THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

**(City)Keys to Belonging:**

**A Qualitative Analysis of Chicago’s CityKey Program, The Changing Role of Non-Governmental Organizations, and New Pathways to Belonging Within Immigrant and Undocumented Communities**

Olivia Shaw

ogshaw@uchicago.edu

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Preceptor: Margaret Teresa Brower

Faculty Advisor: Yanilda María González

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**ABSTRACT**

Municipal ID, specifically CityKey, exists at the center of debates surrounding immigration, federalism, citizenship, and belonging. In this thesis, I seek to answer two questions: one about the extent to which municipal identification influences conceptions of belonging for members of immigrant and undocumented communities in Chicago, the other about how service providers and non-governmental organizations understand their role in creating and/or discouraging pathways for belonging as it relates to municipal ID programs. Between November 2019 and March 2020, I interviewed 14 subjects total from both Chicago and the Chicago suburbs; two city officials, ten NGO advocates, and two community members. As my interviewees expressed, belonging by way of CityKey existed in two forms that worked hand-in-hand: through increased visibility in Chicago, and through participating in active, municipal citizenship. Furthermore, my interviewees spoke to two barriers to belonging: at the city-level, the rejection of CityKey at banks and financial institutions, and at the federal-level, fear caused by the current federal administration. To my second question, according to my subjects, NGOs served as a bridge between their communities and city government, which facilitated pathways for belonging. Further, NGO advocates spoke to the ways they held the City accountable, and areas where CityKey could be improved. In suburban communities, my subjects spoke to differing conceptions of belonging, especially as it relates to access to services and local political representation. As CityKey celebrates its second birthday, it’s important to study how CityKey impacts vulnerable communities, particularly Chicago’s immigrant and undocumented communities.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**INTRODUCTION…………………………………………………………………………….... 1**

*Research Question***………………………………………………………………………………. 2**

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE………………………………………………………………….. 4**

*Immigration Federalism: A Framework***………………………………………………………….4**

*Citizenship: A Status and an Activity***…………………………………………………………….. 7**

*Studying “Belonging”***………………………………………………………………………….... 9**

*Role of Identification and Other Forms of Localized Belonging***………………………………... 11**

*Chicago’s CityKey Program***……………………………………………………………………. 14**

*Beyond the City: Immigration to the Suburbs***…………………………………………………... 16**

*Role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Facilitating Access***…………………….. 18**

*Summary of Gaps in the Literature***……………………………………………………………... 23**

*.*

**DATA COLLECTION AND METHODS…………………………………………………… 24**

**FINDING AND ANALYSIS………………………………………………………………….. 27**

*Government Issued Identification Matters to One’s Sense of Belonging***………………………. 27**

*Visibility in Chicago as a Way of Belonging***…………………………………………………… 28**

*Activating Municipal Citizenship as a Way of Belonging***……………………………………… 32**

*Barriers to City Belonging: CityKey at Banks and Financial Institutions***……………………... 36**

*Barriers to Federal Belonging – Fear in the United States***…………………………………….. 38**

*Building a Bridge: The Role of NGOs in Connecting Communities to Government***……………42**

Through NGOs, New Pathways to Belonging**…………………………………………... 43**

Holding Power Accountable: NGOs Advocacy Role in Creating CityKey**……………... 45**

More is More: An Underfunded and Understaffed Program**…………………………….. 47**

*A Comparative Case: Belonging and Access to Services in the Chicago Suburbs***…………….... 50**

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION………………………………………………………… 53**

*Bibliography*

**INTRODUCTION**

For many people in the United States, government-issued identifications are a rite of passage. Whether it be a passport, a driver’s license, or a consular identification, presenting a valid government-issued ID is often a threshold issue needed to do a whole host of things; from driving a car, to getting on a plane, to buying and consuming alcohol, to accessing welfare benefits, etcetera. Although many are familiar with federal or state issued identification, there is an increasing movement in cities and municipalities in the United States to create municipal IDs. While municipal IDs don’t automatically grant people the ability to engage in federal rights and privileges they didn’t have access to before, municipal IDs sit at the crossroads between ongoing conversations regarding citizenship, federalism, immigration, and belonging. One such program is Chicago’s CityKey program.

In recent years, the City of Chicago has been at the forefront of creating localized policies, like CityKey, that have intended to make the city a more welcoming place for its residents who are immigrants and members of the undocumented community. On top of its municipal ID program, the City of Chicago has also designated itself as a sanctuary city, whereby its local law enforcement has refused to comply with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents in order to protect its residents from deportation. Further, the City of Chicago is part of the larger efforts in Illinois to assist members of the undocumented community in getting drivers’ licenses as part of its Temporary Visitor Driver’s License program (TVDL). While it’s not the only municipality enacting such programs, Chicago has demonstrated that it intends to welcome members of the immigrant and undocumented community through its series of welcoming policies.

Comparatively, the federal government has not done the same. Coupled with an already stagnant immigration system, the introduction of a conservative federal administration in 2016 brought with it physical and figurative barriers for members of immigrant and undocumented communities. In the United States, the process of becoming a citizen was already challenging, but throughout the past decade, policies on the federal level have often signaled to new arrivals that they aren’t wanted here.

Within this conflict, the CityKey Program serves as an example of an emerging form of local citizenship, whereby members of the immigrant and undocumented community are welcomed, even though they might not be welcomed at the federal level. As a result, municipal ID, specifically CityKey in the case of this thesis, exists at the center of debates surrounding immigration federalism, citizenship, and belonging in ways that are increasingly important to consider in the current political climate. Especially in Chicago, many members of the immigrant and undocumented community experience this disconnect between federal and local policies, which fundamentally alters how they are able to live their everyday lives. In turn, access to a program like CityKey has the potential to impact one’s sense of belonging, providing the opportunity to better understand what emerging forms of municipal citizenship could look like.

This unique form of citizenship and belonging provides the basis for the questions this thesis seeks to engage with: *to what extent, and in what ways, does municipal identification that does not require legal citizenship influence one’s behavior and one’s conceptions of belonging for immigrants and members of the undocumented community? Further, how do service providers and non-governmental agencies understand their role in creating and/or discouraging pathways for belonging as it relates to municipal identification and members of the immigrant and undocumented community?*

To answer these questions, I have chosen to explore Chicago’s CityKey program as a case study of how municipal IDs shape conceptions of belonging. I’ve chosen CityKey for a few reasons: first, the population of immigrants living in the Chicago metropolitan area, and second, the newness of the CityKey program. First, according to scholars at the Migration Policy Institute, as of 2018, the Chicago metropolitan area was home to 9,536,000 immigrants (Batalova, Blizzard, and Bolter, 2020; Migration Policy Institute, 2018). Furthermore, from 2012-2016, Cook County, the county where Chicago is located, was ranked in the top five counties of residence for undocumented immigrants living in the United States (Gelatt and Zong, 2020). Due to its sizable immigrant population, Chicago and its suburbs provide a strong foundation for research with respect to this population. By studying the entire metropolitan area, I was able to compare how different environments impact differing conceptions of belonging as it relates to who has access to CityKey. From there, selecting CityKey as my case study was predicated on the newness of the program. As CityKey enters its second year of existence, I hope that my research will contribute to growing scholarship on the implementation and effectiveness of these programs, especially as it relates to immigrant and undocumented communities.

In this thesis, I posit that municipal IDs, like CityKey, significantly shape the experiences of municipal residents who are immigrants and residents who are members of the undocumented community. I hypothesize that my interviewees will claim that those who have a municipal ID feel more connected to Chicago as municipal citizens. Through my interviews, I explore the claim that immigrants and members of the undocumented community use city services more and engage with Chicago more because having municipal IDs makes them feel safe and comfortable in doing so. Further, I examine how municipal IDs impact this community’s understanding of their relationship with government entities on a city level and a federal level. According to my subjects, I discuss the extent to which municipal IDs have bearing on how this community perceives their relationship to their immigration status, as well as their desire to acquire formal legal citizenship in the United States. To my second research question, I investigate how non-governmental organizations serve as a bridge between these communities and government, examining to what extent their role impacts one’s sense of belonging by facilitating peoples’ access to services. Lastly, as explained by my interviewees, I discuss the unique experience of members of immigrant and undocumented communities in the Chicago suburbs as it relates to their access to services as well as political representation in local government.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Immigration Federalism: A Framework

While the literature on the subject of immigration is vast, a more focused approach to studying immigration in the United States is to study immigration federalism. According to Robert Suro (2015), immigration federalism describes the dynamic relationship between federal immigration policy and how that policy is implemented on the state and local level. Suro (2015) argues that, after the mid-1990s, immigration federalism changed from a seemingly structured, static relationship between levels of government to one that is shifting and changing. Accordingly, this dynamic immigration federalism can be understood through the relationship local entities have with the federal government, through the new policy actors that have entered the current immigration policy space, and through the value placed on the timing and spatial recognition of emerging policies (Suro, 2015). Broadly speaking, immigration federalism comprises the unique and now dynamic relationship between federal policy and local implementation.

Immigration federalism has filled a large gap in immigration research, mainly because once a policy is created on a federal level, the nuances in its implementation on a state and local level account for a policy’s differing outcomes. Structurally, according to Miriam Wells (2004), federalism in the United States is intended to allow for discretion to be used in immigration policymaking and implementation among designated levels of government. As Wells (2004) argues, this structure of federalism often leaves room for the intentions of federal policy to be convoluted or misconstrued when translated onto the local level. Wells (2004) cites the decentralization of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) as one way that immigration policy doesn’t escape the US’s broader federalist structure. As a result, studying immigration through the perspective of immigration federalism introduces necessary nuance to how these policies are interpreted and enforced from the federal government down to the grassroots level.

As it stands, understandings of immigration federalism traditionally rely heavily on the study of laws and law enforcement as the sole examples of nuances in the local implementation of immigration policy. According to Emily Farris and Mirya Holman (2017), local law enforcement’s approach towards enforcing federal immigration laws was largely determined by a range of personal factors, such as a sheriff's ethnicity or their political beliefs, and by a range of institutional factors, like a county-police department’s culture surrounding racial profiling. While this study highlights the degree of discretion local entities have in policing people’s citizenship, studying institutional constraints should not be the end of this discussion, as it's equally as important to consider how those affected by such constraints experience their citizenship being policed.

Furthermore, in the current scholarship, immigration federalism often only speaks to how policymakers interpret and enforce the law, which results in prioritizing elite voices in ways that limit their findings. In a study done by Alexandra Filindra and Melinda Kovacs (2012), resolutions written in various Southwest border-states showcase the different priorities of each state when it comes to immigration. Notably, all of the states studied by Filindra and Kovacs (2012) cited the federal government as both the problem with immigration policy and the necessary solution to the issue of immigration reform. This citation of the federal government’s role in local resolutions further reinforces, as Suro (2015) argues, the dynamic nature of immigration federalism. However, while this approach provides context for the laws being enacted and created, Filindra and Kovacs (2012) themselves state that their work seeks to gain perspective on the way elites talk about immigration reform. As a result, this approach doesn’t address the nuances in belonging experienced by immigrant communities themselves, who may or may not challenge the perspective of these elite voices.

Despite its substantive limitations, immigration federalism can provide space to study how laws and legal structures interact with increasing community engagement and advancing conceptions of belonging. As Lauren Gilbert notes, immigration federalism in the United States largely grapples with the important question of who gets to decide the boundaries of a government’s constituents, which directly impacts who has access to the support and services provided by said government. Framing immigration federalism through this question allows for broader discussions about how systematic nuances are then used to advance inclusivity, which is crucial when studying local municipalities, their role in effectuating immigration policy, and the needs of their respective immigrant communities.

For example, immigration federalism provided a helpful framework to study the impacts of a New York City council bill that would expand suffrage to members of New York City’s undocumented community in local elections. This bill would’ve had massive ripple effects because for a city with an estimated 8.4 million inhabitants, it’s believed that roughly 1.3 million people are noncitizens (Gilbert, 2014). As Gilbert (2014) lays out in-depth, noncitizen voting in New York would face serious obstacles at every stage; from reconciling New York City home rule to New York State’s rule, to struggles in effectively implementing the process without providing an outlet for a breach of the election. Despite these challenges, noncitizen voting serves as a strong case study when discussing immigration federalism, along with the ways this framework can include discussions of community inclusivity and, in turn, one’s sense of belonging.

The important nuance that immigration federalism brings to the field has generally been tackled from a legal perspective, rather than moving beyond laws and law enforcement into conceptions of belonging. Here, my approach to immigration federalism is to utilize this framework in order to better understand municipal IDs, as they provide a useful example of the disconnect between narratives on the national level and municipal policy. Traditionally, as noted, immigration federalism often centers on the implementation of federal policy at the local level, but as growing local policy initiatives arise there are substantial applications of immigration federalism in these contexts. However, simply focusing on immigration policy on different levels broadly accepts the definiteness of federal, United States, citizenship and the ways its impact is felt at a more localized level. Thus, a complementary discussion of citizenship, and its nuances, is in order before engaging with questions of belonging.

Citizenship: A Status and an Activity

While citizenship can simply represent a demarcated legal status, a more nuanced approach considers that citizenship also requires one to participate in certain activities; these “activities” are broadly the duties, rights, and privileges granted to citizens by the state. According to Cecilia Menjívar (2006), the gap between a person’s legal status, and the impact of that status, has been largely unexplored. In order to bridge that gap, Menjívar (2006) introduced the concept of limited legality which is “characterized by its ambiguity, as it is neither an undocumented status nor a documented one but may have the characteristics of both.” By studying the experiences of Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants, Menjívar (2006) engages with the grey area between documented status and undocumented status to demonstrate how this ambiguity impacts an “individual’s social networks and family, the place of the church in immigrants’ lives, and the broader domain of artistic expression.” In one example, Menjívar (2006) highlights how institutions, like churches, have “filled the vacuum of government assistance” and serve as vital safe spaces and support systems for Central American immigrants who might otherwise feel in limbo due to their immigration status. As demonstrated, citizenship spans beyond legal distinctions and more fundamentally speaks to the ways that individuals interact with various aspects of their everyday lives.

Keeping in mind these everyday interactions, citizenship has also been framed as an activity rather than simply as a way to classify individuals. In a framework developed by Irene Bloemraad (2018), citizenship is “a process of making membership claims on polities, people and institutions that must be recognized within particular normative understandings of citizenship.” In other words, Bloemraad (2018) argues that “focusing on what citizens do” allows for one to expand the boundaries of citizenship beyond the binary consideration of “citizen” as merely something that one is or one is not. While citizenship does remain rooted in structural definitions and legal constraints, citizenship as an act of claim-making allows scholars to consider expanding the boundaries of a community to include those that might otherwise be considered outsiders. According to Bloemraad (2018), citizenship “consequently face[s] a tension in the clear dichotomy between citizens and noncitizens reflected in who can access a passport, and the reality of citizenship as claims-making, which enlarges the distinctions that people and institutions can draw.” Citizenship, as such, is understood as an active, fluid, engaging concept rather than a passive, rigid, pedantic way to classify individuals.

Empirically, there are a host of examples that support the idea that citizenship is a more dynamic process than its legalistic origins might make it seem. In a symposium compiled by Ron Hayduk and Marcela García-Castañon (2018), many scholars have conducted studies that empirically observe the ways immigrants “resist external attacks within a distinctly American racial state, and pushback to reclaim and protect their rights, communities, and futures.” In one of the studies mentioned, immigrant activism in California advocated for “greater immigrant integration, from in-state tuition and financial aid to expanded health benefits and access to driver’s licenses,” which broadly served as the origin of the growth of policies and scholarship surrounding “state citizenship” (Hayduk and García-Castañon, 2018). Seeing that state citizenship arose out of immigrant activism, California’s policies provide a clear instance in which citizenship functions as an act of claim-making by expanding boundaries of membership within their communities. In contrast to xenophobic and exclusionary rhetoric, often at the federal level, empirical evidence highlights how the dynamic nature of citizenship can expand membership and refine what it means to belong to certain communities at the local, state, and federal levels.

Studying “Belonging”

Defining and studying belonging is challenging. The concept itself is meant to describe, arguably, a nebulous feeling of attachment towards a group or community. In this sense, it's helpful to start by understanding what the alternatives to belonging are. In Anthony Richmond's (2002) work, the antithesis of belonging is social exclusion, which he defines broadly as “not sharing the same opportunities as the majority.” As argued in Richmond’s paper, while the international community has expanded its boundaries of social inclusion to meet the economic demands of the day, social exclusion seeks to challenge the surge of this inclusivity (Richmond, 2002). In turn, social inclusion and exclusion are closely tied to experiences beyond simply one’s identity such that belonging must also consider a range of other dimensions including economic, political, social, and cultural factors.

As a result, many scholars have advanced theoretical or analytical frameworks to study this phenomenon effectively. One strong framework has been put forth by Nira Yuval-Davis (2006), who argued that belonging should be studied considering three components. Accordingly, Davis (2006) argues that belonging needs to be studied on multiple levels such that it considers factors like a person’s social location within society (which is constructed considering cross-cutting identities such as race, age, economic status, etc.), a person’s identification with a certain community that signals emotional attachment to said community, and ways in which a person's social locations and identifications are ethically judged. As Davis (2006) argues, belonging has a bearing on the political sphere insofar as countries need to draw national boundaries which, in turn, impact upon what they consider citizenship to look like. Davis (2006) further considers how different aspects of belonging are utilized in the political sphere to advance political projects, such as how Britain reconciled its imperialist history with new considerations of race and nationalism in the country. Through these dimensions, it's clear that, despite the inherent interconnectedness of belonging, there are still ways to distill core themes that illuminate aspects of one’s sense of belonging to a community or a nation.

To this end, within the scope of immigration, belonging is intimately tied to one’s relationship with their native country as well as their relationship to the country they migrated to. In the context of the United States, Caroline Brettell’s (2006) ethnographic study of immigrant communities in Texas exemplifies the importance of drawing distinctions between types of belonging and inclusion. As Brettell found, some immigrants seek American citizenship solely to further political belonging; they seek the rights and responsibilities of citizenship as a reactionary measure to changes in federal citizenship laws. On the other hand, many immigrants in Brettell’s research still felt a deep attachment to their native country, which complicates their sense of cultural belonging towards their new home in the United States. As Brettell (2006) rightly points out, studying both political belonging and cultural belonging is crucial to understanding an immigrant’s relationship with their formal and informal status.

The literature on belonging highlights not only the nebulous nature of the subject but how scholars have tried to compartmentalize aspects of it. Within my thesis, conceptions of belonging will build upon the literature to understand the various parts of belonging that are tied to a person’s relationship to their local government and to the federal government. However, in this respect, there is an important level of nuance that inherently comes with studying identities and emotional attachments that is important to account for and, thus, my work hopes to add to the study of belonging by capturing the nuance of these experiences through qualitative methods.

For this study, a helpful term that was developed in an attempt to reconcile the government’s role in addressing both one’s sense of belonging and one’s legal, immigration status is “immigrant integration.” As defined by Gilbert (2014), immigrant integration is a local responsibility to ensure that “people work, seek police protection, send [their] children to school, and advocate for safer, healthier, neighborhoods.” In other words, immigrant integration is the space whereby cities, like Chicago, express their authority over how these communities are brought into the fold of the city writ large. Through programs like drivers’ licenses, noncitizen voting, in-state tuition benefits, and municipal IDs, local entities are trying to actualize immigration integration through policies intended to incorporate immigrants into the fabric of their cities, independent of their legal status from a federal immigration standpoint.

The Role of Identification and Other Forms of Localized Belonging

In fostering a sense of local community belonging, cities and municipalities have implemented a series of reforms geared towards including otherwise excluded people. In one case, Ron Hayduk (2015) illustrates the role of noncitizen voting in local elections within the United States. While not as common today, Hayduk (2015) points out that noncitizen voting represents a step towards developing a new conception of democracy within a globalized age. Moreover, according to Suro (2015), many of these local initiatives have been geared towards “mitigating” the conditions of illegality insofar as they reduce the negative stigma and collateral of non-citizenship, without necessarily opposing federal law. In other words, these policies aren’t subverting the federal government’s authority but instead focusing on “reducing the penalty to be paid by people who violate” the federal mandate (Suro, 2015). To this end, Suro (2015) recounts the positive impact drivers’ licenses have on undocumented communities and how federal policy, such as the REAL ID Act of 2005, complicates the state’s role in issuing these licenses. Although not always intentional, municipal entities' efforts to mitigate the consequences of illegality and expand access to services impact one’s sense of belonging in meaningful ways.

Keeping this in mind, a tangible and emerging example of these localized policies is the rise of city-issued municipal IDs across the US. According to a landmark study by Els de Graauw (2014), city officials designed municipal ID programs in cities like New Haven with the intention of better delivering existing city services to undocumented residents within the city’s boundaries. De Graauw’s (2014) findings are crucial insofar as the city officials she studied made it clear that the intention of the ID was not to create rights, but rather to exercise their discretionary power to expand access to healthcare, safety, and welfare services to their city’s residents regardless of status. Furthermore, de Graauw’s (2014) findings showcase the contentious arena that created these municipal IDs, with a special emphasis on the community organizations that were a driving force in the fight for creating these IDs in the first place. While de Graauw (2014) notes that she didn’t study how undocumented communities felt about their IDs or their broader feelings towards the United States, this research establishes a strong foundation for future studies on municipal IDs. Further, while not necessarily intended, increased visibility to government entities and access to services has a considerable bearing upon one’s sense of community belonging. This is a meaningful byproduct of these municipal ID programs that I engage within this thesis.

While municipalities are advancing other forms of informal status, municipal IDs have recently become popular within American cities, such as New York City and Chicago. As this field of research broadly develops, studying municipal IDs serves an important role in reacting to a growing trend in local politics that, largely, contests national narratives of restrictive immigration policy. In this sense, municipal IDs allow for a unique case study into the ways that immigration federalism and conceptions of citizenship interact in order to understand how one’s sense of belonging could change with access to a valid, government-issued municipal ID.

From a policy implementation perspective, municipal IDs, or even noncitizen immigrant-integration efforts, often experience de jure obstacles and de facto obstacles in their creation and implementation stages. In other words, it's not enough for a government to create a municipal ID program, one must ask whether these programs are effectively implemented and utilized to realize their purpose. Essentially, de jure obstacles are when the “laws on the book” are impediments to the program’s success (Enriquez et al, 2019; Gilbert, 2014). In contrast, de facto obstacles are issues with the law’s implementation whereby the “laws in action” don’t account for externalities that create challenges in the policy’s implementation stages (Gilbert, 2014). Whether explicit or not, these are two dimensions of policymaking that are frequently referenced when studying new policies, like municipal ID programs.

Using Chicago’s novel municipal ID program, my research intends to distill whether community members, organizational advocates, and policymakers experienced these tensions in creating and implementing CityKey. In considering these limitations to policymaking, my study grapples with how the roles of different entities have impacted the implementation of the program on the ground, especially the role of community-oriented, non-governmental organizations. In the case of CityKey, the uniqueness of the program and the policymaking area makes it an interesting case study through which to observe both policy obstacles and solutions.

Chicago’s CityKey Program

In 2015, the City of Chicago embarked on a year-long process to develop and fine-tune its municipal ID program. Chicago’s municipal ID, otherwise known as CityKey, “is an optional, valid, government-issued ID card offered to all Chicago residents that will unlock many of the great things our City has to offer” (City of Chicago, 2020). As of this study’s completion, the ID card is free for the first 100,000 cards and, in order to access the card, residents only need to prove that they are residents of Chicago, not that they are United States citizens. Moreover, on top of serving as valid proof of ID within the city, CityKey’s was designed such that card can be linked to an individual’s library card, their transit card (Ventra card), as well as provide cardholders with discounts on cultural experiences and discounts on generic medication through the Chicago Rx Program (City of Chicago, 2020). CityKey received approval from Chicago’s City Council in April 2017, and then the ID was made accessible to the public (City of Chicago, 2020).

While Chicago was not the first city to create a municipal ID program, the CityKey is unique compared to other programs around the county. To this end, CityKey’s limited budget and safety features stand out amongst its other municipal ID counterparts. First, when the program was launched, CityKey was not allocated nearly as much funding compared to other municipal ID programs of its kind. New York City’s municipal ID program, IDNYC, for example, was allocated $13.4 million when it launched in 2015 (Cities for Action, 2015). Chicago’s CityKey program was only allocated $1 million when it was launched in October 2016 (City of Chicago, 2020).

Second, Chicago’s CityKey program only retains three pieces of information from its users: a unique identifier, the date of issuance, and the date of expiration (City of Chicago, 2020). Comparatively, after its creation, New York’s IDNYC struggled with data retention issues, in light of a new federal administration, as well as local lawsuits. When it was designed, IDNYC retained information from applicants, such as their addresses, gender marker, date of birth, and emergency contact information. After the 2016 election, IDNYC’s data retention posed a problem for immigration advocates who worried that the new federal administration would subpoena the city to obtain the program’s data and released this data to immigration enforcement officials. At the same time, two Republican city council members sued, arguing that destroying any of data that the city had already collected would violate New York’s Freedom of Information Law and that the data collected “should be preserved for use by law enforcement officials in case the cards are ever used for criminal purposes” (Nahmias, 2017). As of April 2017, New York City was able to destroy data previously retained and currently does not hold onto any “identity or residency documents in support of an application” (City of New York, n.d.; Heins, 2017).

Another notable component of the Chicago CityKey program was that it was developed in partnership with community groups. In 2015, the City of Chicago convened a task force of community partners to discuss obstacles to obtaining government-issued IDs, as well as what other features should be added to the card (City of Chicago, 2020). Accordingly, organizations that participated in this task force represented many vulnerable communities within Chicago that might have encountered barriers in receiving government-issued ID; some of these constituencies included undocumented immigrants, “refugees, domestic violence survivors, transgender people, the formerly incarcerated, the homeless, and senior citizens” (Drews, 2018). While the task force often focused on vulnerable communities, the City of Chicago stresses that the CityKey intends to serve “all of Chicago’s 2.7 million residents” so that “Chicagoans [can] physically and figuratively [connect] to our City and each other” (City of Chicago, 2020). This paper explores to what extent these goals of belonging and connectivity have been experienced by Chicagoans during the CityKey’s early stages and into the present day.

Beyond the City: Immigration to the Suburbs

New immigrants settling in suburban communities are increasingly becoming a crucial component of studying present-day immigration patterns in the United States. According to the 1990 census, 43 percent of immigrants who have arrived in the United States the previous decade took up residency outside of cities; unlike immigrants of earlier centuries who traditionally moved into urban areas (Alba, 1999). This trend towards suburban residency continued for roughly the next two decades such that, by 2010, “the majority of racial and ethnic minorities in the one hundred largest metropolitan areas lived in the suburbs” (Scott, 2017). While barriers to immigrants settling into suburban communities remain present, this period of migration has, according to Alba et. al. (1999), lowered barriers to accessing suburban communities; mainly, language barriers have decreased due to the increased presence of established ethnic enclaves in suburban communities.

First, it’s important to broadly define the understanding of what qualifies as a suburban community to contextualize this comparative case more effectively. Often, what constitutes “urban” compared to what constitutes “suburban” is met with varying definitions so much so, as Scott Allard and Benjamin Roth (2010) argues, that it’s more effective to embrace these variations rather than simplify these regions down to one uniform term as this divide can be explained and attributed to physical geography by some, and social experiences by others.

This paper will utilize the recommendation made by Scott Allard (2017) and assume a physical understanding of suburbia to best compare the effectiveness of service distribution and belonging in suburban communities. Ultimately, for the sake of this paper, “suburban” will be defined as anyone who, by reason of their residency, cannot access the CityKey program despite their relative proximity to the defined borders of the City of Chicago. The boundaries of the City of Chicago, as well as maps of the surrounding suburban communities are depicted in *Figure 1* and *Figure 2.*



While immigrant communities broadly face challenges in terms of belonging, one unique, specific, challenge facing suburban immigrant communities is a general lack of political representation in government, which is not experienced to the same degree by urban immigrant communities. Due to this lack of political support, in many suburban communities, immigrant-focused nonprofit organizations struggle to advocate for and effectively serve their constituents. In interviews conducted by Scott Allard (2017), suburban executive directors of immigrant-focused nonprofits expressed not only concern surrounding anti-immigrant sentiments within the broader community but concerns about how those sentiments impacted their ability to build local political relationships. In one example, an executive director of a nonprofit serving Latinx immigrants in the Chicago suburbs stressed the necessity of these political relationships by saying “you cannot try to work in isolation, you need [local support],” whereas other executives interviewed expressed that the process of building local political relationships was like “walk[ing] a real fine line” (Allard, 2017).

Moreover, even when communities are considered welcoming communities, meaningful political representation remains a challenge in suburban communities. In Benjamin Cheng’s study (2013) of Berwyn and Skokie, two Chicago suburbs, despite both suburbs being characterized as “welcoming,” the political reality of meaningful, political representation of immigrant communities was more complicated. While both suburbs showcased the possibility for meaningful inclusion to occur in local government, they also demonstrated that a requirement for inclusion was “a state of affairs where the needs and interests of racial and ethnic groups and the political willingness of existing local governances to be inclusive reach[ed] a stage of equilibrium” (Cheng, 2013). Notably, these political realities shape the ways immigrants were able to live and work in these communities and further how accessible services are to the residents of these communities. As the next section discusses, political realities not only impact the communities themselves but also efforts conducted by non-governmental organizations to assist immigrant communities.

The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Facilitating Access

In both cities and suburbs, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are important actors in bridging gaps between vulnerable populations and essential government services. With nuances in local and federal law dictating immigration discussions, NGOs occupy a unique role, whether its “policy-makers include[ing] them in deliberations, the media turn[ing] to them for analysis and comment, federal and local governments fund[ing] them to provide incorporation services, newly arrived refugees and immigrants rely[ing] on them for assistance and advocacy, and intergovernmental organizations look[ing] to them for political support” (Sharry, 2000). In this sense, NGOs are crucial stakeholders in immigration debates and require further discussion.

While not directly providing government services, NGOs often connect community members to street-level bureaucrats within their communities and in this sense mimic some of the expectations of these bureaucrats because NGOs work closely with those directly impacted by government policy. According to Michael Lipsky (1980), who coined the term, street-level bureaucrats are “public service workers who directly interact with citizens…and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work.” Further, as argued by Lipsky (1980), street-level bureaucrats are at the center of political controversy because questions over the scope and impact of their roles are constantly under debate. Since they traditionally serve as mediators, street-level bureaucrats are, as Lipsky (1980) puts it, the ones that “hold the keys to a dimension of citizenship.” In other words, street-level bureaucrats are tasked with distributing key components of citizenship whenever they assist individuals in accessing government services. Notably, NGOs are not the same thing as street-level bureaucrats but it’s important to understand their role in society, as often NGOs operate in close proximity to both street-level bureaucrats and they serve their communities

Coupled with their centrality in political spaces, street-level bureaucrats also have immense discretion in their roles. As aforementioned, the immigration system, writ large, is structured such that there are many avenues for nuance between the levels of government. Similarly, street-level bureaucrats are positioned to exercise immense discretion in the manner in which they approach citizens to assist them in accessing services. Arguably, this discretion exists because street-level bureaucrats are faced with complicated situations, but their work requires a human dimension. To this end, they create a trusting environment that, ultimately, benefits the citizen (Lipsky, 1980). Moreover, citizen interactions with the state depend on, as Bernardo Zacka (2017) argues, the moral agency of these street-level bureaucrats because “how one is treated by the state matters as much as what one gets.” The many pressures placed on these bureaucrats, both individual and structural, ultimately impact their ability to make decisions and provide services. Put differently, as Zacka (2017) notes, “the proper delivery of public services depends on the existence of a fragile moral ecosystem, one that involves a delicate system between a competing array of normative pulls.” As a result, street-level bureaucrats’ central role in political spaces, their discretionary power, and the myriad of pressures they face make these figures an important touchpoint for understanding service distribution, as well as judging the effectiveness of policies themselves.

As mentioned above, NGOs often engage directly with traditional street-level bureaucrats and act as mediators between government agencies, the media, and everyday citizens. One can distill the function of NGOs into two categories; advocates and direct-service providers (Sharry, 2000). While NGOs can have the capacity to serve one and/or both of these functions, this distinction is helpful insofar as it provides a useful understanding of how exactly NGOs compare to street-level bureaucrats. To this end, sometimes these functions come into conflict with one another depending on factors such as government funding, institutional capacity, political landscape, and the state of the economy (Sharry, 2000). As such, it’s important to discuss the nuances within an NGOs' role as quasi street-level bureaucrats and how they, in turn, decide which ways to best support their base.

These tensions are best explained through an example. According to a study done by Enriquez et al. (2019), the passage of California’s Assembly Bill 60 (A.B. 60) was one way in which the functions of advocacy and direct service didn’t necessarily go hand and hand. Bill A.B. 60 was written and passed to provide undocumented residents in California the ability to obtain a driver's license. While this program was written race-neutral, due to a long history of organizations which support members of the undocumented community from Mexico, groups that were targeting other communities, like Asian American and Pacific Islanders, weren’t as equipped to provide direct service support to their respective communities (Enriquez et al, 2019). Because of racialized illegality, whereby “illegality” is “tied to racial histories and power dynamics,” certain communities were better served than others by NGOs during the implementation state of A.B. 60 (Enriquez et al, 2019).

One studied reason why NGOs can be seen mimicking the actions of traditional, governmental, street-level bureaucrats is due to the evolution of the role of NGOs. As Michael Lipsky and Steven Rathgeb Smith (1990) argue, NGOs now “depend on government for over half of their revenue” creating a relationship of “mutual dependence that is financial as well as technical; increasingly, the lines between public and private are blurred.” This phenomenon, Lipsky and Smith (1990) argue, has made massive changes to the ways American social policy is structured by altering the way America’s social welfare state interacts with clients. Put differently, there is now an increased reliance on NGOs to provide social services, which both expands the capacity of government to do more by way of these private NGOs, while also changing the very character of these same NGOs through this expansion. This paradox, as Lipskey and Smith (1990) claim, has the capacity to allow for NGOs to be more attentive to the needs of their clients in ways street-level bureaucrats are typically not known for; however, this paradox has also increased pressure to “be more attentive to the bottom-line.” These partnerships have not only shown to be preserving social welfare services in “an era of declining federal assistance,” but also require NGOs to act as a buffer between the people and the state, which is significantly diminished if, as Lipsky and Smith (1990) argue, the government continues to intervene with the NGO space.

Ultimately, NGOs are a crucial actor when discussing how policy is advocated for and how it is later implemented. In the case of Chicago’s CityKey, NGOs and community groups were instrumental in providing policy insight on the “barriers that many Chicagoans faced when trying to obtain government-issued ID” (City of Chicago). Since then, many NGOs have continued to partner with the City of Chicago to host a printing site or provide their respective communities with information about how to obtain the ID. As such, including the perspectives of NGOs and community partners allows for a more developed, holistic understanding of how effective CityKey is in reaching, and being used by, members of the immigrant and undocumented community.

In a suburban context, existing scholarship points to challenges faced by immigrant communities when it comes to accessing social services in the suburbs. As previously discussed, NGOs, more broadly, often serve as the bridge between immigrant communities and local government, but in suburban communities, many NGOs struggle to connect with government service providers that can serve their population in “a culturally sensitive manner” (Allard, 2017). Furthermore, NGO providers in the suburbs are often very under-resourced and are operating as a much lower capacity than their urban counterparts. According to Allard:

Nonprofit leaders’ perceptions of limited suburban capacity to serve immigrant groups echo in county-level IRS nonprofit data for the three focal metro areas [Chicago, IL, Los Angeles, CA, and Washington D.C.]. IRS revenue data from 2010 indicate that in ten of the seventeen counties (excluding the District of Columbia), registered nonprofit ethnic and immigrant service centers reported annual per-poor-person expenditures of less than $5. Average annual per-poor-person expenditures across these suburban counties was $60.35 in 2010. Moreover, five suburban counties in these three metro areas had no registered nonprofit ethnic and immigrant service organizations in 2010. Although many nonprofit organizations that work with immigrant communities may not register as primarily immigrant service organizations, these data highlight the lack of resources specifically targeted at one of the most rapidly growing components of the population (Allard, 2017).

Evidently, these additional considerations add another dimension to the role NGOs have in suburban communities and must be considered when comparing their work to the work of more-established, better funded, programs that one often finds in cities.

As such, my contribution to the literature seeks to better understand how street-level bureaucrats and NGOs shape the landscape for which belonging is fostered, especially in CityKey’s case as it relates to NGOs serving vulnerable populations. In other words, due to their centrality and discretionary authority, NGOs and bureaucrats have the power to facilitate or restrict meaningful access to government services. Moreover, this power becomes increasingly important to study and question when the constituency is a vulnerable population, as are members of the immigrant and undocumented community. In this respect, my research intends to further question the role of NGOs in service-distribution but, more broadly, whether their role in the CityKey space has helped facilitate or discourage pathways to belonging for members of Chicago’s immigrant and undocumented communities.

Summary of Gaps in the Literature

Keeping these various concepts in mind, my contribution to the literature seeks to better understand how gaps in immigration federalism literature and gaps in citizenship and belonging literature intersect and can be studied in-depth through municipal ID programs such as CityKey. In summary, immigration federalism helps broadly contextualize the dynamic nature of immigration policy, but often prioritizes federal policymaking and local implementation, without considering local policymaking efforts. Further, citizenship as a process of claim-making speaks directly to how local initiatives incidentally foster belonging at the local level. Taken together, one of the ways these concepts intersect is through a study of municipal identification programs, which not only introduce conversations around access to city services for immigrant and undocumented communities but allow for the closer study of belonging in these settings. While not always the intended consequence, studying how municipal IDs have fostered a sense of belonging is where my contribution fits into the breadth of literature. To address this, I’ve chosen to study Chicago’s municipal ID program, CityKey as a case study and the Chicago suburbs as a comparative case, in order to understand belonging as it relates to municipal IDs.

**DATA COLLECTION AND METHODS**

For this study, I interviewed 14 subjects total, ten who live and/or serve communities in Chicago proper, two subjects who live and/or serve communities in the Chicago suburb, and two who live and/or serve communities both in Chicago and the Chicago suburbs. These two geographic areas are distinct insofar as the CityKey program is limited to residents of the City of Chicago, so neighboring communities who border the city do not have access to the program or its services. This geographic distinction allowed for a stronger comparison to be made regarding sentiments of belonging and access and provided further context on the reception of the ID from people not directly impacted by the program. The division of interviews between the locations was unequal in large part because many of the NGOs and community partners serving immigrant and undocumented communities are based in Chicago; although, according to two subjects, there has been a movement for groups in Chicago to branch out to serving the suburbs over the past decade.

Within the individuals that were interviewed in Chicago, there was a diversity of experiences in terms of the subjects’ relation to the CityKey program. In other words, ten interviews were conducted with individuals who work at NGOs who spoke primarily about the communities they serve, two interviews were conducted with officials from the City of Chicago who helped develop or administer CityKey, and two interviews were conducted with community members who were a part of a community support-network who spoke more directly about their personal experiences with the ID program. Throughout this paper, terms like “community leader” and “community member” are frequently used to broadly distinguish interviewees who work at NGOs and interviewees who were part of localized community support-networks. Notably, these terms are not mutually exclusive. All of my subjects spoke to their experiences and their understandings of their respective communities; however, some subjects spoke more to their direct experiences whereas others spoke more to generalizations about the communities they serve.

The NGOs interviewed represent a wide array of communities; three NGOs simply focused on certain regions of the city/state, four NGOs focused on specific constituencies of immigrants/members of the undocumented community (ie. Latinas, the disability community, etcetera), one focused on specific immigration statuses (ie. asylum seekers). Among the interviews conducted to capture the voices of the Chicago suburbs, two interviews were conducted with subjects who work for NGOs and who spoke primarily about the communities they serve; one predominately serves Latinx immigrants/undocumented people, while the other declined to specify.

Interviews were collected between November 2019 and March 2020 and were recruited via direct contact as well as snowball sampling. To recruit participants, I compiled a list of organizations in Chicago and in the Chicago suburbs who supported immigrant and undocumented populations. Alongside my list of organizations, I referred to the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR) list of partner organizations; this is a public list of their community partners that can be found on their website. From there, I contacted these organizations with an explanation about my study and asked if they knew of the CityKey Program and if they would be interested in talking to me about their experiences with the program. After my initial recruitment efforts via direct contact with organizations, most of my subsequent interview recruitment came from snowball sampling whereby I asked all interview subjects who else they thought I should be talking to best understand the impacts of the program. To this end, snowball sampling greatly expanded the diversity of my subject pool insofar as I was not only connected with other organizations, but connected with community members, city officials, and policymakers as well.

Subjects participated in semi-structured interviews which contained questions that were broadly broken down into six categories: getting the ID, using the ID, direct impact of the ID, connection with Chicago or Chicago Suburb, connection with the United States, and thoughts on the future. Because the interviews were intentionally loosely structured, some subjects spent more time addressing some of these areas than others depending on their experiences. In other words, subjects who were more involved in the policy space often engaged more with questions about getting and using the ID than the direct impact of the ID because they lacked experience with the direct constituent-service side of my questions. Interviews lasted thirty to forty-five minutes and were held in a location of the subject’s choosing, or virtually, via FaceTime or phone call.

With the subject’s consent, interviews were audio-recorded and then later transcribed; for interviews that were not recorded, handwritten notes were taken. Data analysis utilized a codebook to track trends within the subject's responses that generally mimicked the structured outline in the interview protocol. From there, other categories arose that deserved separate attention in the overall analysis, such as the subject's perception regarding the safety of the ID. Lastly, the data analysis for this study includes a brief discussion on how the recruitment process for interviews yielded findings regarding general knowledge of the ID program amongst NGOs within the city that can be found in the conclusion of this thesis.

Additionally, this study was informed by participant observation at three CityKey printing sites that occurred in November 2019. All of the CityKey printing centers I studied were mobile printing centers, which meant that the City of Chicago’s CityKey team went into the community with the card-printing machines to administer the cards from that location. While people can set up appointments at Chicago’s City Hall to get a CityKey, mobile printing sites often do not require previous appointments and are generally in partnership with trusted community partners, especially within vulnerable populations. Observations were recorded in the form of hand-written field notes for most, if not all, of the duration of the CityKey Printing site. These events generally lasted from 3-5 hours. At participant observation sites, I handed out flyers that detailed information about my study in the hopes of engaging more directly with community members. No interviews were yielded through these flyers but did garner some interest for my research both from members of the community and from the members of CityKey staff.

**FINDING AND ANALYSIS**

*Government Issued Identification Matters to One’s Sense of Belonging*

Based on the co-occurrences of codes across participants, for city officials, NGO partners, and community members, having proof of identification was the most common reason participants sought out the ID. Furthermore, when advocating for community members to get the ID, NGOs most frequently spoke about how CityKey served as proof of identification when advocating for the ID to members of their community.

As made evident by the code co-occurrences, having a valid government ID was important to the advocates I interviewed, but this sentiment was best captured by Angelica Ortiz, who works with asylum-seeking clients at World Relief: Chicago. According to Ortiz, many asylum-seeking individuals often don’t qualify for other programs like social security numbers or state IDs because they frequently lack documentation from their home country, and can’t retrieve this documentation because “their consulates will not help them [refugees/asylum seekers] because they are basically claiming that their country of origin is not supporting them.” So, when advocating for CityKey in her community, Ortiz said she finds “…it’s pretty easy. A lot of these clients already know that it's good to have an ID from the United States or something that is issued here… they know that it's easy if they have [an ID] in English made by Americans that Americans can understand, so it's not hard to convince people that that's a good idea.” In this respect, the fact that Ortiz’s clients are very aware of the need for valid identification speaks to the importance the ID plays in making people feel recognized by their government and, thus, impactful to their overall feeling of belonging.

It’s notable, here, that despite differing interpretations of belonging, participants overall agreed that valid government identification was important to either themselves and/or their communities. In this respect, participants spoke mainly about two ways in which belonging was fostered through CityKey: first, that CityKey showed them that they were seen by the government and second, that the card allowed them to do things, or do things more easily, within the City. In the following sections, these two forms of belonging will be discussed in depth.

*Visibility in Chicago as a Way of Belonging*

When discussing CityKey, one trend amongst participants was expressing that CityKey made themselves or their communities feel like they were seen by the City of Chicago. Belonging, in this sense, was centered around a feedback loop, whereby city government was more intentional about recognizing Chicago’s immigrant and undocumented communities through CityKey. In turn, advocates felt like their communities belonged in Chicago. For the subjects I interviewed, both the visibility of communities to city government – as in, highlighting government's role in creating CityKey – as well as visibility of city government to vulnerable communities – as in, the increased sentiment that government cares about these communities – were important components to belonging. Ultimately, according to my participants, the dynamic relationship between government and community spoke to the importance of visibility on behalf of the state in fostering a sense of belonging.

First, the most explicit connections between feeling seen by the city to a sense of belonging came from the city officials I interviewed. Both members of city-government that I interviewed told a story about their experience with a community member who received their CityKey during the middle of a *Telemundo* interview that was being conducted about CityKey’s launch. As Kate LeFurgy, the Chief of Communications for the Office of the City Clerk, told me:

[The CityKey Team] were in Back of the Yards and there's actually, Telemundo was there and they were, they were filming this guy and [this staff member] who was on my team at the time came over and gave him his ID and he started crying and he was saying, he lived in this country for 18 years. And he never felt like he had anyone who cared about him. And that the government didn't care about him. And to have access to a government-issued ID was huge - and he was like, the pride that came along with that was just really heartwarming.

This story was also mentioned by Tonantzin Carmona, the former Director of the Office of New Americans and the Chief of Policy for the Office of the City Clerk, who built on LeFurgy by noting that the man said “"I've lived here for years. And like, I've never had something that identified me as a Chicagoan."” Through this story, both of the city officials I spoke to directly connected the work of the city and city officials as to the sense of belonging this individual felt from having a valid ID that showed him he was recognized and seen by city government.

In a sense, both of the city officials I interviewed portrayed the city as somewhat of a mediator between inclusion and exclusion, highlighting the necessity of government to act upon the needs of their constituents. Speaking to the role of government, LeFurgy thought that currently, “a lot of people are looking to their local government for help” and that CityKey showed Chicago’s immigrant and undocumented communities that the City saw them and that the City wanted them to succeed. Going further, Carmona thought that “for the immigrant community, there was [a sense] that like, that this is home. They just … they didn't always feel that. But the card, I heard folks talk about how it made them feel that way.” Overall, the city officials I interviewed demonstrated the ways that CityKey signaled to vulnerable communities that city government cares about them, and that these communities had a place within the City.

While this feedback loop was most explicitly discussed in my conversations with city officials, this sentiment wasn’t exclusive to members of city government. One of the community leaders I spoke to from United African Organization (UAO), a group that serves African immigrants and refugees in Illinois, said that even during a dangerous national political moment, they felt that “in Chicago, [the community members they serve] know that there are organizations and there are programs [like] the CityKey that gives them [the] assurance to say, "'Hey, we got you.'" Regarding the contrast between the local and national government, Angelica Ortiz of World Relief: Chicago shared a story about how one of her clients found it “shocking to her that she didn't have to wait [for her CityKey] and nobody was mean or rude” to her. According to Ortiz, this client “was so happy” that in the client’s words “‘nobody gave [them] any trouble.’” In a similar vein, Bertha Morín, the Director of Community Engagement & Mobilization/Lead Organizer from Mujeres Latinas en Acción, an organization that primarily serves Latinas in Chicago and the suburbs, explained to me that “this is a hard time for the undocumented, for the immigrant people but they feel like it's a good thing in [the] middle of the dark time [that] they have this opportunity to have this CityKey and feel more comfortable in case of they are facing the police or some [parts of] government.” Accordingly, these participants felt that the CityKey program allowed their clients to feel seen by the City of Chicago and that this increased visibility made their constituents feel more connected to the city. As was true with the city officials that I spoke to, these NGO advocates spoke to a connection between increased visibility by the government and a heightened sense of belonging within the City of Chicago.

Of the subjects I interviewed, a community member from Albany Park Defense Network, a community organization based in Albany Park, Chicago, spoke more to the symbolic impacts of this feedback loop. This community member expressed that CityKey was “legitimizing [immigrant and undocumented peoples’] experience and their life here.” The language used here speaks to how just the presence of the card in the community supported a greater sense of belonging. This community member went on to elaborate on the emotive feeling of belonging people they knew experienced by having a CityKey:

To have something that [is] from where they live [in the US] … it feels more symbolic of like, "I have something that says that I live here and that I'm a member of this community in an institutional way" that I think is really cool and has been impactful for them... I don't know that like [CityKey] changed their day to day lives, right? They may have had access to [services so] this might not be a game-changer in terms [of] their access to certain services. And in some cases, it might be, but in general, it's also impactful for them to, you know, feel like they're a part of this community.

To this community member, while the everyday impact of CityKey may not have been apparent, the broader inclusion of Chicago’s immigrant and undocumented community in a more structured, institutional way circled back to this visibility feedback loop and touched on the ways belonging is fostered through it.

Lastly, at one of the CityKey printing sites I visited, the feeling of being seen and recognized by the City was evident through one community member's celebration of their CityKey’s proper gender marker. This CityKey printing site was held at a healthcare provider's office, and members of their team were helping to support the event by laying out snacks for people and checking in with CityKey staff. As this CityKey site, this individual was helping to support the event, but during a lull in printing, they took some time to get their CityKey ID printed. After getting handed their ID, which displayed their proper name and gender marker, this person went around to the office showing off the ID, and others shared in this person’s excitement in having a proof of ID from the city that recognized who they truly are. Within a larger conversation about belonging, this instance further reinforced that this ID isn’t just increasing visibility for members of the immigrant and undocumented community, but it’s helping many people who have often been left behind by government entities.

Overall, belonging through visibility was conveyed to me like a feedback loop, one that required validation and support, followed by concrete action, in order to facilitate. The next iteration of belonging works hand-in-hand with this increased visibility, but more specifically focuses on how CityKey activated a new kind of municipal citizenship for Chicago residents.

*Activating Municipal Citizenship as a Way of Belonging*

In my interviews, belonging was also expressed through activity whereby people felt more able to participate in the activities of local citizenship because of CityKey. Put differently, people felt more like they belonged in the community because they could do things like entering city buildings without scrutiny or accessing discounts to Chicago’s cultural centers. In this sense, this trend showcased that for my interviews, possessing the ID alone didn’t always foster a sense of belonging, but rather that another variation of belonging was derived from what the ID allowed people to do. Belonging, in this case, is seen through active, municipal citizenship, and this was reiterated by advocates I spoke to who wanted less vulnerable members of the community to use the ID to strengthen this kind of localized belonging. These findings broadly reconfirm arguments made by scholars such as Irene Bloemraad (2018), especially how it relates to localized claim-making regarding citizenship.

During my interviews, four people spoke to how CityKey increased their access to certain opportunities and experiences often overlooked by citizens. These experiences were wide-ranging; from decreasing the stigma faced by immigrants and undocumented community members when entering buildings that required proof of ID, to increasing their ability to go to work every day without fear, to allowing them to purchase everyday items, like Tylenol, without getting questioned. According to one of the community leaders I spoke to at UAO, belonging came “because [CityKey] allows you to be able to do more things that you wouldn't otherwise do” and went onto say that by engaging in everyday life without stress or fear, “those [are] ways in which you are connecting with [the] environment that you are in, otherwise, you live like an outlaw.” According to Carmona from the Office of the City Clerk of Chicago, from a “connection standpoint, the discounts [she] felt helped people want to explore the city or things that they just couldn't have access to, which were like cultural institutions and just life outside of work.” Lastly, a community leader I spoke to from the Albany Park Defense Network, who asked to be referred to as M.M. spoke to the ways that communities have claimed Chicago as their own. M.M. expressed that belonging in Chicago isn’t an abstract concept, but rather that “Chicago belongs to us” because people could experience the city and actively engage with what it has to offer. Overall, this iteration of belonging requires action to achieve, and, through these actions, subjects expressed themselves and/or members of their community felt a great sense of belonging.

According to my interviewees, however, this process of belonging was not one that happened overnight. When talking to a community leader from Enlace, an organization that serves residents of Chicago’s Little Village and specifically assists clients with immigration support, they said that they “heard from people that, you know, the first, the first few years are pretty isolating. [Community members] feel hesitant to travel outside of the neighborhood, so they definitely aren't accessing services downtown - they'll access the stuff in the neighborhood and then do very little business outside of the neighborhood.” This hesitation is significant, especially concerning how CityKey is being used by community members.

While both iterations of belonging presented by my subjects are distinct, it’s also meaningful to consider how they work together. To this point, Fred Tsao of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR), who was also the first person to bring the idea of having a municipal ID to the City’s attention, mentioned that although he felt like CityKey is a “benefit” people get from “living in the city,” he noted that many city programs, in general, are already free to the public, saying “it's not like, you know, you need a CityKey to see a concert in Millennium Park.” In this sense, according to Tsao, even though many city services are broadly open to the public, the mere availability of these services alone doesn’t necessarily foster a sense of belonging for people. Instead, Tsao went on to frame CityKey as a “vehicle for a sense of belonging… it is a vehicle for bringing people within the city together.” By framing CityKey as a vehicle for belonging, Tso touches the important intersection between increased visibility and active, municipal citizenship. Overall, according to my subjects, the active usage of the card to engage with Chicago facilitates a kind of belonging routed in active, municipal engagement, one that, while not always immediate, allowed my subjects to express a feeling as though themselves or their communities were part of the City of Chicago.

More specifically regarding usage, the advocates I interviewed mentioned the importance of collective solidarity in the process of solidifying and validating municipal citizenship. Accordingly, it wasn’t enough for the ID to have simply been created and used by those who may not have initially had access to valid forms of government ID. To avoid potentially harmful externalities, the advocates I spoke to emphasized that less-vulnerable members of society also needed to get and use CityKey. Collective solidarity, in this case, broadly reinforces the previous discussion on the ways belonging is formed through active municipal citizenship.

On using the ID in solidarity with community members, Bertha Morín, who works at Mujeres Latinas en Acción, said “this is the reason that I want to use [the ID] every time because I need to hear for myself how the people feel when they say no or something like that… I need to try it first because it's our work.” When the ID card was initially created, Fred Tsao from ICIRR, explained that when creating the card, “one thing that [advocates] did not want this card to be was an immigrant-only card.” This mindset also expressed by the community member who I spoke from the Albany Park Defense Network, who explained:

If we're trying to use it as a strategy to kind of provide like ulterior or alternative forms of identification, in order to protect immigrant members of our community, then we also need to make sure that they're not the only ones using it...people don't want to use something like a matricula or like consulate IDs because that in many cases kind of is a tell that they might not be documented. ...we also don't want the municipal ID to be like that as well. Because I'm a citizen and don't have to be exposed to those types of risks, I thought it was important to kind of, in solidarity, just get one and use it so that it becomes normalized.

There was a range in terms of how the advocates I interviewed used their ID in solidarity with vulnerable populations; Michelle Garcia of Access Living said she used her CityKey for everything, whereas the community leader I interviewed from Enlace mentioned that they often forgot it was in their wallet. Although there wasn’t a uniform effort to get and use the ID across the advocates I interviewed, this sentiment of collective solidarity was broadly understood as being crucial to destigmatized public perceptions that CityKey was solely for immigrant or undocumented folks.

*Barriers to City Belonging: CityKey at Banks and Financial Institutions*

Although my interviews highlighted ways CityKey was expanding the sense of belonging, difficulties in using CityKey exposed one of the limitations to belonging experienced by members of the immigrant and undocumented community. Using code co-occurrence data, a trend emerged in my interviews that subjects most commonly had negative experiences using their CityKey at banks and financial institutions. It’s notable here to mention that CityKey itself doesn’t have any specific banking features on it; Tonantzin Carmona, the former Chief of Policy for the Office of the City Clerk, mentioned that even though other municipal ID programs have banking features on their cards, the CityKey “task force felt very strongly that we should not have banking features on our card … they recommended that we stay away from those types of features, find the budget for this program somewhere else, and then partner instead with banks to accept the card.” Yet, despite this expressed goal, participants I interviewed most frequently cited that they and/or their community members had negative experiences using CityKey at a bank.

Of the subjects interviewed, five participants mentioned negative experiences with using their CityKey at a bank or financial institution. On this, one of the people I interviewed at UAO said: “I went to the currency exchange, I think it was a Western Union transaction where I was asked for an ID and I pulled it up and they wanted a federal ID so did not accept that.” M.M. had trouble using their CityKey at a bank and was told they couldn’t use their CityKey at that location. Other interviewees expressed that using CityKey at banks was a relatively hit or miss experience and that success varied from branch to branch. For example, Michelle Garcia, an immigrant and disability rights advocate for Access Living, an organization that primarily serves individuals with disabilities, said that when she has used her CityKey at banks “they still ask a lot of questions about the ID and I'm like, but I go to one institution of the same branch, and I have no questions asked. And then you go to another branch of the same institution and they ask you all these questions.” Garcia shared this story about one of her members:

his daughter wanted to open a [joint] bank account and [the bank] asked for his [CityKey] because his daughter's a minor ... [but] they wouldn't allow him to use the CityKey to open the bank account. But that's strange, cause in my understanding … you could open [an account with CityKey]. Well, he had to use his matricula…but they also ask you for two modes of identification, so he couldn't open [the account at all] because he only had the matricula and the CityKey.

For these advocates, these negative experiences expose the limitations to belonging, even at a municipal level. While the ID is supposed to be recognized by partner institutions, the prevalence of the ID’s rejection at institutions like this serves as a reminder of exclusion. According to my interviews, the commonality of banks and financial rejection of the ID further reinforced a need for stronger community buy-in to the CityKey program in order to prevent immigrant communities from being stigmatized and excluded for using their CityKey.

One of the advocates I spoke to, Imelda Salazar, an organizer at the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP), which is a coalition of faith centers, schools, and other institutions on the Southwest side of Chicago, (SWOP), explained to me the ways SWOP was actively working with the City to mitigate their members’ negative experiences at banks. To tackle this problem, SWOP’s community navigator followed-up with members of the SWOP network who had gotten their CityKeys to learn about their experiences with the ID and sent a report of these issues to the city. According to Salazar, these community navigators are members of their network who are trained to help with SWOP’s programming and assist in educating members of their community. Interestingly, SWOP’s community navigators found that, based on their conversations with community members, for “most of the people the third time they were rejected, they stop using it as an ID for a bank” noting that the people who accept CityKey vary because “it's really like the driver license - it depends on the person at the office rather than enforcing that branch.” The discretion mentioned here not only reconfirms existing scholarship on street-level bureaucrats, as studied by Michael Lipsky (1980) and Bernardo Zacka (2017), but again serves as a reminder of the limitations to belonging despite the various successes of the program.

This trend broadly speaks to the limitations of belonging, especially if there are gaps in information that inhibit full community support. Without buy-in, rejection of CityKey arguably reminds us of some of the limits to belonging for immigrants and undocumented communities in Chicago. In turn, these limitations not only hinder this community’s abilities to use certain services, they incidentally have an impact on their conceptions of belonging and additionally burden those who are already struggling to belong, given the national context.

*Barriers to Federal Belonging - Fear in the United States*

Considering the role of immigration federalism in belonging, I asked interviewees about how they or their NGO’s constituency felt about living in the United States during this current political moment even though CityKey exemplified a local effort to expand opportunities for immigrant and undocumented communities. The word “fear” came up most often in interviewees’ responses to the current political moment. This rhetoric generally strikes a strong contrast to the conceptions of belonging that were facilitated through CityKey and highlight how conceptions of belonging and engaging in citizenship can vary depending on an individual’s interaction with differing levels of government. Additionally, in discussions more focused on the CityKey policymaking process, this fear translated into worries surrounding the safety of the ID program for immigrant and undocumented communities. In my interviews, ensuring the card wasn’t retaining sensitive information and was, thus, safe for vulnerable communities was brought up as a prominent concern early in the IDs creation. This concern further showcases the intersection between fear and insecurity on the federal level and belonging and security on the local level.

Fear, as mentioned, frequently came up in my interviews. Angelica Ortiz from World Relief: Chicago explained to me that, in the current political moment “there's a lot of fear - fear more than anything, especially for those that went through the border experience… there's always a lot of fear.” One of the community leaders I spoke to at UAO said that after Donald Trump was elected president, they had clients “who had been citizens for 15 plus years who wanted to travel, who canceled their travel because they are afraid to take a step out of this country in fear that they may not be able to come back in.” The community leader I interviewed from Enlace characterized the current federal political moment similarly, saying “the level of anxiety and fear during this administration is definitely through the roof.” In the Chicago suburbs, Jose Vera, the executive director of the Southwest Suburban Immigrant Project (SSIP), which serves immigrants in Northern Will County, Illinois, and Southern DuPage County, Illinois expressed that the current administration has been “fear-mongering,” noting that this has made it “that much more scary to be an immigrant in these times.”

Four of the NGO leaders and community members I interviewed expressed that this fear largely revolved around the uncertainty that was brought about by the current administration, not knowing whether or not themselves or their family could be impacted. Michelle Garcia, who works for Access Living, expressed to me that while there was a lot of fear in their community, their community was prepared, saying to me that “I'm not gonna sit here and lie and say that they're not in fear. Obviously, they're in fear… God forbid that, you know, ICE shows up at their door, but we tell them, ‘you remember where we've learned, don't open the door, you don't have to speak to anybody. Just show them the [Know Your Rights] card.’”

Similar to Access Living, many of the community groups and NGOs I spoke to told me ways in which they were supporting their communities during the strenuous political time. While the SWOP community navigators helped with CityKey, Imelda Salazar explained to me that the main job for these community navigators is “giving presentations” to help educate their membership on important issues like Know Your Rights. While not the same program, Garcia said Access Living also conducts similar training. The community member I spoke to from the Albany Park Defense Network mentioned that this defense network, as well as the Autonomous Tenants Union, another group that they are a part of, felt that “there's a real need right now to be answering our community's concerns around this present threat. And so I think that that for sure changed our focus in some ways.” As this community member then explained, Albany Park Defense Network supports folks who are in applying for asylum affirmatively or in detainment proceedings, as well as leads educational training. Despite the fear felt by their communities, these community members and NGOs explained to me the ways they took initiative to protect people in their networks.

Notably, this fear also had an impact on the way advocates I interviewed spoke about whether members of their community were thinking about naturalizing to become United States citizens. First, many advocates stressed to me that community members’ attempts to naturalize were largely dependent on their current immigration status, and whether or not they were even eligible to follow that process. This sentiment was expressed by Megan McKenna, who serves as Director of Strategy & Development at Mano a Mano, an NGO serving immigrant communities in Lake County, Illinois. According to McKenna, one’s ability to go through the naturalization process “all depends on their eligibility” noting that although Mano a Mano has “seen over the past couple of years an increase in people who are… eligible for citizenship [and] that they… take that step and naturalize.. [that] the challenge [is] that the majority of people are not actually eligible for” citizenship making the topic “kind of a non-issue” for those people. In a similar vein, Michelle Garcia of Access Living told me that she didn’t notice people actively trying to naturalize before the current political moment, but, she said “now more than ever the fear is setting in like, ‘Oh, now it's a moment where if I didn't want to do it before, now it's that I have to because I can lose everything I have…from my family to my support to the services that I need, so I better do it.’” As my subjects’ address, these reactive naturalization efforts speak to both broader desires to belong for fear of the potential consequences of exclusion.

Lastly, the safety of CityKey became an increased priority considering the current political moment. The two officials from the city government I interviewed, as well as Fred Tsao of ICIRR, spoke in depth about the considerations the city and community partners made around the ID. When explaining how the card came into being, Fred Tsao noted that concerns about data security “predated” both the election of President Trump as well as the concerns that arose regarding IDNYC’s data storing policy, but that each of these situations “raise[d] that flag even higher” to ensure that the data collected, if any was collected, would be secure. Tonantzin Carmona, former Chief of Policy for the Office of the City Clerk, noted that the City worked with closely community members each step of the way regarding data security measures, in large part because data security was “a hard ask from the community.” On top of pressures from the community, Carmona spoke to the stresses of creating a program like CityKey under the Trump administration and after data security issues were impacted the IDNYC program:

To me, [securing the data] was really scary. Just to even imagine [that] you're responsible for building something and if you do the wrong thing, you can ruin someone's life and their family. And so I just, I was stressed from that perspective of "you cannot mess this up." … I think even though we wanted to make sure the card appealed to everybody, this one [community] in particular had very big fears

According to Tsao, by deciding that CityKey would not retain the majority of people’s information, it “made it much more safe for people to come forward and get the card and that's eliminated a significant barrier” for vulnerable communities, especially the undocumented community. Kate LeFurgy at the Office of the City Clerk built on this to say that the safety precautions taken by CityKey made it “the gold standard for how something like this work[s] with limited information collection, with making it so that it's something that all residents will want and just really making it an incredibly robust program.”

Overall, the contrast between feelings of belonging on the city level and feelings of fear of the federal level touches on how immigrant and undocumented people can have different experiences interacting with immigration policy at each level of government in a federalist system. Although local efforts like CityKey are actively working to expand municipal citizenship to these communities, federal policies and narratives of restriction serve as a constant barrier to full and total belonging in the United States. Further, the NGO advocates I interviewed spoke of the pursuit of formal naturalization to avoid the consequences of belonging, which rounds out a broader picture of belonging for immigrant and undocumented communities. As the advocates I interviewed explained, the fear caused by the current federal administration is contradicted by conversations around the safety of vulnerable communities at the local level. Ultimately, these competing narratives of exclusion and inclusion on different levels of government demonstrate one of the interesting externalities of immigration federalism, and further what impacts this system has on more localized experiences with belonging.

*Building a Bridge: The Role of NGOs in Connecting Communities to Government*

In response to my second research question on non-governmental organizations, three trends arose regarding the relationship between the city and NGOs. First, the advocates I interviewed expressed that members of their community felt these NGOs had helped them not only access CityKey but more broadly feel more welcome in the community. Concerning belonging, this support most prominently made itself known in two separate instances; the first instance speaks to the role of institutions more broadly, and the second instance speaks to the direct relationship NGOs have with their communities. Next, a handful of the NGOs I interviewed as well as both of the city officials I interviewed spoke to their respective partnerships in helping create CityKey through the City’s task force. Within this initial advocacy, my interviewees tended to speak of this relationship as rooted in accountability, highlighting an interesting dynamic in these early partnerships. Lastly, the members of NGOs that I spoke to commonly cited gaps in the CityKey infrastructure that made the process of getting the ID challenging for their communities. Not surprisingly, underfunded and understaffed infrastructure brought about negative experiences for many of the NGO advocates I spoke to and were spoken of as limitations to NGOs being able to connect their constituencies with necessary city services.

Through NGOs, New Pathways to Belonging

For context, the NGO advocates I spoke to most commonly made reference to their direct involvement with CityKey through their efforts to support their clients in getting a CityKey. Of the NGOs I interviewed, only Angelica Ortiz of World Relief: Chicago spoke about going to City Hall with her clients to get CityKey. Two community members from the Albany Park Defense Network spoke about their experiences at a CityKey printing site in their community that they helped staff. Three of the NGO advocates I interviewed mentioned that their organization had held their own printing sites; two of which, Enlace and SWOP, specifically noted that their printing sites were either only made public to their membership, or were completely closed off to the general public because it was a membership-only, appointment-only, event. Lastly, the advocates I spoke to from UAO didn’t mention a mobile printing-site partnership with their organization, but instead, they spoke about keeping tabs on the CityKey calendar to look for events within their neighborhood. Despite different points of entry, all of the NGO advocates I interviewed actively helped their clients get CityKey in some capacity.

In terms of facilitating a sense of belonging in their communities, there were two distinct instances whereby the NGO advocates I interviewed highlighted the ways they or their organization helped create a pathway to belonging through CityKey. First, the community leader I spoke to from Enlace made it a point to explain to me that institutions served as a way for community members to transition from feeling isolated to becoming active members of the community. This advocate said:

We have community members who are very recent, recently arrived to the neighborhood and they speak about feeling very isolated even in their own neighborhood… they still feel like they miss home or they just feel like they don't know how to access help. They don't know how they would even go about, for example, enrolling their children into school… what we hear is that once people get connected to one of the one institution or one like neighborhood hub, and they start talking with people who have been through it already and… have been here for several years, they learn about how to access different systems and then they feel more comfortable

While this advocate went on to use schools as an example of an institution that connects people to services, the sentiment was expressed by other NGOs via increased visibility and access to the city. Accordingly, different positive interactions with institutions, like NGOs, serve as touchpoints for connecting individuals with services and can, incidentally, increase one’s sense of belonging.

According to my interviewees, the second instance of exhibiting how NGOs were facilitating pathways for belonging was seen when members of their community contacted their respective organizations to ask about how to access CityKey. The community leader I spoke to from Enlace explained to me that their constituents “came to [Enlace’s] office hearing that they, that there was an ID available and they wanted to know how they could get one,” so Enlace “decided to host an event.” Bertha Morín from Mujeres Latinas en Acción reiterated this sentiment, saying “a lot of people they have [CityKey] because they call to [Mujeres Latinas en Acción] and say "Oh, we need the CityKey" and our work is to look into mobile sites and say ‘okay, right now is in the Ecuadorian Consulate or then the Southside Alderman's office’… they obtain this CityKey because they called us.” Lastly, on the day of our interview, Imelda Salazar from SWOP said “this morning, I went to [one of SWOP partnership] school[s] and the principal asked me, ‘are you bringing in CityKey?’” These three examples speak to a trend whereby members of each group’s constituency looked to their NGO to connect them with a desirable government service. As a direct result of NGO engagement, it’s possible, even likely, that many immigrants and members of the undocumented community in Chicago might not have accessed these government services without the support of NGOs.

Holding Power Accountable: NGOs Advocacy Role in Creating CityKey

Second, as aforementioned, CityKey prides itself on being created alongside community partners; it’s prominently featured on their website and distributed materials on the history of the program (City of Chicago, 2020). Within this advocacy component, both city officials I spoke to intentionally gave credit to these community partners, and the various ways they held them accountable. This relationship was characterized by my interviewees, city officials, and advocates alike, as one of accountability whereby NGOs advocated for certain provisions to the program, and city officials felt like it was the job of the City to deliver.

Both of the people I interviewed who worked for the city government, as well as Fred Tsao of ICIRR, brought up the many roundtables that the city had with community partners. During these round table discussions, Tonantzin Carmona, who worked for both the Office of New Americans and the City Clerk, stressed that “the organizations formed more from like an accountability lens in the beginning.” According to Carmona, the NGOs that helped the city develop the CityKey didn’t see their relationship with the city as “‘we're all friends buddy, buddy.’" They really wanted to make sure that the government was doing the right thing.”

Carmona and Tsao both mentioned that NGOs and community partners built a coalition, and then acted as a unit to hold the city accountable. Tsao said that ICIRR and the coalition “kind of [organized] among [them]selves. And you know, [they] were able to really help inform the process and come up with, come up with a really good result we thought.” As the current Chief of Communications for the Office of the City Clerk, Kate LeFurgy pointed out that Chicago was “the first municipal ID in the country to be a four-in-one card… [CityKey is] government-issued ID, a transit card, a library card, and a prescription discount benefit card… [and] all of those different features that I'm going to mention, they all came from community groups. These are all ideas that came from the ground up because we truly believe that the best policy is made by those that it impacts because they're the ones who are receiving the service.”

Of the NGOs that I spoke to, UAO, SWOP, Access Living, Mujeres Latinas en Acción, and ICIRR all participated in the round tables conducted by the City. Many of them, notably, Michelle Garcia of Access Living, spoke about advocating for certain provisions/services at the initial roundtables that, when finalized, were added to the card; Garcia specifically mentioned the role she played in advocating for what kinds of demographic information would be featured on the card. Furthermore, both city officials I interviewed expressed that community groups “were key,” as Carmona put it when it came to getting the word out about CityKey and that since the program was created, LeFurgy noted, the City of Chicago was learning more about how word of mouth was a major contributor to the spread of information about the program. Overall, from my interviews, city officials seem to view NGOs and community advocates as an important piece of CityKey’s creation and it’s notable that, as mentioned in the previous section, this partnership with community advocates continued through the implementation and roll-out of the program.

More is More: An Underfunded and Understaffed Program

While CityKey’s rollout was unique due to its limited funding, since its creation, my interviewees noted that the program is functioning at a much lower capacity than its potential would suggest. This doesn’t come as a surprise to the members of the city whom I interviewed, as both raised a wish that the program could be strengthened through enhanced infrastructure. From the City’s perspective, Kate LeFurgy, Chief of Communications for the Office of the City Clerk, spoke to the high demand for CityKey, but the common inability to fully match that demand given their current capacity:

If I could change one thing, it would be [to] give us an unlimited budget and give us 20 people to execute this program cause there's still lines for it - we have CityKey on prints here on Tuesdays and Thursdays here at City Hall and we're slammed. We still have a ton of people here. We don't have the resources to be able to execute on all the things we would love to do. So I think if I could wave a magic wand, that's absolutely what I do.

This sentiment was reiterated by Tonanzin Carmona, the former Chief of Policy for the Office of the City Clerk, who expressed that although the CityKey program could do more with a larger budget, she “hope[d] that like Chicago good model for how to do [a municipal ID program] without the largest budget.” Here, it was evident that although both of the city officials I spoke to were proud of the program, they acknowledged its current limited capacity to serve Chicago residents.

In practice, these limitations manifested themselves in negative experiences for community members. Most commonly, people spoke to the long lines they experienced in getting their IDs. Of my interviewees, four community leaders cited their anticipation of and/or their members' experiences with long lines. At the UAO, a community advocate I interviewed expressed that they had come to anticipate long lines, saying that “there are people who we've sent there and they go early and they get it, [and then] they get out. I mean there are long lines, but they know that… to get this, you have to go early so they respect the time and they go even earlier than the time required.”

This frustration often trickles down to members of the community. M.M. said that they tried to get their CityKey on three separate occasions. At the first and second mobile printing sites, M.M. expressed that although the City was going to print 200-250 IDs at these sites, there were long lines. The second time they went, M.M waited two hours before the printing site opened and noted that others had been there waiting since 5:00 am. Finally, M.M. was able to get their ID but noted that even at this printing site, there was still a long line and other families they saw were anxious about whether or not they were going to be able to get their ID.

It’s notable that in both this case and the case of UAO, my interviewees were speaking about experiences that they had at open printing sites. With open printing sites, CityKey staff will go into a Chicago neighborhood, often in partnership with a community advocate, and then hold a printing site that’s open to the community. All three of the CityKey sites I visited were open printing sites, but each was held in partnership with a staple part of the community: one was hosted by a consulate, one was hosted in partnership with a larger service fair, and one was held at a healthcare provider’s office space. The diversity of community partners and set up for the mobile printing yielded predictably various experiences for those seeking an ID.

The only place where I experienced long lines was at the event held by the consulate. At this event, the volunteer I sat next to told me that people had lined up for the event as early as 4:00 am, but when I arrived at 11:00 am, thirty minutes after the event started, the room was packed. While observing, my field notes don’t reflect seeing anyone I’d watched this volunteer assist have their number called to get their application reviewed by CityKey staff. Although my field notes don’t indicate an exact number, I noted that individuals asked the volunteer I was sitting with how long they thought the line was, to which this volunteer was unable to definitively say; I observed, then, that these individuals left the site, and expressed that they couldn’t stay and be late for work.

Moreover, according to one of my interviews, long lines may not be the safest for the vulnerable communities who seek out CityKey. Imelda Salazar from SWOP explained to me that having closed events through NGOs not only takes the pressure off of the CityKey printing staff, but these events are often safer for vulnerable communities. At SWOP, as Salazar told me, “[the City] bring[s] the printers they establish, but we do everything else - we do the registration table, the connection is with us. We have like coffee, pan dulces, it's a community celebration cause we know what it means for the families.” Salazar later noted that waiting on line was “not smart for this particular community because it adds a layer of stress” and that she didn’t “think you're treated with dignity” when you have to wait on such long lines. Overall, the most common piece of feedback I heard from advocates I interviewed was more printers, more staff, and a larger budget.

All things considered, the advocates I spoke to broadly framed the role of NGOs as a mediator between an important, but underfunded, government program and the communities they serve, many of whom trust NGOs and look to them for support. According to my subjects, NGOs were important in facilitating pathways for belonging both in the initial stages of CityKey as well as during its rollout, often being the ones responsible for problem-solving when city services weren’t able to fully support the community’s needs. It's notable here my analysis is limited insofar my interviewees were members of NGOs themselves, and so were more likely to have framed their work positively. Building off of this limitation, although I interviewed city officials who also spoke to the positive efforts of NGOs, I wasn’t able to speak to constituents of these NGOs to hear their perspectives on NGO support. However, given the subjects I was able to speak to, both from NGOs and the City of Chicago, it seems evident that community partners are an important character in this narrative, and thus studying how they connect government to people provided a more holistic picture of the CityKey program.

A Comparative Case: Belonging and Access to Services in the Chicago Suburbs

Interesting, localized comparative points between communities with access to CityKey and communities without access to CityKey arose from my interviews with community advocates in the suburbs. First, when asked about what they felt was the biggest difference between Chicago and the Chicago suburbs, advocates I interviewed often spoke of their communities lacking services and resources from the government. This finding reinforces the work of Scott Allard (2017), who studied the scarcity of resources for NGOs in suburban communities. Interviewees’ responses also support existing research regarding the lack of political support for these communities which broadly has an impact on accessing the already limited services (Cheng, 2013; Allard, 2017). Lastly, a link between localized identification and belonging was not absent from the suburbs, as the SSIP membership card demonstrates. Identification programs to help support immigrant and undocumented communities in the suburbs, such as the possibility of a county ID, also further reinforce the role proper government identification plays in increasing access to services and creates the potential for new iterations of belonging in these areas.

According to my interviewees, suburban immigrant communities often experienced challenges in accessing government services in general. Megan McKenna from Mano a Mano, an NGO serving immigrant communities in Lake County, Illinois, explained to me that in the Chicago suburbs “services are not really well distributed and there's not enough services to even get close to the need [in their communities] because a lot of, particularly government funding, is based on population density or it’s based on political power. And there's not either of those things in the suburbs. And so we're kind of at a loss in terms of, there's a little bit of a bias there inherent in how funds are distributed.” Because Mano a Mano is a direct service agency, they experience first-hand the struggles the community face to access resources and services for members of their community.

Building off of this, both suburban NGO advocates I spoke to mentioned that a lack of local political influence was inhibiting their abilities to advocate for their communities. Jose Vera of the Southwest Suburban Immigrant Project (SSIP) said that one of the reasons their group focused on community organizing rather than direct services was because local elected officials struggled to support the community which was “where [they’ve] been able to push and… [have] an impact on the resources and making sure that those [elected officials] are educated and are accepting of the new immigrant community coming at them.” To this point, McKenna noted that while “the City of Chicago has a really strong infrastructure of Latino and Latina leaders in terms of elected officials and civic leaders… whereas the concentration of Latinos and immigrants in the suburbs is something that's still kind of a newer phenomenon… so there really hasn't been a significant change in kind of the leadership structure or kind of like cohort in terms of who's in charge of things politically or civically.” This mention of political capacity significantly differs from the Chicago context, where local leaders were, by and large, more supported when it came to policymaking that impacted their communities.

According to both advocates, access to transportation was the biggest difference between the struggles faced by immigrant communities in the suburbs and the struggles faced by immigrant communities in Chicago; this also meant that Illinois’ Temporary Visitor Driver’s License Program (TVDLs) was more impactful for their suburban constituents. On TVDLs, Vera from SSIP said that “one of the first campaigns that [SSIP] decided to take on and to work towards was to get, [to] make sure that everyone in the state of Illinois had access to a driver's license regardless of their immigration status.” McKenna also mentioned transportation as a big concern for their community, highlighting that although “some people have TVDLs not everybody has them, not everybody's is eligible for them.” Both advocates maintained that because their communities lacked access to public transportation, mobility and transportation were significant obstacles their communities faced that differ from the challenges for immigrants who live in a big city.

One interesting thing to come out of my discussion with Jose Vera was his learned insight about the SSIP membership ID. While the program wasn’t exactly like CityKey, Vera explained to me how their membership card, which has since been discontinued, operated similarly to CityKey in some respects:

We basically were a membership-based organization so when people paid their membership dues, they would get an ID from our organization. that was actually very helpful just because it gave people a, you give people an identity and a connection to their local community.., these are folks, especially undocumented folks that are not able to get an ID, a state ID with a, with a U.S. address, you know, now had that with our local organizational ID. After the [TVDL] licenses, we saw that the need narrowed down for us having to provide that because now they had a… even though the driver's license is not a valid state ID, they had something with them that had an address that they were able to use. What we used our ID for was sort of like a, just a sort of like a gym membership. And it was sort of like, just letting people know that this is an organization that they belonged to. We partner[ed] with a local library[so]the local library accepted it so that people [were able to] get their library cards. We worked with local banks to be able to accept those as a formal form of identification just because people were not eligible for other types of ID. So it helped give people an identity... it help[ed] give them purpose.

Despite the program’s significantly smaller scale, the SSIP ID program was a unique way that this community was looking to address the need for identification as action from the county and state was stagnated. Further, as demonstrated here, localized efforts to support belonging are not exclusive to urban communities, and, as such, this example of a local ID program in a suburban area highlights the promising ways suburban NGOs are working to support their constituencies.

Lastly, conversations around a county ID emerged from not only advocates who exclusively work the suburbs, but also from the two NGOs I interviewed who did work in the city and suburbs. These sentiments spoke to developing conversations about emerging iterations of belonging in the suburbs. According to both Fred Tsao of ICIRR and Bertha Morín of Mujeres Latinas en Acción, they had seen people come to CityKey printing sites from suburbs like Cicero and Berwyn, only to be turned away because they weren’t resident of the City of Chicago. Morín said members of her community from the suburbs came to Mujeres asking “‘What about us? We need CityKey’" and she would have to explain that the program is only for residents of the City. Notably, Morín mentioned that conversations were happening about county-wide ID, but shared a similar sentiment to Tsao, who was worried that the county ID would be significantly more work, especially at a time where CityKey was still relatively “new and unproven.” McKenna expressed concern that the mobility of their communities in the suburbs might make having a municipal ID program challenging in the suburbs, and that “County itself does not really have jurisdiction over the County residents in that respect.” Without a county ID, both suburban advocates cited a wide array of other forms of IDs their communities use: matriculas, consular IDs, passports, TVDLs. Notably, besides the work of direct service agencies like Mano a Mano, there was no mention of other similar institutions that centralized services to the same degree as CityKey.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Overall, my interviews demonstrated six broad categories of findings as the related to CityKey: 1) the importance of valid, government-issued, proof of identification for members of the immigrant and undocumented community, 2) through CityKey, members of this community, as told my advocates, felt like the City of Chicago saw them and validated their experiences, thus creating a sense of belonging through visibility, 3) through CityKey, members of this community, as advocates told, also felt a greater sense of belonging through increased engagement with the City of Chicago, 4) negative experiences using CityKey at banks and financial institutions created a barrier to belonging in the city, and broadly a reminder of the limitations of municipal citizenship, 5) further, full belonging was limited for this community due to fear and uncertainty caused by the current federal administration, which impact the ways members of this community thought about belonging on the federal level vis-à-vis formal United States citizenship, and 6) NGOs were important mediators between community members and essential government, and stepped up to meet the demands of their communities from the early stages of City to the struggles in its implementation. Further, while the comparative case between Chicago and the Chicago suburbs was not balanced, the introduction of suburban communities into this analysis highlighted disparities in service access and, subsequently, differing conceptions of belonging.

Overall, my findings and analysis reconfirm the existing literature on municipal IDs and belonging. Chicago’s municipal ID program was, as Robert Suro (2015) would frame it, “mitigating illegality” by expanding access to services for members of the immigrant and undocumented community. On the municipal level, the expansion of local citizenship through claim-making was evident in the ways the ID allowed Chicago residents to better engage with the city, which reconfirms Irene Bloemraad (2018) conceptions of citizenship and belonging. In line with de Graauw (2014), my interviewees illustrated the contentious political arena in which municipal IDs, but my work went a step further to discuss the impact on belonging these municipal IDs had within immigrant and undocumented communities, as told by NGO advocates who worked closely with them. As studied by Michael Lipsky (1980) and Bernardo Zacka (2017), street-level bureaucrats had immense levels of discretionary power with regards to providing community members with CityKey. Moreover, Michael Lipsky and Steven Rathgeb Smith (1990), the increasing partnership between NGOs and government partners meant that NGO advocates that I spoke to were at the crossroads between their constituencies and the state, and this yielded efforts to fill-in for the city when it was at capacity. Ultimately, my findings reconfirm much of the existing literature, and this thesis hopes that its findings were successful in being able to connect these pieces through studying the CityKey municipal ID program.

As noted in the methods section, a discussion on the limitations of this study are in order; most notably, the challenges to recruiting participants. I contacted thirty-five organizations across Chicago and the Chicago suburbs to participate in this study, all of them at least once via phone and email but, for many of them, I followed up a second time. Of those thirty-five, I was only able to yield responses from nine NGOs and one community organization. Of the organizations I was able to get a hold of but opted not to participate, common replies were that they either didn’t know about the program or they weren’t currently supporting the advocacy or the implementation of the program. Moreover, on at least two occasions, I was the first person who had mentioned the program to a community group. While my interviewees even noted the importance of word-of-mouth to connect people, especially vulnerable communities, with a service like CityKey, it was notable that some of the organizations in the immigration spaces that I reached out to were unfamiliar with the program. A limitation of this study was its small sample size, so future research efforts should continue to reach out to NGOs and community members to discuss how information is being spread from the City to important NGO partners and then to members of the community.

It’s important to note two other limitations to my study which go hand in hand: first, regarding my language limitations, and second, regarding the degree of separation between my subjects and the direct, lived experiences of community members. First, due to my language limitations, I conducted all interviews in English which, in turn, excluded voices from this study who would’ve contributed their experiences of belonging, expressing belonging in ways that might have confirmed or opposed the sentiments of my interviewees. Lastly, as mentioned previously, the fact that the majority of my interviews were conducted with NGO advocates created a degree of separation between the communities directly impacted and their service providers. In other words, NGO advocates might have prescribed certain experiences, needs, complaints, or desires onto their constituencies that might not accurately represent the real opinions from actual members of the community. In terms of discussing belonging, this is an important limitation because NGOs might say CityKey heightened their constituents’ sense of belonging without necessarily knowing if these constituents think of their ID in those terms. These are important limitations to be grappled within this paper and grappled with in future research.

Future research should continue to advance the study of municipal ID programs around the country to include a wider range of case studies of different ID programs. Due to the uniqueness of the Chicago CityKey program, my findings may not perfectly translate onto the experiences had by other city officials, by other community partners, and by other members of the immigrant and undocumented community. Further research should also seek to interview members most directly impacted by CityKey to most clearly how their sense of belonging has been impacted, if at all, by CityKey. Lastly, more research should continue to be conducted on the role of NGOs in connecting vulnerable communities to services, and how this service landscape has continued to change communities’ relationship with the American social-welfare state.

Lastly, as CityKey celebrates its second birthday, future research should continue to study CityKey’s impact in ways beyond belonging but, further, the City of Chicago should continue its efforts to improve the program such that it best serves all of Chicago’s immigrant and undocumented communities.

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