POLITICAL INEQUALITIES AND REIMAGINING DEMOCRACY

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Urban Politics & Chicago's Political Machine

In a city like Chicago, much of the politics goes through and is controlled by the city council and, more specifically, by one's local alderman. In our interviews with young people, the politicians referenced most often were the mayor and the Chicago City Council aldermen. The Chicago City Council, a legislative branch of the city government, is divided into 50 districts or wards that are each represented by one aldermanic representative. The constituents of each ward elect this representative to serve a four-year term.[174]

The Chicago City Council is sometimes viewed controversially by Chicagoans who know its history of corruption. Since the 1970s, many aldermen have accepted bribes,[175] and/or have been convicted of crimes related to their political duties.[176] Moreover, they have predominantly served political elites in the city over the broader population's interests.[177] Currently, an alderman accused of bribery awaits a trial in the summer of 2019; if pronounced guilty, he will be the 30th such legislator over the last 46 years to be convicted of a crime related to corruption in the city. This history of local politics was often mentioned by the young adults we interviewed as they shared how they made sense of politicians' responsiveness, how they evaluated which aldermen were trustworthy, and the extent to which they believed political representatives in the city would advocate for their interests. For example, as Rebecca from Englewood explained: ***"It's the Windy City, right? It's like that because of the politicians; we have a history of having corrupt politicians, and I think that still exists today."***

Another equally defining attribute of Chicago's local political system is its "machine politics," with one party controlling the political and administrative power in the city. In Chicago, this has meant that every mayor since William Thompson in 1915 has been a member of the Democratic Party.[178/179] This political dominance by one party has created a unique environment for city politics in which most politicians cater to different subgroups of Democrats.[180/181] Mayor Richard J. Daley, who served from 1955-1976, was known for appealing to elite and poor white Democrats. For example, he maintained support among working-class whites in part by allowing discriminatory city housing policies, which limited resources to low-income African American populations in the city, to stay in place while other municipalities were changing such administrative policies.[182] In contrast, Mayor Harold Washington (1983-1987) appealed to and created a voting coalition of liberal whites, African Americans and Latinxs—particularly in the South and West Sides of the city.[183] His political agenda was very different than that of Richard J. Daley's, yet both of these mayors represented the Democratic Party in the city.

In a city with a long-standing history of both corruption and machine politics at the local level, to what extent have these structures shaped the political behaviors of young people? To better understand the political engagement of young adults, we asked our interview participants about their perceptions of their access to politicians, their political behaviors, and the extent to which they felt represented by the city government. Speaking to young people with different racial and ethnic identities about their political experiences across neighborhoods in Chicago revealed that they have very different interactions with a political system that is supposed to represent them all equally, yet systematically caters to some while ignoring others. While most young adults living on the North Side explained in their interviews that the political system in Chicago is working for them, the opposite was true for African American, Latinx, and Asian American young adults living in Englewood, Pilsen, and Chinatown-Bridgeport, who often shared experiences of political alienation, interactions with unresponsive political officials, and rejection when attempting to participate in formal politics. These political inequalities shape how young adults engage with and resist this system, and their stories

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should both challenge and motivate us to reimagine politics in the city of Chicago.

Who does the Mayor Represent?

When we spoke to young adults we learned that they had strong views about Mayor Rahm Emanuel, and that their views on the political representation they received from the Mayor of Chicago varied considerably by neighborhood. In their interviews, young adults living in Pilsen, Englewood, and Chinatown-Bridgeport mentioned that the mayor's responses to educational institutions were an indicator of the extent to which local politicians were prioritizing young Chicagoans. Moreover, many of the young adults from these neighborhoods explained that living in close proximity to underfunded or closed CPS schools led them to view these outcomes as political indicators of a negligent local government. Asian American adults in Chinatown-Bridgeport and African American adults in Englewood regularly criticized the mayor and related local officials for their role in endorsing and allowing the closing of CPS schools. Owen, a 25-year-old African American in Englewood, shared why he felt school closings signified that local politicians did not care about young adults' interests. He said: *"I feel that way because, if [politicians] did [care about young adults], then we wouldn't have over 52 schools closing. If they cared [about] anything they wouldn't be shutting down after-school programs that help the kids stay in school and learn. Because those were the best parts of growing up. And grammar school and high school, those are the best parts."*

Alex, a 20-year-old Asian American woman in Chinatown-Bridgeport, also believes local politicians, especially the mayor, do not care about young adults' interests. She said: *"I feel like Rahm Emanuel only really wants the good schools—or not even the good schools, just the charter schools to succeed, and wants to get rid of the public schools. But not everyone can afford [or access] charter schools or private schools, so we need the public schools."* Young adults that we spoke to across age groups, including those who did not attend a Chicago public school, viewed the state of educational institutions in Chicago as a primary indicator of the extent to which their local government is serving young people. For many of them, school closures and under-resourced schools in the city reflect broader political negligence to serve their neighborhoods.

While some white young adults we interviewed on the North Side were also critical of politicians' involvement and association with the closing of CPS schools, many of them were more positive in their evaluations, especially of Mayor Rahm Emanuel. A number of our interviewees positively mentioned the mayor's efforts in making the city more environmentally friendly. Jack, a 28-year-old white young adult living on the North

Side, explained, *"I actually like Rahm; I don't mind him. … I feel like there are things happening in the state that affect my quality of life here, in this city, of course. Yeah, in terms of what Rahm has done, he's very oriented towards green streets. I tend to agree with a lot of his initiatives, overall. I know he gets a lot of flak for school closures, like some of his decisions about that. A lot of people hate Rahm; I don't quite understand where they're coming from, either."*

Emma, also a 28-year-old white young adult from the North Side, shared a similar attitude. She said: *"I feel like Rahm is very interested in the millennial generation and adding bike lanes and creative office [space] and making the city more, like, San Francisco-esque. I feel like that's something he's made very apparent."*
Many white young adults we interviewed saw city improvements, green initiatives, and innovative ways to use city spaces as an indicator that politicians were paying attention to their needs. White young adults, living both on the North side and in Albany Park, often mentioned politicians respond to them, and that they have the power to persuade the mayor to take action. For example, William, a 29-year-old living in Albany Park, explained why he thinks the mayor will cater to his interests. He said, *"**I think if we make our opinions heard we will force the government and politicians to take action in our direction.** … I think that Chicago people are happy, and they gather together and make their opinions heard. Rahm is going to be forced to take an action, but I think somebody needs to push for that action."*
Many other white young adults on the North Side and in Albany Park shared similar sentiments of being able to control and have influence over politicians in the city. In contrast, young adults of color did not express the same perception. The difference is correlated with where these young people live and what signals they use to evaluate their politicians. Many young adults of color perceive the mayor's failed educational policies as evidence that he does not care about them or their communities. Young whites on the North Side, who as noted earlier in the education section of this report attend better-funded public and private schools, view the successful environmental policies of the mayor as a sign that he is pursuing an agenda that they care about.

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Interestingly, while we were in the field, we did not know that Rahm Emanuel would not run for reelection in 2018. However, the variation in how young people across the

city experience and perceive the extent to which the mayor does or does not represent them, is a lesson that mayoral candidates should take to heart. This lesson also applies to any politician in the city. How young adults discuss their aldermanic representatives only further illustrates this point.

The Politics of Chicago's City Council

The local aldermanic system in Chicago was structured to serve as an accessible pathway for local residents to participate in politics. Chicagoans live in the same neighborhoods as their representatives and thus are presumed to have more access to them than to other political officials. However, young adults shared very different experiences with their local political representatives that varied by race and ethnicity. For example, many Latinx young adults living in Pilsen expressed frustration in their interviews that some of their aldermanic representatives supported urban developers over what they perceived to be the interests of their communities. They shared stories of talking to and reaching out to their local representatives, only to be disappointed when those politicians supported gentrification efforts in the neighborhood that ran directly counter to the interests of many young adults. In our interviews, Latinx young adults expressed frustration about living in a place that appeared to have less crime and more development only because more whites moved into Pilsen. Several of them believe local representatives are catering to the new white residents instead of protecting and serving the people who have lived in the neighborhood for decades, including back when it was less developed and had more crime. For many of the Latinx young adults we spoke with, their representatives are reachable, but not responsive to their interests and needs.

Asian American young adults living in Chinatown-Bridgeport mentioned that they know how to reach their local aldermanic representatives, but that oftentimes these representatives take a long time to respond to them and are not helpful. Minh, a 25-year-old Asian American living in Chinatown-Bridgeport, shared an experience that captured her opinion that representatives are not responsive to young people. She said: *"The youth were working on a community mural, and they had asked the alderman for permission and for funding. And for several months, there was no answer from the alderman, even though the alderman had said he liked the project and he wants to support it. We had sent him a letter requesting for funding, and I think if he didn't want to fund us, he should have said so at the beginning. But it took him about maybe five months to say, 'oh, I don't have money.'"* Other young adults in Chinatown-Bridgeport referenced experiences of trying to work with their local representatives, but ultimately,

feeling that their representatives did not take them seriously.

In Englewood, African American young adults told us a different story about their local aldermanic representatives. For those we interviewed, representatives are absent, and many of them mentioned having no contact with their local aldermen. Tyler, a 24-year-old African American, shared why he thinks his alderman does not do a good job representing Englewood residents. He explained, *"because I do not see them enough. I do not see them engaging with the community. I do not see them enough. I have not seen an alderman in our place for like six years, and nobody knows what you look like. So at least walk up and down every block and just wave at people or something—asking people 'will you pass out flyers or have community meetings?' Or post a program like, 'I am going to show you how to buy the houses in the community.' You learn something. I do not see any proactive politicians in the neighborhood."* Llyod, a 21-year-old African American, added, *"the alderman doesn't care. You reach out to the alderman; they get back to you 30 years later."* Most of the African American young adults we spoke with perceived their local political representatives as absent and inaccessible.

In contrast, white young adults shared with us numerous stories of positive engagement with their local representatives, although their interest in political engagement seemed to vary depending on whether they were longtime residents of Chicago or recent transplants. For example, white young adults who were transplants often held positive views of local officials, but ultimately were uninterested in engaging with them because they were less invested in staying in the city long-term. For example, Ashley, who is a 27-year-old white woman living on the North Side, explained she felt she had

access to her local alderman, but ultimately was not invested in politics. She shared: *"I think that from an alderman's perspective where you get smaller and smaller, I would say yes [they represent me]. In terms of my individual interests, I don't engage very much with the political system here in Chicago at all. It's not something that I've ever been super interested in because I've*

always known that I'll probably leave, so I haven't engaged very deeply with it. We do—just through my job and my work; I work with a lot of people who have worked in the mayor's office and are really deeply entrenched in the political system now, and they're people that I respect, and I really like. I know that they feel very strongly that the government here in Chicago is looking out for our interests."

In comparison, white young adults who were long-term residents of Chicago also felt represented by their local aldermen, but they mentioned having a closer relationship to these representatives than those who are recent transplants to the city. Craig, a 25-year-old white man living on the North Side, explained that *"**[city politicians] care about my interests because I'm an upper-class white male, at least at the mayoral level.** I think the aldermen, you could flip a coin depending on who it is. I'm very familiar with certain aldermen. [Carlos Rosa], I think he's an example of an alderman who really cares. And although I think he is really focused on his neighborhood, I think he's somebody who is really passionate about change. I know one of his staffers … and you can just tell that they really do care about seeing positive … revolutionary change."* Overall, white young adults we interviewed expressed very positive feelings toward their aldermanic representatives, and many of them—especially men—felt they could influence these representatives.

Based on these interviews with young adults across the city, we see that young adults from different neighborhoods have contrasting relationships with their aldermanic representatives and have divergent views of the mayor. Despite feelings of alienation among several young adults of color, many of whom we interviewed were able to list a number of political issues they cared about deeply. A lot of these issues have previously been mentioned in this report: education resources, mental health services, violence, crime, safety, and poverty. **Table 1** provides an overview of the political issues young adults were most concerned about, depending on their neighborhood. The issues these young people prioritized tended to vary by race and ethnicity as well. Yet, as previously discussed in this section, young adults' access to politicians who might act on these issues also varies disproportionately. Many of the young adults of color we spoke to who live on

TABLE 1. ISSUE IMPORTANCE BY NEIGHBORHOOD (INTERVIEW SAMPLE)

Pilsen (Latinx)	Englewood (African Americans)	Chinatown-Bridgeport (Asian Americans)	North Side (Whites)
• Gentrification • Immigration • Violence	• Violence • Unemployment • Mental health	• Education • Crime & Safety • Immigration	• Crime & Gun Control • Women's rights • Healthcare

the West and South Sides of the city have decided not to rely on politicians to address the issues they care about.

"[City politicians] care about my interests because I'm an upper-class white male, at least at the mayoral level."

Instead, they are employing extra-systemic strategies of resistance that include developing counter spaces for democracy and engaging in social movements.

Resistance and Reimagining Democracy

As noted above, young adults are having strikingly different experiences with formal systems of political participation. White young adults we spoke to believed they could shape and influence politics through formal types of political participation such as voting, donating money, and contacting political representatives. In contrast, most Latinx, Asian American, and African American young adults we spoke to believe these forms of political participation gave them little to no power to influence political outcomes in the city. Our interviews illustrate that, when formal politics do not work for everyone in the city, many young adults of color turn to alternative forms of political engagement. These alternative forms demonstrate how some young adults feel they are positioned in the Chicago political system, what changes need to occur to improve their position, and where they believe they have leverage or power to affect this system.

Asian American young adults in Chinatown-Bridgeport often mentioned feeling rejected from formal politics. Many told us stories of trying to participate in formal politics—attending a community forum, voting, reaching out to their political representatives—yet ultimately feeling ignored. When many of them reflected on the descriptive representation of politicians in the city, and the lack of Asian Americans representing city residents **(see Figure 1)**, they described wanting more opportunities for people of color, and for Asian Americans in particular to get involved in politics. Vincent, a 24-year old Asian American, explained: *"**I think there needs to be an increase in POC [people of color] politicians. Just people that want to get into that field.** A lot of persons of color, especially Chinese people, they don't want to become politicians.*

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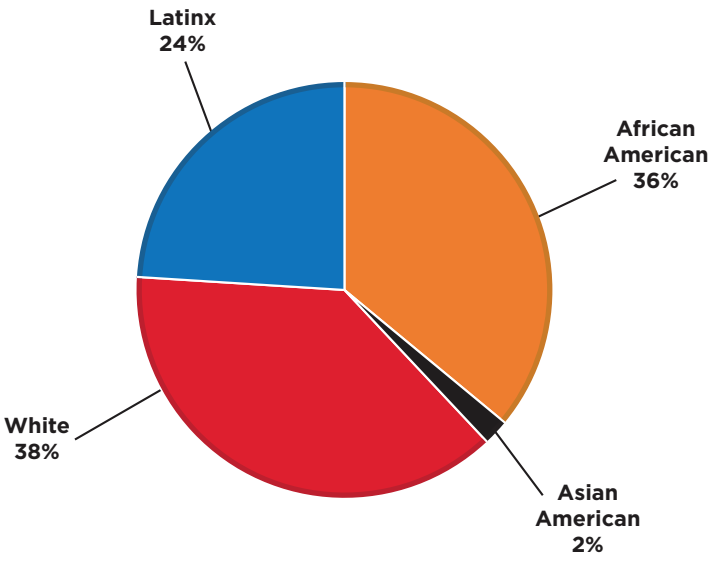
Me, personally, I don't think I would mind being a politician, but it's not something I considered. You don't grow up with those

considerations either. Your parents are always, like, 'become a doctor.' They do say 'become a lawyer,' but they never say 'become a politician.' … And culturally, we're not putting ourselves in positions to help ourselves when we don't have people in our own community serving us in the government." Other Asian American young adults shared with us their belief that there was a need for a larger number of Asian Americans in government. Many Asian American women in particular mentioned getting involved in political advocacy groups and wanting to establish better political pathways for Asian Americans and young adults of color to run for office.

Several of the African American young adults we spoke to in Englewood similarly emphasized community-based organizations in their neighborhoods as places to reimagine democratic engagement. However, unlike Asian Americans in Chinatown-Bridgeport, in their interviews many of them focused on civic engagement that would result in immediate changes in their communities. Many young African American adults explained that these urgent changes required collective action now, and they saw nonprofit organizations in Englewood as an institutional structure for facilitating these swift results. Kayla, a 25-year-old African American in Englewood, explained her involvement in a community project through which abandoned houses on the block were restored by young adults, thus

FIGURE 1: CHICAGO CITY COUNCIL RACE/ETHNICITY



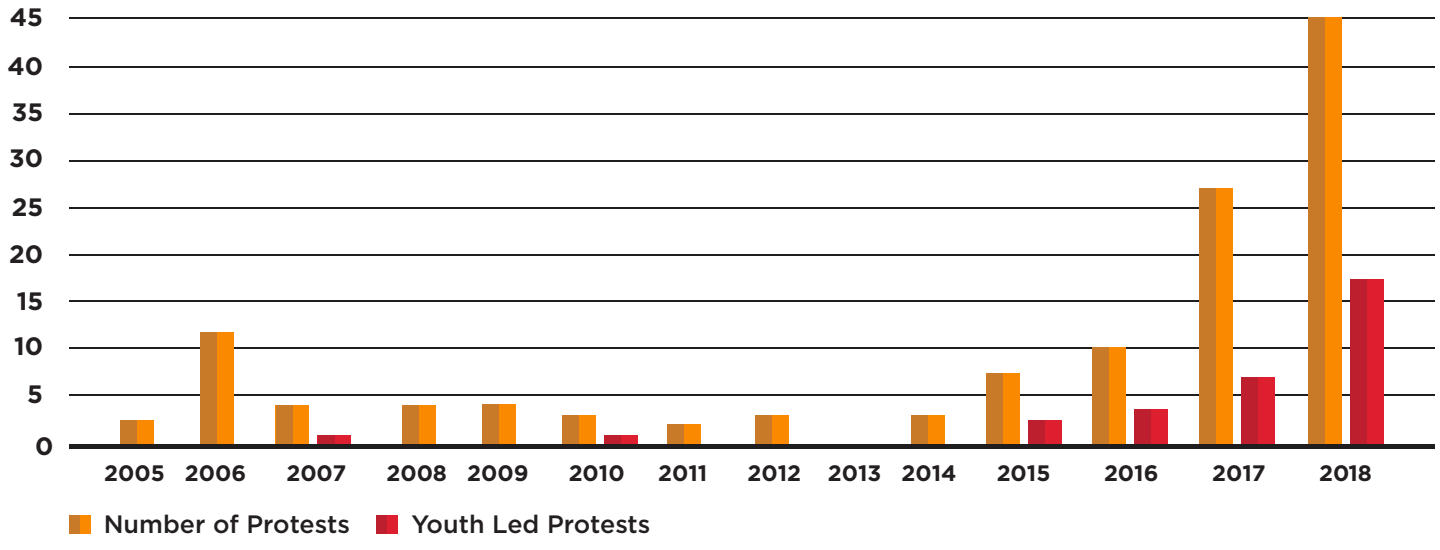
providing them with an alternative form of income and work. She shared: *"This was an abandoned house that was tore up inside, it was stripped down, it had nothing in it. … [The cofounders of the project] set the table up and walked down the block. They got to shaking our hands. … Half of these guys helped build this. We colored this stuff with paint and all of this. These guys on the block got talent, real talent, and she put that to use. [The cofounders] even took some of these guys off of the street and they turned their whole life around."* According to Kayla and other African American young adults we spoke to, if politicians are not going to step up and address issues such as poverty and violence in Englewood, then people in the neighborhoods have to find effective alternative mechanisms, like community organizing, to address these problems.

Emily, a 28-year-old African American living in Englewood, similarly described getting

involved in a community effort to address some of the issues she was witnessing in her neighborhood. She shared: *"I started my organization at the time [someone] was murdered. I started my organization the day after his funeral. And first I just wanted people to see a shirt that told people to put the guns down, but I've seen so many shirts that said put the guns down. And I was like, if I make shirts and I sell them, I can do stuff for the community with the money and that will become a movement. And that's exactly what I did. Every time I would make money, I would figure out how to put it back into my community. Kids need clothes, so I need to do a clothing drive, I need to do a toy drive, I need to do a shoe drive, I need to feed the homeless. I need to have events where kids can come and play and be safe. I need to do a gun buyback. I need to do a GED program, I need to do a water draft, get the people in the community outside the community so they can see that they're not the [only] ones going through things. Let's go to Flint, Michigan. These people don't even have clean water. If you all don't have money at least you have water. So I was able to do everything that I named because of my shirt sales and because I have the power to bring people together. I could call right now and say I need 50 people to meet me outside of the police station tonight."*

Many African American young adults we spoke with in Englewood mentioned that political officials ignore the issues they face in their neighborhood, and as a result some young adults such as Kayla and Emily have turned to grassroot efforts to try to make a difference. Many other young adults we interviewed in Englewood explained that community-based organizations were some of the few places where they felt their opinions were heard, where they felt they had power, and where they experienced working with fellow residents to solve collective problems. In many ways, community-based organizations in Englewood fulfilled a need

FIGURE 2: NUMBER OF PROTESTS REPORTED BY THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE [v]



for democratic institutions and were places where many of the young adults we spoke with felt they could actually experience democratic participation. Teamwork Englewood[184] and the Resident Association for Greater Englewood (R.A.G.E.)[185] are two organizations, among others, that are creating these types of opportunities for young adults.

Other African American young adults felt grassroot organizing was another outlet for democratic engagement, and referenced the Movement for Black Lives or the Black Lives Matter Movement as one form of infrastructure for this involvement.

"Yes [protests make a difference]. If you have the right amount of energy and the right amount of people, you can change [circumstances]."

Marcus, age 24, from Englewood, explained that he got involved in protests and marches through Black Lives Matter. He said: *"You know how they had the Black Lives Matter people walking through the neighborhoods? I did that."* Fatima, age 20, also from Englewood, shared *"I did a protest with my church for Black Lives Matter."* These references should not be surprising: Chicago has a highly visible and active presence of activist coalitions affiliated with the Movement for Black Lives, composed of many youth-led organizations leading marches, protests, and making explicit demands for transforming Chicago's criminal justice system and addressing other forms of systemic racism throughout the city.[186] Chicago has become one of the national epicenters of youth-led activism with organizations such as the Black Youth Project 100,[187] Assata's Daughters,[188] Black Lives Matter Chicago, Let Us Breathe Collective and Chicago Votes[189] mobilizing young people across the city. According to media reports from the Chicago Tribune **(see Figure 2)**, in the last three years protesting has increased in the city of Chicago, and many of these protests have been youth-led.[190/191]

The young African American adults we spoke to from Englewood shared some of their motivations for participating in these types of protests. For some, protests are a way to finally reach distant and unresponsive political officials. Brianna, age 23, a young African American in Englewood, explained: *"Yes, it does [make a difference], because you get your voice heard and you get to tell the political people how you feel and how it is, and then once you do that and more people feel the same way, they'll join and then your voices are going to be heard and you'll get on TV, and then they'll know that there's a problem they need to fix or something."* Others believe that protests are a mechanism for change because they illustrate a sense of unity among

disenfranchised groups. Justin, a 20-year-old African American also from Englewood, insisted: *"**Yes [protests make a difference]. If you have the right amount of energy and the right amount of people, you can change [circumstances].** You can scare Trump. You can make anything happen. We are people, we come as one, unite[d]."*

When political officials are invisible, and issues such as police, poverty, and violence are prevalent in a community like Englewood, many young African Americans search for other political strategies to change these circumstances. For some, community organizations are powerful institutions—places that are attuned to the neighborhood needs and opportunities for individual and collective agency. Others, however, seek political strategies that will dismantle broader political systems of inequality, such as police brutality and mass incarceration—and these goals require visible resistance, often through grassroot organizing and protest.

While many African American young adults in Englewood are invested in activities such as protesting and organizing, there are others who feel deterred from these actions. For some in Englewood, engaging in protest is too risky an endeavor that makes one vulnerable to police retaliation and repression. Taylor, age 20, from Englewood, explains why he has never engaged in protesting:

Taylor: *I've been too scared [to participate in a protest or march].*

Interviewer: *You say you've been too scared? Why?*

Taylor: *Only because people can get very violent, very rowdy. Even if you're protesting something about people … you see, they're [the police] killing people left and right. So, if they do that, if we're just talking about peace, they don't care.*

Interviewer: *So, if you were to go to a protest, the folks you would be afraid of are the police?*

Taylor: *It all depends on who you march with. If they are together with you. I would think so. Like I said, the police, they'll gang up so hard against you. We don't need you all. We're just marching for peace. We just want some peace. What you're doing right now is not bringing peace. You should be on the side with us.*

Like Taylor, several other African American young adults in Englewood referred to the risks associated with engaging in mobilizing efforts like protesting, often mentioning police retaliation as a factor that affected their decision to not participate in these efforts.

These fears are not unfounded; engaging in protests does come with risks and, according to African American and Latinx young adults in Englewood, Pilsen, and Albany Park, there are many instances when police officers unethically and unfairly repress these efforts. For example, Sofía, age 26, a Latina in Pilsen, shared: *I wish [police] were better trained, and they were not manipulated, they weren't brainwashed against—the way they behave towards the people in the community, especially people [of color]. … I have gone to protests where—I'm not a violent person, at all; I protested, so they can hear my voice, and we would be peaceful—we would not be violent, or we wouldn't start anything to cause violence, or anything like that. The police would attack right away; right away, they just react to unnecessary behavior. I've been hit by a cop twice. … We were just protesting, and a friend of mine was holding a poster; I fell out of nowhere, a bunch of cops just came in and they just surrounded him. I was near him, and we were holding hands, so I got caught up into the crowd and my arm was getting punched by a cop. He would just—he was hitting me really, really hard, and I looked up. He looked up and looked straight at me—straight into my eye. He looked at me for like two seconds, and I think he noticed that, "I'm hitting a girl," and he just backs away. I couldn't look at his badge; I remember his face, but I couldn't see his badge.*

Like Sofía, other Latinx young adults in Pilsen also referred to the risks involved in protest, but most insisted that protest and social movements are some of the only strategies that can truly change the political landscape for Latinxs in Chicago. Manuela, a 22-year-old Latina, explained why these are necessary political tools: *"I think if we make them care they, to a certain level, have to care. What I mean by that is, I don't think that politicians, at least any politicians that I've met, have an interest to uplift the immigrant, low-income, Latino, brown, black community; no. I don't think that they have a personal investment or a financial one. So I do not think they care to provide safe spaces, to provide schools that educate our students well and set them up for their own personal success. No, I do not think that they care. There are moments, I think, when the community can mobilize and influence a politician to act on something that we care about, that's the only time I think we or I feel cared for, if we demand it."*

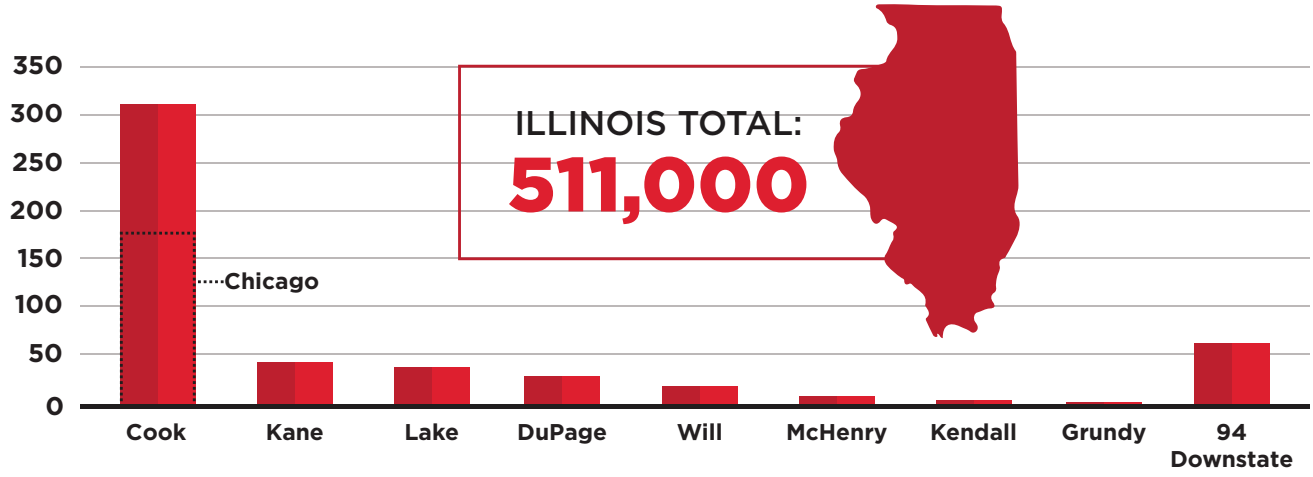
Manuela and others advocated for protesting and marching as an effective strategy for addressing local issues in

their community, such as gentrification. Josefina, a 24-year-old Latina, explained that in order to get the attention of local politicians in Pilsen to support affordable housing, she needed to rely on grassroot organizing. She explained: *"My group of friends and I formed this small group. I work a lot with Pilsen Alliance, and the Resurrection Project, and local organizations. We're starting a march on August 5th, and it's going to pass by the new sites where there is new development. There's supposed to be a 465-unit new development on Peoria and we're passing by it and just talking about trying to really fight for having it stay at 21% affordable income for families and things like that."*

Others organized marches and rallies as a way to resist gentrification and demonstrate the importance of preserving the culture of their community. María, a Latina, age 21, from Pilsen, explained she was going to participate in a march to illustrate what gentrification in the neighborhood would destroy as a result of new development projects. She explained *"the march is called Joyful Resistance … we're trying to preserve our community. Because [there is] all this culture here, all these traditions. It's actually a community. I feel like [gentrifiers] come and they look at us from a distance, and it's like a zoo. … That building had a beautiful mural with a bunch of revolutionaries of Latinos and mexicanos. You're trying to erase that? I feel like the kids growing up should get to see that and know the important people from their culture and why that's important. So tomorrow we're coming together [to march] as a celebration [of] our people and our culture."*

Young adults in Pilsen view protesting and marches as versatile political strategies to visibly illustrate localized issues in their community—and these strategies are effective. Because of this type of advocacy, Pilsen, unlike other Chicago neighborhoods, has strict mandates for developers. For example, the percentage

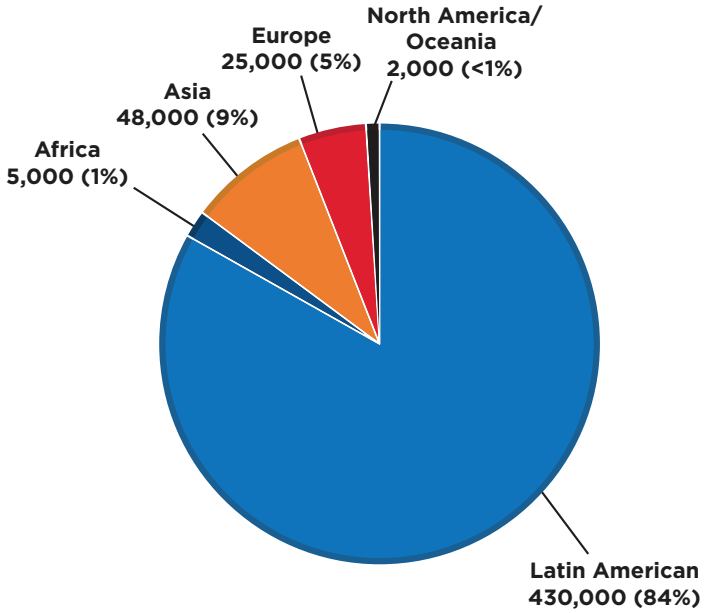
FIGURE 3: ESTIMATED UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT POPULATION BY COUNTY [W]



of affordable housing required in Pilsen is double that of the rest of city's neighborhoods, as regulated by the Affordable Requirements Ordinance.[192] These types of mandates are possible through activism and support from local community organizations such as the Resurrection Project, the Pilsen Alliance, Eighteenth Street Development Corporation, and Pilsen Neighbors Community Council, which organized dozens of public meetings and activism around zoning changes in Pilsen.[193]

Latinx young adults in Pilsen also use protest and grassroots organizing to address immigration issues that span beyond Pilsen. In Illinois and Chicago, the undocumented population is majority Latinx **(see Figures 3 and 4)**, and in the last two years there has been a large increase nationally in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)[194] immigration arrests of Latinx individuals.[195] Community organizations in Chicago, such as Organized Communities Against Deportation, report that in Chicago ICE has been operating with impunity, often engaging in racial profiling and entering homes without warrants.[196] Latinx young adults from Pilsen often mentioned in their interviews experiencing and hearing about these types of incidents in their neighborhood and realizing there is a need for political action. Indeed, immigration is a motivating political issue for many Latinx young adults who fear they will lose someone they love due to deportation. For example, Alec, age 20, explains his constant anxiety of losing his parents as a result of deportation: *"Just the whole concept of me and my parents being deported [is scary]. As of right now, I only live with my dad. He's the only one that, you can say,[is] contributing. He's the one who's taking care of my brothers. It got to the point where my sister[is] like, 'They're going to take dad away from me?' And I'm like, 'No, no, no, they're not going to do anything. Don't worry. Relax.' And like, 'But what if they take him away? Whatever he's done, we're going to take him.' I really don't know how to explain to a little girl, like, 'Yes, this is going on, but nothing's going to happen.'"*

FIGURE 4: CHICAGO IMMIGRANT AREAS OF ORIGIN [W]



Many Latinx young adults in Pilsen explained that despite Chicago's status as a sanctuary city—which is supposed to limit cooperation with federal immigration enforcement agents to protect low-priority immigrants from deportation—ICE continues to operate within the city's jurisdiction due to the city's limited influence over a federal agency.[197] In response to this issue, Juan, age 23, a resident of Pilsen, insisted on political changes that *"offer an actual path towards citizenship for people. Or some amnesty, some sort of amnesty."* When asked how to achieve these political goals, Juan continued: *"Be an activist. Take part in social movements. If you see a problem and you don't do anything about it then it's not going to change. You have to do something, somewhere or another. That's kind of how people throughout history have gained rights through social movements and protests. It seems like it works."* Juan is not alone in this belief: many young Latinx adults in Chicago have joined organizations such as the Immigrant Youth Justice League,[198] which was founded and is led by undocumented youth organizers in Chicago to advocate for the rights of those who are undocumented, and Organized Communities Against Deportation,[199] another organization in Chicago led by Latinx young adults to fight deportations and immigrant detentions.

Asian Americans in Chinatown-Bridgeport also mentioned immigration issues as a political issue that mobilized them, but not in the same way. Claudia, a 27-year-old Asian American living in Chinatown-Bridgeport, explained that immigration issues are really important to Asian Americans. She states: *"So I've always wished the Asian community here in Chicago would be more supportive in terms of—like I think we're in an interesting middle group where these things don't affect us as much because we're not talked about in the media. So everyone thinks immigration issues have to do with Latinos, which is not true. It affects every immigrant."* Asian Americans we interviewed in Chinatown-Bridgeport were less concerned with deportation and more concerned about the available services in the community to support immigrants' transition to the United States, such as

translation services, healthcare clinics, and adult education programs. Jevon, age 27, an Asian American living in Chinatown-Bridgeport, explained the type of local, political advocacy organizations she would like to see further supported: *"They're always cutting into Springfield, lobbying for USCIS [United States Citizenship and Immigration Services] programs, moms and baby's programs, food stamps, and all that works. ...There are organizations out there that do help the vulnerable, and the underrepresented, and those who have language barriers, to try to have access to social welfare. There's another organization that I recently signed with. ... They are a coalition for limited English-speaking [people], specifically for [the] elderly."*

Like African American young adults we spoke with in Englewood, many Asian Americans in Chinatown-Bridgeport viewed nonprofit organizations as important counter spaces for democracy. George, an Asian American who is 19 years old and lives in Chinatown-Bridgeport, highlighted the importance of these institutions in light of government negligence. He explained: *"I feel like maybe the community itself [has to act], not so much the government, because even though the government can help us it's not always a guarantee because I always feel like there's some kind of separation between the government and its people.* ***I feel like as long as the community is sticking together, and staying connected and in touch, we can all support each other.*** *"* Although Latinx and Asian American young adults emphasized different priorities related to immigration, both often mentioned in their interviews not being able to rely on local politicians to lead these political efforts. Latinx young adults in Pilsen pursue strategies of protest, social movements, and grassroots organizing, while Asian Americans in Chinatown-Bridgeport focus on local, political advocacy organizations that will support immigrants in their neighborhoods.

"I feel like as long as the community is sticking together, and staying connected and in touch, we can all support each other."

Young adults living in Englewood, Chinatown-Bridgeport, and Pilsen are all grappling with a deficit of political representation in Chicago. Many of these young adults are forging new and wide pathways through protest, social movements, and community advocacy that will provide nontraditional forms of power to act on the issues they care about. These young people are persistent and imaginative, pursuing a new vision of democracy in the city of Chicago—one that takes seriously the concerns of young people and elevates their political agendas.

New Political Futures

The stories we heard from young adults across the city point out their different opinions about the way forward for Chicago politics. White young adults living on the North Side envision a future much like the present: participating in formal political institutions, supporting responsive political officials, and enjoying the many ways in which politics improves their lives. Meanwhile, young adults from Chinatown-Bridgeport, Pilsen, and Englewood are insisting we envision a new political future, and they have ideas and suggestions for how to craft it. For many, these perspectives are informed by their attempts to participate in politics formally by voting, contacting their representatives, or voicing their concerns at city council meetings—all methods that ultimately make visible an unequal political system of representation in which those with power seem uninterested in the voices, concerns, and issues most important to young adults of color. For many young adults with whom we spoke, these experiences motivated them to consider creative and alternative strategies for engaging in politics. Some of these strategies are risky, and many of them depend on resources outside of the state, as many young adults rely on nonprofits, community organizations, activist organizations and neighborhood resources to facilitate their political participation. For many of them, these institutions and places are counter spaces for democracy.

Asian American young adults we spoke with in Chinatown-Bridgeport have ambitions for creating new pathways for young people of color to run for office. African American young adults in Englewood are creating organizations and getting involved in grassroots efforts to reimagine democratic institutions and build new initiatives that are designed to benefit people in their neighborhoods. Moreover, some African Americans and many Latinxs are participating in a vibrant scene of collective action in which social movements help to shift the power in their direction. Thus, the young adults we interviewed in Chicago are very much engaged in local politics, but often their pathway to justice, equality, and liberation is one that leads them outside of sanctioned state institutions. Many are working hard to create new pathways through which politics is reimagined and opportunities for change are created by these young people themselves.

RECOMMENDED CITATION

Brower, Margaret Teresa. “Political Inequalities and Reimagining Democracy” in *Race & Place: Young Adults and the Future of Chicago* (Genforward at the University of Chicago, 2019), p98-115.