

A New Frontier of Immigrant Labor Organizing:
Explaining Worker Center Presence in 2011

Mindy M. Chen

Department of Social Welfare

UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs

Los Angeles, CA 90095

mindymchen@ucla.edu

Abstract

This study seeks to explain the presence of low-wage worker centers across the U.S. by considering contextual factors including immigration, precarious employment, organizing climate, and labor and nonprofit mobilization. A unique census of all worker centers was compiled for this project, and four models tested the effects of explanatory variables. Results show that immigration, organizing climate, and civil rights nonprofit infrastructure are positively and significantly correlated with worker center existence, demonstrating both political opportunity and resource mobilization at work in facilitating worker center presence. Union density exerts significant and unexpected negative effect, which reveals the complexity of labor organizing today. As worker centers represent an innovative intervention to the economic exploitation and political exclusion of low-wage immigrant workers, knowing the conditions in which worker centers exist helps inform how social movements and SMOs adapt to changes and contribute to the revitalization of labor and civil rights in the U.S.

Since the 1970s, globalization, technological changes and shifting markets have transformed the U.S. economy: the disaggregation of firms and rise of network supply chain model resulted in the reliance in subcontracting arrangements (Kallenberg, 2008). Meanwhile, deregulation led to growth in the service economy that increasingly turn to immigrants as labor supply for service and agriculture jobs, food and garment manufacturing, and other forms of precarious employment characterized by uncertain, unpredictable and risky nature of work (Fine, 2011; Milkman, 2011; Kallenberg, 2008). Immigrant workers, perceived by some as a flexible work force that frees employers from complying with labor laws and safety regulations, are increasingly recruited by employers across the U.S. (Milkman, 2006; Rodriguez 2004). Driven by political turmoil in countries of origin and the promises of economic opportunities in the U.S., immigrant workers often arrive to find themselves working in exploitative conditions. Currently, about 23 million workers or 15% of U.S. workforce are foreign-born; among whom, 1/3 are unauthorized immigrants mostly from Mexico or Central America (Milkman, 2011), and many are routinely subject to hazardous working environments, denial of water and food breaks, off-clock work, and wage theft (Bobo, 2011; Valenzuela et al., 2006). As an illustration, 46% of domestic workers—nannies, housecleaners, and caregivers working in private homes— are foreign-born (U.S. Census Bureau). A recent national survey of domestic workers reveal that 23% of them are paid below state minimum wages, 35% regularly work long hours without breaks, 38% suffer from occupational wrist and back injuries, and many endure verbal, psychological, and physical abuses on the job without recourse as they are unprotected by contracts and laws available to other workers (Burnham & Theodore, 2012). Similarly, Latino immigrants employed by poultry processing plants in the South show a prevalence in suffering work-related respiratory problems and musculoskeletal deformities, yet they largely refrain from

contesting health and safety violations on the job because of language barriers, fear of retaliation, or, for those who are undocumented, fear of deportation (Flores et al., 2011; Quandt, 2006; Fink, 1998). Lastly, many employers' preference in hiring immigrant workers contributes to anti-immigrant sentiments, discrimination, and further isolation for the newcomers (Flores et al., 2011). As work is intimately related to other social, economic, and political issues (Kallenburg, 2008), the inequality, insecurity, and instability on the job have widespread effects on immigrant workers and their families.

Recently, a new type of organization known as worker center emerged in the U.S. in response. While there is much heterogeneity among worker centers—some are independently registered 501(c)3 nonprofits while others are affiliates of larger institutions; some organize on the basis of ethnic identities, some adopt a geographic focus, while others target specific occupations or industries— they constitute a unique organizational population in that they share common purpose of empowering immigrants with the explicit goal of improving labor standards (Martin, 2012; Milkman, 2011). As hybrid organizations (Fine, 2006; Minkoff, 2002), worker centers pursue multiple strategies to intervene at the workplace and in the broader community. A typical worker center may engage in activities such as providing ESL lessons, recovering unpaid wages for individuals, advocating for improved health codes enforcement and immigration reform, and developing worker-leaders for collective action around specific worksites (Martin, 2012; Martin et al., 2007). In simultaneously utilizing direct service, policy advocacy, and grassroots organizing, worker centers draw on tactical toolkits of diverse set of social service agencies, civil rights organizations, and labor unions to improve conditions for workers in comprehensive manners (Fine, 2006). Through combining organizational repertoires (Clemens, 1993), worker centers also overcome constraints of traditional service-oriented nonprofits as they

mediate behaviors of egregious employers while advocating for low-wage immigrant workers outside of many unions' legal purview within the National Labor Relations system (Milkman et al., 2010).

Scholar note that civil society has been adapting to meet low-wage immigrant worker needs ushered in by the changing economy and demographics: community-based organizations across American cities are adding programs for new immigrants (Marwell, 2007; Cordero-Guzman, 2005) while existing immigrant-serving nonprofits are modifying services to deal with consequences of precarious employment such as occupational injuries and wage theft (Bobo, 2011, Martin, 2010). In various case studies, there has also been increasing attention on how emergent worker centers intervene on both demand and supply sides of the labor market through monitoring employers while improving worker quality (Valenzuela et al., 2006), contend with downgrading local labor market through matching workers with jobs and assisting with wage claims and workplace conflicts (Martin et al., 2007), and promoting civic engagement among immigrant women through educational workshops related to health, self-help, and politics (Sullivan, 2010). In general, it is suggested that worker centers are proliferating across the U.S. because they effectively contribute to labor movement revitalization and immigrant worker empowerment when little other support for low-wage immigrant workers existed (Milkman, 2011; Fine, 2011; Sullivan, 2010). As of 2011, there is an estimate of 236 active worker centers in the U.S., and their per capita distribution is shown in Figure 1.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

As expected, worker centers concentrate in the West, Northeast, and around the Great Lakes—areas with large port of entry urban centers. Yet there are seventeen states without

worker centers; how might one explain why they exist in some states and not others? As most of the current literature on worker centers is comprised of case studies on individual focal organizations, there is no known work that establishes how the presence of worker centers across the U.S. is related to broader social, political, and organizational conditions.

Janice Fine, a pioneering researcher on the subject, surveyed forty centers and conducted nine in-depth case studies in *Worker Centers: Organizing Communities at the Edge of the Dream* (2006) to probe why worker centers exist where they do. In describing the rise of worker centers, Fine identified three waves of formation: those that emerged during the 1970s in response to the rise of service sector jobs and de-unionization, those founded during the late 1980s to mid-1990s to advocate for Latino and Asian American civil rights, and those that arose after the 2000s to meet the needs of growing numbers of low-wage immigrant workers in service and agricultural sectors across urban and rural settings. Fine suggested that worker centers developed in areas with high numbers of immigrant workers, but also noted that many evolved from older institutions such as churches, social service agencies, immigrant and Civil Rights NGOs, and unions. Guided by these insights as well as the aforementioned empirical challenge, this paper will address the following research question: in 2011, what factors are correlated with the existence of worker centers in a state?

This study seeks to add to the analysis of the worker center movement in the U.S. through examining the relationship between social, political and institutional contexts and the presence of worker centers at the state level in 2011. First, relevant literature in social movement and organizational theories will be reviewed to provide expectation for covariates. Next, logit and probit regressions will be used to examine correlations between selected independent variables and worker center presence across the fifty states and D.C., as well as across forty-nine states to

control for the influence of California and New York. After reviewing data sources, results of regression models will be presented. The paper will conclude by discussing the implications of findings as well as suggesting directions for future research.

Theoretical Framework

Social movements are collective efforts to challenge or uphold social conditions (Snow & Soule, 2010), and the formal structures that seek to implement movement goals are social movement organizations or SMOs (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Theorists have emphasized how crises often foster founding of new SMOs (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012), while existing SMOs adapt to shifts in political and resource environments through incorporating and hybridizing repertoires—features and strategies—of distinct organizational forms to overcome constraints and manage uncertainty and change (Clemens, 1993; Hasenfeld & Gidron, 2005; Minkoff, 2002). As mentioned, worker centers combine grassroots organizing, policy advocacy, and service provision of diverse nonprofits and unions when these “pure” organizational forms became inadequate at contesting unjust conditions on behalf of low-wage immigrant workers in the recent precarious economy (Sullivan, 2010; Martin et al., 2007; Fine, 2006). In this sense, the burgeoning worker center phenomenon constitutes an emergent social movement, while the centers themselves can be conceptualized as hybrid SMOs that arose to contend new challenges.

All organizations are structured by their geographic and institutional environments (McQuarrie & Marwell, 2009). In other words, broader contexts in which organizations are situated contribute to their growth and development—and the same applies to SMOs. Theories on social movements and SMOs underscore two important concepts in the environment: political opportunity and resource mobilization. Political opportunities denote how changes in

sociopolitical conditions such as public policy and availability of influential allies create new possibilities for collective action (Snow & Soule, 2010; Tarrow, 2011). On the other hand, resource mobilization stresses that the emergence of social movements and SMOs depend on the availability of resources such as people, money, or legitimacy that can be channeled into mobilization (McAdam et al, 1996; McCarthy & Zald, 1977). While hybrid SMOs develop as result of adaptations to changes in political opportunities, hybridizing is also facilitated by interaction with and support from parent-form organizations (Minkoff, 2002). Together, these concepts help explain how hybrid SMOs emerge when opportunities and constraints shift, and when resources in the environment support their development and expansion. In the following discussion, these perspectives are thus integrated to suggest conditions that are related to worker center presence. Social conditions broadly indicating political opportunities and resource mobilization are grouped and presented for hypothesis testing.

Political Opportunities: Immigration, Service Economy, Favorable Organizing Conditions

While turbulent changes in social, economic, and political environments precipitate crises that push organizations to adapt to the requisites of the environment, they also provide the context for emergence of new organizational forms that navigate around constraints and capitalize on new openings (Hannan & Freeman, 1989; Minkoff, 2002). As such, changes in demography, migration, and the economy can constitute a shift in opportunities that encourage new waves of organizing (McAdam, 1982). Along with social changes, altering configurations in politics and public policy also facilitate new collective actions, innovative strategies, and emergence of hybrid SMOs (Tarrow, 2011; Minkoff, 2002). Recent case studies on worker centers described how individual worker centers came into existence as immigrant worker needs increased in low-wage service sectors, garment manufacturing, day labor, and across areas of

great economic downturn (Sullivan, 2010; Martin et al., 2007; Valenzuela et al., 2006; Fine, 2006). As the rise in number of immigrants and service workers may signify to activists monitoring changes in the political environment as demand and opportunity for mobilization (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004), accordingly, places that present increasing needs ushered in by changing demographic, economic, and political contexts present new challenges—but also encouragement for innovative immigrant worker organizing.

Low-wage service industries often turn to immigrants as labor supply (Milkman, 2011, 2006; Rodriguez, 2006). Because immigrant workers often lack effective recourse to government agencies and unions, worker centers have become important in challenging exploitative conditions (Martin et al., 2007). Organizational entrepreneurs may be encouraged to mobilize in areas with higher immigrant population, and worker centers tend to be rooted in places where immigrants have settled (Fine, 2011). As such, areas with higher concentration of immigrants create urgency and opportunity for worker center to take presence, hence:

Hypothesis 1: worker center presence is positively related to immigration.

Worker centers emerged in response to the rise of a predominantly service-oriented economy that accompanied the decline of stable, higher wage employment in manufacturing of previous decades (Fine, 2006; Kallenburg, 2009). Recent literature on the changing nature of employment suggested that jobs within the service sector are often characterized as uncertain, undesirable, and precarious—and strongly associated with underpayment, violation of labor laws, job insecurity, limited benefits, exposure to hazardous conditions, and employer retaliation (Vosko, 2005; Bernhardt et al., 2012). The primacy of service employment consequently places

new demands and opportunities for worker centers to emerge as labor protection to contend with consequences of the new precarious economy. Therefore, it is also expected that:

Hypothesis 2: worker center presence is positively related to service employment.

Public support, favorable public policy, as well as allies within the government can constitute political opportunity for worker organizing (Tarrow 2011; Jenkins & Perrow, 1977). One indicator of favorable conditions for workers is the presence of state law that mandates a minimum wage higher than the Federal minimum wage. Conversely, unfavorable public policy and lack of allies within the state can be inferred from the presence of a “right-to-work” statute that prohibits agreements between unions and employers to require employees’ payment of union dues, consequently undermining the effectiveness of organized labor and presenting a hostile environment for worker organizing (Wallace & Figueroa, 2012). States with laws mandating minimum wage higher than the Federal minimum wage and states without “right-to-work” laws thus constitute a favorable climate for worker organizing. It is expected that:

Hypothesis 3: worker centers presence is positively related to favorable organizing climate.

Resource Mobilization: Civil Rights Nonprofit Infrastructure and Union Density

All organizations need resources in order to exist and carry out their missions, and worker centers are no exception. Research has shown that underlying demand alone is often only weakly correlated with the existence of organizations that meet that demand (Marquis et al., 2011). For social movements and SMOs to respond to environmental conditions and opportunities, they must mobilize resources (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). As worker centers grew

out of adaptation and recombination of forms, features, and repertoires and earlier organizations—namely civil rights nonprofits and unions (Fine, 2006), the presence of such organizations and existing infrastructure in the resource environment constitute important requirement for the presence of worker centers.

Interactions within and between organizations is important in shaping the diversity of organizations in society (Hannan & Freeman, 1989). Social movement organizations frequently interact in sharing personnel, information, and tactics as well as cooperate in coalitions (Soule & King, 2008; Minkoff 1997; McAdam 1995; Tarrow, 2011). Hasenfeld and Gidron (2005) proposed that a proliferation of civil society nonprofit organizations is necessary for the emergence of hybrid organizations. Specifically, among contemporary American social movements, the Civil Rights Movement was critical in shaping trajectories of later social movements and SMOs (Minkoff 1997, 1995). There is also considerable evidence that various nonprofit advocacy organizations and SMOs coordinate activities (Walker et al. 2011). In detailing the rise of worker centers, Fine (2011, 2006) has argued that many worker centers were established with the support of civil rights organizations or directly evolved from civil rights organizations. Moreover, most worker centers are fiscally supported by civil rights nonprofit and foundation funding (Fine, 2011). Hence:

Hypothesis 4: worker center presence is positively related to civil rights nonprofit infrastructure.

While worker centers developed as a new hybrid SMO form to address the needs of low-wage immigrant workers difficult for unions to organize (Milkman, 2011; Sullivan, 2010; Fine, 2010), differentiation between worker centers and unions also lead them to play complementary

roles (Fine, 2011). Recently, organized labor federations such as the AFL-CIO and Change-to-Win and many of their affiliated unions are increasingly sympathetic to worker centers and consider them as legitimate alternatives to organize workers outside of their traditional purview (Fine, 2011; Milkman, 2011). A high union density can also signify the presence of labor activists, organizing infrastructure, diffusion of tactics, as well as financial support and other resource sharing. Thus:

Hypothesis 5: worker center presence is positively related to union density.

Data and Methods

The outcome of interest, the presence of worker centers in a state, is defined as a binary variable for all fifty states plus the District of Columbia for the year 2011 (N=51). Independent variables are also measured at the state level, but lagged one year prior in 2010 in order to avoid simultaneity bias. The cross sectional study design was chosen to yield insights on how worker center existence in a state may be related to political opportunities and resource mobilization across the aforementioned hypotheses.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable for this study is the presence of active worker centers in a state in 2011. Janice Fine (2011) defined worker centers as “community-based mediating institutions that organize, advocate, and provide direct support to low wage workers.” For the purpose of data collection, Fine’s definition was used.

In assembling the list of all active worker centers in 2011, the census of worker centers from Fine’s (2006) book was used to provide a baseline. Through personal communication with

Fine, the author obtained an updated version of this list. Additional methods were employed to prepare the list for the present study. First, the author conducted nonprofit organizational searches using National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS), Guidestar, and IRS websites to identify founding and disbanding dates in order to exclude worker centers that were inactive in 2011. The author then checked for branch listing using the aforementioned sources as well as official worker center websites. Because this study seeks to ascertain the cross-sectional effects of place-bound factors on worker center existence, all separate sites that carry out worker center activities were included in the final list whereas administrative headquarters that do not engage in worker center activities were excluded. To ensure that the population of worker centers was captured, the author also used links from major worker center network websites to identify unlisted affiliates. Finally, another NCCS search was employed using keywords “worker center,” “immigrant worker,” and “worker advocacy” to find additional worker centers, and all mission statements were browsed to vet the accuracy of search findings. In end, a census of 236 worker centers was produced for the year 2011. This census of worker centers was then converted into binary data at the state level (N=51) where a state that has any active worker center presence is assigned a value of 1, while a state without any worker centers is assigned 0. There are thirty-four states with worker presence and seventeen states without.

Independent Variables

Independent variables for this study were grouped by hypotheses into immigration, service employment, favorable organizing climate, union density, and civil rights nonprofit infrastructure. Table 1 describes the independent variables.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Hypothesis 1: Immigration.

As there is no single source of data for “immigrants” that captures related constructs of inflow of authorized as well as unauthorized newcomers, the number of foreign-born residents, and the number of temporary workers who work and reside in a state. Thus, multiple sources were used to operationalize the immigration construct.

Green Cards Issued. The number of permanent resident arrivals with intended state of residency provided by the Department of Homeland Security’s *2010 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* was used to estimate documented immigration into the U.S. This measure was included as a share of state population (per 100 persons) and logged to adjust for skew.

Unauthorized Immigration. Estimates for the percent of undocumented immigrants in a state in 2010 were acquired from the Pew Hispanic Center’s report *Unauthorized Immigrant Population: National and State Trend, 2010*. This measure was logged to correct for skew.

Unauthorized Workers in Labor Force. Estimates for the percent of undocumented immigrant workers within the labor force for each state were obtained from the Pew Hispanic Center’s report *Unauthorized Immigrant Population: National and State Trend, 2010*. This measure was logged to adjust for skew.

Temporary Workers VISAs Issued. Among exploited immigrant workers are workers admitted on temporary VISAs, such as those involved with post-Katrina rebuilding of New Orleans (Blue & Drever, 2011). Data for temporary worker admissions (E1 to E3, H1B, H1B1, H1C, H2A, H2B, H2R, H3, H4, I1, L1, L2, O1 to O3, P1 to P4, Q1, R1, R2, TD and TN VISAs)

was obtained from Department of Homeland Security's *2010 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*.

The data was converted to share of population (per 100 persons) and logged to adjust for skew.

Percentage of Foreign Born Residents. While the percent of foreign-born residents does not measure the movement of migrants into a state, it is an indicator of the share of immigrants living in a state at a given time (Passel & Suro, 2005). Measures for percentage of foreign-born persons were obtained from U.S. Census's American Community Survey 2010. The measure was logged to adjust for skew.

Percentage Latinos. Previous research suggested that most low wage new immigrant workers are of Latino descent (Milkman, 2011; Flores et al., 2011; Quandt, 2006). While the percentage of Latinos per state includes long-term residents and native-born Americans of Latino heritage, it provides a proxy measure for Latino immigrants. The percentage of Latino residents was obtained from the U.S. Census's American Community Survey 2010, and the measure was then logged to correct the skew.

Due to the high correlation among these related immigration variables, factor analysis was conducted using Stata 12 to create a single index variable that captures all aforementioned aspects of the immigration construct.¹

Hypothesis 2: Service Employment

Service Employment.² The percentage of service sector employment was obtained through aggregating the total employment percentages indicated as "service" under the North

¹ The Cronbach's alpha for the six variables is 0.91, which indicate that the factors are closely related.

² The author considered incorporating additional variables such as wage and hour violations and other employment statistics to capture dimensions of precarious work conditions associated with service economy. However, the author chose to exclude these measures, as state-level data are unreliable due to difference in state regulations,

American Industry Code (NAIC) in the 2010 County Business Patterns published by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Hypothesis 3: Favorable Organizing Climate

Existence of Higher State Minimum Wage. Information on state minimum wage laws in 2010 was obtained from the Department of State and coded as a binary variable. The states with laws that mandate minimum wages higher than the Federal Minimum Wage were coded as 1.

Not Right-to-Work State. The Right-to-Work status of states in 2010 was obtained from the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation and coded as a binary variable where 1 denotes a state that does not have a Right-to-Work statute.

Due to the high correlation among these two related aspects of favorable organizing climate, an index variable combining both variables was also created for the analyses.³

Hypothesis 4: Civil Rights Nonprofit Infrastructure

Civil Rights Nonprofit Revenue. Estimate for the total revenue of civil rights organizations was obtained through searching the National Center for Charitable Statistics website using National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE) codes R20 (Civil Rights), R22 (Minority Rights), and R30 (Intergroup and Race Relations) using 2010 CORE PC. After obtaining the total revenue of all registered R20, R22, and R30 organizations produced by NTEE code search, organizations that also appear in the dependent variable list were deleted. The amounts are in 2010 dollar value. The total revenue was divided by the state population to produce revenue figures for per 100 persons. The measure was logged to adjust for skew.

varying enforcement standards, and inconsistent uniform data reporting and collection across state and Federal agencies. For a more thorough discussion on the subject, see Bernhardt & McGrath (2005).

³ Cronbach's Alpha between the two measures is 0.69.

Hypothesis 5: Union Density

Union Membership. Labor unions' presence within a state is measured by the share of union members within a state's workforce. Estimates of union membership percentage in all industries across the U.S. in 2010 were acquired from the *Union Membership and Coverage Database* constructed by Barry Hirsch from Georgia State University and David Macpherson from Trinity University.

Analytic Strategy

In this study, the outcome of interest is the presence of active worker centers within a state in 2011. The dependent variable is a binary variable, which makes logit and probit regressions appropriate. For the purpose of ensuring consistency of results, logit and probit regression models were both used.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

In Model 1, independent variables from each of the five hypotheses were regressed with the binary outcome variable using logistic regression (N=51). Because of concerns for the large share of immigration within the states of California and New York, the same logistic regression was conducted in Model 2 with those two states removed (N=49). In Model 3, the independent variables were regressed with the outcome variable using probit regression (N=51). In Model 4, California and New York were once again removed while the independent variables were regressed with the outcome variable using probit regression (N=49). Because of the small N size, coefficient estimates for all models are presented as significant at $p < 0.10$.

Results

Table 3 presents the logit and probit regression results of worker center presence on independent variables using Stata 12. Looking across the table, one can see how each of the hypotheses stood up to empirical testing. A positive and significant logistic coefficient means that the independent variable increases the odds of worker center presence, whereas a negative and significant logistic coefficient means that the independent variable decreases the odds of worker center presence. The probit regression coefficients give the change in the z-score or probit index for a one unit change in the predictor; a positive and significant probit coefficient means that the independent variable increases the z-score, whereas a negative and significant probit coefficient means that the independent variable decreases the z-score.

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Hypothesis 1 proposed that immigration is positively related to the presence of worker centers. The index variable for immigration exhibits a significant positive relationship with the presence of worker centers at $p < 0.05$ across all four Models, confirming the hypothesis and demonstrating that immigration significantly contributes to the presence of worker centers.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that a predominantly service economy indicated by high share of service employment is positively related to the presence of worker centers in a state. Results from all four Models suggest that there is no significant relationship between state-level service employment and worker center presence.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that a favorable organizing climate is positively associated with worker center presence. Results from all four Models indicate that a favorable organizing climate has a highly significant positive relationship with the existence of worker centers within a state at $p < 0.01$, thus providing very strong support for Hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 4 proposed that civil rights nonprofit infrastructure is positively related to worker center presence. The selected indicator of nonprofit civil rights infrastructure—the total revenue of civil rights organizations per 100 persons—is significantly and positively related to worker center presence at $p < 0.10$, providing adequate support for hypothesis 4.

Hypothesis 5 proposed that union density is positively related to worker center presence. Results from all four models show that union density, while highly significantly related to worker center presence at $p < 0.01$, actually exerts a negative effect. Contrary to Hypothesis 4, the higher union density, the lower the likelihood a state will have worker centers.

Discussion

How might one explain why some states have worker centers and not others? What factors contribute to the existence of worker centers? Examining worker centers in light of political opportunity and resource mobilization allows consideration of how geographically-bound broad social, political, and resource conditions relate to the presence of these hybrid social movement organizations. This analysis suggests that at the state level, immigration, favorable organizing climate, and civil rights nonprofit infrastructure facilitate worker center presence; service economy exhibits no significant effect, while union density exerts significant and unexpected negative effect on worker center presence.

First, in line with various scholars' (Martin, 2012; Fine, 2006; Milkman, 2011) characterization that worker centers are located in places with high influx of immigration to provide support for low-wage immigrant workers, results from all four Models reveal that the immigration index variable is significantly correlated with the presence of worker centers. In accordance with previous research, states with high level of immigration demonstrate the need

and opportunity for worker center mobilization. However, contrary to expectation, there is no significant correlation between service economy and worker center presence. Since previous research suggests that worker centers developed to contend with downgrading low-wage labor markets, it was hypothesized that worker center presence would be positively related to service economy strongly associated with precarious employment conditions. The lack of significance may be due in part to data limitation, as the variable used—service employment percentage from the County Business Pattern—may not have captured the informal, contingent, and invisible work within the precarious economy often performed by low-wage immigrant workers.

With regards to organizing climate, results from all four Models indicate highly significant effect of favorable organizing climate on worker center presence. As previous theory and research propose that availability of influential allies and favorable public policy signal openness and create possibilities for collective action (Snow & Soule, 2010; Tarrow, 2011), it was hypothesized that favorable political climate in the form of higher state minimum wage mandates and a lack of “right-to-work” statutes would facilitate worker center mobilization. Indeed, in the present analysis, favorable political climate exhibits a highly significant positive relationship with worker center presence, thus demonstrating the paramount importance of political opportunities in engendering social movements and SMOs. In explaining why some states are without worker centers, the present analysis hints that when there is suppression—in this case, worker-unfriendly state laws—SMOs that organize vulnerable low-wage, low-skilled immigrant workers would be difficult to sustain or may not take off from the ground altogether.

As for resource mobilization, results adequately supports the hypothesize that civil rights nonprofit infrastructure has a positive effect on worker center presence—that is, an increase in the state civil rights nonprofit revenue increases the likelihood of worker center presence. In

accordance to Fine's (2006) proposition that worker centers emerge out of existing support structures of civil rights organizations and previous inquiries on the Civil Rights Movement (Minkoff, 1997, 1995), a high-capacity nonprofit civil rights infrastructure does appear to facilitate other SMOs—e.g. worker centers—to mobilize.

Finally, contrary to researcher's expectation that union density is positively related to worker center presence, union density exerts a highly significant negative effect. The unexpected result offers a glimpse of the complexities within the modern American labor movement and among SMOs that organize workers. The negative relationship between union density and worker center presence suggests that variable used—total union membership within a state—may not have captured the actual pattern of unions' resource sharing with worker centers, as many recent worker center efforts are supported by national labor federations and international unions based out of D.C. and that the flow of resources from unions to worker centers do not necessarily occur locally within a state⁴. Furthermore, while differentiation between worker centers and unions may lead them to play complementary roles (Fine, 2011), some unions may still consider worker centers as less-desirable alternative form of labor protection to unions because of lack of collective bargaining protection; therefore, the results may actually reflect a dynamic of competition between unions and worker centers rather than complementary niche sharing within a state. Lastly, as worker centers may be alternatives to union organizing within low-wage immigrant worker communities—where due to the undocumented status of some workers, high potential of employer retaliation, or the informal nature of many low-wage jobs, union organizing within the confines of NLRB rules may be highly difficult. In these circumstances, union density and worker center presence may take on a

⁴ For commentary on funders of worker centers such as the AFL-CIO, Change-to-Win, and SEIU International, see <http://www.thenation.com/blog/175313/who-should-fund-alt-labor#>.

negative relationship where a high union membership within a state reflects the ease of organizing workers into unions which makes worker center organizing less necessary. On the other hand, low union membership may indicate weakness of the traditional union form and NLRB organizing repertoire in supporting low-wage immigrant worker needs, consequently calling for worker centers as innovative alternatives to navigate around constraints.

Conclusion

Kallenburg (2008) noted that as the nature of work changes in the new precarious economy, so must the response to mobilize. At a time when the downgrading economy presents new challenges to traditional forms of immigrant and worker protection, resilient NGOs adapt and recombine tactics in response. Worker centers represent a practical and multipronged response by civil society to improve conditions for low-wage immigrant workers through providing much needed services, engaging in public policy advocacy, and empowering workers through community and economic action organizing. Although numerous case studies have detailed the ways worker centers challenge unjust employment practice, empower immigrant workers, and contribute to community and labor revitalization, research has been limited to case studies on focal organizations. Furthermore, while scholars have paid increasing attention on the burgeoning worker center phenomenon, there is an absence of research on this important new form of social movement organization in the nonprofit and civil society literature.

The premise of the present study is to contribute to the ongoing understanding of the worker center movement in the U.S. In addition to assembling a census of all active worker centers in the fifty states and D.C. in 2011, this study tested the relationships between worker center existence in a state and various indicators of political opportunity and resource

mobilization. By analyzing how state-level factors contribute to worker center presence, this study adds to the ongoing efforts by scholars to study the burgeoning worker center phenomenon as well as recent low-wage immigrant organizing. As such, this study is the first to empirically establish how the presence of worker centers across the U.S. is related to demographic, economic, political, and institutional factors from the social movement perspective.

This study highlights the geographical variation in contextual environments that explain organizational presence. Findings strongly support scholars' characterization that worker centers arose to meet immigrant worker needs. Findings also strongly support the prevailing tenets in social movement research that attribute high importance to political opportunity contexts in facilitating burgeoning social movements and organizational forms. While there is some support for the importance of civil society resource mobilization in supporting an emergent SMO form that advocates for some of the most marginalized members of the U.S. society, future research may better understand the effect of civil rights nonprofit resource sharing by utilizing a more refined research design to examine more local effects. Similarly, the dynamics between unions and worker centers can be better understood by employing other research that examines patterns of both competition and cooperation across different geographical unit of analysis.

There are a number of limitations to the present study. First, as most worker centers on the author's census maintained official websites or appeared in NCCS and IRS searches, the dependent variable list may have undercounted worker centers that are small, resource-poor, without 501(c)3 statuses, or located in isolated rural areas. Furthermore, due to the cross-sectional analysis design, the present study can only make conclusions about correlations between worker center counts and contextual conditions in 2011. Future studies should incorporate a longitudinal design, increase the N size, and examine the interaction of variables in

order to provide stronger causal assertions on factors that lead to worker center emergence.

Also, a longitudinal design would enable better understanding of how phases of opportunity and constraints affect patterns of founding, growth, institutionalization, and diffusion of worker center organizational form over time.

Besides temporal comparisons, future studies on worker centers can also explore different geographic units of analysis. Additional cross-sectional designs using finer-grain geographic unit of analysis such as county or metropolitan statistical area can examine how community-level conditions relate to attributes of worker centers located in those areas. Finally, both temporal and geographic studies should attempt to identify how differences in form and strategies among worker centers (e.g. organizing focus, revenue size, organizational structure, and network affiliation) may arise and proliferate due to varied organizational and institutional conditions in time and the environment.

References

- Baum, J. & Oliver, C. (1996). Toward an institutional ecology of organizational founding. *Academy of Management Journal*, 39(5), 1378-1427.
- Bernhardt, A., Spiller, M., & Polson, D. (2012). *All Work and No Pay: Violations of Employment and Labor Laws in Chicago, Los Angeles and New York City. Los Angeles and New York City* (December 1, 2011).
- Bernhardt, A. & McGrath, S. (2005). Trends in wage and hour enforcement by the U.S. Department of Labor, 1975-2004. *Economic Policy Brief, September*. Brennan Center for Justice, New York
- Blue, S. & Drever, A. (2011). Subcontracting work via social networks: migrant Latino labour and the rebuilding of New Orleans. *Population, Space and Place*, 17, 489-504.
- Bobo, K. (2011). *Wage theft in America*. New Press, LLC.
- Burnham, L. & Theodore, N. (2012). *Home Economics: The Invisible and Unregulated World of Domestic Work*. New York: National Domestic Workers Alliance.
- Clemens, E. (1993). Organizational repertoires and institutional change: women's groups and the transformation of U.S. politics, 1890-1920. *American Journal of Sociology*, 98(4):755-798.
- Cordero-Guzman, H. (2005). Community-based organizations and migration in New York City. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31, 889-909.
- Department of Homeland Security (2010). *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*. Retrieved from http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/yearbook/2010/ois_yb_2010.pdf
- DiMaggio, P. & Anheier, H. (1990). The sociology of nonprofit organizations and sectors. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 16: 137-159.

- Fine, J. (2011). New forms to settle old scores: updating the worker centre story in the United States. *Industrial Relations*, 66(4), 604-630.
- Fine, J. (2006). *Worker Centers: Organizing Communities at the Edge of the Dream*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Fink D. (1998). *Cutting Into the Meatpacking Line*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Fligstein, N. & McAdam, D. (2012). *A Theory of Fields*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Flores, L. Y., Mendoza, M. M., Ojeda, L., He, Y., Meza, R. R., Medina, V., & Jordan, S. (2011). A qualitative inquiry of Latino immigrants' work experiences in the Midwest. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 58(4), 522.
- Gleeson, S. (2009). From rights to claims: the role of civil society in making rights real for vulnerable workers. *Law & Society Review*, 43(3), 669-700
- Hannan, M. & Freeman, J. (1989). *Organizational Ecology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hasenfeld, Y., & Gidron, B. (2005). Understanding multi-purpose hybrid voluntary organizations: The contributions of theories on civil society, social movements and non-profit organizations. *Journal of Civil Society*, 1(2), 97-112
- Hirsch, B. & Macpherson, D. *Union Membership and Coverage Database* [Data file and codebook]. Retrieved from <http://www.unionstats.com/>
- Jenkins, J. & Perrow, C. (1977). Insurgency of the powerless: farmworker movements (1946-1972). *American Sociological Review*, 42: 249-268.

- Kallenburg, A. (2009). Precarious work, insecure workers: employment relations in transition. *American Sociological Review*, 74: 1-22.
- Marquis, C., Davis, G. F., & Glynn, M. A. (2011). Golfing alone? Corporations, elites, and nonprofit growth in 100 American communities. *Organization Science*.
- Martin, N. (2012). "There is abuse everywhere": Migrant nonprofit organizations and the problem of precarious work. *Urban Affairs Review*, 48(3), 389-416.
- Martin, N., Morales, S., & Theodore, N. (2007). Migrant worker centers: contending with downgrading in the low-wage labor market. *GeoJournal*, 68, 155-165.
- Marwell, N. (2007). *Bargaining for Brooklyn: Community Organizations in the Entrepreneurial City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McAdam, D. (1982). *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McAdam, D. (1983). Tactical innovation and the pace of insurgency. *American Sociological Review*, 48, 735-754.
- McAdam, D., McCarthy, J., & Zald., M. (1996). *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McAdam, D., Tarrow, S., & Tilly, C. (1997). Toward an integrated perspective on social movements and revolution. In M. Lichbach and A. Zuckerman (Eds.), *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McCarthy, J., & Zald, M. (1977). Resource mobilization and social movements. *American Journal of Sociology*, 82, 1212-41.
- McQuarrie, M. & Marwell, N. (2009). The missing organizational dimension in urban sociology. *City & Community*, 8(3), 247-268.

- Meyer, D. & Minkoff, D. (2004). Conceptualizing political opportunity. *Social Forces*, 82(4): 1457-1492.
- Milkman, R. (2006). *LA Story: Immigrant Workers and the Future of the U.S. Labor Movement*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Milkman, R. (2011). Immigrant workers, precarious work, and the US labor movement. *Globalizations*, 8(3), 361-372.
- Milkman, R., Gonzales, A., & Narro, V. (2010). *The failure of employment and labor law for low-wage workers*. Los Angeles: UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment.
- Minkoff, D. (1995). Interorganizational influences on the founding of African American Organizations, 1955-1985. *Sociological Forums*, 10(1), 51-79.
- Minkoff, D. (1997). The sequencing of social movements. *American Sociological Review*, 62, 779-799.
- Minkoff, D. (2002). The emergence of hybrid organizational forms: combining identity-based service provision and political action. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 31(3), 377-401.
- National Center for Charitable Statistics (2012). *Nonprofit Statistics*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute. Retrieved from <http://nccsdataweb.urban.org>.
- National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, Inc. (2012). *Right to Work States*. Retrieved from <http://www.nrtw.org/rtws.htm>.
- Passel, J. & Suro, R. (2005). *Rise, Peak, and Decline: Trends in U.S. Immigration 1992-2004*. Washington D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center.
- Passel, J. & Cohn, D'Vera (2011). *Unauthorized Immigrant Population: National and State Trends, 2010*. Washington D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center.

Quandt, S. Grzywacz, J., Marin, A., Carillo, L., Coates, M., Burke, B., & Arcury, T. (2006).

Illnesses and injuries reported by Latino poultry workers in western North Carolina.

American Journal of Industrial Medicine, 49, 343-351.

Rodriguez, N. (2006). Workers wanted: Employer recruitment of immigrant labor. *Work and*

Occupations, 31, 453-472.

Snow, B., & Soule, S. (2011). *A Primer on Social Movements*. New York: W.W. Norton &

Company.

Sullivan, R. (2010). Organizing workers in the space between unions: Union-centric labor

revitalization and the role of community-based organizations. *Critical Sociology*, 3(36),

793-819.

Tarrow, S. (2011). *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 3rd Edition.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

UCLA: Statistical Consulting Group. *Stata FAQ: How can I check for collinearity*. Retrieved

from <http://www.ats.ucla.edu/stat/stata/faq/svycollin.htm>.

U.S. Census Bureau (2012). *Selected characteristics of the native and foreign-born populations,*

2010 American Community Survey 1-year estimates. Custom table, American Factfinder.

Retrieved from <http://factfinder2.census.gov>.

U.S. Census Bureau (2011). *Hispanic or Latino of any race, 2010 American Community Survey*

1-year estimates. Custom table, American Factfinder. Retrieved from

<http://factfinder2.census.gov>.

U.S. Census Bureau (2012). *Service employment count and percentages*. Custom table, County

Business Patterns. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/econ/cbp/>.

Valenzuela, A., Theodore, N., Melendez, E., & Gonzales, A. (2006). *On the Corner: Day Labor in the United States*. Los Angeles: UCLA Center for the Study of Urban Poverty.

Vosko, L. F. (2005). *Precarious Employment: Understanding Labour Market Insecurity in Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Walker, E., McCarthy, J., & Baumgartner, F. (2011). Replacing members with managers? Mutualism among membership and nonmembership advocacy organizations in the United States. *American Journal of Sociology*, 177(5), 1284-1337.

Wallace, M., & Figueroa, R. (2012). Determinants of perceived immigrant job threat in the American states. *Sociological Perspectives*, 55(4), 583-612.

Figure 1. Worker Center Organizational Density in the United States

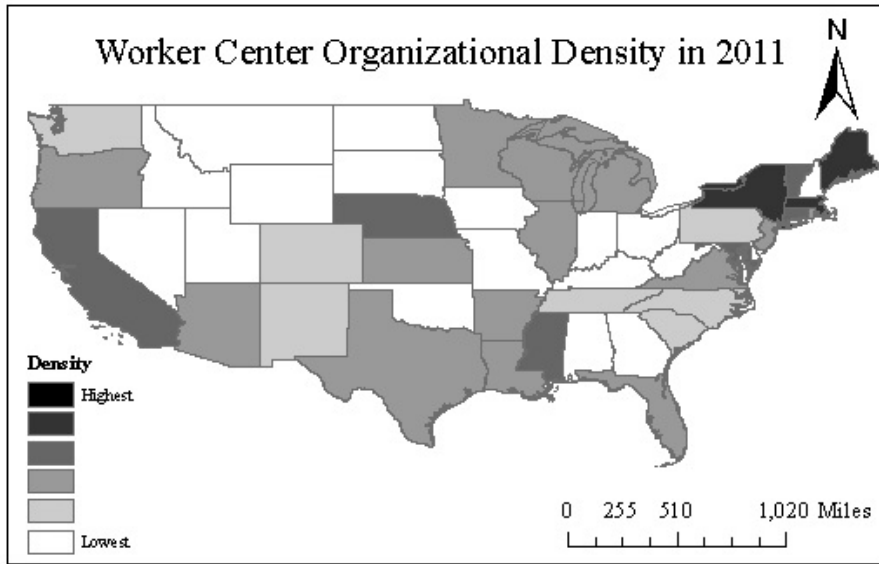


Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Continuous Independent Variables

	Mean	SD	Median	Min	Max
Immigration	0	1	-0.07	-2.62	1.89
Service Employment	3.96	0.09	3.95	3.78	4.37
Civil Rights Nonprofit	4.19	1.87	4.37	0	10.10
Union Membership	10.92	5.40	10.20	3.20	24.20

Table 2. Correlation Matrix

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Immigration	1				
2. Service Employment	0.4411	1			
3. Favorable Organizing Climate	0.2036	0.3757	1		
4. Civil Rights Nonprofit	0.2252	0.5439	0.3049	1	
5. Union Density	0.2011	0.1691	0.7376	0.3614	1

Table 3. Logit and Probit Regressions of Worker Center Presence

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Immigration	1.286** (0.548)	1.318** (0.602)	0.779** (0.321)	0.780** (0.346)
Service Employment	-0.060 (0.122)	-0.094 (0.133)	-0.033 (0.073)	-0.051 (0.077)
Favorable Organizing Climate	4.644*** (1.769)	6.653*** (2.290)	2.835*** (1.023)	4.022*** (1.315)
Union Density	-0.390*** (0.143)	-0.573*** (0.188)	0.237*** (0.080)	-0.344*** (0.107)
Civil Rights Nonprofit	0.476* (0.267)	0.537* (0.283)	0.285* (0.155)	0.321* (0.168)
Constant	4.628 (6.344)	7.285 (7.018)	2.641 (3.752)	4.066 (4.051)
Log Likelihood	-22.557	-20.318	-22.299	-20.085
Pseudo R-Square	0.305	0.358	0.313	0.365
N	51	49	51	49

Standard error in parentheses
 *p <.10, **p <.05, ***p <.01