Abstract

Undocumented immigration from Latin America is a heated and divisive topic in United States’ politics. Politicians in Washington, D.C., are debating the legislation which would provide a pathway to citizenship for some 11 million undocumented immigrants. The Indianapolis Congregation Action Network (IndyCAN), a grassroots activist group in Indianapolis, is organizing the Latino community through faith and shared political goals. Many undocumented Latino immigrants are utilizing IndyCAN to mobilize and attempt to influence legislation for undocumented immigrants. The result is that many Latino immigrants are engaging in a political system which refuses to grant them a legal status.

Policy and Structural Vulnerability

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

The Indianapolis Congregation Action Network (IndyCAN)

Founded in early 2011, IndyCAN has sought to effect progressive policy change in Indiana and nationwide through a conglomeration of multiple congregations and Indiana residents. IndyCAN is an affiliate of the People Improving Communities through Organizing (PICO) and is working with PICO’s Campaign for Citizenship in attempting to effect progressive immigration reform.

Enacting Activism through Religion

IndyCAN and the Campaign for Citizenship branch participate in activism through seemingly nonpolitical means such as prayer, prayer vigils, and the sharing of testimonios. Prayer vigils were conducted extensively throughout the summer of 2013 in order to sway public opinion and Indiana’s politicians to support immigration reform. These occurred at the Soldiers and Sailors Monument in Indianapolis multiple times a week throughout May and June 2013. Attendances ranged from four people to over 30 at these prayer vigils.

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References