed findings about trust in each sector, modes of civic engagement, and the intersection between trust and civic activities.

### **Education Findings**

When comparing the four sectors, education is the most trusted sector among our participants. In relation to this sector, we asked participants to share their perspectives on several targets: teachers, professors, principals, school counselors, and classmates. Here, as in all sector findings sections, we report overall sector findings and selected findings from specific targets. We also highlight the most common forms of evidence used in making trust decisions.

In their interviews, almost 80% of the youth in our study stated a trusting stance towards the education sector as a whole. However, we observed notable variation in trust across individuals within the sector. Looking at specific targets, 82% of participants reported trust in teachers, whereas only 57% stated trust in school counselors. In terms of evidence used to make trust decisions, performance-based evidence, such as the quality of targets' teaching or advising, was cited most often (by 38% of participants). Interaction-based evidence, or the students' interpersonal contact with educational targets, came next with 23% of participants mentioning relationships as a basis for trust or distrust.

Both high levels of trust in education as well as the performance and interaction evidence used to form trust decisions are partially expected findings. Participants' extensive, direct experiences with the education sector; the centrality of trust in student-educator relations; and findings from other research all point in the direction of at least a baseline level of trust in schools by young immigrants. For example, the building of mutual trust between learners and teachers has been shown to be essential in promoting Latino and Asian youths' academic success as well as positive dispositions toward schooling more generally (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Harris & Kiyama 2013; Stanton-Salazar 2001; Valenzuela 1999; Wong 2008, 2010).

As Valenzuela argues, the kinds of trust that create positive academic outcomes go beyond simple functional trust in teachers doing their jobs as educators or students completing their academic work (1999). Rather, students hope to see what Valenzuela calls "authentic caring"—caring about the student not in terms of his/her academic outcomes, but in terms of the student as a person. The expression of that caring is demonstrated through educators both attending to students' personal needs and, most centrally, building a trusting relationship with students based not on their respective roles as teacher and learner, but on their interpersonal relationships. In short, the literature suggests the centrality of interactions and, to a lesser extent, performance evidence for forging trust. In relation to educational targets they deem to be caring, be it through interactions or the high quality of their work, youth are likely to feel trust.

Thus, we suspect the high level of trust in the education sector could be related to the extent of personal interactions and relationships possible with education figures as compared with targets in the other sectors. The variation in levels of trust toward proximate figures as compared with more distant figures in schools also shows the importance of direct interactions, especially positively-tinged ones. More proximate targets such as teachers and college professors are more trusted than school counselors and principals. This trend appears to be related to the daily interactions and closer relationships youth have with those teaching them compared with less frequent occasions to meet with more distant figures, such as the principal.

As expected, demonstrations of caring through actions are key to trust in this sector. Consider the following statement from Liset, age 18:

*This teacher who I had never had as a teacher and just offered like all the seniors who wanted their college essays read, he read all of them. He read 15 drafts of mine of the same essay. This man was amazing. And we would just go to his office after school. He would read our essays and he would talk to us about his wife, his kids, the situation of our school for like three hours....And we would tell him the same. He would just show concern and show that he cared and that's where that trust was formed.*

Liset speaks here to both performance-based and interactive trust. Her teacher's actions—reading college essays—were perceived positively. However, the trust formed between Liset and her teacher largely stemmed from him showing “concern and...that he cared.” While it is difficult to disaggregate performance and interactions such cases show how demonstrating personal “concern” is linked to positive trust outcomes. For participants in our study who had access to higher education, professors were often trusted as well, with trust outcomes also based in positive, caring interactions.<sup>1</sup>

One finding of note is related to youths' trust in school counselors. In the interviews, approximately 60% of participants reported trust in school counselors, leaving 40%, a sizeable number, who did not trust them. Some youth stated they did not know who their counselor was. But for those who were familiar with their counselor, many had negative experiences. We often heard stories of counselors who failed to encourage students to apply for college, or who actively discouraged them from applying to certain schools. Furthermore, counselors were at times depicted as unknowledgeable, and perhaps most troubling, uncaring. As with teachers, trust, or distrust, was based on the relationships formed in interactions with counselors and the quality of counselors' work with students. The following quote from Diana, age 23, exemplifies some of the frequently voiced reasons for distrust in school counselors.

*My counselor was really bad communicating to students like, you know, just basic opportunities that we had, like outside of the school. And when it came to the college application process, she would – I feel like she really would be very selective. She would actually select which students should, you know, apply to this school or that school and I don't think that should be – so everyone should have to opportunity to do so if you qualify and have the – meet the requirements. So something as simple as that – she would discriminate.*

Diana's counselor could have steered students toward opportunity, but she did so selectively, leading Diana to distrust her. However, Diana's comments also demonstrate the untapped potential of counselors. If Diana had seen her counselor perform well she would not only have trusted her more but would have also benefited from a responsive gatekeeper.

Despite this notable gap in trust in certain educational figures, we found a baseline sense of trust in education as a sector; this held true even for participants who had negative personal experiences in school. These findings suggest that the education sector is highly valued for its own sake or for its alleged purpose—to prepare youth for participation in society. In sum, the migrant youth in this study highly trust the education sector. Given the high level of trust in educators, it is clear that members of this profession are poised to be positive gatekeepers for migrant youths' academic success and for the development of trust in a key societal institution.

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<sup>1</sup> However, in the entire sample, professors were trusted more in terms of their social role and credentialed status. This may suggest that immigrant youth trust professors because of the perceived expertise or the credentials of an individual's position. It is important to note that most data regarding professors emerged in the scenario interviews. In addition around 50% of participants were not in college and therefore had limited interaction with professors.

The relationship between teacher and student is not merely one that shapes academic outcomes, but may also shape civic trust outcomes more generally as educational professionals are among the first non-familial adults that youth come to trust. And for migrant youth, educational professionals are among the first ‘state’ officials that they and their families come to interact with and thus trust or distrust, potentially setting a precedent for future trust decisions with respect to other institutional and civic sectors.

### **Religion Findings**

For the participants in our study, trust in the religious sector falls somewhere between the very trusted education sector and the highly distrusted sphere of news media. The young immigrants with whom we spoke are more likely to trust the religious sector than distrust it; 46% report trust compared to 22% reporting distrust. This pattern also holds true for the specific target of religious leaders; 44% trust and 22% distrust these figures. Yet, these findings show that less than half of our participants are trusting when it comes to religion. Likely related to this is the relatively low religiosity of our sample; slightly more than half (54%) say that they identify with a religion, but only 31% consider themselves religious, and fewer still (18%) report that they attend religious services regularly.

When making trust decisions about the religious sector, the most used evidence type was performance, i.e. the help and guidance that religious institutions provided in times of need. Shared background was the second most used evidence type, as many youth based their trust in the extent to which a religious figure or institution was aligned with their own religious beliefs. Youth also drew on other kinds of evidence, including interactions (such as knowing a religious target for a long period of time); the role of a religious leader as one that should be trusted; and the reputation of religious figures garnered from news stories or from others in the community.

A decline in religious attendance and religiosity in the U.S., especially among young people, has been well documented (Putnam & Campbell, 2012). Putnam and Campbell (2012) further detail that diminishing attendance of Catholic Church members in particular have been offset somewhat by an increase in attendance by Latino immigrants. A considerable amount of the immigration literature describes migrants as very religious and continuing or adapting the religious rituals from their country of origin (Smith, 2006; Stepick, 2005). Additionally, it is suggested that involvement with religious institutions, such as attending services and events, along with the social ties formed there, is related to high levels of trust in churches and religious leaders (Capps, Castañeda, Chaudry, & Santos, 2007). Consequently, such interactions with religious institutions provide newcomers and their families with opportunities for civic engagement (Levitt, 2008).

Given this literature, we expected a good portion of our sample to identify as religious, report active membership in a religious institution, state high levels of trust in religious leaders and the religious sector, and describe civic involvements that were connected with their religious institution. However, as noted above, we found lower levels of trust than expected, relatively small numbers of participants who say they are religious, and even fewer who attend religious services regularly. It is therefore not surprising that most of the civic engagement activities participants describe are not linked to a religious institution.

For participants who do trust religious leaders, the role itself is sometimes enough evidence to trust. But for others, like Sebastián below, evidence of positive experiences of performance and interactions constitute the basis of a trust decision.

*Yeah, 'cause like I said when I went to church when I was smaller, the [religious leader] he was actually very nice to me. He got me involved in programs. We played sports with each other. He gave me advice, all that. And he did actually a lot for me. He invited me to his house. He had like little small like you know parties I would like to say but not really. But he invited my parents, people from the program too, and it was good. So like I felt like he was a person that I could have confidence in and just look up to when I needed advice or anything from him.*

For Sebastián, an 18-year-old second generation Guatemalan, his trust in the religious leader grew over time and was built on shared experiences. The religious figure demonstrated caring for him in spending time with him, involving him in activities, and giving him good advice.

For other participants, however, other types of evidence supported their trust – or lack thereof. From youth who reported distrust in religious leaders, we heard repeatedly that their decisions were based on reputation evidence—e.g., stories in the news, or from other people, of sex abuse or money mismanagement by religious leaders. Erica, an 18-year-old first generation Dominican youth, shared,

*Well, I keep seeing in the news that those people like raping kids and yeah. You see all these stories about kids being abused by religious people. So I say, well, people they are supposed [to] help people and they are doing that to kids. So from that, I don't trust them.*

In Erica's view, religious leaders are supposed to help others. In other words, their roles and their actions form the basis for her trust, or distrust, in religious figures. What she hears from others—reputation evidence—allows her to determine whether such figures are fulfilling their roles and providing help to others. It is notable that news media are often cited by youth like Erica as playing a significant role in their distrust of religious figures, even while news media are generally distrusted, as will be discussed below.

Shared beliefs and values are another source of trust or distrust in religious leaders. Misalignment of a participant's beliefs and those of religious leaders or teachings led many to adopt a distrusting stance. This stance was true for Liset, who was introduced in the education section. She said,

*And what happens in a lot of religion is like they are constantly shoving information down your throat and it's these religious leaders that is advocating that, which is why I just do not trust them. Their views are too skewed for me too all over the place. Well not all over the place, they have – they know where they're going it's just – I can't live my life the way they do.*

The disjuncture between the values Liset, an 18 year-old 1st generation Dominican, holds and those espoused by religious leaders, leads to her distrust. She also expresses concerns about the ways in which she perceives religious beliefs to be promoted—“*shoving information down your throat*,” as she puts it. For Liset, then, performance evidence is also salient.

Primary data regarding trust targets, trust stances, and evidence was gleaned from participants' narratives about real experiences in their lives. However, we also posed the two hypothetical situations described earlier – one involving illegal dumping of chemicals into the water supply and the other regarding a raid by ICE officials and detainment of restaurant workers. Interestingly, in the hypothetical dilemmas, approximately 60% of youth who answered the illegal dumping question, and 65% of who answered the raid question, said that they would turn to religious leaders for help or advice. These figures far exceed the 44% of youth

who reported trust in religious leaders. In explaining why they would turn to religious leaders, participants described how such individuals are recognized as important members of the community and it is their job, indeed their role, to help others.

Religious leaders were often described by youth in our study as figures that other people turn to in moments of crisis; accordingly they are viewed as being able to reach community members where and when other prominent public figures may not. Milagros, a 23-year-old, 1st generation Salvadoran, who is quite wary of religious leaders because of misalignment of views, particularly around birth control and sexual orientation, clarifies her response of reaching out to religious leaders in the hypothetical scenarios in this way:

*Like they [religious leaders] could provide housing where people could stay, or a meeting place. For like mobilization or speaking to other people. So somebody who could spread information a lot of faster than I would be able to...because they, of course, have trust, people in the community trust them already. And I do not have the trust of the community also.*

Whether this perception is true or not, religious leaders are seen by our participants as having a central role in the community and can be trusted in most instances even when the individual youth does not trust them on a personal level.

Despite this tendency to rely on religious figures, religious institutions may no longer be playing as robust a role in providing immigrants with ready-made avenues to civic participation as in the past. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, slightly more than half of participants say they identify with a religion, but under a third consider themselves religious, and fewer still report they regular participation in religious services. Only 5 participants (about 7%) mentioned civic engagement activities they were involved in that had a religious association. Many civically engaged youth in our sample reported participation with nonprofit or community organizations not affiliated with a religion. Low religiosity could explain the diminished likelihood for civic engagement originating from a religious connection.

When it comes to religion and religious figures, the immigrant youth with whom we spoke paint a mixed picture. We expected to find high levels of trust, religiosity, and civic engagement linked to religious institutions. Instead we found surprisingly low levels of religiosity, which may explain the lower than expected levels of trust. Perhaps these findings indicate that immigrant youth exhibit the general pattern of decline in religiosity among Americans noted by Putnam and Campbell (2012). If migrant youth are not attending and interacting with religious institutions or figures, then the chance of accumulating evidence, such as performance and interactions, to make a trust decision is reduced. The youth rely instead on second hand information, from the news or family and friends. At the time of our study, the sex abuse scandal of the Catholic Church was in the forefront for many youth and provided strong evidence for warranted distrust. And yet, in particular contexts, our participants view religious figures as central community members with a valuable role to play—especially in a crisis scenario. And so it appears that many youth take an instrumental approach to their trust in religious figures—turning to them, implicitly trusting them, for help in times of need but otherwise holding a cautious, distanced stance.

## **Justice Findings**

Trust stances towards the justice sector are split and polarized. Participants were asked about their notions of trust toward the following targets: police, lawyers, judges, and Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Given ICE's collaboration with local law

enforcement through measures like 287(g) and Secure Communities, we included ICE in the justice sector.

Approximately 35% of young immigrants in our study trust the justice system, whereas almost 30% distrust it. For the remaining third, 21% have a mixed stance, where they both trust and distrust the sector, 15% withhold or do not make a trust decision, and the remaining 1% has an unclear trust stance. The pattern is very similar for the specific target of the police, one of the more discussed targets in our interviews. Performance is the dominant mode of evidence across targets and sector-wide, cited in 43% of responses, followed by social role (25%), and reputation from known others and the news (17%). Given the well-studied trend of low trust in the justice system and police, we expected to find low levels of trust in police and the justice sector more broadly. However, it is surprising that over a third of subjects have trust in the sector. We suggest that this resilient trust in the sector, which exists despite both overwhelmingly negative experiences with and distrust of justice sector targets, suggests a strong desire or need to be trusting of the US justice system.

In recent years, scholars have documented minorities' diminished trust in the police and the justice system, stemming from both experiences and perceptions of racial profiling in policing (Harris, 2002; Tyler, 2005; Tyler & Huo, 2002). In his survey of a diverse sample of NYC adults, Tyler finds lower levels of trust in minority populations, but also finds that trust does exist and is largely dependent on performance with respect to perceived fairness in policing. In her examination of attitudes of Boston residents to the police, Stoutland (2001) has similar findings: trust in Boston Police is mixed largely due to a perceived lack of respectful interactions between individuals and police. Additionally, scholarship looking at teen's views about police, regardless of race, tends to show low levels of trust similar to that found among adults (Hurst & Frank, 2000).

These findings are consonant with those from our study. Youths' trust decisions are largely based on the actions of individuals in the sector, often towards them directly. Participants reported many negative experiences with the police and with ICE. Some students cited serious 'run-ins' with the justice system as a source of their distrust, including the deportation of parents and other family members by ICE. Twenty-two year old Arturo cites the legal battle over his father's deportation as his basis for distrust in the justice system:

*I just don't trust it, and the thing that happened with my father also, that he got deported and everything – even though he had three kids here—and I just didn't like that at all how they separate families.*

Arturo perceives ICE, his lawyer, and judges in the system as having a callous disregard for him and his siblings, and thus he distrusts the entire system. Many other subjects felt that deportation and a prevalent disregard for its effect on families as a main performance-related reason to distrust both ICE and the larger justice system.

However, for some, distrust didn't necessarily have to stem from a major incident or deportation. Luis, 24, an alumnus from a highly selective college, recounted an incident in which campus and local police stopped him and his friends, a mix of black and Hispanic males, on their college campus:

*All the white kids were just walking by. We were stopped there...for a good twenty minutes. They asked for all of our I.D.'s and they were saying that they got reports, this and that. And ultimately nothing came from it, because we did nothing... I didn't think it was going to happen to me, because I was younger, but that's so vivid. And the embarrassment was horrendous. And [we were] all college students, which is the worst*

*part about it.*

During the interview, Luis stated he could point to six similar “low-level” incidents in his life where police officers seemed to target him, his family, and friends. The incident on his own college campus and others like it convinced him that the police racially profile and therefore are not to be trusted. Many youth in our sample pointed to detention, questioning, and pulling over by the police as common experiences for them. It also did not escape these youth that this policing was racially motivated. Milagros, 23, stated that she felt like she should be able to trust the police not to discriminate but “*they discriminate against people based on race, gender, sexuality and the such, and class, of course.*” Outside of direct experiences, youth also drew on reputation evidence—stories of interactions with police largely marked by racial profiling in the news and shared by friends and family members.

Racial profiling, family separation stemming from deportation, and the everyday indignities of being a ‘policed’ population have long-term effects. Chief among these seem to be distrust in police. Some participants stated that they would not go to the police for help and doubted the police’s ability to maintain law and order in their communities. Mary, 19, stated she wouldn’t go to police if she were a victim of a crime: “*I feel like they wouldn’t do anything really.*” Perhaps most dramatically, Luis stated that, to him, the police are “*hands down one of the most dangerous forces I think of the entire country.*” Beyond a lack of trust in them to “serve and protect,” Luis feels a looming sense of danger around police and other justice system targets.

However, despite the preponderance of distrust in targets, there *are* pockets of trust—even if only weak—in the justice system. For many young migrants, comparisons between the US justice system and that regnant in their families’ countries of origin lead them to feel a greater sense of trust in the US. Additionally, some youth seem willing to join the justice system. Both Mary and Luis hope to pursue careers in law enforcement and the law. Such aspirations for careers in the justice sector suggest that, despite very real experiences with injustice, these youth at least believe in the principles that are supposed to guide the system.

When thinking about the justice system as a whole, some participants voiced some faith in the strengths of the system. Consider the following statement from Teresa, age 21:

*I guess I have more faith in the system itself than I do in the people who participate in it, because they’re also meant to abide by the laws, and those restraints are very real... I trust the system to work.*

In this statement, Teresa suggests that despite a lack of faith in individuals within the justice system, she retains faith in the overall system. Such testimony suggests that distrust is not always generalized from individual performance to the whole sector. However, it also demonstrates that participants’ distrust in police is often warranted based on very real negative experiences with justice targets. More hopefully, it also suggests that trust can be built based on a future positive experience.

A baseline sense of trust in the justice system is an unexpected note of optimism amid youths’ troubling experiences with individual justice sector gatekeepers, notably the police. The ability to trust in a system—even a flawed one—is germane for a democracy as it allows for dissent with a recognition of the enduring value of institutions. Systemic trust, disaggregated from personal experience, reveals a complex trust decision-making process well suited to thoughtful democratic participation. As youth take their model of trust forged in their experience with the justice system into other spheres of the larger political system, they may be well-poised to make warranted trust decisions on individual actors and the broader democratic system.

## News Media Findings

News media include a wide range of broadcasting outlets and venues including television, radio, print, digital, and social networks. Of the four sectors of society we asked participants about, news media are least trusted when ranked with the other three sectors. Only 37% of the youth with whom we spoke reported trusting news media in their interviews. National TV and newspaper reporters fare slightly better than their local counterparts – 66% of participants trusted these national reporters, yet 62% reported trusting local newspaper reporters, and only 54% trusted local TV reporters. These targets were followed by radio commentators, bloggers, and talk show hosts in descending order of trust and increasing order of distrust. Talk show hosts were trusted by a mere 35% of participants and distrusted by 32%.

In deciding whether or not to trust various branches of news media, youth mostly drew on evidence of the performance of news organizations or of specific figures. Almost half of participants referenced the extent to which a journalist or other figure did her job well, usually in terms of sharing credible facts in a balanced and clear way. Shared background was the second most used evidence as the youth sought out news media figures who were similar to them in some way. Youth also relied on other evidence, such as how much or little control they perceived an individual or institution to have in the content she broadcasts. Finally, some youth based their trust decisions about news media on the role they thought media play or should play—i.e., the media are there to inform us and therefore should be trusted.

A marker, or perhaps a pre-requisite, of civic engagement is civic knowledge. Being informed about issues or current events enables action. Youth may gain this knowledge through various means, including school classes, discussions with family and friends, and reading, watching or listening to news media. Minority youth, particularly Hispanic youth, are known to trail behind their peers in this civic engagement category (Jacobsen & Linkow, 2012). While consumption of traditional media—print papers, TV news, radio news—has declined, getting news online or through social media is on the increase. Worryingly though, almost a third of young people under 30 get no news from any type of media on a given day (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012). While little is known about immigrant youth's trust in news sources, generally speaking, trust in news media remains at the lowest levels in several decades among Americans (Gallup Politics, 2012) and when asked in a survey if they would prefer to get news from sources that reflect their own political point of view or sources that have no specific political perspective, the majority of participants responded with a preference for sources that have no particular political point of view (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2012).

We expected our sample of immigrant youth to be similar to their US counterparts in their low trust or distrust of news media and low media consumption. However, given the role of media in providing information about issues directly impacting these youth or their families—the latest discussions surrounding immigration reform, for example—we wondered if the news media in their country of origin language may fare better than English language media in terms of trust and consumption. Not surprisingly, we indeed found low levels of trust in news media in general. And while country of origin language media was trusted more for news on immigration, this trust was based more on a sense of shared background rather than on evidence gathered from personal experience. Notably, many youth reported that due to perceived bias or sensationalism, they do not watch, read, or listen to English, Spanish, or Asian language media.

When the youth in our sample who trusted news media provided a justification for this stance, they most often drew on performance evidence, followed by role and other evidence.

The ways in which reporters delivered news, in other words, how they performed, held great importance for the youth. Jesse, a 25 year-old, second generation Korean female, succinctly exemplifies this type of response when she says of the media; *“I would expect them to produce an unbiased view and a pretty thorough kind of understanding of the situation.”* The trustworthiness of media figures was often judged on the ability to be objective and knowledgeable in the eyes of the viewer.

For other youth, the perceived role of the news media drives their trust stances. Some youth trust media figures simply because they assume that the reporter or journalist must be qualified to be in the role and will do their job well. Sendy, a 21-year-old, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Guatemalan female provides an example of role evidence based trust. She said,

*I think that they're there for a reason and they're there to communicate the truth to us and the stories behind what's going on and stuff like that, so I mean I trust in that because I know they're doing their job.*

In Sendy's view, media figures are to be trusted by virtue of their role as communicators of details of current events. They have a job to do and she believes they will do it to the best of their ability. A number of participants also trusted the media for reasons that we categorized as based on “other evidence.” Responses in this category usually had less specificity of details and an emotional quality to them. For Osner, an 18 year-old, second generation Dominican male, he conveys that he has no choice but to trust news media.

*Basically, well you have to, because there's no other way you're gonna get your information. Like maybe by word of mouth, but it's gonna take a pretty long while for like news from [the west coast] to get to [the east coast] from just by word of mouth. So I guess I have no other choice not to do it.*

Osner's understanding of how and where he can get news influences his trust stance towards news media. And so his trust decision is not driven by something the media do or do not do, or qualities media figures have or do not have. Many youth, however, have clear reasons for distrusting media, principally performance. News media are often seen as biased, not informational, and mostly for entertainment value. The prejudiced nature of news media was one reason Zitco, a 23-year-old Mexican male, referenced in relation to his distrust of reporters. He says, *“I think most of the reporters and – especially the people in the news – when they say something about a problem, they give their opinion, they don't give two perspectives. They only give what they think is right.”*

This lack of objectivity was a recurrent theme as was the drama that some news media organizations or figures appeared to incite. Youth view such reporters or journalists as competing for increased audience ratings—a form of “other” evidence—and not as serious news correspondents. This sentiment was summed up by Cara, a 21-year-old second generation Korean female, in this way.

*Even though I believe that news should be objective, I know -- that because ultimately it is a business, they are influenced obviously by outside sources -- by what they should write about, how they should present it. So I think that is why I won't trust it as much. And I think in general, maybe it is because I read too many novels or watch too many TV shows, but there is always the whole, they're like sensationalizing everything. But it makes sense that they have to do that to catch people's attentions, so I think that's it, because you don't know how much of it they sensationalize, and then that's like, difficult.*

Dramatizing the news in this way leads Cara, as well as many other youth, to distrust media. Other youth add that they can't trust someone they can't relate to on some level. For

some participants, a common background – not to be confused with ethnicity – or an understanding and interest in certain issues were used as evidence in trust decisions. Emiliano, a 20-year-old, first generation Mexican youth explains that he distrusts most news media reports because they cannot understand his point of view and that of other immigrants. In response to the question, “Do you trust the way the English language media covers immigration?” he replied:

*Honestly, I don't because truthfully, to me, they kind of really haven't been in that situation for them to actually report on it. If you get somebody who is speaking Spanish, you know that they have somebody in their family, say, grandmother, great-grandmother, who came here, so that they understand the struggles so they won't portray it as bad. They will just leave it neutral. But when you give it in English it is like, “Oh, immigrants are just doing this.” They don't give a full story, and to me that sometimes bothers me, like I don't really trust them to give the full story.*

News media outlets were perceived by youth like Emiliano to be trustworthy or not, depending on the extent to which participants saw the reporters as similar to themselves. Yet, while Spanish or Asian language media were generally trusted more than English language media when it comes to covering immigration issues, all media was similarly distrusted for most issues. As described, this distrust was often based on the assumption that media are biased or sensational. However many of the youth are making these decisions based on limited personal experience in consuming media.

These findings about lack of news media consumption, and of trust in the news media, are troubling for democratic involvement: being well-informed about what is going on in society is a vital component of participation. Many of our youth participants do not consume much news media, and what they do view, read, or listen to, they assume is biased, not worth trusting, and is not worth paying attention to. Their ability to actively participate in an informed way is potentially at risk by tuning out the media.

### **Civic Engagement Findings**

Civic engagement—including political activities such as voting as well as community involvements—has been shown to be a positive aspect of youth development and an important component of a thriving democracy (Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Luhmann, 1979; Putnam, 2000; Uslaner, 2000). Studies of civic engagement among young immigrants suggest that they participate at similar rates to non-immigrant youth, but may be engaging in ways that are not captured by traditional measures (i.e., voting) (Arnett Jensen & Flanagan, 2008; Stepick et al., 2008). Moreover, the data suggest some notable variation by immigrant group, and region of the U.S., among other factors (Brettell & Reed-Danahay, 2011; DeJaeghere & McCleary 2010; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2010). Recent studies of Latino young immigrants in particular suggest high levels of participation and leadership in civic life despite the fact that many undocumented Latino youth face numerous obstacles to open civic participation (Perez, 2012; Perez et al., 2010; Rogers, Saunders, Terriquez, & Velez, 2008).

The relationship between trust and civic engagement has been a frequent topic of discussion and study. Trust is widely understood as a fundamental ingredient for, or precondition to, participating in civic life (Allen, 2004; Cook, 2001; Flanagan, 2003; Levine, 2008; Putnam, 2000). Given this body of prior research, we were interested to understand the extent to which and how participants in our study were civically and politically engaged. Crucially, we also sought to understand how their trust in various sectors of society related to civic engagement.

Below, we report both quantitative survey findings as well as findings from our in-depth interviews related to civic engagement in general and its relationship to trust stances.

### *Civic Engagement*

Analyses of our survey about young people's civic and political involvements yielded some noteworthy findings. The youth in our study are very active in their communities; an impressive 30% reported engaging in their communities (e.g., volunteer work, fundraising, caring for a neighbor, helping others) on a *daily* basis and only 10% reported never engaging in such activities. Expressive forms of engagement – such as displaying a flag or wearing a t-shirt about a cause, signing an email or paper petition, or writing an op-ed – were fairly prevalent, with over 15% of young adults reporting daily engagement in such practices. Political engagement was less frequent, with only 7% reporting being involved in political activities (such as volunteering for a political candidate or group) every few months and almost 80% indicating that they had never engaged in such activities. Gender and time in the U.S. did not appear to affect community, expressive, or political involvements. Women and men, and first and second generation young adults, were engaged at similar levels.

Turning to data from our qualitative interviews, our youth participants confirmed that they were civically involved in activities ranging from occasionally volunteering in one-off or sporadic activities, such as helping out at a soup kitchen, to daily involvement in community, campus, or religious organizations. Anita, a 20-year-old, second generation Dominican youth told us,

*Well, I do a lot of work around service and justice and so we are a student club on campus that I have been a part of since my freshman year. We do a lot of service-related service and justice-related events... I am also part of another office—I am like the student face of it and it is called the Office of Multicultural Affairs and so I am the diversity peer leader and we basically do dialogues which raise awareness to different like, concepts and ideas about multiculturalism.*

When discussing their motivations for these activities, many of the emerging adults in our study shared a desire to be role models for children and adolescents in their neighborhoods. As Audrey, an 18-year-old, second generation Mexican youth shared,

*I usually try to devote my time to school, but sometimes, you know, you need to keep school a little on the side so I try to stay really close to church and the girls. Because I feel like when I read in church, people see me a different way. I have had mothers come up to me and tell me that “I want my daughter to be like you when she grows up,” or “I see my daughter in you.” And that feels good, you know? Especially when they see that I help the little girls in the Girl Scouts. I see the girls' eyes when they stare at me. They want to be like me, so that feels good, so...*

Audrey's narrative reflects the gratification that comes from being perceived as a good role model for younger girls in her community.

Many youth with whom we spoke were motivated to serve and strengthen their communities because of family expectations or because of a general altruistic impulse. Johanna, a 24-year-old, second generation Dominican youth told us,

*What I look for in anything that I get involved in is helping, like, where I come from, or the people that I come from, like, low-income families, medium-income families, Latinos. Helping them become more educated, because I think that's something that's really -- that*

*is lacking in, like, our community, is education on a lot of aspects in life. And how to be successful. So, that's what I'm looking— that's what I look for.*

Johanna shared a clear desire to help change and uplift her community and people from communities like the one in which she grew up.

The youth with whom we spoke were involved in activities that touched a range of societal issues, including education, inequality, discrimination, and immigration. Additionally, a number of young adults reported taking on leadership roles particularly around the Dream Act; the civic engagement of these young adults was particularly shaped by the identities they claimed as “Dreamers.” Twenty-four-year-old Lovely, a first generation Mexican youth told us,

*I was a dreamer.... when I say I was a dreamer, I mean I was undocumented so, like, I understand their struggles, I understand what it means to be frustrated, I understand why they get depressed, why it's so frustrating to feel like you want to do so much but you can't. You are so close but yet so far. So when I help them, they always ask me questions like, how do you deal with this, how do you deal with that? Suggestions or programs that I know or opportunities like this one where like they're from Mexican origin or Dominican origin...I give them an optimistic view on it, yes. And pursuing the political, you have to go to representatives and I intend to vote for the DREAM Act and stuff like that.*

Lovely was among the small number of youth in our study who engaged in specifically political activities as part of her efforts to help young people like herself.

### *Conceptions of the Good Citizen*

In our participants' narratives about their civic engagement, we can perceive certain beliefs about and conceptions of citizenship. When we asked participants outright, “What does it mean to be a good citizen?” 31 participants (46%) spoke about the obligations and rights of citizens and 18 participants (26%) mentioned being an active community participant. As Alejandro, a 24-year-old, first generation Dominican youth described,

*To me that means doing community service, so giving back to your city, your state in any way that you can. Volunteer...providing mentorship...It's just things that you're not going to be compensated for monetarily but that are going to make a difference in somebody else's life. That's what I think of.*

Some immigrant youth in our study (13 participants or 19 %) spoke about a sense of belonging as a key aspect of citizenship. For example, 24-year-old Lovely, who described her DREAMer identity above, shared,

*To be a citizen means to be part of something, [to] contribute and also be able to learn from whoever -- the people surrounding where you live or where you're at, especially in any setting I am a citizen because I belong to something. Just because if you are not a citizen, then you don't have a sense of identity, you're just an “it.”*

Finally, awareness of the protections afforded by documents like the Bill of Rights often informed participants' conceptions of citizenship. Alejandro, who shared his views on being active in the community above, explained that rights go beyond what is documented:

*Thinking about America, I just think about whatever is on the Constitution, Bill of Rights, etcetera, so it's what's written down. But I believe that just living in our world, no matter whether you consider yourself a citizen of a country or not, everyone has human rights which I can't really say that those are written down, but I think that they should be common sense, like everyone should be treated equally, people should have similar*

*rights, but citizenship rights come to those who live in the country and abide by those rules.*

References to the rights and obligations of citizens, and of the importance of active participation were prevalent across our interviews with young immigrants.

In sum, measures of civic engagement focused on political activities alone do not capture the important ways in which immigrant origin youth are engaging in their communities. Our qualitative interviews show that their engagement is motivated by a sense of responsibility to help fellow immigrants from their communities of origin, a sense of obligation to their parents for the sacrifices they made, and/or out of a desire for positive social change in their communities. Accordingly, when immigrant youth talked about what it means to be a good citizen, “helping others” was frequently mentioned. Civic engagement in the form of helping one’s community is a value that seems to emerge out of the experience of being a first or second-generation immigrant; it is not tied to a perception of U.S. values or country of origin values.

### **The Intersection between Trust and Civic Engagement**

In order to explore how immigrant origin youth’s sense of trust across sectors might be related to their civic activities, our research team aggregated an overall trust mean that included the media, education, justice system, and religious institution sectors in the U.S.. Somewhat counter-intuitively, we found that controlling for gender, and generation status, overall trust in the aggregated U.S sectors significantly *negatively* predicted political engagement [ $b = -.28$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $p = .04$ ], though it accounted for a small percentage of the variance (5%). We also found a positive relationship between U.S. overall trust sector and gender (with women trusting more than men) and expressive engagement accounting for 20% of the variance.

We also found a negative association between participants’ trust in their country of origin justice system trust sector and their engagement in various sectors in their homeland. Controlling for gender, generation status, and country of origin negative experiences with the justice system in the homeland negatively predicted respectively country of origin community trust ( $b = -.24$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p = .01$ , accounting for 12% of the variance); country of origin expressive trust ( $b = -.29$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p = .003$ , accounting for 12% of the variance); as well as political engagement ( $b = -.19$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p = .03$ , accounting for 8% of the variance).

Similarly, we found an association between participants’ trust in the U.S. judicial system and expressive engagement ( $b = -.37$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p < .00$ , accounting for 24% of the variance). Controlling for gender, generation status, and U.S. education trust, trust in the U.S. justice sector significantly negatively predicted expressive engagement; in other words, the less the trust in the U.S. justice system, the greater their expressive engagement. We also found a statistical trend between participants’ trust in the US justice system sector and both community ( $b = -.17$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p = .07$ , accounting for 6% of the variance) and political engagement ( $b = -.15$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p = .07$ , accounting for 6% of the variance). Thus, the less the trust in the U.S. judicial system, the greater the participation in expressive engagement and in community and political activities. What light did the qualitative data shed on this?

#### *Distrust following Unfair Treatment*

Many participants traced their engagement to direct experiences of unfair treatment experienced directly or witnessing injustices related to race, language, undocumented status, or being an immigrant. While Frank, a second-generation Mexican origin young man denies

experiencing unfair treatment himself, he witnessed unfair treatment of his sister and father, which, in turn motivates him to pursue a law degree to focus on immigrants' rights. He says:

*I personally wasn't treated unfairly ... I don't feel like that it personally happened to me. I think it was my sister more when she was in school. She wasn't allowed to go to school, all because she didn't have the little document....I think they see my dad and my dad, he looks Mexican, he's darker than I am, and he looks kind of -- well not really indigenous but he -- he's darker skinned and he looks like someone you know that doesn't speak good English and it upset me, you know, to the point where I -- you know, what does that have to do with anything, you know he's still a human being, he still went through [these] things, we have a certain justice system -- he pays his taxes, he's a resident and you know what made him different?.... It inspired me, I wanted to be an immigration lawyer and hoping one day to be in government, I'd like to be governor one day, or a senator. That's my dream, to be involved in government, eventually down the road. . . I think it's my one dream to one day see that these people get the justice that they deserve.*

Similarly, Zoe's civic engagement is driven by awareness of injustices and seeking an opportunity for the "American Dream":

*Well, I always believe in like, justice, I mean, I guess you can call it that. That we should all have the same rights. You know, even though yes, it's true some people were not born here, but I mean, some kids were like and going to school and you know, I think they deserve an opportunity to be part of this...[concerns]...discrimination between people. I think really it's like, I think one of the things that I am like, like I said I like people to be treated the same way not just because you are white or black or just because you speak Spanish or speak another language, being discriminated for that.*

### *Creating Social change*

A number of our participants brought up creating social change as a motivation for civic engagement. For Latino first and second generation immigrants, the cause that was most often mentioned was around concerns about undocumented status and the DREAMer movement. Notably, for several of our undocumented Latino emerging adults whose educational opportunities are stymied and who are unable to work, civic engagement was the only avenue in which they may channel constructive energies to help themselves and their community (Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanginoti, 2013).

While some were propelled by concerns spurred by personal experiences, others were driven by observing the injustices experienced by those around them. Frida, a second-generation Mexican origin young woman exemplifies this. She realized that while she personally had options after high school, her undocumented peers did not. As such she was called to action:

*In high school I started a petition with signatures. . . I got 150 signatures, which was not bad at all. Where I went to high school [there were] a lot of immigrants, but it was not just Hispanics, it was South Asians, they were from all different parts of the world.*

Anita, a second-generation Dominican origin woman terms her involvement a 'moral responsibility':

*I guess it wasn't really a decision, it was more -- it was like a calling, I had to. It just felt like such a huge moral responsibility and like, social responsibility to kind of, you know, just like, as a human being. You know, I just couldn't stand and watch and not be in solidarity with people. And so -- and obviously I got a -- you know, growing up as a Latina, I mean, it was inevitable a lot of my friends, you know, were going through some*

*of these injustices that like, I perceived, so I really -- it was like, more of a personal thing, like I didn't really decide, I kind of had to due to like, empathy and a feeling of solidarity with these people.*

### *Summary of Motivations for Civic Engagement*

Social responsibility driven by relationships with others as well as a moral sense of justice (Wray-Lake & Syvertsen, 2011) was at the core of civic engagement for the majority of the young people we interviewed who were civically active. For many, that engagement was fueled further by a sense of social (in)justice. Many had experienced some form of unfair treatment directly or had seen injustices towards their close relations and members of their communities. Discriminatory acts and unjust treatment served to propel a desire for change and civic participation (Jensen, 2008). Notably, for immigrant origin emerging adults of this generation, unresolved issues related to undocumented status and the Dreamer movement (Perez, 2009) was a clear concern (Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011). For some, creating change was done by educating others while for others it led to greater active engagement in a civic cause. Thus, for many who involved themselves in civic causes, a perceived “moral sense of justice” (Wray-Lake & Syvertsen, 2011) was a response to (in)justice(s).

### **General Discussion**

This exploratory study of young immigrants’ sense of trust and involvement in civic pursuits has uncovered both expected and unexpected findings and points to important questions for future research.

In the expected category, we observed that youth exhibit a greater sense of trust in educational figures and institutions than in other sectors of U.S. society. Our findings showing high trust in teachers align with earlier research that suggests the important role teachers can play for immigrants as they make their way in a new land (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Harris & Kiyama 2013; Stanton-Salazar 2001; Valenzuela, 1999; Wong 2008, 2010). The trust youth hold is often built on the direct relationships they forge with teachers in particular. However, the fact that many youth don’t extend this trust to all school figures—particularly school counselors—reveals an important educational support gap for these youth. This finding is consistent with previous research showing the unfulfilled potential of schools in preparing immigrants to succeed (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Suárez-Orozco, Gaytan, & Kim, 2010; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2010). This finding holds implications for the professional development of educators who occupy such roles in schools.

Youth’s distrust in news media was expected—given previous research showing widespread skepticism of news sources (Davis et al., 2012; Gallup Politics, 2012). While the youth in our study were not high consumers of news media, they did rely on it when needed—even while perhaps taking the information they find with a warranted grain of salt. These findings suggest that these youth—like many other youth today—may lack needed literacies for evaluating the quality of information shared via the news media. Given that access to credible information is an important foundation for quality civic participation (Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, 2011), this skill gap requires attention.

Also unsurprising is the distrust youth in our study conveyed toward the justice sector. The participants in our study confirmed that immigrant youth—along with other youth of color—are subjected to profiling by police officers, experiences that lead them to warranted

distrust in these individuals. Negative experiences with ICE in particular contribute to a generalized distrust in the sector as a whole. Experiencing or witnessing immigration related injustices often served to fuel engagement in civic participation to create systemic change. These negative experiences are serving as an engine of civic engagement for many Latino immigrant origin youth in this generation.

In the unexpected category, the distrust youth displayed in the justice system was not absolute. Rather, a surprising number of youth expressed a sense of hope, and even thin trust, in the principles and ideals upon which the U.S. justice system is based. For many, this positive attitude was based on their original reference point—the often corrupt nature of justice systems in their countries of origin.

We also saw that religion did not play the expected role in the lives of the youth who participated in our study. Previous research shows that religious institutions often provide key supports for immigrants (Hirschman, 2004; Levitt, 2008; Stepick, 2005), yet the youth in our study were not as involved in religious life as this research led us to expect. Their trust in the religion sector was limited and—related to this—religious institutions were not a common entry point for involvement in civic life for these youth.

Finally, and perhaps most notably, we found youths' overall civic trust (e.g., trust in all four sectors under study) to be negatively related to political forms of engagement. In other words, despite considerable previous research suggesting that trust and civic engagement are positively related (Luhmann, 1979; Putnam, 2000; Uslander, 2000), the immigrant youth who reported high trust across the sectors were not as civically active as their more distrusting counterparts. We observed a negative relationship between trust in the justice sector in particular and various forms of engagement—community, expressive, and political. In contrast to, and going beyond, the sparse research that suggests in certain contexts political distrust may lead to unconventional forms of political engagement (Craig, 1984; Moisés, 2011), our data reveal that distrust in other democratic institutions is related to increases in both traditional and non-traditional political and civic activities. These unexpected findings further suggest that immigrant youth's civic participation may be borne out of a sense of disappointment in the reality of life in the U.S. Youths' motivations to get involved appear to stem from direct and indirect experiences of various forms of discrimination. A sense of injustice propels some youth to work both within and outside public institutions to address civic and political areas of concern.

As noted, while distrust in the U.S. justice system runs deep among young people in our study, there is also an undercurrent of hope that the principles on which the system was built are still trustworthy—especially as compared with the state of play in their countries of origin—and, with their involvement, can be realized. In this light, youth's civic activities may be seen as an effort to fulfill the American promise of a fairer, more trust-worthy justice system and society.

Our study points to an interesting set of dynamics between trust and civic engagement among a group of Latino and Asian young immigrants living in the Northeastern United States. It is important to note, however, some of the limitations of the study and the analyses conducted. The small sample may conceal associations between other sectors of trust and civic engagement. Further, our sample was not balanced with respect to gender and generation of migration, and was more highly educated than the general population of young Latino immigrants in the U.S. today.

Additional research is also required in order to probe the meaning of specific findings—such as the inverse relationship between trust in the justice sector and civic engagement. Ideally, such research would be qualitative in nature in order to uncover the particular motives, goals,

and perspectives that guide youth who are at once distrustful and engaged in efforts at social change. At the same time, quantitative research is needed in order to explore the extent to which this finding is unique to our sample—which may in itself be an unusual sample—or representative of a pattern in a larger population. More generally, future research with larger samples of youth in other regions of the U.S. would provide important insights about the generalizability of the findings we surfaced. The study also suggests other lines of inquiry for future research, including the nature of immigrant youth’s trust in other vital institutional sectors, including the health care and political systems. The nature of trust and civic engagement among older immigrants would also be a fruitful avenue of study.

## **Conclusion**

American public schools are for the first time in history minority-majority. This is part of a broader demographic shift taking place in nearly all advanced post-industrial democracies. It is a phenomenon driven in part by large-scale global migration over the last two generations (Gastelum, 2014). At the same time, progress on immigration reform legislation continues to be stalled and states are taking matters into their own hands in very different ways (Grovm, 2014). This complex, confusing, and intimidating context arguably vexes young immigrant adults’ sense of trust as they navigate everyday life in the U.S. One might fully expect young immigrants to respond by withdrawing from public participation either because they lack a core sense of trust in the key sectors of society (Putnam, 2007) or because their allegiances are focused elsewhere (Huntington, 2004). However, the findings of this study suggest that the possibility space is more complex. Indeed, the voices, perspectives, and activities of first and second generation immigrant youth brought to light here suggest that even – and perhaps especially – those who lack trust may be civically active in impressive ways.

Exploring how these youth make trust judgments of educators and schools, religious leaders and institutions, journalists and the media, and the police and justice system revealed a nuanced story about trust and about civic engagement. Despite negative experiences and warranted distrust towards individuals in these key sectors, many youth tended to express explicit or implicit trust in the sectors themselves. Rather than *hunkering down* (Putnam, 2007), we saw that youth across our sample were civically engaged at relatively high levels. Further, despite numerous barriers, many of the youth with whom we spoke express an interest in being involved or giving back to their community and working to address issues of public concern. Interestingly, youth who expressed the least amount of trust across all the sectors, and in the justice sector in particular, tended to be the most civically and politically engaged, and in both traditional and new ways. This complicated relationship between trust and civic engagement points to multiple pathways to participation in the civic sphere, and a real desire on the part of young immigrants to become citizens in more than a legalistic sense. Our hope is that this portrait can contribute in a positive way to the national dialogue on immigrants and immigration reform.

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