



# Arvin, California: Dust Bowl, Bajio, Sierra Mixteca To San Joaquin Valley

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*Transformation of Rural American Communities  
and Implications for Immigration Policy Reform*

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# Our Pluralism Project Research on Rural Community Transformation

- With support from USDA/CSREES we conducted case studies of 6 rural communities in the U.S. and how immigration is transforming them. Field research took place 2001–2003. The final report—an overview and individual community monographs—was prepared in September, 2006.
- We knew from the outset that standard datasets do not have adequate resolution or adequately reliable data to answer crucial questions and that understanding the micro-dynamics of immigration, settlement, and processes of civic integration and community response to change could contribute to improved immigrant social policy and practice.
- We interviewed local residents, community leaders, service providers, small immigrant entrepreneurs to provide a better understanding of issues related to immigrant social/civic integration and develop recommendations for effective local initiatives
- It became clear that two axes are needed for visualizing diversity between migrant-receiving communities and understanding the social/civic dynamics within them : “vertical” (temporal) and “horizontal” (cross-sectional)

# How the New Pluralism Research Can Inform Comprehensive Immigration Reform

- 19 new settlement states (all of them rural) experienced an average 159% growth in immigrant population from 1990–2000; another 3 rural states fell into the 90–100% growth range. The social landscape of rural America has changed; immigration reform will profoundly affect the rural US —it would help to really understand exactly how.
- Our research provides crucial insights for analyzing “the pathway to citizenship”—the initial “yield of” provisionally legalized immigrants, the transition to permanent residency, access to citizenship, and resulting changes in community life.
- Our current analyses yield insights into processes of change at the individual, family, and community-level challenges in immigrant social/civic integration, and examples of effective local initiatives to address them. More research is needed to fully understand the multi-generational dynamics of family life, immigrants’ labor market trajectories, political perspectives, and entrepreneurship.
- The New Pluralism survey data supports analyses and insights to counter speculative assumptions about immigrants’ post-reform occupational trajectories, and use of social, health, and education services.
- Our work highlights the need for immigrant social/civic integration strategies which respond to differences between communities and provides a planning framework—for New American Integration Councils (Senate Bill), for “State Impact” grants (STRIVE).

# About Arvin

- A town built by availability of low-cost water and field labor, a compact town of 11,000 at the southern end of the San Joaquin Valley, made famous via Walter Goldschmidt's 1946 book *As You Sow...*
- In Kern County, with slightly more than \$2 billion in agricultural production, one of the top 3 labor-intensive production US counties.
- Part of a cluster of communities southeast of Bakersfield which also includes Lamont (part of the Arvin High School District) and Weedpatch, hometown of famous California agribusiness- DiGiorgio Farms, a boom town as its labor-intensive production skyrocketed from the 1920's through the 1950's.
- Part of the fictional landscape for John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* and linked to Sunset Camp (Arvin Federal Camp), later actual area of intense UFW struggle with DiGiorgio.
- In the words of a middle-aged Mexican farmworker, resident of Arvin for 30 years, "Este pueblo como dicen en Mexico, ni es muy muy, ni tan tan" (...not very very [good] nor very very [bad])"

# Dimensions of Diversity Within and Between Communities with Concentrations of Immigrants

- Arvin is a paradigm case of a community with a long history of migration set in a labor-intensive agricultural production area. I
- In the overall New Pluralism study we compare and contrast it with communities with shorter histories of migration (Woodburn, Oregon and Marshalltown, Iowa). Its profile is summarized here in 6 “snapshots” and, subsequently, with a quick review of community history.
  - Snapshot 1–Origin and legal status of Arvin residents
  - Snapshot 2–Migration network affiliation
  - Snapshot 3–Length of residence in community
  - Snapshot 4–Family configuration and living conditions
  - Snapshot 5–Occupation/earnings
  - Snapshot 6–Education and language

# Arvin Snapshot #1:

## Community Residents' Origin and Legal Status

Origin and Immigration Status of Arvin Heads of Households, Overall Population, and Minors: 2003			
Citizenship/ Immigration Status	% of HH Heads (N=160)	% of All Persons in HHs (N=673)	% of Minors 0-18 years of age (N=287)
U.S.-Born	18%	33%	68%
US-born—non-immigrant family	9%	7%	4%
US-born--2 <sup>nd</sup> -3 <sup>rd</sup> gen. immigrant	9%	26%	64%
Foreign-Born	82%	66%	32%
Naturalized Citizen	10%	5%	1%
Legal Permanent Resident	42%	27%	11%
PRUCOL/Qualified	4%	5%	7%
Unauthorized	26%	22%	13%

# Potential Policy and Program Implications of Snapshot #1

- Because Arvin has such a long history of migration, only about one-quarter (22%) of the total population would benefit from current legalization provisions—but more than one-third (35%) of households would, because some or all persons living in the HH are unauthorized.
- Passage of the DREAM Act would benefit about 13% of the minors in Arvin—a crucial group for future community leadership.
- Shortening the visa queue will be a significant benefit for 5% of Arvin residents (long waits for family members of Mexican LPR petitioners)
- With 1 out of 5 immigrant heads of households politically disenfranchised and 96% of Arvin's children living in immigrant households building future civic engagement will be a challenge.
- Currently, the average Arvin voter is 49 years old —because of demographics among the US-born, out-migration of English-speakers, legal status of immigrant adults, and difficulty of naturalization. This inevitably skews voter perspectives.

# Arvin Snapshot #2:

## Mexican Migration Network Diversity Today

- 23% of HH's—Yuriria–Xoconoxtle, Rancho del Tigre, Rancho Palo Alto area, other Guanajuatenses 13%: more than one-third of community
- 15% of HH's—Jalisco (urban and rural)
- 14% of HH's—Baja California and Sinaloa
- 13% of HH's—Michoacan
- 5+% of HH's—Tejano networks
- 5% of HH's—other Chicano networks (including urban flight from LA)
- 5% of HH's—Oaxaca
- Seven other Mexican sending states with <5% each

# Nortenizacion en el Norte: Affiliation With A Dominant Network

- Three-quarters of the Guanajuato-born heads of household said that “lots” of their fellow villagers already lived in Arvin when they first arrived.
- About two-thirds (62%) of all immigrants were helped in settling by their own nuclear or extended families or in-laws. Another 23% were helped by paisanos.
- Due to Arvin migration networks’ maturity, there is extensive whole-family migration.
- Elena (Yuriria) –My husband’s relatives lived here and invited him to come and work and I also had aunts who were already settled here in Arvin. That made it easy to move.
- Dolores (Yuriria)– I’m going to stay here. All my friends and family are here. I have no more relatives in Mexico. Everyone is here in the San Joaquin Valley, here and in Planada, so this has become home.

# Potential Policy and Program Implications of Snapshot #2

- More than a quarter (27%) of the Mexican immigrant HH heads had come to Arvin as a child or young adult accompanying their parents. Children who migrate to Arvin at a young age grow up with children of different ethnicities, learn English at a favorable point in the maturation process. Chain migration facilitates immigrant social integration
- “Bonding” social capital in immigrants family/village networks cannot always be drawn upon easily. Tensions between competing networks (e.g. Mixtecos and Guanajuatenses) and immigrant cohorts (settlers and sojourners) hinder immigrants’ conversion of social capital into “civic capital” or “political capital”, smaller networks are frayed.
- The communication and negotiation skills to develop “bridging” social capital are rare but crucial in communities such as Arvin where multiple migration networks converge. However, Okie migrants’ low levels of educational attainment and shared experiences with Mexican immigrants as low-wage agricultural workers have facilitated the process of establishing cross-network linkages in Arvin.

## And Further Implications of Snapshot #2

- Local institutions can do much to facilitate or hinder accumulation of bridging social capital. Senate bill provisions for New American Integration Councils might make a significant positive impact—but only if these become more than symbolic gestures to address nativists' fears.
- Arvin residents have deliberately sought common ground in a shared concern about children's well-being and education. The community's school system has played an important and positive role in social integration—for children and their parents (Arvin Family Resource Center)
- Evangelical protestant churches in Arvin have entrepreneurially drawn Mexican immigrants by working diligently to create social niches for low-income families, relying on lay pastors, and providing counseling to address a broad range of stresses on family life.
- The cultural challenge faced by Arvin and similar communities is not so much immigrant-native social relations as cultural maintenance—which Mixtecs are quite successfully grappling with but which has been more difficult for the Yemeni minority in town.

# Arvin Snapshot #3: Settlers and Sojourners

- About one out of six immigrant heads of household in Arvin (17%) are newcomers who first came to the U.S. less than 6 years ago. But even these recent arrivals include some settlers who knew as soon as they came that they would remain in Arvin. Only 12% of the Mexican immigrants in Arvin think of themselves as sojourners.
- Almost three-quarters (72%) of Arvin immigrant HH heads who think of themselves as settlers decided to stay in Arvin immediately after arrival (largely due to family/village network affiliations).
- The remaining one-quarter (28%) of the settlers took, on the average, 8 years to decide about settling or not.
- Arvin can be contrasted with many farmworker communities in that there are relatively low numbers of unaccompanied male migrants—in part because Mexican sending villages have such a long history of interaction with Arvin.

# Potential Policy and Program Implications of Snapshot #3

- Our research in Arvin (and other farmworker communities) suggests that policymakers' notions of the ways guestworker programs might actually facilitate circular migration is dangerously speculative.
- A guestworker program without provisions for family unity will spur further unauthorized migration. STRIVE makes a major step forward in affording temporary workers the option of bringing their families and allowing families to eventually decide to settle or return home.
- In the 500 or more rural farmworker communities like Arvin where one or more migration networks is already established, any efforts to "formalize" the transnational labor recruitment process will simply replicate current labor contractors' recruitment networks.
- Legislative options which have, from time to time, been discussed to deny legalization to the most recently-arrived immigrants are arbitrary in assuming they are somehow different (actually the main difference is the educational attainment of rural Mexicans continues to increase so new immigrants are better-educated)

# Arvin Snapshot #4: Economic Progress Has Been Minimal

- In 1944, 76% of Arvin heads of household in the labor force who worked were in agriculture; in 2003, 82% are. The town's lean mix of non-agricultural jobs is virtually unchanged from a half century ago.
- However, only one-quarter (24%) of the US-born HH heads who work are in agriculture, while 90% of the immigrant HH heads who work are.
- There are now fewer local residents who are farm operators (down from 12% to almost none) but more residents (16%) are employed in relatively stable packing-processing jobs.
- There are dramatic differences in the occupational profile of immigrant and native-born HH heads in Arvin. Almost half (49%) of native-born HH heads are not working; only 16% of immigrant HH heads are not working. Of those, 3% appear to be discouraged workers and 2% are disabled (compared to 10% of the native-born HH heads).
- 87% of the students in the Arvin-Lamont High School are classified as socioeconomically disadvantaged. Census data show that 32% of the town's residents live in poverty (2.6 times the national poverty rate).

# Potential Policy and Program Implications of Snapshot #4

- AgJobs provisions will be the primary route to legalization for Arvin residents (and others in communities like it). Many may perhaps be spared the impact of a “points” system intended to reward only “worthy” immigrants with access to LPR status.
- One-third of the currently unauthorized women in Arvin who are raising children would will be denied LPR status by the “points” provisions of Senate bill. The typical Arvin stay-at-home married mother would get 0–10 points out of a possible 100 (if she had worked while raising her children). This would put her very low in the queue for a green card.
- Occupational migration out of agriculture will be very slow. Almost three-quarters (71%) of the IRCA-legalized immigrants in Arvin still work in agriculture—implying a very low exit rate. Access to ESL and vocational training (either agricultural upgrade training to qualify for supervisory jobs or non-agricultural employment training) will be important services. But community economic development schemes have failed to have a significant impact.

# Arvin Snapshot 5#: Family Life and Housing

- More than half (52%) of immigrant HH's are nuclear families with school-age children while only 13% of native-born HH's are
- Only 7% of immigrant HH's consist of couples without children while 26% of native-born HH's are couples without children
- More than half of Arvin residents own their home (60% of native-born households, 55% of immigrants)—slightly above the national average
- Although one-third (33%) of native-born households own their house free and clear, only 5% of immigrant households do
- But much of local housing is crowded with a mean household size of 5.1 persons—almost twice the national average (although availability of affordable housing is improving)
- Arvin has only one small trailer park with mobile homes; it is here that many of the recently-arrived, unaccompanied, male migrant workers live.

# Potential Policy and Program Implications of Snapshot #5

- The sharply contrasting demographic (as well as educational) profile of immigrant-headed and U.S. citizen-headed households makes it almost inevitable that different types of health, education and social services will be used by each group (details in following slide)
- Depressed real estate values in Arvin have made the American dream of owning one's home a reality for many immigrant families. However, a high proportion of their family income goes to shelter costs as compared to native-born households. The "points" reward for home ownership in the Senate bill will make a slight positive contribution to Arvin immigrants' eligibility for LPR status—but not enough.
- The relative accessibility of affordable housing in Arvin underscores the role that county housing authorities may play in immigrant integration and the general need to integration general social policy with immigrant policy.
- Crowded housing makes the city's parks an important resource—for mothers with children and for unaccompanied male migrant workers. This gives rise to some civic tensions between sub-groups of immigrants—but not actual conflict.

# Further Implications from Snapshot #5

## Immigrant Use of Public Services

- Political assumptions about immigrants' use of public services are not empirically-based. If STRIVE provides impact assistance to states it would be wise to examine which services are actually most useful and evaluate their effectiveness and efficiency (unlike IRCA—where little serious program evaluation took place).
- Immigrant-headed households in Arvin rely less on Welfare/TANF than native-born households (11% vs. 30%) and less used food stamps (23% vs. 39%)
- However, immigrant-headed households' use of subsidized health services (Medic-Cal or Healthy Families) was higher than native-born households (74% vs. 46%)—largely due to more children in the immigrant-headed households.
- Adult education services more often used by immigrant-headed than native-born households (25% vs. 10%) but the programs—primarily ESL—were not considered very effective by immigrant learners.
- Family service, public health and affordable housing programs were considered more responsive/useful by native-born HH's than by immigrant HH's (due to language, paperwork)—but were also seen in a fairly positive light by immigrants who used them (several are run by a community action agency)

# Arvin Snapshot #6: Educational Attainment and Language Ability

- 85% of immigrant HH heads have less than a high school education and almost two-thirds (61%) have only a primary school education
- Native-born Arvin HH heads have remarkably low levels of education; more than one-third (41%) didn't finish high school; another one-third (38%) only finished high school. This is, in a sense, a positive factor in community social dynamics—there is little discrimination based on SES. Arvin's current city government provides strong evidence of “bridging” social capital being stronger than “bonding” social capital.
- About two-thirds of Arvin HH heads (60%) speak Spanish and are limited in English or speak none—but more than two-thirds (67%) of the children in these households are bilingual. Over time, the community is not losing English but it is becoming pervasively bilingual.
- In 11% of the households there are internal language barriers where one or both parents and one or more children are not fluent in the same language—e.g. children speak English, limited Spanish, a parent limited English or only Mixtec or other indigenous language.

# Potential Policy and Program Implications of Snapshot #6

- The Senate Bill provisions for Z visa immigrants renewing their provisional residency are extremely onerous for immigrant populations such as those in Arvin (1st renewal—progress in learning English and civics, 2nd renewal—success in learning English and civics).
- Our ethnographic research in Arvin showed quite limited availability of ESL programs (despite vigorous efforts by the school district—using state funding and efforts by UFW/FIELD). Quality was reportedly mediocre.
- Based on our extensive research on the Central Valley Partnership for Citizenship and District Office naturalization data, it appears that, even with good ESL/Civics services, less than half of the Mexican Z visa immigrants in Arvin would make it past the 2nd checkpoint on the illusory “pathway to citizenship” (i.e. at 8 years after legalization).
- The language patterns within Arvin households suggest that availability of English learning opportunities for adult immigrants will be important for family life and children’s education—not simply for occupational mobility and civic life. (Internet-based ESL as proposed in the Senate Bill is not likely to be an effective “solution”)

# The Temporal Dimension of Arvin's Community Identity, Dynamics, Prospects

- Community history can provide us useful insights about how rural life came to be what it is today and how the “new pluralism” emerged. As our case study community with the longest history of migration, Arvin can also provide insights about future trajectories of social life.
- Arvin has always been a community of migrants—a nexus of natural resources (water, land, soil) and human social and economic activity. Its’ founders migrated from the Los Angeles basin around 1910
- In 1923, the Fowler Ensign quoted E.E. Wray of the San Joaquin Valley Fruit Growers, “..The Hindus are drifting back to their own lands, and the Indians are decreasing in numbers...the Mexicans are independent, lazy, and disloyal...but must be depended upon for 60% of our labor”
- Cary McWilliams and Paul Taylor told the basic story of rural California more than half a century ago (successive waves of migrants). Arvin today has memories and echoes of its genesis as part of global agribusiness in the early 20th century. It is only reasonable to ask, “Whose community is it?” “Who are the ‘natives’?”

# Woody Guthrie Didn't Know The Whole Story....

*This land is your land, this land is my land  
From the redwood forest to the New York island.  
From the snow-capped mountains to the Gulf Stream waters  
...This land is made for you and me!*

- When Woody Guthrie first wrote his famous song about Dust Bowl migrants in 1940, Mexicanos from the Bajio had already been settling in Arvin and throughout the San Joaquin Valley for at least a decade.
- DiGiorgio—arguably the nation's first agribusiness was a powerful magnet. In the one year from 1935 to 1936, tree fruit production increased 83% and grape production increased by 18%.
- J.R. Horlacher, a young “Okie” migrant arrived in 1936. He told us Arvin had 8 buildings, 1 restaurant and 2–3 families of “Spanish people”
- Buck Cox, another young “Okie” migrant arrived in 1937. He remembers crews of “Oakies/Arkies”, Mexicans, Filipinos, and Japanese farmworkers “dumping fruit”
- But we don't know if Mexicans got to live in Sunset Camp—a major federal experiment in housing/social policy in 1938.

# Nor Did Walter Goldschmidt....

- Walter Goldschmidt's seminal study of the relationship between agribusiness and rural civic life (*As You Sow* —1946) reported 6% of Arvin heads of household were of Mexican origin in his 1944 survey.
- From a contemporary perspective, Goldschmidt's analysis of civic health (a crude inventory of formal organizational membership and activities) does not provide a reliable portrayal of civic dynamics or valid indicator of "civic capital" .He ignores the troqueros who played a key role in labor recruitment, the bars for Braceros, and only mentions a Mexican church in passing. The troquero/as were avid community networkers, the bars an important venue in civic life.
- Beto Felix arrived in Arvin as a 17 year-old in 1941, to work with a female labor contractor (Escalera) --"We showed up like 'Okies' " . He remembers a popular bar "Tu, Solo Tu". Connie Mediano, who came to live in the Arvin area in 1948 remembers the first Braceros living at Di Giorgio Farm Camps #8 and #10 and several Mexican bars catering to them
- Servando Rivera Juarez, who settled in Tijuana after coming to the U.S. as a Bracero remembers working for "Jessie" Marquez a good-hearted Bakersfield-based troquero immediately after WW II.

# After Migrants from the Bajio, Tejano/as

- About half of Arvin's native-born heads of households are Generation 1.5, 2nd or 3rd generation Mexican-Americans with strong ties to the migrant networks from "El Valle". They have played crucial roles in the social dynamics and civic life of Arvin and other farmworker communities where they settled
- The Luevanos (Adalia born in General Teran, NL; Jesus born in Sombrerete, Zacatecas, both grown up in Donna, TX) settled out of a "Texas long-haul" migrant crew led by "La Guera Maggie" (who also first brought Mexican workers to Immokalee, FL) in 1961. Two decades later, Adalia served on the City Council and is, to this day, a respected community leader.
- Adalia—"We all knew each other because we all worked together in the big crews—up to 100 people sometimes...We didn't know anyone in town when we arrived...But you'd go out in the morning and you'd smell Mexican food....People cared more about each other...in the evenings when people sat outside you'd hear Spanish. We could both maintain our culture and participate in community life".

# And then the Mixtecos came...and settled

- Mixtecos' road to Arvin was a long and difficult one--domestic migration to sugar cane Veracruz, urban work in D.F., Baja California, Sinaloa, and Sonora tomatoes in the 1970's and then, in the late 1970's to California, Oregon and Washington—in part due to inter-ethnic conflict (“no querian a los chaparritos”).
- Mixtecos began settling in Arvin no later than the early 1980's. Simon Ruiz, for example, first came from San Juan Mixtepec to Arvin in 1985 as a 16 year-old migrant farmworker traveling with his brothers. Another early Mixtec migrant, now a well-known community leader in nearby Lamont, came in 1984 as a 15 year-old migrant farmworker.
- Passage of IRCA in 1986 and Oregon small growers' willingness to help in the legalization process encouraged Mixtecos to settle—in both “upstream” communities in the Willamette Valley and in the San Joaquin Valley.

# Arvin Celebration of San Juan Mixtepec's Patron Saint's Day, June, 2006



- In 2002, Arvin hosted the first celebration of San Juan Bautista in California.
- The celebration of Mixtec presence in Arvin continues as part of cultural revival
- Committed individuals and community-based groups (FIOB/CBDIO, Se'e'Savi, and CRLA) are necessary ingredient for restoring "cultural capital"
- A Generation 1.5 Mixteco from Arvin, Hector Hernandez, now hosts a website for this transnational village website (<http://www.sanjuanmixtepec.com>)

# Residents Say Community Life is Good

- More than half (56%) heads of Arvin household we surveyed responded to an unprompted query about good and bad aspects of community life by mentioning something positive related to social environment—e.g. “es tranquilo”, “no gangs/crime”
- Lack of jobs, shopping, poor transportation, and limited recreation were considered the main negative aspects of Arvin
- Immigrants are somewhat more positive than native-born but the majority of both groups say they like living in Arvin “a lot” or “quite well” (69% of immigrants, 58% of native-born)
- However, native-born heads of household are less positive than immigrants about current trends—with 40% saying the community has gotten worse and only 20% saying it has improved while 50% of immigrant heads of household say it has gotten better. Similar proportions of each group (27%–29%) feel that nothing has changed during their time in town.

# Residents' Assessment of Community Institutions' Response to Key Issues

- Only 12% of native-born and 27% of immigrants said municipal government was doing “pretty well or very well”. But understand the complexities of federal–state–county–municipality arrangements to carry out projects and/or provide services.
- Schools were viewed much more positively with 48% of the native-born and 53% of immigrants saying they thought schools were doing a very good job.
- The community library was rated very positively by two-thirds (65%) of the native-born and half of the immigrants (47%). Although there were almost no Spanish-language reading materials, immigrant parents recognized the value of children using the library as a resource for learning.
- Churches were viewed as very responsive by two-thirds of the native-born (65%) but slightly less so by immigrants (59%)—largely due to minimal responsiveness by the local Catholic church.
- U.S.-born residents were more positive than immigrants about police services—but there was agreement that discrimination was decreasing (although we observed significant problems in English-speaking police officers' ability to respond to Spanish-only individuals).
- After experiencing an extraordinary period of municipal government scandals and political conflict during the 2001–2004 time we conducted field research, Arvin is now led by a city council including native-born and immigrant council members.

# Local Business Support of Civic Causes

- While his indicators were flawed, Goldschmidt's conclusion more than half a century ago that large agribusiness was associated with an impoverished civic life appears to continue to hold true.
- Few Arvin residents (only 29% of native-born heads of household, 14% of immigrant heads of household) knew of any local businesses which donated to community charities, fund drives, or scholarships.
- The local businesses which were known to support civic causes were small, primarily immigrant, businesses—a Mexican supermarket, the pizza parlor, the local labor contractor who helps send the bodies of deceased immigrants home to Xoconotle.
- Review of standard databases—United Way of Kern County and Kern County Community Foundation—showed that the very rich agribusiness firms in Kern County donated almost nothing to any charitable cause anywhere in the county—much less Arvin.

# Arvin Residents' Participation in Civic Life

- About one-third (36%) of native-born heads of households rated themselves as “somewhat” or “very” involved in volunteering but only 15% of immigrant heads of household were. This is below the national average as measured in the Civic Participation Study (Verba et al 1995)
- However, low levels of volunteerism among immigrants stem partially from long work hours and child-rearing responsibilities as predicted by the SES model developed by Verba et al. It also seems to stem in part to flawed “civic recruitment networks” (since most volunteering opportunities expect English-speaking ability).
- Native-born and immigrant households' willingness to contribute money or goods to charitable causes is relatively high—with 41% in each group making cash donations, 10–12% making in-kind donations, while 12% of native-born households and 7% of immigrant ones help out with both cash and in-kind. This is about the national average.

# Implications of New Pluralism Research for Immigrant Community Social Policy

- Our case studies of “the new pluralism” show that immigrants and native-born residents of Arvin and other rural communities can find common ground and work collaboratively to improve community life.
- But we see little evidence of comprehensive response or any single model of “best practice”. Each community has distinct priorities and relies on a unique mix of local resources. More information-sharing is called for and local-county-state federal collaboration.
- Because of the great diversity among Mexican immigrants to rural U.S. communities—due to multiple overlapping and competing migration/social networks and to differences between immigrant cohorts which arise in the course of living in the U.S. “bonding” social capital inherent in migration/social networks is not easily or immediately translated into “civic capital”.
- However, it is less difficult than might be thought to develop “bridging” social capital and deploy it to address civic issues. In Arvin the school system (and to a slightly lesser degree) churches were proactive and made very positive contributions in this arena.

# Federal Immigration Policy Dialogue and Legal Framework Need To Change

- Rural agricultural communities face many real-world challenges in responding to the “new pluralism” and economic stagnation. Current federal policy is dysfunctional in not addressing these low-income communities’ actual needs
- A crucial first step is to recognize that the U.S. does not have separate “immigrant” and “native-born populations. Residents of Arvin and similar communities work, live, and raise children together. They recognize but need to better understand their diversity and become more proactive in developing creative strategies for effective immigrant social and civic integration.
- New strategies and adequate federal funding are needed to overcome language barriers, revitalize an employment base at risk in the global economy, offer lifelong learning opportunities, stem rural-urban migration of “the best and the brightest”, negotiate cultural tensions, and promote civic participation.
- Stores of human, social, cultural, and civic capital are crucial resources in rural, economically disadvantaged communities. A meta-policy goal must be to assure these resources can be drawn upon for positive community change.

# Legalization Provisions of Current Immigration Bills—Initial Assessment

- Effective policy reform requires provisions for a viable “pathway to citizenship”. AgJobs and STRIVE have imperfect but reasonable provisions and thoughtful implementation can make them work
- However, further efforts will be needed to reform the naturalization process so citizenship is not conditioned on education background and language-learning opportunities. An ethical/legal issue of real concern is whether it is wise to establish a precedent for arbitrary discrimination (granting or withholding “immigration benefits”) based on factors beyond individuals’ control.
- Efficient and equitable immigration policy reform requires family unity provisions—a shortcoming of IRCA was that it didn’t. Guest worker programs violate basic human rights to live as families and will inevitably fail due to the arrogant (and incorrect) assumption that basic human social behavior can be effectively regulated/legislated this way.

# And Specific Structural Flaws: Sound “Architecture”, Shoddy Construction

- The Z visa provisions of the Senate Bill (“Bargain”) will deny many immigrants opportunities for stable residence—due to off-the-cuff stipulations for learning English and civics as preconditions for even achieving LPR status (“progress” within 4 years, “success” in 8 years).
- The Senate bill’s provisions for LPR status based on a “point system” are particularly poorly thought out. Arbitrary denial of access to LPR status will undermine efforts to promote immigrant integration. These rest on unreliable indicators of “immigrant quality” (even if national policy is to pick and choose) and not only ignore but actively seek to disrupt family life by leaving many mothers and children out in the cold. So much for a federal social philosophy of attention to families!
- Questionable analysis of the actual feasibility of “triggers” for implementing legalization (border control benchmarks, implementation of EEV), shaky infrastructure for processing 11 million or more legalization cases, and the dysfunctional symbolic requirements re “touchback” as a penitential ritual reveal a dangerous commitment to finding political solutions with little serious attention to real-world social, economic, and civic consequences.

# Current Bills' Provisions for Immigrants' Social and Civic Integration

- Including proactive provisions for immigrant social and civic integration into US society is a wise and crucial component in the legislative “architecture” of the comprehensive immigration reform efforts.
- STRIVE correctly includes provisions for impact assistance to states in the aftermath of immigration reform. The Senate Bill seeks, correctly, to promote state and local planning to develop comprehensive, workable strategies for immigrant integration.
- However, neither bill demonstrates adequate appreciation of the stake that local communities have in effective immigration reform or adequate appreciation of the complex ways in which immigrant families and the communities in which they live will be changing over a period of more than 15 years as immigrants move along the pathway to citizenship.
- A crucial issue will be immigrants' access to ESL and civics instruction and strategies to assure quality instruction. US government processes are complex and hard for even US-born citizens to understand. A constant threat is that “civics instruction” may be oriented toward trivia rather than as an intervention reasonably designed to promote effective civic engagement.

# The Need for Well-Targeted Applied Research To Guide Implementation

- Complex provisions of the comprehensive immigration reform legislation have been put forward based on questionable analyses of the actual dynamics of immigration. Ideally, research would be needed to refine a broad range of initial provisions. Research is needed, at the very least, to monitor what is projected to be a 15-year process.
- Given the likelihood of “mistakes” in the basic provisions for implementing immigration reform, focused applied research will be a crucial tool for developing regulations and strategies to mitigate a multitude of unintended negative consequences.
- Such a research agenda might, for example, include careful examination of shaky assumptions regarding the initial numbers of legalization-eligible immigrants, “yield” of actual applications, impacts of processing delays, interactions between clearing the family visa backlog, numerical caps, and mix of new visa.
- It might also address the shaky assumptions and monitor the functioning of a temporary worker program of unprecedented size as well as new, yet-untested features.

# Final Considerations for Configuring A Targeted Applied Research Program

- The “symbolic” provisions in current proposals: “touchback”, “the point system”, border control “triggers” for legalization, are not clearly feasible. Their impacts cannot be reliably projected. It will be crucial to empirically examine scenarios for implementation and impacts.
- Even reasonably–conceptualized provisions such as EEV may not be possible to implement in even a minimally effective fashion.
- If we are serious about promoting immigrants’ responsible civic participation, for example, attention must be given to what actually helps make that happen and what doesn’t. Similar research is urgently needed in other areas also, for example about efforts to improve labor market functioning and use of available human capital effectively.
- The legislative framework includes what seem to be a few sporadic reports to Congress on “hot button” issues. A serious, ongoing program of applied research (including serious objective evaluation of federal agency efforts) will be needed to guide planning and implementation.
- Longitudinal research on immigrants’ experiences, problems, and life strategies in becoming “new Americans” will be essential in such a program.