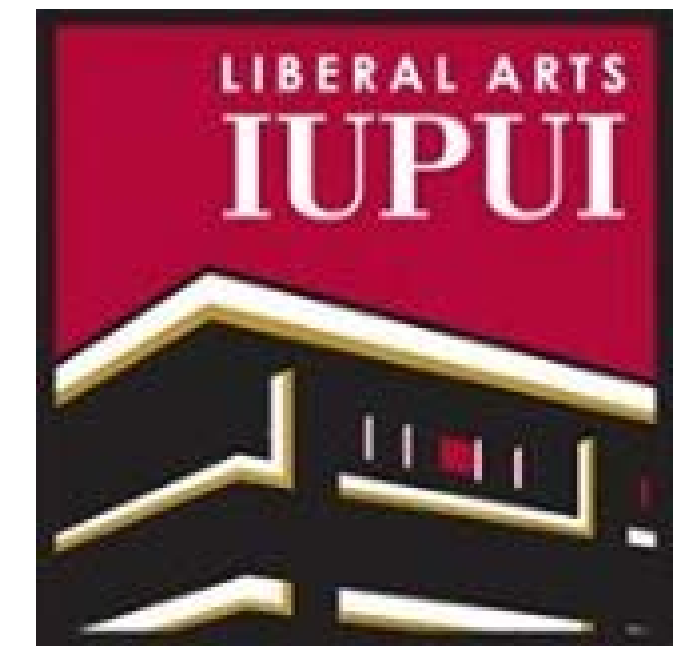


**“CUANDO ACTUAMOS, ACTUAMOS JUNTOS”:  
UNDERSTANDING THE INTERSECTIONS OF RELIGION,  
ACTIVISM, AND CITIZENSHIP WITHIN THE LATINO COMMUNITY  
IN INDIANAPOLIS**



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**Abstract**

Undocumented immigration from Latin America is a heated and divisive topic in United States' politics. Politicians in Washington, D.C. are debating new legislation which would provide a pathway to citizenship for some 11 million undocumented immigrants. The Indianapolis Congregation Action Network (IndyCAN), a grassroots activist group in Indianapolis, is organizing the Latino community through faith and shared political goals. Many undocumented Latino immigrants are utilizing IndyCAN to mobilize and attempt to influence progressive policy change. However, nativist groups challenge these efforts by trying to define who can be considered an "American" and are attempting to block legislation due to their negative perceptions of Latinos. Debates about citizenship reveal the embeddedness of race and ethnicity in defining "American." Despite this, many Latino immigrants are forging their own identities in the United States and are engaging in a political system which refuses to grant them a legal status. Within IndyCAN, this political involvement occurs through religious strategies that seem apolitical yet are implicitly an enactment of activism. This project reveals how undocumented Latino immigrants in Indianapolis are impacting the political process regardless of their legal status.

**Theoretical Framework & Bodies of Literature Reviewed**

Theoretical Framework:

- Structural Vulnerability
- Structural Violence

Bodies of Literature Reviewed:

- Engaged/Activist Approaches to Anthropology (Dana-Ain Davis, Charles Hale, Barbara Johnston)
- Race and Citizenship (Ruth Gomberg-Muñoz, Gilberto Rosas, Nicholas de Genova)
- Structural Vulnerability (Quesada et al., Seth Holmes)
- History of Catholic Church, Social Activism, immigrant Populations (David Badillo, Timothy Matovina, Roberto Treviño)

**Race and Citizenship**

Debates regarding citizenship often contain racialized discourses about who is and is not considered truly "American." The use of such racialized terminology as "illegals, aliens, terrorists, and criminals" to refer to undocumented immigrants causes this population to be perceived as "other" and "non-Americans." State and federal-level nativist groups attempt to sway the public and politicians to vote against progressive immigration policies.

The Indiana Federation for Immigration Reform (IFIRE) is one such nativist group in Indiana.



On their website, IFIRE claims that "it's not about race, it's about numbers" yet refers to undocumented immigrants as "an army of illegal aliens including criminals, drug smugglers and terrorists is invading our country."

The reality is quite different:

"They (anti-immigrant groups) have a very wrong and misguided idea... they think we (the immigrants) come here, steal their jobs, get on welfare, and all that. I don't think so!" – Hector

"I'm not anything special, I'm just a man, a person with necessities, with a dream, with a strong desire to help my family also" – Javier

Despite the racialized discourse surrounding citizenship, the feeling of many immigrant interviewees is summed up in this quote:

"I love *Estados Unidos* because the door is open for me." – Javier

**Policy and Structural Vulnerability**

Policies enact structural vulnerability in marginalized populations. This is especially the case for undocumented Latino immigrants who are at a disadvantage due to their lack of a legal status. Undocumented Latino immigrants face exploitation, discrimination, and other forms due to their structural vulnerability which is enacted through policy.

Indiana's Current and Failed Immigration Policies:

- **HB1402:** bars undocumented immigrants from receiving in-state tuition; signed into law May 1st, 2011
- **SB590:** largely a copycat of Arizona's nationally debated SB1070, both would have essentially institutionalized racial profiling; both struck down as unconstitutional

Federal Immigration Policies:

- **IRCA:** Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, 3 million undocumented immigrants were granted a legal status, made it illegal to knowingly hire undocumented immigrants
- **H.R.4437:** caused widespread fears of mass deportation resulting in the immigration protests of 2006, failed to pass in the senate

Proposed Immigration Reform:

- **S.744:** Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013

While it creates a structured pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, there will still be structural vulnerability enacted through the passing of this legislation. In order to qualify for the temporary legal status one must prove:

- No gaps of unemployment lasting longer than 60 days
- Pay back taxes, hefty fines, and fees (up to \$5,000 per person)

The result will be that many will remain undocumented due to possibly not being able to pay the fines and fees or able to have steady employment.

**The Indianapolis Congregation Action Network (IndyCAN)**

Founded in early 2011, IndyCAN has sought to effect progressive policy change in Indiana and nationwide. It is a conglomeration of multiple congregations and Indiana residents. IndyCAN is an affiliate of the People Improving Communities through Organizing (PICO). IndyCAN's branch of PICO's Campaign for Citizenship is attempting to effect progressive immigration reform. Through seemingly religious actions such as prayer, prayer vigils, and the sharing of *testimonios*, IndyCAN enacts activism through a basis in shared religious faith. Lastly, IndyCAN also focuses on improvements to mass transit, anti-violence initiatives, expanding accessibility to healthcare, and addressing housing issues in Indianapolis.



**Enacting Activism through Religion**

IndyCAN and the Campaign for Citizenship branch participate in activism through seemingly nonpolitical means such as prayer, prayer vigils, and the sharing of *testimonios* (personal witness). The participants of IndyCAN and the Campaign for Citizenship shied away from such terminology as activism and protesting. Instead, they preferred to participate in *la fe en acción* [faith in action]. *La fe en acción* was described as being based in religious faith and as being capable of sustaining a movement for longer than through non-religious based activism.

*La fe en acción* is an enactment of activism and was carried out through the sharing of *testimonios*, prayer, and prayer vigils at churches and public spaces such as the Soldiers and Sailors Monument at Monument Circle in Indianapolis.

**Contested Ideas of Testimonios:**

The sharing of *testimonios* was contested by IndyCAN volunteers as it could potentially politicize people's pain. Still, *testimonios* were an important fact which united IndyCAN members through common experiences. Additionally, *testimonios* act to humanize undocumented immigrants and to effect the minds of politicians.

**Acknowledgements**

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**La Fe en Acción [Faith in Action]**



Prayer vigils ranged in size, this one occurred at a local Indianapolis parish and had approximately 800 people in attendance. Congressman André Carson pledged his public support of immigration reform at this event.



This is a silent march in the Hart Senate Building, Washington, D.C. which occurred in May 2013 for immigration reform. Members of IndyCAN met with other members of the People Improving Communities through Organizing (PICO) to lobby politicians for immigration reform. This line was made up of approximately 60 people lead by six robed clergy people.



Prayer vigils were conducted extensively throughout the summer of 2013 in order to sway public opinion and Indiana's politicians to support the immigration reform. These occurred at the Soldiers and Sailors Monument in Indianapolis multiple times a week throughout May and June 2013. Attendance ranged from four people to over 30 at these prayer vigils.

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