

**Latino Leadership:
Civic and Political Participation of Latinos in Somerville**

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Abstract

Much of contemporary U.S. political discourse focuses on “the Latino community”, concentrating on immigration reforms, border security, and minority electoral power. Diverse civil rights movements (i.e., African American, Asian, Latino) have stressed the importance of minority political representation as a way of improving the socio-economic situation of these ethnic/race/nationality-based communities. While there has been significant national attention given to these historic changes, there is still a great need to understand the dynamics of political participation and leadership at the local level. In this paper I will discuss the leadership of some members of the Latino community and how their actions reflect an increase in the overall increase of political participation in the Latino community. According to the 2000 census, 29% of Somerville’s population is foreign born. Somerville’s Latino/a American community is 25 years old, and yet no Latino has held an elected position in local government. Since September 2006 I have conducted interviews with Somerville government officials, residents, and Latino leaders. My ongoing research focuses on the leadership of individuals and organizations. Preliminary findings indicate that while there is a strong desire among Latinos to engage politically, the obstacles – communication, trust, access, socioeconomics, lack of continuous organizational leadership, and an immigrant’s status – greatly challenges their motivation, leading to disengagement. While the oral histories of interviewed participants teach us much about the numerous ways in which Somerville City government fails to build trust and create “citizen/stakeholder buy-in,” their greatest value is in uncovering the as of yet unexplored methods for leading solidarity across diverse, and currently silenced, groups within this community.

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Foreword

As a Costa Rican immigrant coming from a region that has suffered from political instability, natural disasters, and violent conflict, the incorporation of immigrants and refugees to new communities has always interested me, so when I moved to the Boston area and enrolled in *Urban Borderlands*, a community-based research seminar, I had a natural interest in exploring how Somerville's Latino immigrants are being integrated politically.

My involvement in Somerville does not end in just curiosity. I have volunteer in many different places and areas in the city, worked as an intern for the Somerville Arts Council and recently, working for an local non-profit, started a small screen printing business that motivates young Latinos to engage in non-violent activities by providing sustain employment.

Somerville is not just where I do my schoolwork. I have been an intern for the Somerville Arts Council since late 2006 allowing me to work in the City Hall and obtain different perspectives on the ins and outs of the city. Also, I became a volunteer for Centro Presente, a legal services provider and human rights advocate for Latinos, in their youth program and then started a small screen printing business that motivates young Latinos to engage in non-violent activities by providing sustained employment. These last two roles—volunteer and social entrepreneur—have given me the chance to observe Somerville Latinos' leadership from a strategic perspective.

Introduction

Much of the contemporary US discourse on Latinos has focused on how their growing numbers might translate into electoral power at the national level. The dynamics of how Latinos are being incorporated into civic life at the local level, where the interactions between individuals and the state first begin to take shape, have therefore become a subject of much interest to the general public, politicians, and social scientists. In the recently published book *Latinos in New England*, political scientist Amílcar Barreto (2006) notes that unlike the previous European immigrant groups – Irish, Italians and Portuguese – who successfully incorporated into local political and civic life, Latinos in New England, despite their growing numbers, have yet to hold an elected position at the federal level and only a handful have been successful at the state level. Barreto observes that Latinos' low level of participation has been attributed to their dissimilar culture, thereby blaming Latinos themselves for their political marginality, but he proposes other structural factors that account for their marginality: first, many Latinos, especially newcomers, are unable to vote and run for office, but more importantly, they have not been able to achieve a critical mass in many communities.

Latinos' inability to influence electoral politics, however, should not be interpreted as a withdrawal from community life. Blocked from this entry into formal politics, Latino community members have found other avenues for addressing their material, socio-economic and political needs by participating in community based organizations and civic associations. In this regard their strategies and tactics are similar to those described by social scientists writing about social movements in Latin America, where, as Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar emphasize, observing political incorporation must not only be in "delimited institutional spaces... it must also be seen to encompass power struggles enacted in a wide range of spaces culturally defined as private, social, economic, cultural and so on."ⁱ

As part of my community-based research class in anthropological methods, Urban Borderlands, I began collecting perspectives and reflections on the state of Latino political participation from members of the Somerville community and then compared them to Barreto's conclusions regarding Latino political participation in the Northeast as a whole. I found that Latinos in Somerville have been actively involved in business, religion, education, and social services, but as Barreto saw elsewhere in New England, not in local politics. Latinos placed part of the blame on city officials, who had expressed little interest in connecting to this new demographic, and indeed, the controversy about a proposed anti-gang ordinance brought simmering resentments about Latinos to the surface. However, I did observe signs of important changes in Somerville that suggest that Latino participation is increasing in both the informal and formal political arenas. This increase, I argue, is the result of the leadership of individuals and organizations in the city.

Largely based on oral histories, census data and my personal experiences in Somerville, the report describes the main factors that account for my observation. I focused on the actions and activities of these leaders and organizations that demonstrate the growing trend.

My methods were simple but demanding. Throughout Fall 2006 I conducted interviews with Somerville government officials, residents, and Latino leaders and asked them for their

opinions and reflections on Latino political participation. These were hard to schedule and the information was difficult to obtain. People in the local government are cautious about what they say while others, sometime, release more information than what you need to know. But, by far, my informants emphasized the role of active people and active organizations in the community.

I have divided the report that follows into three short essays, each one presents the comments and perspectives of the people I interviewed, census data collected, and some analysis.

The first essay provides a brief context on immigration in Massachusetts and Somerville. It will also show some of the important moments that fostered Latino political participation in the city. The second focuses on the Latino leaders and their work in the community. More specifically, I look at way their actions are speaking for Somerville Latinos as a whole. The third essay describes the work of some organizations and their leadership in the community. Finally, my analysis underlines the results, and some challenges, of the increasing participation of Latinos in the city.

Somerville: A City of Immigrants

The presence of Latinos in the United States has increased considerably. The 2000 census shows a Latino population of more than 35 million. We outgrew the “invisible minority” category in the eighties and became the fastest growing community in the country today. This growth is not going to slow down much. Census analysis and case studies project that the Latino population will continue to grow and could make up about 25% of the US population within 45 years.ⁱⁱ The 2000 census also showed that about 800,000 Latinos and Latinas reside in New England. The growth of this population definitely brings important changes in socio-economic and political landscape at the local level.

The first Latinos to arrive in Somerville were Salvadorans who came in the 1980s to escape the armed conflict in Central America; they were followed in the 1990s by large numbers of Brazilians seeking economic opportunities, as well as smaller numbers from other countries such Colombia, Nicaragua and Honduras. By 2000 9% of Somerville’s population of 78,000 were Latinos—a larger percentage than the statewide average of 6.8%. The next table shows some numbers of the Somerville population and its more recent trends.

General Characteristics	Number	Percent	U.S.
Total population	77,478	100	100%
Male	37,730	48.7	49.10%
Female	39,748	51.3	50.90%
Median age (years)	31.1	(X)	35.3
Race			
One race	73,721	95.2	97.60%
White	59,635	77	75.10%
Black or African American	5,035	6.5	12.30%
American Indian and Alaska Native	171	0.2	0.90%
Asian	4,990	6.4	3.60%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	50	0.1	0.10%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	6,786	8.8	12.50%
Social Characteristics			
Foreign born	22,727	29.3	11.10%
Speak a language other than English at home (5 years and over)	26,381	35.6	17.90%
Housing			
Total housing units	32,477	100	100.00%
Occupied housing units	31,555	97.2	91.00%
Owner-occupied housing units	9,656	30.6	66.20%
Renter-occupied housing units	21,899	69.4	33.80%
Vacant housing units	922	2.8	9.00%

The changes in the make up of the population brought important consequences in the history of the city. Older residents, many European immigrants themselves, grew unhappy with the influx of new comers. Lindsey Nicholson and Adrienne Van Nieuwenhuizen, fellow Urban

Borderlands researchers in 2004, researched the conflict that rouse around new immigrants and noted, “Previously arrived residents had become anxious about the security of their jobs and homes. Fear and prejudice had resulted in overt discrimination and, occasionally, episodes of violence.”ⁱⁱⁱ In 1990, conflict between youth of different ethnic groups escalated and lasted for about a year; the press named the event “race riots.” Later, in 2004, mainly due to the increasing violence among youth, the city passed an Anti-Gang Loitering Ordinance that gives police officers the power to question any group of people in the street under reasonable doubt of gang affiliation.^{iv} The largely unconstitutional grounds for the ordinance propelled the leadership of the Latino community to organize and defend their children from being constantly targeted by the police.^v The Sanctuary City Resolution, a previous event, however, also showed the leadership of Latinos in the city.

The Sanctuary City Resolution came from the hard work of organized Latinos with the support of local groups. Groups offering social services focusing on immigrants, such as the Welcome Project, united forces to fight against initiatives that prevented immigrants from getting access to health care and education for their children.^{vi} Finally approved by the Board of Aldermen in 1987, the resolution has continued to mark Somerville as a welcoming place for immigrants. The resolution has promoted equal access regardless of immigration status, allowing immigrants access to some key services.^{vii} However, according to some of the Latino leaders that I talked with, the resolution fell short from being a complete solution for new immigrants; federal aid services were not available and older residents did not become more welcoming overnight. For people coming from El Salvador, fleeing the civil wars of the region, the resolution gave them access to a solid Temporary Protected Status (TPS)—a special permission to live and work in the US for those who had to abandon their home countries due to conflict—for the next decade. For this reason, part of the Salvadorian community became highly involved in different parts of community life.

Looking closely at the chart, Latinos still make the largest minority in the city. The 9% figure, however, obscures the internal diversity of the Latino community, especially in regard to their length of residence in Somerville, which I realized is the variable most likely to affect political engagement.

Newcomers have many significant obstacles to participation: they are often undocumented, transient, they work too many jobs to have time for political organizing, they may not speak English, or their experiences of state corruption in their homelands has made them distrustful of government. Those who have been in Somerville for over a decade, on the other hand, are demonstrating a dynamic participation in civic life that have positioned them to enter the arena of official politics. This activity has, in turn, motivated the municipal government to acknowledge Latinos’ importance to the city’s political landscape in several symbolically significant ways.

Latino Leaders

Throughout my research, I met incredible people who work hard for the wellbeing of their community. I call these Latino men and women *leaders* because of their help and service to others which is invaluable and central to the fabric of the Latino community in Somerville.

Latino leaders are greatly involved in most aspects of community life. They are concerned parents and citizens, good neighbours, taxpayers, and, those who can, vote in all elections. But they go beyond just that. These individuals do not rest; they are always trying to solve issues affecting the lives of their children, the environment, and the people around them. The hard work of these leaders is one of the fundamental factors behind the growth of political participation in the city. The level of participation of Latino leaders, however, should not be thought of as the norm. Most of the leaders that I met have the option to be highly involved. In general, their double shifts, language and immigration status allows them no time or incentive, as some of my informants put it, “to even participate in a PTA meeting per year.”

When looking at the power of few over a larger group, economists have a principle called the 80/20. Introduced by Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto in the early 1900s, the principle is based on the idea that, in average, 20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the work.^{viii} From what I have seen in Somerville, I believe that the growing participation of Latinos in different levels of community life has something to do with the 80/20 principle. Not because 80% of Latinos do not care or do not participate, but because their actions of Latino leaders, those who organize the rest of the community, are having a stronger resonance across the city. I spoke with several Latino leaders who are responsible for much of the increased civic and political participation.

One perfect example of Latino civic engagement is **Consuelo Perez**, who migrated from Peru in the 1980s. A mother of three, she is an active member of the community at many levels. She has been the president of the PTA at one of her girls’ school, the Michael Capuano School, in order to help Latino parents understand how the community works, how to navigate bureaucratic procedures, and how to become engaged. In her opinion schools are a gateway to civic activism; as she notes “many Latinos feel responsible and obligated to step out of their shyness and participate.”

Mrs Perez believes that being involved with school related activities is the gateway to a larger civic participation in the community. Mrs. Perez explained to me that the structured work in the schools helps with the participation of parents. Her motivation came from wanting to help her daughter get an education. “My desire to participate as part of the community really formalized when my oldest daughter entered the Kindergarten,” she told me over coffee, “I wanted her to count on me.”

“Here is where I became an organizer,” Mrs. Perez said about the school. For her, the experience obtained in the schools of her daughters developed into the main way to adapt to her life in the diverse community of the city. According to the Massachusetts Department of Education, Somerville has about 5,383 students, of which, 31% are Hispanic, 8% Asian, 15.6% African-American, and 45% White. Also, 62% of minority students come from low-

income families. She observed the cultural diversity of students and parents and felt compelled to bring them together. She then helped parents of different backgrounds to organize playgroups in order to provide them both, parents and children, with social spaces for community building.

Mrs. Perez has worked really hard to increase the Latino political and civic participation in the city. She has participated in several campaigns of candidates for Alderman and other current city officials. As the director of the Parent-Teacher Association, she helped create after-school programs, organized assemblies to celebrate Latino-American culture, and motivated different community members to get involved. She even got me involved in one of her most recent projects. Because I was working with the Somerville Arts Council, she managed for me to help her find a venue for her Mothers' Club, where Latinas and non-Latinas can join to do art projects for a small business while their children played together. Mrs. Perez is a Latina who leads by example and she, in my view, represents one of the highest levels of involvement in the city.

Another example is **Tito Meza**, a Honduran immigrant who had lived in the Greater Boston area for 35 years and now works as a community organizer for the Somerville Community Corporation, Inc. (SCC) which advocates for the city's diverse Latino community. Community organizations like SCC depend on the human and social capital provided by leaders like Mr. Meza. As I walked with him down a street in East Somerville past numerous local Latino owned and run businesses it was clear that he lived here, knew the residents and their issues, and that his mind contained a virtual directory of information and contacts which he could draw upon to help community members in need. As we walked, Tito was warmly greeted by passersby. He smiled, waved, shook hands and answered questions, almost like a seasoned politician – but with a distinctly local connection and feel. People know that Tito really knows you.

Participating in the community takes a lot of effort. Few Latinos feel encouraged to spend part of their time in this type of activities. "Those who finally get involved prefer to participate where they feel welcomed and not alienated," Tito commented referring to the specific spaces that he has helped create for Latinos to participate. That is where leadership is key. Having the continuous presence of effective and trustworthy leaders in the community facilitates the existence of social networks for immigrants, which indirectly become hubs for civic participation.

Understanding both the needs and the social capital of one's community is a rare skill that comes only with experience. Mr. Meza tells me that it has taken him years to really know Somerville. He believes there are many skilled Latinos and Latinas working hard in one or two jobs who would be willing to cooperate in any initiative for the benefit of the community. "They are excited to get involved," he says, "but they need someone to bring them together", but he went on to note, "They have to trust you." Meza himself is not a politician, however, and he is critical of local government because it relies too heavily on local community organizations and Latino informal social networks to address the community's needs rather than engaging Latinos directly in the political process.

According to Hanna Pitkin (1967), there is great symbolic value in achieving minority representation at the political level, because it provides an important motivational factor for minorities to continue engaging in the political arena.^{ix} Lack of minority representation, on the other hand, reduces motivation, and in turn, results in less minority participation. This has certainly been the case in Somerville, where in spite of their numbers there has never been an elected Latino official, and indeed, there are very few Latino faces in City Hall. **Marty Martinez** is the main Latino leader working to change this.

Martinez is a second generation Mexican-American who got his BA in Political Sciences in Nebraska, and his Masters in Urban and Environmental Planning at Tufts. After graduating Martinez was appointed as Director of Youth Services for Somerville's City Hall, which motivated him to continue his work as a community organizer. Recognizing the growing Latino presence in Somerville, Martinez he decided to run for Alderman in 2003, the first time a Latino had run for public office in Somerville. He lost by a small margin, but his run brought him to the attention of the city's political establishment. He ran again in 2005, losing by an even smaller margin. Mr. Martinez ran one more time in 2006 after Alderman at-large Denise Provost became a State Representative generating an special election for her position.

This time, Mr. Martinez worked harder than ever before. He had established his credentials as a serious candidate. He had the support of leaders and activists such as Consuelo Perez who began organizing Latinos to vote, saying "Having a Latino in City Hall would improve the way we are being listened to. It will show to the rest of Somerville that we are capable of great things." Martinez moved beyond being "the Latino candidate," reaching out to the city's diverse ethnicities and interest groups. His campaign slogan, "One Somerville," made Martinez' appeal to diversity and inclusion explicitly.

Martinez won the primaries by a landslide. However, it was not enough. The support from old-time residents and early-wave immigrants went to his adversary, who campaigned on a more traditional platform more appealing to this voting base. Mr. Martinez came out only a few hundred votes under. He continues to be an active leader in Somerville, but is not thinking about of another campaign in the near future.

This event could be analyzed in many ways. Some of the residents and administrators I spoke with believed that he Somerville is not ready to have a Latino official. Others, mainly people within City Hall, feel that the city is ready for someone like Mr. Martinez, but also feel that his campaign needed to reach out more to the older generations of residents. Beyond local politics, I believe, Mr. Martinez' campaigns have demonstrated that local Latino leaders do not act only within the Latino community; they are conscious of the community as a whole and want a better future for all. Namely, his hard work has underlined the diversity of the city.

Throughout my research it became clear that the presence of Latinos in Somerville is well recognized, but their active civic participation in the city is less understood. The City Hall staff and administration agreed that Latinos are not invisible, administrators now are more inclusive when taking decisions that affect the entire population. But it was surprising to observe how much is not known by city officials about how integrated Latinos/as are in Somerville's community life. The right political representation definitely plays an important on increasing

Latino political representation. Somerville Latinos would feel more encouraged to participate in the political process with a Latino elected-official. However, immigration status and economic stability prove to be too high of a hurdle for newer immigrants to become engaged. It is the work of these hard-working Latino leaders that represents the increase in participation. Civic participation, in the other hand, is an increasing commitment in more than just the Latino leaders. The Latino community of Somerville has become more concern with civic issues because of the work of key organizations in the city.

Organizations' Leadership

The different organizations, on which the Latino community depends on, play an important role as services and communications hubs for newcomers and older immigrants alike. Their leadership is essential in the community and grow in importance in a standard manner. They are established to provide social and immigration services for the community. Then, they begin organizing people, for example, to achieve critical mass at demonstrations, supporting political campaigns, and/or providing programming for immigrant children. Eventually, they grow in size and relevance. During my time in Somerville, I observed some organizations try to diversify their work and serve a broader base. They hired new staff and their work became more streamlined to help more people. In other words, their work is based on grassroots organizing and tends to efficiently get people involved for long periods of time. Two organizations are doing an extraordinary work to encourage political and civic participation.

Having been largely researched by Urban Borderlands' students, Centro Presente and the Welcome Project are perfect examples of the organizational leadership responsible for the increasing participation of Latinos. Established in 1981, Centro Presente is an immigrant-led, community-based organization. Centro's mission is to "develop the capacity of the Latino community in New England to determine its future." Centro Presente accomplishes its mission through community education and development, adult education programs, youth leadership development, and immigration legal services. They provide ESL, Literacy, and Citizenship classes. They also have a youth program that serves the children of some of its members. Besides their great range of services, they also count with solid internal leadership.

Dr. **Maria Elena Letona**, an immigrant from El Salvador, is the Executive Director of Centro Presente since 1999. She has become one of the most renowned Latino leaders in Boston for her ability to organize immigrant supporters across the state. Although she is a professional musician, she has been committed immigrant rights for over a decade. The focal point of her work at Centro has been the push for an organized community; one that, for example, can quickly support other immigrants after raids or can communicate quickly to about possible I.C.E. presence. She created several more positions for Community Organizers and began helping organize Somerville Latinos several years ago. We can be almost certain that their work has contributed for the increase participation of Latinos in the city. And, now that Centro Presente moved to East Somerville, we could only expect more.

The Welcome Project is a community-based initiative that began in the Mystic Public Housing Development of Somerville, Massachusetts in 1987. As new residents were arriving from Haiti, Central America, Viet Nam and other parts of the world, many were victims of discrimination and harassment by the surrounding Somerville community. The founders of the Welcome Project began as a dedicated group of tenants and community members who came together to welcome and support new residents.

Nelson Salazar is the former Director of the Welcome Project. He has been a key Latino leader who has worked on housing advocacy, access to education and human rights for the immigrant community. After his time directing the Project, Mr. Salazar has graduated in from with a Master degree on Urban and Environmental Planning from Tufts and he currently looking

at getting more involved in urban housing issues. Regarding the increased involvement, he believes that organizations have been able to easily get immigrants involved because they are safer than other institutions where immigrants can be required to give documentations in order to be part of.

“We feel safer away from [government] institutions. Non-governmental organizations generate a sense of understanding about immigrants experience and a shield from direct interaction with federal complications. Latinos feel *more welcomed* outside of traditional political initiatives because they don’t have other hidden objectives.”^x

After this interview, Mr. Salazar mentioned to me that the advantages that being a non-profit organization is that people do not fear asking for help, and, “if they get the help they need, they will be more motivated to be part of the organization and its activities.”^{xi}

Since 2006, and with a new director, the Welcome Project (WP) has focused on presenting immigrant culture in a positive light for the city as a whole. They became really interested in showcasing the similarities between the different immigrant experiences of older and newer immigrants. Instead of organizing, the Project has worked hard to offer programs for adults and young people leading to the compilation of images and stories from all immigrant groups of the city. The Girlz Photo Project, for example, encouraged young girls from the Mystic Housing Development to use photography to document the lives of some newer immigrants. The presentation of this work came about after the WP united forces with the Urban Borderlands class of 2007. Together they created a very welcomed exhibition by residents, old and new, presented in the Somerville Theater.

These organizations encourage, and in some cases require, their members to become involved politically and civically. They constantly make calls to action to support immigrant rights, gather workers from different sectors to demand a good work environment, and lobby for affordable housing. My informants helped me observe that Latinos tend to get involved with these organizations because their work inspires trust and reliability to a community heavily burdened by long work hours and limited language skills, which prevents self-sufficiency. At the same time, the immigrant services organizations, the commercial groups and the churches, facilitate an space to develop their potential as members of the community as some of the members become encouraged to be leaders and organizers of their buildings or neighbourhoods. In general, their work combined are essential building blocks for the Latino community.

Analysis

These efforts of the Latino Leaders and the organizations are bearing fruit. The city's Mayor Joseph Curtatone, a second generation Italian-American himself, has sought to improve the poor communication between city hall and immigrants, and to address issues of diversity within city hall itself. In October 2006 the Somerville's Art Council sponsored a festival inaccurately called "From Rio Grande to Canal de Panama; A Central American Celebration" that for the first time publicly celebrated the cultural heritage of the city's Central American and Mexican communities. Also, a collective art exhibit organized by the East Somerville Main Streets during the month of May, 2008 called the Colors of the Americas showcased over 15 artists from Latin America. Furthermore, Curtatone has established a Multicultural Affairs Commission in order to provide a space for the voices of marginalized ethnic groups to enter the city's decision-making process.

Aru Manrique, a Venezuelan immigrant who has lived in Somerville for about twenty years was appointed to Chair the new commission. Manrique is a long time community activist and Latino leader who has worked with several of the city's grass roots agencies, such Community Action Agency of Somerville, the Latino Coalition of Somerville, and the Youth Activities Committee, and is thus familiar with the needs of the city's different ethnic groups. Manrique acknowledged that the Multicultural Affairs Commission (MAC) is not functioning at its best because the city has had trouble filling up all 17 seats intended to accommodate at least one representative of each cultural group. Mr. Manrique eventually left the MAC due to this issue and his frustration with the lack of commitment from both the administrators and the cultural-groups' leaders. Nevertheless, one of the commission's, first efforts was initiating the process of making Somerville the sister city of Yucuaiquin, a small city in the north of El Salvador where most of Somerville's Salvadorians are from. I should note that a former Urban Borderlands student, Sebastian Chaskel,^{xii} uncovered the connection between Somerville and Yuquiaquin. The explicit goals of sister city agreement, which the mayor signed into law on February 23rd, 2007 at a ceremony with the Salvadoran consulate, and the Mayor of Yucuaiquin is to encourage cultural exchanges, but it is also intended to gain Salvadorans' support in the next Mayoral elections, demonstrating the mayor's understanding that he must adjust to the city's changing political landscape.

Confirming Barreto's findings in the Northeast as a whole, the channels employed by Somerville Latinos as they seek to address their community's needs have depended heavily on integrating the Latino community's social capital—long time residents with a deep knowledge of and committed to their community—in non- or semi-governmental agencies rather than directly in the electoral process. Nevertheless, as time went by I realized that what was more interesting than the frustrations with unresponsive local government being articulated by Latinos, or the establishment's critiques of Latinos political disengagement, were the strategies being employed by community members to identify openings in both formal and informal institutions and political processes. In so doing Latinos have contributed to an emerging if imperfect dialogue between community members and city officials that appears to be bridging the longstanding divide between the arena of official electoral politics and the arena of civically engaged organizations.

Granted, not all gestures towards increased democratization and participation are ideologically progressive. Somerville's sister city agreement, are simply practical strategic moves aimed at consolidating political power; after all, local government and its representatives in order to remain in office must attract local community support. The agreement was signed in 2007 and, since, not much has happen; there have been no further celebrations and the anniversary of the agreement was not mentioned too loud. Also, the Salvadorian group who pushed for the agreement dissolved due to internal differences. Much of the happy sentiments between city officials and the Latino immigrant community have tone down with a new wave of gang activity—local authorities believe it comes from the Salvadorian Mara Salvatrucha 13—and the increasing number of I.C.E. raids in East Somerville.

Moreover, it worries me that Latino civic and political participation might be reaching its peak. The goal-achievement strategies of the organizations, Centro Presente and the Welcome Project, have led them to take an increasing financial burden. More staff or programs translate to bigger budgets. In turn, the size of their operational costs has pushed the organizations to focus a lot of their time and human resource to raise funds. This has begun to result in having less informed members and a lot less participation in their events and programs. Furthermore, the current Latino leaders have been very busy dealing with the new wave of negative events—the raids and the youth violence—and others, like Mr. Manrique, simply leave because they are growing frustrated with the status quo. What worries me the most, however, is the lack of investment in the new generations of Latino leaders. Besides Centro Presente, I did not encounter much community or institutional interest in educating and empowering younger Latinos to make a positive difference in their very communities. Action is urgent.

Nevertheless, the leadership exists. Initiatives such as the MAC, Centro Presente in Somerville and Marty Martinez' campaigns demonstrate that within the public policy arena and the civic fabric there are moments of opening and reform generated by local leaders, and that if these opportunities are recognized and seized, they can transform the Latino community's future in Somerville.

Appendix 1: Individuals Interviewed

State Representative, Denise Provost: has lived in Somerville since 1981. She was an Alderman at-Large from 1999 until 2006, when she was elected Representative for District of Middlesex, which covers part of Somerville. She is part of the Board of Trustees for Somerville Community Corporation, a civil organization in pursuit of better and more affordable housing for the city's residents. As an Alderman, Representative Provost supported measures to secure affordable housing and low-skill jobs for the city.

Consuelo Perez: is an active mother, community leader, and citizen. She has been involved in the education of her three daughters since they joined school in Somerville. She has lived in Somerville for over a decade in her own home. She has been the President of the PTA in her daughters' school, organizer of several community initiatives, campaign worker for various candidates, and she participates in most cultural events for the city as volunteer or coordinator.

Nelson Salazar: immigrated to United States in 1980 fleeing from the violent conflicts that erupted in El Salvador, where he is originally from. He lived in Boston for over a year. He moved to Somerville where most of the Latinos he knew lived. Mr. Salazar has invested a lot in his personal development since he arrived in the country. His involvement in the community began in the 1990s with some social services organizations that served mainly immigrants to Somerville. He then became the Executive Director of the Welcome Project, organization dedicated to help all immigrants to Somerville by advocating for their rights. Now he is part of Tufts student body, and he is seeking a Masters degree in Urban and Environmental Planning.

John Long: has been Somerville's City Clerk since 2001. Previously, he worked as the Executive Director of SCM (Somerville, Cambridge & Medford) Community Transportation. Mr. Long has been a member of Somerville's community since 1987. His office is in charge of all record keeping for the city. His office also provides the licenses for businesses and other venues, as it provides help to obtain the permits.

Aru Manrique: was born in 1976 in Venezuela. Mr. Manrique has lived in Somerville since he was twelve years old. He graduated from Boston University and Emerson College. He first started working with the Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS) as the Latino Youth coordinator; he focused in the anti-tobacco campaign, which was very successful. He did this until the Mayor ask him to join him in the newly created Multicultural Affairs Commission during the summer of 2005.

Tito Meza: is a Salvadorian immigrant who came to Massachusetts 35 years ago, in 1972. He considers activism to be a big part of his life. In 1974, Mr. Meza began to work with some community organizations around Boston, but his passion has always been unions. He makes it a priority to look for injustices committed against defenceless workers. Although he works with all kinds of people that need help from all backgrounds, he does give an especial priority to Latino workers and immigrants. He strongly believes that an unorganised group of people is largely susceptible to injustices and exploitation. Mr. Meza does not live in Somerville. He works as the Community Organizer for the Somerville Community Corporation Inc. (SCC) for about three years. Everyone knows him in the community. He is largely involved with the

initiatives to promote and generate affordable housing. He also works in a project that is negotiating with the City's administration to secure many jobs for residents in case of the development of a train stop at Union Square.

Marty Martinez: a first generation Mexican-American through his father and second generation through his mother. He got his Bachelors of Arts in Political Sciences in Nebraska, and his Masters in Urban and Environmental Planning at Tufts. Mr. Martinez took his first political job as the Youth Services for Somerville's City Hall. This motivated him to continue his work as a community organizer and, in the year 2003, decided to run for Alderman for the first time. He did not win then or in his next time in 2005, but he continues with his goal of "One Somerville," where he requests a united and inclusive Somerville for all residents. Now, with a special election for Alderman happening soon, many residents feel it is Mr. Martinez's turn, and the Latino community gets a new chance for better representation in the city.

Ify Mora: is the co-Chair of the Somerville Human Rights Commission, which aims to eliminate unlawful discrimination and to provide education about human rights issues in Somerville, and works with diverse individuals and groups to promote tolerance and mutual respect. Ms. Mora is a Tufts alumna and a MPA candidate at the Kennedy School of Government.

Citation List

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- ^{iv} Interview with Representative Denise Provost, October, 2006.
- ^v Interview with Nelson Salazar, September 2006.
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- ^{vii} Interview with Representative Denise Provost, October, 2006.
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