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## A virtuous nation and its deserving immigrants. How the immigrant rights movement embraced nationalism

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### ABSTRACT

Immigrants, and particularly undocumented immigrants, are often-times seen as disrupting the nation state and destabilizing its boundaries. This paper develops the argument that immigrants can, under certain conditions, actively employ nationalist frames and language to support their rights claims. It presents a two-prong argument to explain for this outcome. First, immigrant rights advocates needed to select a ‘master frame’ that would will resonate with audiences in different regions of the country and counter the anti-immigrant discourses of their adversaries. These constraints favored the selection of a frame that was nationalist enough to make sense to middle-of-the-road Americans and liberal enough to provide ‘deserving immigrants’ a pathway to citizenship. Second, advocates needed to ensure that their frames were delivered with a degree of consistency in different localities across the country. This favored a robust and centralized discursive infrastructure that could exercise dominance over the production and diffusion of core messages. The paper uses a range of sources – including interviews with leaders of immigrant rights associations, organization documents, training materials – support the argument.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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Immigration; activism;  
nationalism; rights

Leading immigrant rights advocates in the United States have often depicted immigrants as people who cherish national values and stand to make enormous contributions to the vitality of the country. They have reimagined the nation as open and cosmopolitan (but still well-bordered) and represented certain undocumented immigrants as deserving of citizenship because of their deep affiliation with the national community. Affiliation, the argument goes, makes immigrants ‘de facto Americans’ or ‘Americans in waiting’ (Carens, 2010; Motomura, 2012). While national leaders have embraced this framing strategy, it has not gone unchallenged. Radical and grassroots activists have rejected nationalism and the notion of the deserving immigrant, and have constructed frames inspired by postnational human rights (Unzueta and Seif, 2014; Seif, 2010; Swerts, 2015). The leading national organizations were well aware of these alternative frames and, in certain instances, quite sympathetic. Nevertheless, they rejected transgressive notions of belonging, rights and citizenship and embraced a frame that centered on the virtuous nation and its deserving immigrants. Why did leading organizations embrace this particular framing when a viable alternative existed?

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This paper suggests that shifting the activism from local fights to a national-scale social movement precipitated two fundamental changes in how rights claims were framed. First, the shift in scale motivated immigrant rights advocates to select a ‘master frame’ that would resonate with audiences in different regions of the country *and* counter the anti-immigrant discourses of their adversaries (Snow, et. al., 1986; Koopmans, Statham, Giugni, & Passy, 2005). These constraints favored the selection of a frame that was nationalist enough to make sense to middle-of-the-road Americans and liberal enough to provide ‘deserving immigrants’ a pathway to citizenship. Second, advocates needed to ensure that frames were delivered with a degree of consistency in different localities across the country. This favored a centralized discursive infrastructure that could exercise control over the production and diffusion of core messages. Thus, shifting to the national scale contributed to the selection of a broadly resonant national frame and the construction of a massive discursive infrastructure that would ensure the dominance of that frame among advocates and activists around the country.

Following the literature review and methods section, the paper examines the consolidation of powerful national advocacy organizations in the 2000s and early 2010s (Gonzales, 2014). The paper then shows how these organizations produced a nationalist frame and diffused it through its countrywide activist networks.

### **Framing immigrant rights claims**

Scholars have argued that a ‘discursive opportunity structure’ imposes constraints on how activists generate frames and make claims in the public sphere (Giugni & Passy, 2004; Koopmans & Statham, 1999; Koopmans et al., 2005). For the case of minority and immigrant rights activists, norms associated with national belonging restricts how they frame their claims. Koopmans and Statham argue that “the nation-state continues to be by far the most important frame of reference for the identities, organizations, and claims of ethnic minorities (Koopmans & Statham, 1999, p. 688–689). Giugni and Passy add that immigrant mobilizations are constrained ‘by the shared (cultural) understandings and collective definition of the groups involved and of the ways in which the members of those groups should be included in or excluded from the larger community – in this case, the national state’ (Giugni & Passy, 2004, p. 52–53).

Liberal nationalism is a particular ‘master frame’ that allows immigrant rights advocates to adhere to core national principles while also advocating for a more inclusive political community (Abizadeh, 2004; Benhabib, 2004; Bosniak, 2006; Damien, 2001; Tamir, 1993). It maintains that a well-bordered nation with a strong national identity remains a precondition of a rights-granting citizenship regime, but that such a nation should provide an opening for those who merit membership (Damien, 2001; Motomura, 2012; Song, 2009). A ‘moral economy of deservingness’ (Chauvin & Garcés-Masareñas, 2012, p. 242) deems that culturally assimilated, well-embedded, and economically productive undocumented immigrants are entitled to national membership (Carens, 2010; Motomura, 2012; Yukich, 2013). Motomura notes that ‘contributions to American society, especially if substantial, can offset prior acts even if those acts are viewed as clear violations’ (Motomura, 2012, p. 377). Liberal nationalism therefore provides an opening to well affiliated and contributing immigrants, but it also recognizes that borders need to exclude less affiliated and less contributing immigrants from the country.

Though the discursive opportunity structure facing immigrants may favor nationalist frames (albeit liberal rather than ethnonational), it does not preclude frame disputes between ideological factions (Benford, 1993; Benford & Snow, 2000). The literature on immigrant rights activism has shown that important factions have employed postnational and human rights frames (Carrasco et al., 2014; Lauby, 2016; Patler, 2017; Seif, 2010; Swerts, 2015). Postnationalism rejects national affiliation as a condition of rights and the nation state's monopoly over citizenship (Abizadeh, 2004; Damien, 2001; Soysal, 1994, 1997). Soysal explains that 'solidarities are shaped beyond national boundaries; and the referent is no longer exclusively the national citizen, but increasingly an abstract individual entitled to claim the collective and bring it back to the public sphere as her "natural" right' (Soysal, 1997, p. 511). The immigrant rights movement has an influential radical faction – reflected in campaigns like Not One More and Abolish ICE – that 'challenges the boundaries of citizenship and insist on human rights' (Seif, 2010, p. 445).

The concept of discursive opportunity structure, as articulated by Koopmans and his colleagues, suggests that nationalist norms and culture induce activists to employ nationalist frames. However, the literature on immigrant rights activism reveals that the framing process is riven by disputes and is by no means a mechanical response to a discursive structure. The next section identifies the mechanisms responsible for selecting nationalist frames over postnational alternatives and for making these frames dominant in the social movement.

### **Framing immigrants' rights through a nationalist lens**

Entering the national political field precipitated two shifts in framing strategies. First, leading advocates selected liberal nationalism because they wanted to achieve resonance with a broad audience and counter the negative portrayals of anti-immigrant adversaries. Second, the need to maintain consistency across the country resulted in the creation of a discursive infrastructure. This infrastructure helped make liberal nationalism into the dominant frame of the immigrant rights movement.

### **Selecting a nationalist frame**

Social movement organizations, including those involved in the immigrant rights movement, select frames that they believe will connect with the beliefs, values, and cultural dispositions of target audiences (Bloemraad & Trost, 2011; Bloemraad, Silva, & Voss, 2016; Patler & Gonzales, 2015; Snow et al., 1986, p. 469). Resonance, according to Robert Benford and David Snow, depends on 'how essential the beliefs, values, and ideas associated with movement frames are to the lives of the targets of mobilization' (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 621). The 'beliefs, values, and ideas' of target audiences vary by region (e.g. Los Angeles versus Atlanta suburbs), geographic scale (e.g. neighborhood, state, nation), and ideological affiliations (e.g. left, moderate, right). Some left-wing activists may seek to energize and recruit other activists in progressive cities, while others may wish to change the 'hearts and minds' of middle-of-the-road Americans across the entire country. The same frame will not resonate with these different audiences. Frame selection, consequently, depends on the specific audience that a campaign is targeting.

For organizations targeting middle-of-the-road Americans, nationalist language is more likely to resonate because nationalism remains an essential category for evaluating immigration, rights, and citizenship. Nationalism, according to Norbert Elias, forms ‘an integral part of the we-images and the we-ideals of most of the individuals . . . This, in short, is one of the many instances of correspondence between specific types of social structure and specific types of personality structure’ (Elias, 1996, p. 152). Viewed from this perspective, the nation is part of a person’s feelings, thoughts, and actions. It is, according to Berezin, ‘constituted as moral ontologies, collectively defined ways of being in the world, as well as political categories’ (Berezin, 2009, p. 46). Given the stranglehold of the nation over the political culture of average Americans, framing the rights of immigrants through national norms generates greater resonance than a frame (postnationalism, for instance) that rejects the nation state.

Countering the frames of anti-immigrant adversaries reinforces the selection of liberal nationalism (Benford, 1993; Benford & Snow, 2000; Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996). Anti-immigrant forces argue that undocumented immigrants are polluting agents (for example, rapists, murders, cultural inferiors, and usurpers) who violate the nation. This framing aims to disqualify undocumented immigrants as possible Americans (Chavez, 2008; Ngai, 2004). Pro-immigrant advocates counter these disqualifying frames by inverting them. If anti-immigrant forces disqualify immigrants because of their cultural otherness and supposed freeloading, pro-immigrant advocates represent immigrants as culturally assimilated and hardworking contributors. If anti-immigrant adversaries disqualify pro-immigrant advocates by calling them ‘no border radicals’, pro-immigrant advocates respond by stressing their patriotism and commitment to the bordered nation state. Movement-counter-movement dynamics, consequently, reinforce the discursive constraints of nationalism.

Thus, targeting a broad national audience favors the selection of liberal nationalism while movement-counter-movement dynamics lock advocates into this frame.

### ***Discursive infrastructure***

Whereas national resonance and counterframing favored nationalist language, a discursive infrastructure helped make nationalism the dominant language to talk about rights, citizenship, and belonging.

Advocates targeting a broad audience need to ensure that a frame is delivered with consistency and discipline by the many activists making up the campaign. Benford and Snow note that ‘a frame’s consistency refers to the congruency between the SMO’s articulated beliefs, claims, and actions’ (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 629). The absence of consistency results in a cacophony of utterances, which obscures the impact of a well-developed message (Benford, 1993; Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow et al., 1986).

Achieving consistency is a challenge for a countrywide movement made up of many activists and organizations. It requires a discursive infrastructure to ensure that a central message is articulated and disseminated by different actors in different localities in a similar way. The growing importance of communication in social movements has contributed to the expansion of sophisticated communication operations that employ professionals and consultants (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Walker, 2014). Communication specialists craft discourses to represent an issue and develop methods to ensure that discourses are used in

a consistent fashion. They produce messaging, talking points, scripts, and narratives, on the one hand, and devise training materials and workshops to ensure that messaging is employed in a consistent way, on the other hand. The need to ensure consistency therefore encourages leading organizations to construct a discursive infrastructure comprised of methods to manufacture language, circulate it to movement members, and train members in its proper use. While all countrywide social movements are confronted with the issue of frame consistency and try to assert some control over messaging, only those with sufficient financial resources, like the leading organizations of the immigrant rights movement, can invest in sophisticated discursive infrastructure. Investing in such an infrastructure allows for one frame to achieve dominance in a social movement.

In sum, not all advocates respond uniformly to a discursive opportunity structure. Responses can vary according to the target audience and the ideological preferences of advocates and activists. This paper maintains that when advocates target a broad, countrywide audience, nationalism is more salient. Pro-immigrant advocates needed to create a message that could resonate with a broad, mainstream, and thoroughly American audience. This favored a master frame that was nationalist enough to speak to American sensibilities but liberal enough to provide sufficiently deserving immigrants a pathway to citizenship. Pro-immigrant advocates also needed to counter adversaries who sought to disqualify undocumented immigrants from national membership. The constant effort to invert disqualifying stigma locked proimmigrant forces into the use of liberal nationalism. Lastly, the need to generate a consistent message required an infrastructure to produce a common message and to train grassroots activists in the use of the movement's language.

## Methods

The paper uses various sources of data. We selected the 2000–2014 period because it is a period that marks the movement's transition from scattered and mostly localized mobilizations into a national social movement consisting of a common infrastructure, leaders, strategies and discourses. This study primarily focuses on the discursive strategies and practices of the leading organizations of the movement. Because the leadership had inordinate power within this field, their strategies had a disproportionate influence over the whole movement. Whether or not a particular organization subscribed to a framing strategy, they had to contend with it because they were embedded in a field where the discourse dominated.

First, for this particular study, the first author performed 26 interviews with executive directors and organizers of immigrant rights organizations. We selected the respondents on the basis of their national-level prominence and grassroots activism. While we cover a range of organizations (local to national), this is not a representative sample of the whole immigrant rights movement because many smaller organizations were not included. Each interview was between one to two hours. The semi-structured interviews covered several thematic areas including an overview of an organization's activities, changing goals and strategies, alliances, and the discourses employed to frame their claims. Only those interviews cited are included in the reference section of the paper.

Second, we compiled a database using eighty-four Open Society Foundation and Institute project documents – memoranda, reports, notes – procured through DC Leaks.

The paper refers to all such documents simply as Open Society. Open Society worked in close coordination with lead organizations to craft the core strategy and messaging. Documents provide important behind-the-scenes insights into important issues concerning the framing of rights claims. The documents span from 2008 to 2016. The first author and his research assistant extracted 1,382 statements from these documents that directly addressed the issue of immigration. These statements were coded for frames, strategic preferences, partnerships with foundations and organizations, and various other discussion topics. The paper employs established rules of the mainstream press concerning documents obtained through Wikileaks and similar sources. We have ensured that compromising information is not used.

Third, to address the formation of a national social-movement infrastructure, we collected documents associated with the major national coalitions during the 2000s and 2010s. The Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM), Reform Immigration for America (RIFA), and the Alliance for Citizenship (A4C) are three national coalitions that have played a central role in nationalizing the immigrant rights movement. Using web archives of coalitions and organizations, Foundation Center data, and Google searches, we obtained documents on these coalitions and their activities. A database contains information on the leading organizations, leading persons, projects, events, and finances of FIRM, RIFA and A4C. We were able to compile twenty-two documents from the web searches. These documents helped provide information about the basic features of the social-movement infrastructure.

## **The immigrant rights movement**

The immigrant rights movement was not a countrywide movement before the turn of the century. In the 1990s, different immigrant organizations in different localities of the country engaged in struggles for rights and recognition (Nicholls, Uitermark, & Sander van, 2016). Some organizations connected to one another through personal and professional ties but most worked alone on local and state-level issues. There was little coordination, no cohesive identity, and no common discourse to express their rights claims.

The immigrant rights movement began to form into a national social movement in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Gonzales, 2014; Nicholls, 2013; Zepeda Millan 2017). The move into the national political arena was largely spurred by the proliferation of restrictive federal laws and policies in that decade (Meissner, Kerwin, Chishti, & Bergeron, 2013). In 1997, the Center for Community Change (CCC) invited large local immigrant rights organizations to participate in a new coalition, National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support (NCJIS), to fight against the recently enacted welfare reform law, Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). Within this broader coalition, the immigrant rights organizations formed the Immigrant Organizing Committee.

By the end of the welfare campaign, the immigrant rights organizations petitioned CCC to invest more resources in the fight for federal immigration reform. In 2003, they worked with CCC to create the Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM), which was the first long-term national immigrant rights coalition in the country. By 2005 and 2006, CCC, FIRM, and a number of prominent advocacy organizations (National Immigration Forum, National Council of la Raza, America's Voice, Center for American Progress, among others) formed a new coalition to fight against the highly restrictive House bill in 2005 ("Border Protection, Anti-terrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act) and fight for the

Senate's Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act in 2006 and 2007 (Gonzales, 2014; Zepeda Millan, 2017). While the coalition took on different names (Coalition for Comprehensive Immigration Reform; Reform Immigration for America [RIFA], Alliance for Citizenship [A4C]), the principal organizations largely stayed the same (Gonzales, 2014; Nicholls et al., 2016).

The leading organizations, mostly located in Washington D.C., would go on to invest millions of dollars in developing an infrastructure to advance the goal of passing comprehensive immigration reform in 2006, 2007, 2010 and 2013. While they did not achieve their goal, they worked assiduously to change the 'hearts and minds' of Americans concerning the virtues of the nation and the deservingness of undocumented immigrants.

### Selecting a nationalist frame

The movement's entry into the national political arena in the 2000s required it to reach a much broader and, in many instances, more conservative audience. Winning support from this audience prompted leading advocates to select language that would resonate with national norms. The Opportunity Agenda – a project closely aligned with the national leadership – issued a messaging memorandum in 2011 titled 'Real Solutions, American Values: A Winning Narrative on Immigration.' It stated,

Over the past three years, pro-immigration advocates and communications experts have developed and pushed out a pro-immigrant narrative designed to move hearts, minds, and policy. With the president revisiting comprehensive immigration reform, it is crucial that we continue this drumbeat so that our echo chamber of values and solutions that work for all of us reverberates in the national conversation (Opportunity Agenda 2011).

An earlier memorandum from Open Society reported that 'the goal of the new campaign is to turn the tide of public debate and to develop policy solutions for broad immigration reform rooted in the American values of earned citizenship, the rule of law, and the promise of the American Dream' (Open Society, 2008). The leadership believed that 'the tide of public debate' could be turned by making a direct link to national values and emphasizing 'earned citizenship.'

The Open Society memo went on to outline the messaging themes for the upcoming 2009–2010 campaign. It asked 'Who we are as a country?' and answered with another question: 'Will we be defined by our ideals and the promise of the American Dream for all, or by the fear, intolerance, and the extremism of those pushing mass deportation?' (Open Society, 2008). It then asked 'Who we are as immigrants?' and went on to answer that, 'Immigrants are workers, families, taxpayers, citizens, soldiers, people of faith, Americans in all but paperwork' (Open Society, 2008.). Lastly, the document stressed how the legalization of undocumented immigrant would benefit the nation, including 'American workers, local communities, immigrant families, local economies, and the rule of law' (ibid.). The memorandum reinvented America as fair, tolerant, and welcoming of affiliated and contributing immigrants ('Americans in all but paperwork'). There were no criticisms of national citizenship's exclusionary and racist underpinnings (FitzGerald, David and Cook-Martín, 2014). Instead, the leaders refashioned the nation into a central pillar of a liberal, multi-cultural citizenry.

Advocates stressed the economic contribution of immigrants to the country (Gleeson, 2015). ‘Reflected throughout this work,’ another Open Society report noted, ‘is an attempt to connect equal opportunity concerns across issues and constituencies and to demonstrate how integrating immigrants into the mainstream of society will lift all boats’ (Open Society 2009a). The economic contribution frame grew increasingly important over the movement’s history. Coalition documents from 2007 stressed ‘hardworking’ immigrants but discussed their economic contributions in vague terms (Fair Immigration Reform Movement 2007). Later documents maintained that legalization and naturalization would ‘generate \$1.5 trillion in cumulative GDP over 10 years’ (Alliance for Citizenship 2013). Immigrants had been reframed as the savior of the American Dream.

Moral and economic rationales combined to create a single powerful argument for immigrant deservingness. The Alliance for Citizenship wrote that ‘a reform package that includes a path to citizenship makes economic sense and is true to our ideals as a nation’ (Alliance for Citizenship 2013). The cultural attributes of immigrants and their contributions to the economic vitality of the country made them deserving of membership. Citizenship needed to be earned by displaying the qualities that made a person a *de facto* American. One document described the goals of the RIFA campaign as follows: ‘The goal of the new campaign is to turn the tide of public debate and to develop policy solutions for broad immigration reform rooted in the *American values of earned citizenship*, the rule of law, and the promise of the American Dream’ (emphasis added) (Open Society, 2009a).

Overly restrictive policies were said to stand in conflict with the country’s core principles. A memo from Opportunity Agenda stated, ‘Harsh policies that force people into the shadows are not consistent with our values. Some anti-immigrant forces want to ban undocumented immigrant families from renting apartments or sending their kids to school. These kinds of policies are unworkable and are not consistent with our values’ (Opportunity Agenda 2011). During the 2013 battle for immigration reform, the executive director of the Florida Immigrant Coalition, a close ally of the national leadership, argued that, ‘To codify a person who lives in this country but will never have an opportunity for citizenship creates a second class. It seems completely un-American’ (Preston, 2013). National values had become the metric to evaluate the morality of the country’s immigration policies.

Leading organizations also felt compelled to counter the stigmatizing discourses of their anti-immigrant adversaries. The leaders believed that their failure to secure immigration reform legislation in 2007 was due to their inability to counter negative frames. Deepak Bhargava, the former-executive director of the Center for Community Change, noted that a big problem for the movement ‘was its inability to match the nativist forces toe to toe. In 2007, that is unquestionably what cost us the bill’ (Deepak Bhargava, Center for Community Change, personal interview). An Open Society report on that year’s battle made a similar point, noting that ‘proponents fought mainly a policy battle while the opposition mounted a political and cultural fight. Anti-immigrant forces garnered greater media attention, which succeeded in intimidating lawmakers on both sides of the aisle’ (Open Society 2012). Leading advocates drew a clear lesson from 2007: the fight for immigrant rights had to be fought on cultural terms. For decades, anti-immigrant groups argued that immigrants were a threat (Chavez, 2008). These negative attributes made immigrants ineligible for legal membership in the nation. Leaders of the immigrant rights movement countered by depicting immigrants as deeply integrated in the country. They possessed an extraordinary work ethic and had the same family values as ‘normal’

Americans. Their assimilation, economic utility, and family values were held up as attributes that made them deserving of citizenship (and therefore rights) in the United States.

In sum, leading advocates believed that to win the hearts and minds of their target audience, they needed to employ a liberal national frame and to counter their adversaries by inverting anti-immigrant arguments. Rather than being a threat to all things American, immigrants were praised for being the realization of the American Dream.

### **Discursive infrastructure**

The leadership developed a discursive infrastructure that would ensure liberalism's dominance in the movement. The infrastructure consisted of a centralized apparatus to produce the central frame and organizations to diffuse the frame to activists across the country.

### **Producing the frame**

The leadership invested enormous resources in producing the movement's message. Frank Sharry, the director of the National Immigration Forum before going on to America's Voice, assumed a leading role in devising the communication strategy. His organization performed surveys, polls, and focus groups to identify the political predilections of the national public. 'In the middle of the 2000's, the National Immigration Forum probably had done most of the messaging research,' according to Rich Stolz, then-director of RIFA (Rich Stolz, Reform Immigration for America, personal interview). America's Voice also worked with several organizations to assess the impacts of messages on different demographics. 'To evaluate the impact of the economic crisis on the immigration debate,' one document reported, 'polling and focus groups are underway by numerous organizations, including America's Voice, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, and Opportunity Agenda' (Open Society 2009c). By mapping out the norms and discursive preferences of the public, Mr. Sharry and his colleagues developed a series of messages and talking points that resonated with the public, media, and national politicians.

Liberal think tanks played an important role because they generated empirical proof and verification for core claims about immigrant deservingness. Open Society, for instance, funded a number of organizations to generate such reports, including the Economic Policy Institute, the Migration Policy Institute, and the American Immigration Law Foundation's Immigration Policy Center. A 2009 Open Society document stated, 'Access to original research on the impact of immigration on the economy, and the economic benefits of legalization, is critical to the campaign's efforts to counter the growing influence of the oft-cited anti-immigration researchers' (Open Society 2009b). This research was viewed as part of the movement's efforts to counter the stigmatizing frames of adversaries. The document went on to provide a detailed outline of the specific contributions by immigrants to the national economy:

With OSI support, MPI [Migration Policy Institute] will produce detailed policy recommendations on how the United States should rethink its immigration policy in the context of the current economic turmoil and future long-term trends, taking into account growing income inequality, concerns about US competitiveness, uncertain demand for migrants at all skill levels, and demographic and technological changes (Open Society 2009b).

Think tanks like Migration Policy Institute were funded by the same foundations that funded the leading movement organizations. They were seen by funders and organizations alike as vehicles for producing supportive yet objective facts.

### *Diffusing the frame*

The movement's leadership created an infrastructure to control the diffusion of the master frame. The infrastructure would make it possible to diffuse talking points and train activists to use them in a consistent way.

As noted earlier, well-endowed and politically connected national organizations (mostly headquartered in Washington D.C.) worked with local immigrant organizations to form a string of new coalitions (FIRM, RIFA, A4C). The coalitions fashioned new instruments (organizations, communication networks, trainings and workshops) to transmit frames about rights, immigration reform, and citizenship from the centers of power (Washington D.C.) to immigrant communities around the country. The former director of Reform Immigration for America (RIFA) remembers the importance of message discipline. 'By the time we launched Reform Immigration for America [2009–2010] that campaign became the infrastructure to basically distribute that messaging across all the different organizations that were participating. There was a fair amount of message discipline across the campaign' (Rich Stolz, Reform Immigration for America, personal interview). The director of a prominent local organization reiterated the importance of the infrastructure:

For us, it was very important that we can move as many people as we can with the same message, as many people as we can all around the nation, communicating comprehensive immigration reform, communicating citizenship for all, communicating the contributions of our families and our community in the economy, in the culture, in the social fabric of this nation (Gustavo Torres, CASA Maryland, personal interview).

With thousands of different actors communicating the same message in the same way, the leadership hoped that the central message would reverberate loudly in the public sphere.

CCC modeled its trainings and workshops on a program developed by Marshall Ganz. Ganz was a veteran community organizer, an architect of the grassroots strategy for Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, and a senior lecturer at Harvard University. He was hired as a consultant for the immigrant rights movement. One Open Society document recommended funding Mr. Ganz and his associates:

We recommend providing resources to these organizers and other innovators to develop a series of workshops for our grantees, especially organizations well-placed to expand public participation in policy reform efforts. We could target this training in regions where we are already funding significant clusters of advocates to ensure that their work has maximum impact at the state and federal levels (Open Society, 2009d).

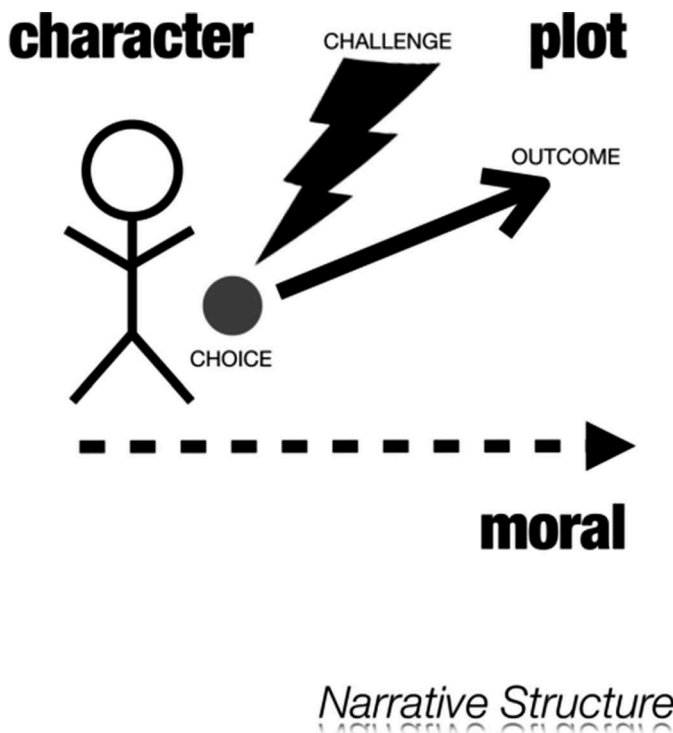
Ganz and movement leaders believed that the most effective struggles were value-based campaigns rather than issue-based ones (Ganz, 2009, p. 7). Whereas issue-based campaigns reinforced 'silos' between groups, value-based campaigns enabled people to reach across boundaries by tapping into common morals and norms. Stories were, for Ganz, the most effective vehicle to deliver value claims to the public.

Because values are experienced – and communicated – emotionally, they are the source of the moral energy – courage, hope, and solidarity – that it takes to risk learning new things, exploring new ways. And because values that inspire action are communicated as narrative, each person can learn to inspire others by learning to tell their own story, a story of the experience they share with others, and a story of an urgent challenge that demands action – a public narrative (ibid.)

The public narrative, Ganz went on to argue, ‘can help us link our own calling to that of our community to a call to action now – a story of self, a story of us, and a story of now’ (ibid.). Finally, he stated that ‘as a practice, it [the public narrative] can be structured, learned, and shared’ (ibid.).

Stories became the preferred vehicle to communicate the shared values of undocumented immigrants with the American public (Enriquez & Saguy, 2016; Fernandes, 2017; Nicholls, 2013; Patler & Gonzales, 2015; Swerts, 2015; Terriquez, 2015). One training manual explained, ‘Stories draw on our emotions and show our values in action, helping us feel what matters, rather than just thinking about or telling others what matters. Because stories allow us to express our values not as abstract principles, but as lived experience, they have the power to move others’ (Dream Team Los Angeles 2010, 16; emphasis in original).

Activists participated in training sessions where they would learn the importance of storytelling, receive instructions on how to construct emotionally compelling stories, engage in small-group exercises to stories that were consistent the movement’s messaging, and participate in large group reflections to analyze strength of their own stories (see Figure 1). Training workshops provided nearly identical methods to ensure alignment between the



**Figure 1.** Visual representation of a narrative used in training.

Source, *Dream Team Los Angeles Document*, 2010

members of the movement. The following five elements are outlined in a Center for Community Change document (Center for Community Change Document, 2011): 1) Creating Shared Story: This method consisted of harnessing the emotional content of stories and aligning them with the public narrative and message of the campaign; 2) Creating Shared Relational Commitment: This consisted of creating strong associations between campaign participants to ‘recast our individual interests as common interests’; 3) Creating a Shared Structure: This method consisted of creating clear divisions of labor and organizational supports to help structure and solidify strong leadership teams; 4) Creating a Shared Strategy: This method aimed to generate ‘a clear strategic objective, a way to turn those values into action and to unleash creative deliberation’; and 5) Creating Shared Measurable Action: This method consisted of generating common and consistent metrics to measure whether specific actions are contributing to the general efforts of the struggle.

Training manuals stressed that discipline and unity were necessary for achieving campaign goals. The table below (see Figure 2) was used in a training manual to illustrate that unity results in organizations that were singular in mind and purpose whereas the absence of unity results in organizational drift, passivity, confusion, reactivity, and inaction. Workshop trainings employed identical exercises and activities in different contexts, ensuring alignment within and between local and regional activist hubs. This infrastructure was designed to rationalize and discipline the language of the movement. Newly recruited activists could expect to enter coalition-sponsored trainings in whichever part of the country and encounter the same methods, exercises, activities, language, discourse, strategic preferences, and leadership norms.

To ensure alignment and consistency, the movement’s leadership developed a top-down and centralized training model. Master Trainers worked for the large professional organizations such as CCC (New Organizing Institute 2011, p. 4). They trained Lead Trainers from organizations around the country who would then organize regional trainings and workshops. They were also expected to reach out and recruit people in their immediate communities. The Lead Trainers would then train all new recruits to become Lead Trainers in their own right, and these new trainers would subsequently organize their own training sessions. The process of building a grassroots base involved

DISORGANIZATION	INTERDEPENDENT LEADERSHIP CREATES	ORGANIZATION
Drift	Shared Story	Purpose
Passive	Shared Relational Commitment	Participation
Confused	Shared Structure	Understanding
Reactive	Shared Strategy	Initiative
Inaction	Shared Measurable Action	Change

Figure 2. Center for community change explaining ‘the advantage of unity’.

Source: Center for Community Change document, 2011

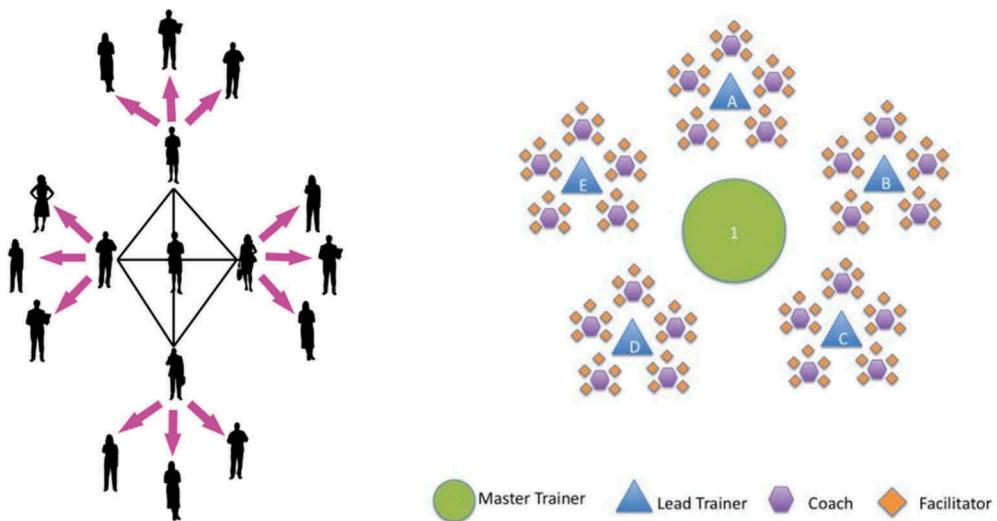
training participants in how to be leaders and to extend the movement's reach from the center to small communities around the country:

An organizer's job is to reach out and find leaders in your community who can help you recruit and coordinate others. These leaders will be the backbone of your local campaign. You must be able to trust them to delegate responsibility to other dedicated, reliable people, and to follow through on commitments. You may be the leader in the middle, or part of a leadership team in the middle, guiding volunteer efforts and being held accountable for outcomes, but you will be deeply reliant on your relationships with others for success (Center for Community Change 2011, p. 14)

Local organizing teams replicated the divisions of labor found in national coalitions in order to avoid 'duplicating and running into each other' (New Organizing Institute 2011, p. 24) The training model was referred to as a snowflake (see Figure 3) approach because it was mimetic, creating grassroots teams across the country with the same structures and functions. These teams were then tied to one another through the Master Trainer, a person employed by a leading national organization.

The leadership invested in hundreds of meetings, summits, and trainings between 2006 and 2014 to ensure message discipline. These provided the leadership with direct connections to local organizations. They were designed to connect activists to one another, strengthen bonds, and set the agenda and strategic priorities of locals in ways that were consistent with the visions of the national leadership. Leading organizations and funders invested heavily in training local activists and advocates to speak and perform in accordance with the established liberal national discourses.

The movement's leadership partnered with regional organizations, most of which were FIRM members, to sponsor training events and workshops. Regional partners reached down to connect to their own grassroots allies. According to the director of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR), his organization served



**Figure 3.** Snowflake approach diagrams.

Source: Center for Community Change (2011, p. 14)

as the local representative of the national movement. 'In Illinois, we were the only FIRM organization. Still are, so our member organizations and allies in the faith community and labor community basically defer to us on what was the strategy' (Lawrence Benito, Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, personal interview). ICIRR and other regional organizations served as local relays of the national movement, disseminating centrally produced discourses to activist communities around the country. Reporting on its Democracy Boot Camp held in 2008 (cosponsored by FIRM and ICIRR), ICIRR recounted that it had

trained 63 people from 16 states, representing 43 different immigrant rights organizations. A total of 45 of the participants were Latino (67 percent); 6 were white; 3 were Korean; 3 were Arab/Muslim; and 1 each were African American, Chinese American and Filipino (3 unknown) (Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights 2008).

ICIRR assumed a lead role in organizing the event, but CCC ran many, if not most, of the actual training sessions. Nine of the ten workshops and sessions held on the first day were organized or co-organized by CCC staff members. Regional organizations held other training events in localities across the country. CASA Maryland, for instance, worked with CCC to reach out to local organizations in the DC area. Its director remembered that 'we trained in the Washington, DC area. That was like 40 various small nonprofit organizations. Our role was to make sure that they work with us pretty much with the same message' (Gustavo Torres, CASA Maryland, personal interview).

The proliferation of local organizing teams was designed to have a 'cascading' effect in targeted regions. Marshall Ganz and Emily Lin described how the process unfolded in Florida.

In this first workshop, the presentation, facilitation, and coaching were provided by experienced trainers, most of whom were former students. Three weeks later, the fifteen Florida trainees had applied their learning to organize another three-day workshop of 175 young people who, deployed as thirty-six leadership teams, organized fourteen actions across Florida in which 1350 people participated to launch the campaign . . . Encouraged by this success, a second "train the trainers" workshop was held in Washington, D.C., in November, attended by one hundred young people from five more states: North Carolina, California, Nevada, New York, and Ohio (Ganz & Lin, 2011.).

Each designated leader served as another extension point of the national network. The model provided national leaders with a method to achieve a high level of cohesion and control over the language and conduct of geographically dispersed activists. It enabled thousands of activists and advocates to speak with one centrally produced and managed voice.

Thus, the strong belief in generating a unified and disciplined voice, underpinned by a common story, resulted in a vertically integrated and rationalized organizational structure that enabled the center (that is, the leaders of the national coalitions) to steer activities, words, and even emotions in countless localities across the country. With thousands of different actors communicating the same message in the same way, the leadership hoped to create an echo chamber in which their central message would reverberate loudly in the public sphere.

Trainings and associated workshops were labor intensive and involved heavy socialization of trainees in the discourses and norms of the movement. Unity enabled national

leaders to mold activists' speech, feelings, and performances. New activists, from Florida to California, underwent a similar process of political socialization, resulting in a unitary political subjectivity that transcended the radically diverse backgrounds of the immigrant community. Thus, this infrastructure contributed to liberal nationalism's dominance within this social movement.

## Conclusion and discussion

Adopting a liberal nationalist frame was not an automatic response to a discursive opportunity structure. Immigrant rights advocates faced a complex political puzzle because they demanded the legal incorporation of undocumented immigrants into a nation that was hostile to foreigners. To change the hearts and minds of Americans, leading organizations crafted a master frame that emphasized the openness of the country and the deservingness of immigrants. To counter anti-immigrant adversaries, advocates inverted each disqualifying stigma into a qualifying virtue. Movement-counter-movement dynamics, in other words, tightened the movement's embrace of nationalist language. The erection of a discursive infrastructure provided the frame with durability and dominance in the social movement. Through countless workshops and trainings, activists across the country were socialized in this language, relaying it in every public utterance, protest, and performance.

This social movement became a massive, multimillion-dollar effort to alter the scope and the boundaries of the nation state. While leaders stayed very much within accepted understandings of the nation (bounded, exclusionary, culturally homogenous), they revised the idea of the nation to make it more open to undocumented immigrants. It must be stressed that this nationalizing strategy was not only used by immigrant rights organizations. It shaped the interventions of national political leaders advocating for immigration reform. In his farewell speech on 10 January 2017, President Obama argued that, 'the stereotypes about immigrants today were said, almost word for word, about the Irish, and Italians, and Poles, who it was said were going to destroy the fundamental character of America. And as it turned out, America wasn't weakened by the presence of these newcomers; these newcomers embraced this nation's creed, and this nation was strengthened' (Obama, cited in CNN, 2017).

The leadership assumed that the rights of immigrants would be recognized once they had gained membership in the national community. This required them to identify the attributes (shared culture, utilitarian contributions) that made immigrants deserving of membership and rights. Such a discursive strategy by necessity sets up a distinction between deserving and undeserving immigrants, with those people possessing these attributes deemed eligible for membership and those without them targeted for deportation. Early on undocumented youth activists, largely trained by the national coalitions, argued that 'We are Dreamers, Not Criminals.' By stressing the contrast between deserving Dreamers and undeserving criminals, they effectively reinforced the bright line between immigrants. The rhetorical tactic of juxtaposing deserving/undeserving was also taken up by elected officials. President Obama's mass deportation campaign was framed as targeting 'criminals' and not 'families'. President Trump has further amplified these distinctions by emphasizing that DACA recipients are, or at least some of them, 'great kids' while other immigrants pose an existential threat to the United States. Thus, the framing strategy of the immigrant rights

movement expanded the boundaries of the nation while reinforcing its exclusionary nature. This was, according to much of the leadership, an unfortunate consequence of doing politics within the confines of the nation state.

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