

Cultivating Consent: Nonstate Leaders and the Orchestration of State Legibility¹

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In recent decades, the sociology of the state has become engrossed in the relationship between knowledge and modern statecraft. Heeding recent calls for “society-centered” approaches, this article investigates the role of nonstate leaders in the production of state knowledge. It takes up the following question: How have nonstate leaders (i.e., civil leaders and community advocates) contributed to what James Scott has termed “state legibility”? While historical traces suggest that these actors have worked to lessen opposition to state projects, this activity remains empirically understudied and conceptually underdeveloped. Addressed to this problem, this article introduces the concept of *consent building* and proposes an analytic approach that focuses on the motivations of nonstate leaders, the obstacles of noncompliance they confront, and the persuasive tactics used to foster public cooperation. To illustrate the purchase of this approach, it presents a case study of local Latino promoters of the 2010 U.S. census. This analysis reveals how nonstate leaders can enable, rather than impede, the capacity to “see like a state.”

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of Foucault’s theory of governmentality, Bourdieu’s addendum to Weber’s classic definition of state power, and the growing vitality

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of science and technology studies, the sociology of the state has become engrossed in the relationship between knowledge and modern statecraft (e.g., Goldberg 1997; Desrosières 1998; Curtis 2001; Eyal 2006; Mukerji 2009; Leibler 2014; Loveman 2014). Within this broader locus of inquiry, scholars have investigated what Scott (1998) has influentially called “state legibility,” a knowledge-based optic that has enabled state actors to see society in administratively efficacious ways. State legibility rests on the ongoing production of “synoptic, standardized knowledge” of society (Scott, Tehranian, and Mathias 2002, p. 5). But, as research has shown, the production of such knowledge is neither a straightforward nor a guaranteed process.

Scholarly efforts to open the “black box” of state knowledge making have revealed that this process is—even under the most optimal circumstances—a laborious enterprise. It requires substantial investment and ingenuity, what Curtis (2001), following Bowker (1994), has described as “infrastructural work.” On the whole, the extant scholarship has primarily focused on the infrastructural work of state actors, typically state elites (Diamant 2001). While this focus has unearthed taken-for-granted contingencies and dynamics, it has, nonetheless, drawn an incomplete portrait of knowledge production (Emigh 2002; Emigh, Riley, and Ahmed 2015).

Responding to recent calls for “society-centered” analyses, this article directs attention toward nonstate leaders, particularly civic leaders and community advocates.² Specifically, it takes up the question: How have nonstate leaders collaborated with state actors to produce social knowledge? Or said differently, in what ways have community leaders contributed to the orchestration of state legibility? Although the question is largely neglected, historical and contemporary evidence suggests an answer. Nonstate leaders have, at times, attempted to mitigate and manage popular noncompliance (e.g., Clark 1998; Curtis 2001; Carroll 2006; Mora 2014). This represents one of the methods state actors and their collaborators have employed to “compel informants to yield up accounts” (Curtis 2001, p. 32). And yet, the nature of such efforts remains empirically understudied and conceptually underdeveloped.

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² I define nonstate actors, simply, as social actors who are not official functionaries of a government or state bureaucracy. In certain contexts, the line between “nonstate” and “state” actors, however, can be rather blurry.

I argue that nonstate leaders have engaged in what I term *consent-building*—a form of infrastructural work that aims to convince local populations to cooperate with “legibility projects,” such as civil registries, cadastral maps, and censuses. Building on the sociology of the state and of cultural sociology, I propose an analytic approach designed to provide insight into the consent-building work of nonstate leaders. This approach specifically seeks to capture the motivations that animate their efforts, the problems of noncompliance they confront, and the tactics they employ to cultivate consent and cooperation among the governed. As such, the objective here is not to determine whether consent was achieved. Instead, it is to understand the process of consent building from the perspectives and practices of nonstate leaders.

To illustrate the usefulness of this approach, I turn to the case of the modern census. I have selected this case for two reasons. First, over the past several decades, the census has received unprecedented attention from social scientists and historians.³ Yet, while scholars have treated the census as the paradigmatic legibility project, they have rarely focused on the consent-building work of nonstate leaders. Second, the modern census—in contrast to the premodern census—has tended to rely on “voluntary compliance” (Loveman 2014, p. 26). For this reason, it has been particularly dependent on consent-building. Although we cannot assume that other legibility projects have been equally reliant on nonstate leaders, the census nonetheless offers a productive starting point. To this end, the empirical heart of this article is a case study of local consent-building for the 2010 U.S. census.

In the months before the census, the U.S. Census Bureau successfully enrolled community leaders and organizations throughout the country to actively promote local participation in the census. Drawing on qualitative and ethnographic data, I present an analysis of the Rhode Island Latino Complete Count Committee (RILCCC), one of thousands of local campaigns assembled to promote the census. This particular committee was created to persuade Latino residents—especially those without legal documentation—to participate in the census. Seeking statistical proof of local Latino demographic growth, community leaders endeavored to overcome public indifference, frustrations with ethnoracial categories, fear of state surveillance, and a boycott of the census. While not generalizable, this account sheds light on the Census Bureau’s long-standing reliance on nonstate lead-

³ Scholars have examined the census in relation to numerous themes, such as state formation and colonial administration (e.g., Starr 1987; Appadurai 1993; Curtis 2001; Carroll 2006), national imaginaries and race making (e.g., Anderson [1983] 2006; Lee 1993; Jung and Almaguer 2006; Morning 2008; Loveman 2014; Thompson 2016), citizenship and political representation (e.g., Prewitt 1987; Anderson and Fienberg 1999; Nobles 2000), social movements and policy making (e.g., Skerry 2000; Hattam 2005; Hochschild and Weaver 2010; Paschel 2013; Mora 2014), and numeracy and the popularization of statistical knowledge (e.g., Hacking 1990; Porter 1996; Desrosières 1998; Cohen 1999; Emigh 2002).

ers to reach “hard-to-count” populations (Choldin 1994; Hillygus et al. 2006).

Findings reveal that nonstate leaders mediate complex and sometimes contentious relations between state actors and local populations. This suggests that consent building remains necessary—even for seemingly routinized state projects such as the census—because state bureaucracies interact with local populations in diverse and contradictory ways, and correspondingly, the governed do not have a uniform relationship with those who govern. The analysis further shows that consent building targets public perceptions of state projects. As such, the capacity to “see like a state” (Scott 1998) rests—at least to some extent—on the ways the “state” is seen by social actors during knowledge production. By working to persuade the public to assent, nonstate leaders can act as facilitators of, rather than obstacles to, state legibility.

STATE LEGIBILITY AND THE LIMITS OF A STATE-CENTERED APPROACH

Political scientist James Scott’s notion of state legibility is an influential point of departure for current research and theorizing on the role of knowledge in modern statecraft. In the opening paragraphs of his widely cited monograph, Scott (1998, p. 2) uses a “homely analogy” of beekeeping to clarify the meaning of state legibility. He instructs that harvesting honey in “premodern times” was a difficult and inefficient enterprise. Not only did the process routinely destroy the bee colony, it was also next to impossible to extract honey in a neat and consistent fashion. Scott likens beekeeping to the “premodern state,” which he contends was “partially blind,” knowing “precious little about its subjects, their wealth, their landholdings and yields, their location, their very identity” (p. 2). Consequently, state interventions—like honey extractions—were “often crude and self-defeated.” By contrast, modern beehives and state systems have sought to conquer illegibility. With respect to beehives, new devices, methods, and arrangements have created more precise ways to inspect, extract, and transport honey than previously possible. Likewise, the modern state has employed techniques of classification, measurement, and aggregation to render individuals and peoples legible for administration and rule.

State legibility places knowledge production at the center of modern statecraft. As Clemens and Cook (1999, p. 454) correctly note, legibility for Scott is not a purely textual matter. Rather than passively reading or recording society, state legibility “transform[s] the world to fit the categories.” Echoing other scholars (e.g., Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol 1985, p. 357; Foucault 1991; Curtis 1997, p. 390), Scott argues that state legibility has amplified and augmented capacities for administrative intervention in

social life. Indeed, it has enabled “governing at a distance” (Rose and Miller 1992), facilitated the “primitive accumulation” and “exercise” of state-based symbolic power (Loveman 2005), and configured the official “space of possibilities for personhood” in modern societies (Hacking 2002, p. 107).

With few exceptions, theories and analyses of state knowledge production are decidedly “state-centered” (Emigh et al. 2015), as if attention to state actors and agencies accounted for the entire process of knowledge making. Scott largely adopts this orientation. State legibility is theorized primarily from the vantage point of state elites. To be fair, research on legibility projects (Cohn 1987; Scott 1998; Diamant 2001; Carroll 2006; Loveman 2007) has acknowledged and documented popular evasion and opposition. But such research typically treats nonstate actors as reactive to, rather than constitutive of, state legibility. Indeed, as Diamant (2001, p. 449) claims, we have far more insight into the motivations and machinations of state knowledge producers than “how ordinary people [deal] with central state authorities.” In their recent work on the social origins of modern censuses, Emigh et al. (2015, pp. 11–12) highlight five ways that the state-centered orientation inflates “the influence of states.” First, it exaggerates the “correlation between state power and information gathering.” Second, it “overstate[s] the ability of the state to impose novel categories on the populace and to extract entirely new information, either in form or content.” Third, it “over emphasizes the role of state bureaucrats in developing and implementing censuses.” Fourth, it ignores “how the power of social actors influences information gathering.” And fifth, it exaggerates “the extent to which any states’ intentions or goals drive information gathering.” This overly narrow focus on state actors has, in effect, drawn an incomplete and arguably skewed portrait, not only of census making but also of state knowledge production, more broadly.

Emigh et al. (2015) propose a “society-centered” perspective to rectify the conceptual and substantive imbalance created by the reigning state-centered orientation. Their intent is not to replace one approach with another but to analytically privilege that which has been ignored, so as to reveal that knowledge production is, in fact, an “interactive process” involving both state and social actors (p. 14). While society-centered approaches are underdeveloped relative to state-centered ones, empirical traces in the literature offer grounds for a broader analytic horizon (p. 13). Picking up on these traces, the next section mines the existing research on popular resistance to uncover how nonstate leaders have worked—whether at the behest of state actors or on their own accord—to combat noncompliance.

NONSTATE LEADERS AND THE PROBLEM OF NONCOMPLIANCE

Scholars have excavated numerous political, technical, and logistical obstacles to state knowledge production. Overcoming these obstacles requires a

great deal of “infrastructural work” (Curtis 2001). Historically, one of the most significant obstacles has been popular reticence and resistance to legibility projects (Cohn 1987; Clark 1998; Scott 1998; Diamant 2001; Cronin 2003; Carroll 2006; Loveman 2007). For instance, civil registration in 19th-century Brazil provoked uprisings that stalled state formation for decades (Loveman 2007). In the same century, the disciplinary aims of Canadian officials were challenged not by open resistance but by the “willful distortion” of census takers (Curtis 2001, p. 127). Diverse forms of private and public opposition to marriage registration in Maoist China rendered attempts to “create a more administratively legible and politically legible society” partially unsuccessful (Diamant 2001, p. 452). More recently, in the 1980s, successive boycotts against the census in West Germany severely hindered data collection. Boycott organizers invoked the memory of the Nazi regime to build on and channel widespread concerns with state encroachment and surveillance (Hannah 2009, p. 71).

State actors have employed various methods to manage noncompliance. These methods have ranged from coercive tactics, such as fines and physical force, to efforts to legitimate and incentivize cooperation with state projects. The empirical record suggests that the latter method has involved collaboration with nonstate elites (e.g., Cohn 1987; Choldin 1994; Clark 1998; Carroll 2006; Brown 2009).⁴ For example, in preparation for Ecuador’s 1950 census, state authorities enrolled religious leaders—including the archbishop of Quito—to promote the census (Clark 1998, p. 195). Similarly, in response to “widespread resistance” to the 1812 census in Ireland, British colonial authorities urged local Catholic leaders to communicate publicly “the intentions and design” of the subsequent census (Carroll 2006, p. 94). In the U.S. context—and relevant to the case study presented below—the U.S. Census Bureau established minority advisory committees in the 1970s to help “sway public opinion toward the census” (Choldin 1994, p. 60). As Choldin notes, census officials believed that “if these minority leaders could be persuaded that the census was valuable and trustworthy, perhaps they could influence their groups to cooperate” (pp. 60–61). In preparation for its 1991 census, the British Home Affairs Committee—inspired by the U.S. Census Bureau—urged its Census Office to “solicit advice and support from ethnic minority organizations, produce ethnically oriented publicity material, and hire ethnic minorities as enumerators in particular neighborhoods” (Brown 2009, p. 20).

These examples show that nonstate leaders have collaborated with state agents to combat popular noncompliance. Such collaboration suggests that

⁴ The reliance on nonstate actors is far from a universal strategy. For instance, the failure to incorporate local leaders left Brazilian state elites without a means of defusing resistance to civil registration (Loveman 2007).

state agencies have relied on nonstate actors to produce social knowledge and legibility. However, the state-centered focus of the literature has, unsurprisingly, led to scant attention to the nature of these collaborations and thus has obscured a key investment of nonstate leaders—consent building.

CONSENT BUILDING

Definitions

The concept of consent building is composed of two terms. By *consent*, I simply mean a willingness, on the part of the governed, to cooperate with state projects. It conceives of this consent as, by and large, a product of persuasion. Although this definition is by design philosophically shallow, it does not preclude deeper engagement with the political and normative debates traditionally tied to the question of consent (cf. Gramsci 1971; Connolly 1987; Pateman 1988; Mills 1997; Taylor 2003). It recognizes that these debates—despite their richness and value—have often remained at a level of abstraction unsuitable for grounded social scientific investigation.

By *building*, I wish to communicate that consent is neither automatic nor permanent. This point, as readers will recall, was foundational to the political praxis of the Italian thinker and political prisoner Antonio Gramsci (1971), who argued that consent, while at times appearing “spontaneous” is actually the result of organized ideological work. Consent thus demands continual cultivation (de Leon, Desai, and Tuğal 2015, p. 27). In this regard, I depart from scholarly claims that once-contested state projects of legibility have largely become taken for granted (Scott 1998; Torpey 1998; Noiriel 2001; Loveman 2005). While there is some truth to this conclusion, it nonetheless runs the risk of overestimating the entrenchment of state projects and underestimating the kinds of labor still needed to secure popular consent. Taking these terms together, I define consent-building as efforts undertaken by state actors and their nonstate collaborators to transform popular noncompliance into cooperation by means of persuasion.

Parameters

To give further clarity and specification to this definition of consent building, I highlight five conceptual parameters. First, I restrict consent-building to efforts to generate public support and cooperation for *particular* state projects. Drawing analytic inspiration from Burawoy’s (1982) classic shop floor ethnography, this focus shifts attention from broad meditations on the “macro” sociohistorical foundations of consent to its localized cultivation.

By the same token, the study of consent building leaves it as an empirical question whether support for a given state project encourages consent for other state projects or for the wider political system. Second, I conceive consent building as an *intentional* practice. It is deliberately carried out to cultivate public support and consent. Third, it is a *coordinated* effort. Coordination here connotes organization and collective work. This distinguishes consent building from contributions made by individuals in their personal capacity, such as urging relatives to fill out a census form. I consider such efforts consent building only when carried out and understood as part of a larger initiative. Fourth, consent building aims to procure the consent of some perceived *aggregate* of people, such as a “nation” or “population.” While individuals are the concrete receivers of consent-building rhetoric, they are—as individuals—not its primary objects. Fifth, consent building operates primarily through *persuasion*. This does not necessarily mean the absence of coercion, as governments often employ both coercive and consent-building tactics to produce state knowledge (Clark 1998; Loveman 2007; Brown 2009). However, I reserve the classification of consent-building for efforts attempting to persuade rather than force populations to comply.

Analytics

With these definitions and parameters in mind, I propose and pursue an analytic approach to investigate consent building for state projects of legibility. Although the substantive focus of this article is on nonstate actors—specifically, local leaders—this approach could be used, with minor modification, to study the consent-building efforts of state actors. Building on insights from the sociology of the state and of cultural sociology, I focus on three issues: motives, obstacles, and tactics.

The first issue of concern is *motives*. Why have nonstate actors chosen to engage in consent-building? What motivates their efforts? Given its state-centered orientation, the existing literature offers limited insight into these questions. Presumably, nonstate actors may collaborate with state officials to gain favor or out of a sense of duty. In cases in which knowledge production is connected to government funds or political representation, such as the U.S. census, we might suspect greater interest among nonstate leaders. Although his empirical focus is not on state knowledge production, Owens’s (2007) detailed analysis of collaborations between black churches and state agencies is relevant here. Owens found that black churches that actively partner with government agencies often do so as a deliberate political strategy. These churches seek to become “intermediaries to affect public services and public policies in their neighborhoods” and “to win government attention and policy responsiveness to the interests of low-income black neigh-

borhoods” (p. 4). His account challenges scholars not to assume that non-state/state collaborations are universally sites of cooptation or to narrowly focus on the objectives of state actors. Rather, Owens invites investigation of the political rationales and aspirations of nonstate actors. This attention is particularly important, for as Owens notes, the fact that government agencies invite collaboration does not mean that this invitation will be accepted (p. 43). Indeed, similar to consent itself, the willingness to engage in consent building is not always present and may require the enrollment of local leadership. For this reason, it is analytically important to ask what contextually specific factors or aspirations move nonstate leaders to collaborate with state projects of legibility.

The second issue of concern is *obstacles*. What are the sources of noncompliance, as perceived and engaged by nonstate leaders? Past scholarship provides some guidance on this issue. Legibility projects that are considered illegitimate are more likely to foster noncooperation. This was a major problem in early modern attempts to conduct legibility projects. As Loveman (2005) notes, the extension of state authority into new domains was often viewed as an unacceptable and unjust intrusion into local affairs. It would take considerable effort and time for governments and state bureaucracies to “establish [their] legitimacy as social accountant” (p. 1658). Yet, as suggested by the case of West German census boycotts described above, this obstacle is not confined to the distant past. Another obstacle highlighted in the research is mistrust (Cohn 1987; Choldin 1994). Anthropologist Bernard Cohn (1987, p. 239), for example, has described how fears of taxation and conscription led to “little co-operation” between the Indian populace and British colonial administrators during the 1871 census. At stake here was not whether colonial officials had the authority to collect information but whether the stated purpose of enumeration could be trusted. While these two sources of noncompliance—illegitimacy and mistrust—have been firmly documented, there is no reason to assume that they exhaust the factors that encourage noncompliance or discourage cooperation.

The third issue of concern is *tactics*. Over the past several decades, cultural sociologists and social movement scholars have developed a fertile conceptual and analytic vocabulary for the study of persuasion (e.g., Schudson 1989; Hunt 2004; Polletta 2006; Ghoshal 2009). For instance, Snow et al.’s (1986) theory of frame alignment has helped scholars explicate how social movements enroll recruits and grow public support. Polletta (2006) has similarly examined the role of narratives and storytelling in politics. Drawing on Gramscian-inspired political theory, de Leon et al. (2015) have proposed the notion of “political articulation” to capture how political parties create constituencies and cleavages. Here, I draw inspiration from the literary theorist Kenneth Burke. Following Aristotle, Burke ([1950] 1969, p. 46) understood rhetoric as the art of persuading someone to take

an action or, more commonly, to adopt a different “attitude” about someone or something (p. 50).⁵ He maintained that the persuasive force of rhetoric was linked to what he called “identification,” the manner by which an oration makes the audience identify with the orator and her interests. With a focus on rhetorical appeals, I analyze the public messages used in attempts to persuade the governed to cooperate with state projects. These messages, as I show below, tend to be high “resolution,” meaning, they tell “the audience precisely what to do to respond” (Schudson 1989, pp. 171–74). However, my objective, as noted above, is not to ascertain rhetorical efficacy but to identify the specific appeals crafted and circulated to overcome obstacles of noncompliance.

Marshaling the concept of consent building, the remainder of this article turns to the case of the 2010 U.S. census. I use this case as an opportunity to illustrate the purchase of my analytic approach.

DATA AND METHOD

The empirical material presented in this article originates from a qualitative and ethnographic study of the RILCCC, one of thousands of consent-building campaigns assembled to promote public participation in the 2010 census (more details below). Heeding Kertzer and Arel’s (2002, p. 6) methodological call for “more ethnographic” studies of censuses, I base my analysis on multiple data sources collected between February 2010 and March 2011. I draw on in-depth interviews with 22 individuals (several follow-up interviews were conducted with key respondents). Respondents were identified through snowball sampling (Weiss 1994) and my participation at public events. The majority of interviewees were members and supporters of the RILCCC. The remaining respondents were local elected officials, journalists, regional census officials, and temporary census employees, such as partnership specialists and enumerators.

Interviews ranged from approximately 45 to 130 minutes and were conducted in English and Spanish. Generally, interviews focused on (1) respondent’s educational, professional, and civic trajectories; (2) previous experiences with the decennial census; (3) perspectives on the 2010 census and its significance; (4) personal and collective contributions to census promotions; and (5) understandings about the census schedule, particularly the “Hispanic-origin” and “race” questions. Adapting certain techniques of the focused interview (Merton and Kendall 1946), I used prompts (e.g., census schedules, newspaper articles, and promotional objects) to elicit reflections of situations lived by actors. Since the RILCCC was established before I

⁵ An attitude for Burke (1969, p. 50) is an “incipient act.”

began data collection, interviews helped me document the committee's formation and its initial promotional work.

Along with interviews, I conducted participant observation at several public events related to the 2010 census. Most were either organized or co-organized by the RILCCC and its Census Bureau liaisons. These events included press conferences, educational forums, door-knocking outreach drives, and farmers' markets. At these events, I took field notes and integrated them with interview data to develop an account of RILCCC promotional work. I also traveled to Washington, D.C., to attend the spring 2010 joint meeting of the Census Bureau's Race and Ethnicity Advisory Committee, which has since been reconstituted as the National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic, and Other Populations.

Furthermore, I collected local and national media coverage in both the English and Spanish press to supplement interview and observational data. Locally, the most significant were the *Providence Journal* and *Providence en Español* and the online news service RIMIX. Nationally, I followed 2010 census coverage in major media outlets such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and Univision. I also collected primary materials from the Census Bureau, including press releases, promotional packets, samples of targeted media and advertisements, and instructional manuals, as well as RILCCC meeting minutes and promotional materials. As qualitative and ethnographic research is an iterative process in which data collection and analysis are dialectically connected (Glaeser 2000), I refined my questions and thematic emphases in the course of research.

CENSUS PROMOTIONS IN 2010: AN OVERVIEW

In 2010, for the twenty-third time in its history, the U.S. federal government conducted a decennial census, which it often describes as the country's "largest peacetime operation." On March 15, census schedules began arriving at homes across the country. Months before this date, households were sent several informative postcards, later followed by encouraging reminders to fill out the form and "march to the mailbox." Beginning in May, enumerators began visiting uncounted residences. In the year before enumeration, a multi-million-dollar media and advertisement campaign saturated national and local television, radio, print, and online outlets. The official 2010 slogan, "It Is in Our Hands," was translated into about 28 languages and printed on an untold number of documents, billboards, and promotional objects. In K–12 classrooms throughout the country, teachers gave civic lessons and facilitated exercises about the importance of the upcoming enumeration. Joining the promotional chorus, thousands of community organizations and leaders publicly exhorted local residents to take part in the

census. These initiatives carried out throughout the country belie the potential fragility of the census project—a fragility indexed by political scientist and former Census Bureau director Kenneth Prewitt (2004) in an essay titled “What If We Give a Census and No One Comes?”

Over the last century, promotions have become an integral part of consent building for the census (Anderson 2008; Igo 2011). Historian Margo Anderson (2008, p. 12) notes that census promotion and advertisement first emerged in the early 20th century, as census administrators “became increasingly concerned about the interaction between government and respondent in the census process.” Thomson (1940, p. 311), for example, details how the Census Bureau developed a public relations program to “elicit maximum cooperation and minimize resistance” in the 1940 census.

Since the 1970s, however, the challenges to enumeration have increased as census administrators began to rely primarily on mail-in responses rather than exclusively on door-to-door enumerators. In response, the Census Bureau has developed a sophisticated and multifaceted promotional arsenal to address decreasing mail-in response rates, soaring enumeration costs, controversies over privacy, and persistent disparities in participation among “minority” ethn racial populations and language groups. This effort was especially evident in the 2000 census, which, for instance, “mounted an extraordinary public effort to reach hard-to-count minority populations” (Prewitt 2002, p. 358).

Building on the previous census, the Census Bureau planned and carried out an “integrated communications campaign” to promote the 2010 census and address obstacles of noncompliance. This promotional campaign was composed of three major initiatives. The first initiative, paid marketing and advertising, accounted for about \$340 million out of the Census Bureau’s roughly \$13 billion budget for the 2010 census (Office of Inspector General 2011; Newburger 2012). Following a precedent set in 2000, the 2010 census was promoted in national and local television, radio, billboard, and print advertisements. Television advertisements included a 30-second spot during the Super Bowl halftime that cost \$2.5 million, a subplot in a popular *Telemundo telenovela* in which one of the main characters becomes a census enumerator, and a public service announcement featuring Nickelodeon’s hit cartoon show, *Dora the Explorer*. Census Bureau billboards, posters, and newspaper advertisements targeted both the general public and specific populations, such as nondominant linguistic and ethn racial populations. These populations have consistently exhibited lower response rates than whites and monolingual English speakers. For instance, one poster directed at the Native American population featured a photograph of a young woman facing three teepees, somewhere in what looked like the Great Plains. Overlaid on the image was the text “If I Don’t Say It, Who’s Going to Say It For Me?” Materials were also produced in over 20 languages, including Spanish,

Mandarin, Cantonese, Tagalog, Hindi, Arabic, Polish, and Russian, among others.

The second major promotional initiative targeted elementary and secondary schools. As part of their ambitious Census in Schools program, which also debuted in 2000, census employees distributed census educational kits to principals and teachers throughout the country.

The third initiative of the integrated communication campaign—and the focus of this article—involved enrollment of nonstate leaders. The Census Bureau claims to have assembled over 250,000 leaders and organizations from the religious, civic, political, and economic sectors to promote the census in local communities. In a blog post, Robert Groves, the director of the Census Bureau during the 2010 census, heralded community partners as the “true heroes” of the census. “They’re not being paid. They’re not visibly honored by their locales. They’re not becoming famous. They’re working their neighborhoods because they believe that a fair count of their areas will provide the desired political representation and federal funding.”

The Census Bureau’s “community partners” were often members of complete count committees. These entities were volunteer-based promotional bodies that were established by “tribal, state, and local governments, and/or community leaders” to raise “awareness about the census and motivate residents in the community to respond.” These committees were “charged with developing and implementing a plan designed to target the unique characteristics of their community” (U.S. Census Bureau 2008, p. 8).

With the support of community partners and complete count committees, the Census Bureau worked to persuade the public to participate in the 2010 census. Local census promoters were given a slew of promotional materials, including talking points and templates for fliers, posters, and press releases. These “trusted voices,” as census officials described them, were encouraged to modify promotional messages in locally specific ways. As with other promotional tactics, the Census Bureau made efforts to partner with leaders and organizations that could help convince hard-to-count populations, such as ethnoracial minorities, to participate in the census. For instance, the NAACP, the National Urban League, and the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation created the Count for Change campaign geared toward African-Americans. The National Congress of American Indians and its partners launched a parallel promotional campaign, Indian Country Counts, to lower the undercount of Native Americans. Their national counterparts in Latino civil rights organizations similarly invested in census promotions, carrying out campaigns such as the “¡Hagase Contar!” (Make Yourself Count!) initiative spearheaded by the National Association for Latino Elected and Appointed Officials and other influential national Latino advocacy and media organizations. In the following sections, I delve deeply into one such promotional campaign led by nonstate leaders.

THE RHODE ISLAND LATINO COMPLETE COUNT COMMITTEE

The RILCCC was established in April 2009, a year before the 2010 census. In anticipation of the census, the campaign organized, hosted, and participated in dozens of community events, cultural festivals, and public forums throughout the state and disseminated promotional messages via local English- and Spanish-language media and the Internet.

Its objective, as declared on its website, was to “increase mail response rates among Latino households in Rhode Island through an active community education campaign.” This goal was, for these leaders, especially critical in light of low participation in the previous census. Results from the 2000 census revealed that response rates in areas heavily populated by Latinos and Latin American immigrants, such as the city of Central Falls and parts of several neighborhoods in Providence, fell far below the national average of 67%. For instance, only about 50% of the residents of Central Falls, a one-square-mile town located northeast of Providence, took part in the 2000 census (U.S. Census Bureau 2002).

The Census Bureau deemed areas with low participation rates high priorities and instructed its “partnership specialists” to oversee the establishment of local promotional campaigns. In Rhode Island, this task was placed in the hands of Marta Martínez, one of three partnership specialists in the state.⁶ Marta, a Mexican American community leader, is not a Rhode Island native, but she has deep roots in the state, beginning first as a student at Providence College and later as a community activist and executive director of the Center for Hispanic Policy and Advocacy, one of Rhode Island’s first Latino-focused social service and advocacy agencies. Extremely knowledgeable about the Latino population and local leadership, Marta set out to establish a promotional committee focused on the Latino population.

She first reached out to Pablo Rodríguez, a well-respected Puerto Rican doctor and community leader, whom other leaders consider a major pillar of Rhode Island Latino politics. Marta believed that not only would Pablo’s influence and reputation help her attract other leaders but also his local radio show could serve as an important transmitter of promotional messages. Pablo agreed but insisted that two others help cochair the RILCCC. Pablo suggested Anna Cano Morales, a Colombian American advocate born and raised in Rhode Island, then working at the respected Rhode Island Foundation, and Doris de los Santos, a first-generation Dominican American who was at the time the president of the Rhode Island Latino Civic Fund. Anna and Doris agreed to join the committee and, together with Pablo and Marta, drafted a list of influential local leaders. The list included elected officials, community activists, cultural workers, nonprofit executive directors,

⁶ At the request of respondents, I have opted to use actual names rather than pseudonyms, unless noted otherwise.

religious leaders, educators, and business and media entrepreneurs. Reflecting the diverse ethnic composition of Rhode Island's Latino population (Itzigsohn 2009), their list and subsequent membership included leaders of Dominican, Puerto Rican, Guatemalan, Mexican, and Colombian descent. Although not all invitees joined the campaign, many leaders heeded the call and became local spokespersons for the 2010 census.

The decision of these leaders to join the Census Bureau's promotional campaign raises an important question: What motivated members of the RILCCC to expend time, energy, and resources to increase Latino participation rates in the census? As discussed above, this question of motivation is a central aspect of the analytic approach proposed here. Thus, before turning to the specific problems of noncompliance confronted by the RILCCC, the next section focuses on the motivations that compelled their investment in consent building for the 2010 census.

ENROLLING THE ENROLLERS: DATA AND DEMOGRAPHIC RECOGNITION

For most members of the RILCCC, the decennial census is a familiar enterprise. Many, for instance, have promoted past censuses, even as far as back as the 1980 census—the census that debuted the category “Hispanic.” Some have also worked as enumerators and can recall knocking on doors to help individuals fill out their census forms. In their daily work, either as directors or as employees of social service organizations, they routinely mine and rely on census data. This work has instilled in them what the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1993, p. 324) described as “numerical habits” (see also Cohen 1999). For instance, José González, a Harvard-trained educator and long-time community activist, described the 2010 census as key to documenting the size and growth of the Latino population. Although he noticed signs of demographic growth throughout Providence, he insisted on the need for census data to provide statistical “proof of what is out there.” “It is one thing to be in the community and say, ‘My God, all these bodegas are popping up everywhere, and all these restaurants, and people coming into our schools.’ But a lot of times, I say well that’s anecdotal information, give me some hard numbers.” José and his colleagues affirmed that in order to influence public policy, they needed statistical data, which unlike “anecdotal information” were “undeniable.” Pablo Rodríguez put the stakes in these terms: “Public policy follows the numbers.” Or, in the words of Carmen Díaz-Jusino, a program director for a local organization fostering women’s entrepreneurship, census statistics could lead to “a bigger piece of the pie”—a point about federal funds also used to motivate potential census takers.

RILCCC promoters were also motivated by the role of census data in helping increase Latino political representation and influence. Take, for ex-

ample, a commentary written by Pablo Rodríguez on the heels of the fall 2010 election of Dominican American Angel Taveras, the city's first Latino mayor, and the decision of then newly elected Governor Lincoln Chafee to reject the federal government's controversial E-Verify program to track undocumented labor.⁷ As he and other local leaders eagerly awaited the release of 2010 census data, Pablo reflected on the Rhode Island Political Action Committee (RILPAC) and posed the question: "What has been the secret of our success?" Several factors were given, including the organization's commitment to nonpartisanship, its rigorous endorsement process, and its belief that good policy should guide politics more than ethnic affiliation. But most strongly, Pablo affirmed the importance of the 2000 census. "The Census showed remarkable growth in our neighborhoods and redistricting presented us with an opportunity to draw favorable lines for the election of Juan Pichardo, our first state senator and the first Dominican state senator in the country." He argued that the political success of RILPAC could not be understood apart from the "unique opportunity given by the Census every 10 years." Aspirations were strong that the 2010 census would have a similar impact. RILCCC promoters thus sought after and intended to use census data to render the needs and electoral influence of the "Latino community" publicly visible.

But more deeply, RILCCC investments in consent building were embedded in a collective desire for recognition, registered most evocatively by the campaign's slogan: "¡Si No Nos Cuentan, No Contamos!" (If They Don't Count Us, We Don't Count!). Pablo Rodríguez first uttered these words during the kickoff press conference in April 2009. In his closing remarks, Pablo urged those present to join him in chanting the slogan. Soon after, the group's "battle cry," as he described it to me, would appear on promotional artifacts of various kinds. It would be further invoked in print media, public service announcements, and speeches and on airwaves. Leo Morales, a local media entrepreneur and RILCCC member, shared with me his interpretation of the slogan's meaning. "[If] we don't have participation, they don't know us. We don't count for anything . . . because it's like if we didn't exist. If we didn't make ourselves count, if they don't count us, we don't count. We are not part of the community, not part of the process." Roberto González, an immigration attorney of Puerto Rican descent, further expounded on the theme of recognition. Sitting in his office in East Providence, he recounted the impact of the previous census: "The headlines [of] *TIME* mag-

⁷ E-Verify is a federal program designed to ascertain whether a prospective or existing employee is legally eligible to work in the United States. While mandated for federal agencies and employers receiving funds from the federal government, states have shown considerable variation in uptake, as some states require all employers participate in the program, and others have chosen to abstain from it. For an empirical analysis of the variation in state adoption, see Newman et al. (2012).

azine, shortly after the [2000] census figures came out, were Hispanic or Latino political force. I forgot the exact words, but it was right there, for everyone to see, a major U.S. publication coming to terms with the Latino community. The numbers are there, and we are going to be a political giant. All of a sudden politicians start paying attention to Latinos.” He continued:

This didn’t happen back in the 90s. . . . When Latino groups have press conferences the press shows up because this is a legitimate group and is recognized. Things like funding for activities whether it is political organizations, whether it’s PAC [political action committee] monies, they come flowing. People are paying attention as a result to the community. You don’t demonstrate how many people you have doing the parade anymore, that we used to do down Broad Street every year. Now they look at these census figures, at least the people that make important decisions, and looking at these census figures and they’re saying, “Look this is a community.” Certainly we saw that in the last elections.

While he readily admits that many challenges remain, Roberto recalls how difficult it was to secure funding for Latino-focused social service agencies or convince local media to attend press conferences. For Roberto and others, the 2000 census transformed the Latino population—nationally and locally—into a “legitimate group.” These and other quotes suggest that, in many ways, recognition was “at the heart of the matter” (Calhoun 1994, p. 20).

But how did RILCCC promoters want to be recognized? José described the Latino population as a “kind of a sleeping giant still, but numerically it is big.” Numbers, as Espeland and Stevens (2008, p. 408) note, express difference in terms of “magnitude.” While Marta Martinez, as a partnership specialist, had been instructed and trained to emphasize access to federal resources, she was also personally motivated by the political possibilities of increased numbers. She commented, “The whole idea of doubling numbers was an exciting thing. . . . The more Latinos, the more political power.” These statements communicated a sense of pride and confidence, rooted in the belief that census data would render the Latino community and its growing importance visible. Accordingly, RILCCC promoters viewed the census as a kind of “obligatory passage point” (Callon 1986), which was economically and politically “indispensable” to the future well-being of the Latino population. Being counted, as the RILCCC slogan dramatized, was fundamentally about recognition (i.e., being taken into account).

In short, the perceived promise of demography—namely, greater influence and recognition—motivated RILCCC members to join the Census Bureau’s promotional network. Census data, they believed, would help them realize this promise. But they were also convinced that this hinged on whether the local Latino population participated, en masse, in 2010 census and thus made itself legible to state actors. For this reason, the RILCCC

chose to engage in consent-building and confront major obstacles to the enumeration of Rhode Island's Latino community. To this end, the next four sections each focus on a different obstacle confronted by these nonstate actors and the specific tactics used in attempts to persuade cooperation with the Census Bureau.

THE OBSTACLE OF INDIFFERENCE: PROMOTIONAL
RHETORICS AND ARTIFACTS

On an afternoon in April 2010, RILCCC volunteer Annelies Miles and I made our way up the backstairs of a three-story building in Central Falls.⁸ We were participating, along with other volunteer teams, in a local manifestation of a national push to "march to the mailbox" before the April 15 deadline. As her three grandchildren waited patiently below, she knocked on the backdoor of the top apartment. Almost immediately, a young boy she seemed to recognize answered. She queried whether his mother had completed the census form. Understandably, he did not know and quickly interjected that his mother was sleeping. Annelies courteously asked him to wake her up. Noticing the boy's hesitation, she invoked the future, telling him "[we] gotta get money to send you to college and get better schools. . . . Tell your mother not to get angry at you; tell her to get angry at me." The boy conceded, and soon after his mother appeared. Seemingly unbothered by our visit, the mother confirmed—to Annelies's delight—that she had already mailed her census form. After an exchange of thanks and a 2010 census tote bag, we left and continued our door-knocking expedition. While this particular resident was informed and participated in the census, not all of the homes we visited that day were as inclined or concerned.

Much RILCCC promotional work was geared toward addressing the obstacle of indifference, which they perceived as one of the major sources of noncompliance. As stated in its website, "we cannot assume that Latinos are interested in or want to participate in the census." In order to increase mail-in rates, these census promoters undertook the task of convincing residents that the census was worth their attention and involvement. This was no simple task because, as Choldin (1994, p. 61) has noted, census promotions have to motivate participation "without promising any specific benefit from participating in the census, and in sending this message to people who distrust government and expect nothing but inferior services and facilities from it." Although providing concrete specifics was a challenge, a chief tactic was rhetorical appeals that framed the census as vital to the socioeconomic and political future of the Latino population and the state as a whole. In other words, the very issues that motivated the RILCCC in the first place.

⁸ Annelies Miles is a pseudonym.

For instance, in her interactions with Central Falls residents, Annelies made explicit the connection between census participation and access to federal resources for education, health care, and social services. A well-known personality in the neighborhood, Annelies was at the time the coordinator of a food pantry at Channel One, a local social service and community center.⁹ Of Cape Verdean descent, she became an active contributor to RILCCC-spearheaded promotions in Central Falls. As we walked from block to block, she described this small city as “85% Latino,” adding that the majority were undocumented immigrants, many of whom were afraid to participate in the census.¹⁰

Annelies Miles was not alone in her emphasis on federal resources. Norma Wilson, a staff member at Progreso Latino, recounted distributing informational materials to the teachers of the organization’s ESL classes and speaking with clients about the census.¹¹ Her message to them was “the census is done in order to help communities and when they have a count of the community they can find out what the community needs.” In my interview with José González, he recalled passing out 2010 census pencils and making pitches to parents at report card pickup. His pitch involved describing how local organizations had used past census data to improve the livelihood of the community. “When you talk to people, particularly Latinos, you say, ‘we [wouldn’t have been] able to build this brand new Women and Infants Hospital if it wasn’t for the demographics that proved we needed it. That is an important institution for us, for Latino families.’”

While José’s example focused on previous uses of census data, most promotional messages were future oriented. For instance, at public events and interviews, RILCCC members frequently claimed that each census taker ensured the distribution of \$10,000 in federal funds over the next decade.¹² When I spoke to Pablo Rodríguez in his office, he asked, “What is going to happen to our children? What’s going to happen to funds for education? What will happen with the funds for communities that are now suffering? What will be the future if we don’t participate?” These broad questions

⁹ In July 2010, Channel One and the Central Falls public library were closed. Despite community opposition, public officials justified the decision because of lack of funds. The sad irony here, of course, is that increased participation rates did not, in this case, immediately translate into greater resources for these programs.

¹⁰ The 2010 census found a much lower percentage. In Central Falls, Latinos account for 60% of the population. Researchers have found that the U.S. public tends to deflate the demographic size of dominant groups and inflate the numbers for immigrants and non-dominant ethnoracial groups (Alba, Rumbaut, and Marotz 2005; Diaz McConnell 2011).

¹¹ Norma Wilson is a pseudonym.

¹² This figure neither originates with nor was uniquely circulated by the RILCCC. This widely used promotional device, developed by the Census Bureau, was based on a simple calculation: divide the country’s 300 million inhabitants by an estimated \$300 billion in federal funds.

were personalized in conversations with residents, such as when funding for college was invoked in this section's opening vignette. By the same token, promoters also stressed that a low participation rate would defer access to greater resources until the next census.

Whether communicated in face-to-face interactions or on airwaves, RILCCC promotional rhetoric must be understood within a context of profound social, economic, and political uncertainty. The areas of focus for the campaign, Central Falls and south Providence, suffer from among the highest levels of poverty and unemployment rates in the state (Pew Hispanic Center 2011), a reality further complicated by the 2007–9 economic recession and the 2010 foreclosure crisis. Similarly, claims about the political or electoral significance of the census were expressed within an environment marked—as I discuss in more detail below—by increased deportations and raids on undocumented immigrants. Patricia Martinez, a local leader and director of a state agency, recounted, for example, tying census participation to immigration reform in her meetings with local stakeholders. “If we are so concerned with immigration and we don’t get counted—the fact that we could lose one or two reps. in Congress—it is going to take two votes away from a probably, potential immigration reform.” To achieve relief, local residents were urged to participate in the census, a mechanism, RILCCC promoters argued, that would convert more or less automatically into greater resources and political influence.

RILCCC tactics relied not only on promotional messages but also promotional materials of various kinds. Seeking to transform public indifference into enthusiasm, promotional events were inundated with census artifacts, as were informational tables set up at community festivals and forums. At a concert organized by RILCCC members in the Providence neighborhood of Olneyville, for example, volunteers passed out mini soccer balls, as culturally relevant artifacts. Such objects were used to further attract, inform, and familiarize residents with the census. Any given interaction with potential census takers would likely involve the transfer of documents, such as sample census forms and pamphlets on the importance or confidentiality of the census, and giveaways, such as thumb drives and refrigerator magnets. Individual community partners could request up to \$3,000 from the Census Bureau to produce their own promotional artifacts. The RILCCC made, among other things, T-shirts, stickers, and buttons that prominently displayed the committee's slogan and logo, which featured, similar to the official 2010 census logo, an assortment of variously colored arms and hands.

As their promotional work unfolded, the RILCCC would direct its attention to other obstacles besides indifference. Once obstacle was inscribed into the census form's questions on ethnic and racial identification. As Ruppert (2008) argues, census taking requires a particular capacity to identify with categories found on the census. “Individuals must engage in both creative

and confessional acts that involve comprehending and identifying themselves in relation to categories of the population” (p. 9). Yet, as RILCCC leaders would learn, this capacity is far from universal.

THE OBSTACLE OF IDENTIFICATION: ETHNORACIAL CATEGORIES AND CONFUSION

On a chilly Saturday morning in February 2010, community leaders and residents gathered in Central Falls for the culmination of an “MLK food drive,” which doubled as a RILCCC census promotional event. At the end of the program, I joined a small group of Mexican and Central American men on a tour of an interactive installation designed—according to Census Bureau press releases—to bring “the 2010 census to life.” Led by a census worker, we visited 10 five-foot-tall stations, each dedicated to a specific census question. Eventually, we came upon question 8, which asks: “Is Person 1 of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?” After we took a short pause to read and presumably reflect on the question, our tour guide led us to question 9, which asks: “What is Person 1’s race?”¹³ Curious to hear our guide’s response, I asked whether those who identify as Hispanic were required to fill out the race question. The guide responded matter-of-factly, stating that one question captures an individual’s “origins” and the other their “race.” On this day, neither the census employee’s distinction nor the census categories provoked much commentary or debate. And yet, as I would soon witness, this seamless and user-friendly trip through the 2010 census gave way to a more fraught reality. Indeed, once census schedules began to arrive, RILCCC members were forced to confront the chasm between lived identifications and state categories.

RILCCC members narrated to me that local residents, coworkers, and relatives held strong reservations about the “race” question—reservations they also shared.¹⁴ At the heart of the confusion and frustration were numerous, and not necessarily congruent, conceptions of race, what Morning (2011) calls, “racial conceptualization.” For instance, some local residents and RILCCC members challenged the federal government’s claim that “people of Hispanic origin can be of any race.”¹⁵ Instead, they conceptual-

¹³ Beginning in the 2000 census, the words “mark one or more boxes” have followed this question. On the issue of multiraciality and the census, see Perlmann and Waters (2002).

¹⁴ Echoing past research, the “Hispanic” question was generally described as less troublesome than the “race” question, although some expressed dissatisfaction with it as well. For a recent review of research on Latino self-identification, see Rodríguez, Miyawaki, and Argeros (2013).

¹⁵ To clarify, the Census Bureau’s taxonomy and definitions are based on the Office of Management Budget’s Statistical Directive 15. For more background on the directive, see Choldin (1986), Hattam (2005), and Mora (2014).

ized “Latino” and “Hispanic” as racial categories. These individuals were troubled by the absence of the category Latino in the race question—an absence that scholars believe has contributed to the disproportionate selection of “Other Race” among self-identified Latinos and Latinas (Rodríguez 2000; Hitlin, Brown, and Elder 2007; Compton et al. 2012; Dowling 2014). In the course of expressing his frustration with the government’s ethnic definition of the category Latino, Roberto González described a hypothetical scenario of an awkward encounter between a census enumerator and a census taker identifying himself racially as Latino. “Excuse me, this [census form] is incomplete, you just put *Latino*.” “Yeah.” “But what race are you?” “What?” “Latino.” “No, you have to tell us if you are white Latino, black Latino, or all of the above.” Even permanent census employees, such as a census coordinator from Boston I interviewed, echoed this point: “I don’t see myself as white, black, or anything, I see myself as Latino. So for me to fill out a race question, I really have to stop and think.”

Regularly, such racial conceptualizations were explained in terms of racial mixture. In an interview, Pablo Rodríguez remarked, “We come from that tradition, of being the mix of . . . Africa, Spain, and the Americas coming together and forming this new thing. It is part of our DNA. It’s part of our vision of ourselves.” Or, as Marta Martínez noted, she would often mark “Native American” because she has “some Native American blood.”

More frequently, the race question was interpreted as a question of skin color. A Latina census enumerator that worked with the RILCCC recounted numerous situations in which people told her “I am mixed, neither white or black. Look at my skin and see how I am. . . . Look, I am not any of these categories, none qualify.” Another example comes from field observations in Central Falls. One afternoon I helped an elderly woman complete the census form in her dimly lit dining room. When we reached the race question, she gave me a puzzled look, and after pondering for a moment, proceeded to extend her arms out. Lacking the confidence she had when she told me to mark “Mexico” on the Hispanic origin question, she looked down at her forearm, rotating them slightly, and softly stated, “Tengo negra y blanca” (I have black and white).¹⁶ After unsuccessfully trying to convince me to adjudicate, she sighed and instructed me to mark “white.” Along with many RILCCC members, this census taker interpreted the race question as a question of skin tone, and she imagined herself closer to white.

¹⁶ This act was far from the only time. Several other individuals, including census promoters, also extended their forearms to determine their “race.” To accurately gauge skin color, one respondent recommended the Census Bureau develop some “visual way” to help people determine their race qua skin color. To assist census takers, this RILCCC leader suggested a United Colors of Benetton–inspired instructional video or props such as a mirror. For a critical challenge to the idea that race is visually obvious, see Obasogie (2014).

These expressions and experiences suggest that from some members of the Latino population filling out the census was far from straightforward. In fact, for these individuals, including most RILCCC promoters, the act of census taking was experienced as a vexing and exasperating operation. Part of the RILCCC's consent-building work involved attempts to minimize widespread confusion and frustration. Numerous tactics were used to this end. Pablo Rodríguez, for instance, transformed his radio program into a forum where listeners could voice their concerns and receive clarifying information from RILCCC members and experts from the Census Bureau. Several community organizations, such as Progreso Latino, which hosted the food drive mentioned at the beginning of this section, also agreed to serve as "Be Counted" and "Questionnaire Assistance Centers," where residents could seek answers to questions about the census. In addition, RILCCC leaders and volunteers discussed the census directly with local residents at community events and house visits.

In face-to-face and virtual encounters between the RILCCC and potential census takers, promoters stressed that completing the census, and specifically the Hispanic and race questions, was a personal affair. This message was a key promotional tactic. Although the 2010 census was home (as are all modern censuses) to a set of preformed and standardized questions and categories, they insisted that only an individual can determine his or her racial identity. Marta Martínez reiterated this point to a group of volunteers discussing how to deal with individuals that write Hispanic or Latino on the "Some Other Race" line on the race question. She acknowledged that, while census officials did not prefer this choice, residents had the right to identify in whatever way they pleased.

RILCCC members considered frustrations over census categories a serious obstacle. But they were glad that there was little public concern specifically over the Hispanic-origin question, which for them was the question that mattered most. When I asked Nilda Espinosa, a RILCCC supporter, whether frustrations with the race question could have deterred her from filling out the census, she replied: "Even if we [Nilda and her husband] were not sure about the answer, I would have looked for the answers, some help, and someone that could guide us, but I needed to be counted. . . . We needed to be counted and counted as a 'Hispanic.'"¹⁷ Pablo Rodríguez similarly insisted that the "important number was Latino." But, there was little worry that Latinos would not self-identify as Latino on the Hispanic-origin question. In this context, decades after the introduction of the category "Hispanic" on the census, the RILCCC did not feel it necessary to explicitly encourage people to identify panethnically.¹⁸ It was taken for granted that the

¹⁷ Nilda Espinosa is a pseudonym.

¹⁸ Nonstate promoters elsewhere, however, did work to shape how individuals self-identified in the 2010 census. For example, the Afro-Latin@Forum, a coalition of intel-

“Latino community” existed and that Latinos and Latinas of diverse national origins, linguistic practices, legal statuses, generations, and migratory and settlement experiences could be unproblematically housed under this panethnic label.¹⁹ Instead, they tried to assuage aggravation over the “race” question.

Indifference with the census and frustrations over ethnoracial categories—the subject of the preceding sections—were not, however, the only obstacles to participation. From the perspective of the RILCCC, the most difficult challenge was convincing undocumented immigrants to partake in the enumeration.

THE OBSTACLE OF FEAR: NONCITIZENS AND THE FEAR OF DEPORTATION

Historically, fear of the state has been a major obstacle to the success of censuses and other legibility projects (e.g., Scott 1998; Curtis 2001; Loveman 2005; Carroll 2006). Yet, fear, as well as trust in government, is not uniformly or universally distributed. The RILCCC and its counterparts in other states were often assembled with the expressed intent of convincing “noncitizen” immigrants to take part in the census.²⁰ Several factors made this aspect of consent-building difficult to accomplish.

According to RILCCC promoters, Rhode Island’s immigrant community inhabited an increasingly inhospitable climate. As examples, they cited a past governor’s public support for increased surveillance of undocumented workers and repeated (albeit failed) attempts to introduce legislation similar

lectuals and community activists primarily based in New York City, produced bilingual public service announcements encouraging Latinos and Latinas of African descent to identify as “Latino” and “Black” on the census. *Voto Latino*, a civic engagement organization that targets Latino millennials, advocated for this population to fill out “other race” in the race question (Padgett 2010). Efforts to shape how people identified in the census were not restricted to Latinos. For example, an Arab Complete Count Committee in Orange County, California, garnered national media coverage because of its slogan: “Check it right; you ain’t white!” (Blake 2010). For an example of similar “consciousness-building campaigns” outside of the U.S. context, see Paschel (2016, pp. 36–40).

¹⁹ Far from inherent or straightforward, a growing scholarship has examined the historical, social, political, and cultural processes and dynamics through which such pan-Latino identities are developed, embraced, and contested (e.g., Flores-Gonzalez 1999; Flores 2000; Dávila 2001; Ricourt and Danta 2003; Itzigsohn 2009; Beltrán 2010; Rodríguez-Muñiz 2010). More broadly, scholars have also explored other panethnic formations, such as Asian American (Espíritu 1992; Okamoto 2014) and Native American (Cornell 1988; Nagel 1995). For a recent assessment of and proposal for a sociology of panethnicity, see Okamoto and Mora (2014).

²⁰ By “noncitizen,” I am referring to undocumented immigrants primarily but also to those living what Menjivar (2006, p. 1004) terms “liminal legality”—the “gray areas between documented and undocumented.”

to Arizona's controversial S.B. 1070.²¹ Compounding matters, the Obama administration chose not to halt Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids or deportations during the census. As Roberto González expressed, "We thought that was a setback. [Halting deportations] had been achieved in previous years." Memories and traumas of ICE raids of factories were still fresh when census schedules began reaching homes. It was within this context that the RILCCC worked to convince the Latino noncitizen population that the census posed no risk.

Envisioning their work as, first and foremost, educational, census promoters set out to publicly dispel what they took as popular myths about the census. For this work, RILCCC leaders drew on materials from the Census Bureau and several national organizations, including the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a Washington, D.C.–based coalition, which produced a widely circulated document titled "Myths and Facts on Immigrants and the Census." The document covered several widespread notions, such as the idea that "undocumented immigrants should not be counted by the census" and that "immigrants don't benefit from the census." Perhaps the most challenging myth—according to local leaders—was the assumption that participating in the census increased one's chances of deportation. RILCCC member Leo Morales put the situation in these words: "They think that if they give all of their information—where they live, what their name is, where they work, their names and others—they are going to compromise themselves and that the data will be used to later prosecute them criminally as illegals and take them out of the country." Promoters responded to these objections by proclaiming that participation in the census was "safe" and "confidential" on all the communication platforms at their disposal (e.g., radio programs, e-mail lists, newspapers, and public events).

In considering these tactics, it is useful to distinguish between concerns of "privacy" and "confidentiality." As Prewitt (2004, 2010) has argued, the former considers the census an illegitimate infringement to personal privacy,

²¹ Arizona Senate Bill 1070, signed by Governor Jan Brewer in April 2010, was widely considered at the time of passage the country's most expansive and rigid statute targeting undocumented persons. Far from unique, similar laws have been attempted in numerous states and signed into law in a subset of these states, often underwritten by conservative anti-immigration groups. One of S.B. 1070's most controversial provisions required local and state police to act as immigration authorities when "reasonable suspicion exists that the person is an alien and is unlawfully present." Although in 2012 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that certain aspects of the bill were unconstitutional in *Arizona v. United States* (641 F. 3d 339 [2012], cert. no. 11-182), the "show me your papers" provision, as it was termed by civil rights advocates concerned with racial profiling, was spared. Among RILCCC leaders, S.B. 1070 exemplified a pervasive anti-immigrant and anti-Latino sentiment in U.S. society. For more on S.B. 1070, see Sáenz, Menjívar, and García (2011).

while the latter expresses concern with how collected data are shared.²² The RILCCC approached the hesitation to participate among noncitizens as a matter of confidentiality and thus rested its rebuttals on protective legal statutes. Transmitting the language found on official 2010 census pamphlets and fliers, promoters habitually invoked Title 13 of the U.S. Code, which stipulates that “no individual or agency (federal, state or local) can have access to any information that will tie the respondent to his or her responses.” One RILCCC flier read: “It’s confidential.—Your responses are protected by law (Title 13, U.S. Code, Section 9). All Census Bureau employees have taken an oath to protect confidentiality and are subject to a jail term, a fine—or both—for disclosing any information that could identify a respondent or household.” A lesson plan developed by the International Institute of Rhode Island, a RILCCC partner organization, emphasized that census “information is locked for 72 years.” In other words, consent-building for the census framed participation as providing benefits without negative consequences.

Recent scholarship, however, paints a more complicated picture of the census, revealing, for instance, moments of interagency collaboration, such as the case of World War II Japanese internment and more recently post-9/11 surveillance of Muslim and Arab Americans (e.g., Anderson 1988, p. 194; Seltzer and Anderson 2001; El-Badry and Swanson 2007). Mention of such cases was, unsurprisingly, absent from both Census Bureau promotions and those of its local collaborators. Yet local leaders did voice real concern to me over the potential that the results of the 2010 census might spark a “backlash” against the Latino population. For example, RILCCC cochair Anna Cano Morales insightfully described Latino demographic growth as a “double-edged sword.” In an interview, she parodied an “anti-immigrant” and “anti-Latino” person commenting on the results of the 2010 census. Making her voice deeper and raspier, she remarked: “There are those Latinos. We must have at least 500,000 undocumented in Rhode Island. They are all in our school system. No wonder Central Falls is crumbling apart. We are educating all these illegals.” While shared by many

²² Concerns with government surveillance and intrusion were not exclusive to the undocumented immigrant population. For example, libertarian groups raised serious objections to the 2010 census. These objections, however, were not about confidentiality. Instead, they called into question the very legitimacy of the federal government to collect data on its citizens. Research shows that challenges to the census in the name of individual privacy have a long history (Thomson 1940; Petersen 1979; Taeuber 1979; Anderson 1988). For example, before the 1940 census, a Republican senator waged a struggle against the inclusion of new socioeconomic questions on income on these grounds (Anderson 1988, p. 188). In his classic essay on privacy, Shils (1966, p. 305) argued that, while the problem of privacy is as old as government, the problem has intensified over the 20th century because “it has become engulfed in the expansion of the powers and ambitions of elites and in the difficulties that they encounter in attempting to govern and protect and please vast collectivities.”

RILCCC members, such concerns with the postcensus discourse on demographic change were not part of their public conversation. Instead, RILCCC appeals reiterated and amplified Census Bureau claims that legal protections shielded census takers.

By leaning heavily on legalistic arguments about the safety of the census, RILCCC promoters somewhat ironically called upon local residents to trust the very government they feared. But how could legal protections be trusted? RILCCC promoters and their collaborators in the Census Bureau expressed a clear answer to this question: the messenger. Diego Castillo,²³ a Guatemalan immigrant rights activist, put it this way: “It is not the same for someone, for example, if I [promote the census], who has had relationships with the community for years, versus someone who has never physically visited it.” For all promotional parties involved, the Census Bureau had to rely on “trusted voices” because it lacked intimate relationships with the individuals and communities it was seeking to enumerate. Anna Cano Morales similarly maintained that the success of the census depended a great deal on the presence of “well-recognized, well-respected people in the community.” While people might not “trust” the federal government or census officials, she believed that “if they heard our names being part of it, or if they saw our faces they might feel inclined to participate.” As Michelle DePlante, the youngest member of the RILCCC leadership, summed it up, the role of the group was to “relay the message that the census is safe and important and needs to be done.”

Despite their best intentions, RILCCC promotions were dogged by a contradiction poignantly expressed by a local bishop: “The dilemma was, they were asking me to encourage the immigrants to come forward and be counted, through our parishes, presumably, at the same time we know that the federal government—at least in the last year or so—has been staging these immigration raids” (Ziner 2009a). Although this bishop was not opposed to the census, a group of local and national religious leaders seized this contradiction and became major dissenters of the 2010 census. The emergence of this challenge threatened the consent-building work of local leaders and the promise of demography motivating their efforts.

THE OBSTACLE OF DISSENT: BOUNDARY WORK AND THE SCIENCE/POLITICS DIVIDE

Throughout summer 2009, RILCCC promoters and census employees staffed census promotional booths at each of the major Latino cultural festivals. Wearing T-shirts emblazoned with their slogan, “¡Si No Nos Cuentan, No Contamos!” they distributed census materials and tried to familiarize

²³ Diego Castillo is a pseudonym.

people with the census using mock schedules. As they engaged in consent building, rumors began to surface about a national boycott of the census. To the chagrin of RILCCC promoters, they eventually learned that a group of local religious leaders, led by a minister in Central Falls, had endorsed the boycott. Adding a twist of irony, the reverend was a board member of Progreso Latino, an official census community partner. As rumors turned into confirmations, the relatively calm seas of census advocacy became quite turbulent. Soon Latino and immigrant rights activists were pitted against each other over the census, both in Rhode Island and across the country.

Launched roughly at the same time the RILCCC was established, the census boycott was initiated and spearheaded by the National Coalition of Latino Clergy and Churches (CONLAMIC), which is headquartered in Washington, D.C. CONLAMIC gained national exposure as coplaintiffs against restrictive immigrant laws and boasts a membership of over 20,000 evangelical churches. Although all of the major national Latino civic organizations, such as the National Council of La Raza, the League of United Latin American Citizens, and the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, voiced strong opposition, CONLAMIC's chairman, Reverend Miguel Rivera, justified the boycott as a response to the treatment of undocumented immigrants. In a widely circulated press release, Rivera maintained, "Our church leaders have witnessed misuse of otherwise benign Census population data by state and local public officials in their efforts to pass and enact laws that assist in the perpetration of civil rights violations and abuses against undocumented workers and families." CONLAMIC and its local representatives demanded the legalization of the country's estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants before enumeration. As its slogan expressed, "Antes de contar, nos tienen que legalizar," or in English, "Before you count, you have to legalize us."

Boldly, CONLAMIC claimed that it would organize over 1 million individuals to abstain from enumeration. For this reason, census promoters throughout the country took the boycott seriously. Locally, the RILCCC immediately denounced the boycott and worked to minimize its potential effects. Although RILCCC promoters were also frustrated with stagnation on immigration reform—several having long histories in the immigrant rights movement—they condemned the boycott and its leadership using the same communication channels used to promote the census. For instance, its members and their allies took to the pages of the *Providence Journal*, the city's main newspaper, to criticize the boycott and to restate the importance of the census. In an op-ed two RILCCC leaders, Doris De Los Santos and Juan García (2009), publicly questioned the logic of the boycott. "While we understand the movie, we can't agree with the method. While the boycott may be well intended, it ultimately will prove to be misguided and irresponsible because it will hurt the very immigrant communities the ministers are try-

ing to defend.” Another leader, quoted in the press, charged that the boycott “is going to set us back. To get real immigration reform, we need to organize. We’re undercounted. [If the boycott has any effect], those resources we would have received—we wouldn’t. It doesn’t just affect the undocumented, it affects everyone” (Ziner 2009*b*). The group also organized a press conference and rally condemning the boycott at St. Theresa’s Church in Olneyville, a neighborhood with a large Latin American immigrant population. RILCCC meeting minutes underscored how the event garnered “good coverage” in the local and regional press. In addition, the boycott was critiqued on Pablo Rodríguez’s and Diego Castillo’s respective radio programs.

The RILCCC also took its message directly to the boycotters. At a CONLAMIC’s national meeting, attorney Roberto González reportedly debated the boycott’s leader, Reverend Rivera. Months later, when we spoke, Roberto lamented failing to persuade the organization to end the boycott. Perhaps the RILCCC’s most successful response was the enrollment of a group of local procensus religious leaders to counteract the boycotters. These religious figures reiterated messages of confidentiality and described the importance of the census to local communities.

In interviews with RILCCC members, the boycott was frequently described as “foolish” and “ridiculous.” Roberto, for instance, asserted, “I just didn’t see how they were helping the immigration cause by boycotting the census. . . . It was almost like, ‘I’m going to hold you ransom. You don’t get any information from me unless you give me comprehensive immigration reform.’” Patricia Martínez similarly expressed, “I was shocked, especially coming from clergy. That they would use the community for something so out of place . . . we cannot hijack the community on things that are not necessarily straightforward.”

These comments reveal competing ideas about whether the Census Bureau and the 2010 census, specifically, was a legitimate political target to pressure for immigration reform. Boycotters cited historical collaborations between the Census Bureau and intelligence agencies and recent raids to claim that it was a rightful target. In its consent-building efforts, the RILCCC rejected this position. While they recognized, as described above, the political significance of census data, the 2010 census was largely depicted as a nonpolitical enterprise conducted by a relatively autonomous scientific agency within the state bureaucracy. Doris de Los Santos, for example, described the census as a “really huge operation. It is an operation that includes so many ends within the state government, but at the same time, they have to get themselves independent from the government.” Doris, an activist with years of work experience in state programs, expressed sympathy for census administrators. She distinguished the “bureaucracy,” which included agencies like the Census Bureau, from the “government.” The latter, she believed, was the site of politics. A RILCCC supporter wrote a commentary in a

local Spanish-language newspaper that made a similar, albeit more subtle, point. "The terms in which [boycotters] defend the boycott are supported by aspects of daily discourse of the administrative and political life of nations. They allege corruption, discrimination when distributing funds, and also speak of the use of information for purposes. Whether some of these motives are isolated and can be proven, it may fall on other jurisdictions and not in what the Census Bureau, a statistical agency, represents" (Acevedo 2009; author's translation).

Along these lines, several RILCCC members described the Census Bureau as nonpartisan, scientific, and neutral. José González, for instance, maintained, "People who work for and volunteer for them understand that they are numbers gathering, scientific. It is not tied to any political party or affiliation." Although he acknowledged that the wider community might not become fully convinced, it was nonetheless the job of the RILCCC to "let people know that the census' only job is to collect data." A story told by Marta Martínez is particularly telling in this regard. She shared that she once engaged a senior staff member at the Census Bureau's regional office in a conversation about local frustrations with the race and ethnicity questions. According to Marta, her supervisor told her, "You know Marta, the bottom line is the Census Bureau counts people. They don't care." From this, she concluded, although with some uncertainty, "They don't care how you feel. They just, I guess, that is what it is . . . just a data place." To combat boycotters, the RILCCC embraced the Census Bureau's own depiction and cast the 2010 census as essentially a "head count."

In this manner, both promoters and dissenters took part in what Gieryn (1983) has defined as "boundary work," namely, the activity of differentiating and demarcating science from nonscience. Emphasizing science, RILCCC promoters sought to challenge the idea that the Census Bureau was merely an arm of the federal government. They maintained that it was a relatively detached entity, disconnected from other state agencies.²⁴ But leaders confronted individuals and communities for whom these discursive differentiations were either unrecognized or could not be trusted. Only further exacerbating things, the expanded use of deportation under the Obama administration made it especially difficult to maintain the symbolic boundaries erected by the Census Bureau and its collaborators. Even if people could be convinced that the census was merely a data-gathering initiative, state practices against undocumented immigrants reinforced fears and added fuel to the boycott.

²⁴ By distinguishing the Census Bureau from the rest of the federal government, the boundary work of the RILCCC represents an intriguing disaggregation of what Abrams (1988) termed the "state-idea," the hegemonic vision of the "state" as a coherent, monolithic, and unified actor. This empirical case proffers a situation in which the unified "state-idea" became an impediment to the objectives of a specific state agency.

And yet, while RILCCC members believe the boycott negatively affected census participation, they took solace and pride in the fact that no other local leaders publicly joined the boycott. Ultimately, for these census promoters, proof of their triumph over the boycott was found in the census numbers, which by mid-April 2010 revealed an increase in mail-in response rates over the prior census, particularly in Central Falls, where the rate was 57% in contrast to 48% in 2000 (Ziner 2010).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Roughly a year after enumeration began, the results of the 2010 U.S. census entered into public circulation. Seized by the press, census data have been widely taken as proof that the United States was undergoing a dramatic and unprecedented demographic transformation—the so-called *browning* of America. As science studies scholars would expect, the complex and messy process of production receded into the background. Opening up the “black box” (Whitley 1970; Latour 1987) of census data, the preceding sections reveal that the RILCCC—and presumably its counterparts elsewhere—helped to coproduce demographic knowledge. But my objective here is not simply to provide a detailed account of local census promoters. Rather it was to leverage this empirical case of consent-building to shed light on the role of nonstate leaders in the orchestration of state legibility. In these concluding paragraphs, I highlight some of the major insights and contributions of this article for the study of state knowledge production and the sociology of the state more generally.

As previously elaborated, the approach I take to consent building focuses on three concerns: motivations, obstacles, and tactics. While the nature of qualitative data prevents generalization, these concerns generated some important insights. With respect to the first concern, the analysis found that RILCCC promoters were strongly motivated by a desire for data. Prior censuses convinced these nonstate leaders that statistical proof of the size and growth of the Latino population was indispensable to what they understood as Latino political empowerment. Far from unique, this conviction has permeated civil rights advocacy for decades and undergirds political conflict over the census “undercounts” (Anderson 1988; Anderson and Fienberg 1999). As the anthropologist Jacqueline Urla (1993, p. 836) writes, “Minorities understand that in the current political economy of knowledge, numbers function as authoritative ‘facts.’” RILCCC promoters were well aware that “what counts—in the sense of what is valued—is that which is counted” (Badiou 2008, p. 2). Yet, this analysis suggests that data possessed more than an instrumental value. Census data—as the group’s slogan best illustrates—were perceived as sources of recognition and identification. These insights reinforce recent arguments about the meaning-laden nature of sta-

tistics. Far from transparent, statistics and numbers are multivalent cultural artifacts, which, as de Santos (2009) has shown, can become “fact-totems,” or “powerful collective representations that articulate and mobilize deep meanings and emotional responses” (p. 472). In short, the desire for data, rooted in instrumental and emotive understandings, functioned as a key enroller of these nonstate leaders. As such, state legibility was, in this case, both an incentive for—and outcome of—nonstate consent building.

Attention to the obstacles of noncompliance—the second analytic concern—raised several additional points. To begin, it showed a greater diversity of obstacles than typically recognized in the extant scholarship. RILCCC leaders did not only confront problems of illegitimacy and mistrust, they also faced indifference toward state projects and frustrations with state categories. Findings indicate, however, that these obstacles posed different challenges for local promoters. Moreover, the analysis challenges the conclusion that state legibility projects, such as the census, are necessarily taken for granted in the present. While contemporary implementations rarely provoke the forms of outright opposition documented in the past (Loveman 2005, p. 1658), the RILCCC case suggests that even seemingly institutionalized state projects may require consent building. Finally, the analysis suggests two general complications that may account for the ongoing need for consent building. On the one hand, individuals and groups do not have equivalent or uniform relations to state authorities, particularly in societies structured by “bright” boundaries (Alba 2005) and deep stratifications. Certain relations between populations and state authorities may encourage, rather than minimize, noncompliance with state projects. On the other hand, state actors and agencies can act in divergent, if not contradictory, ways. ICE raids, for instance, turn some undocumented immigrants against the census and provide rhetorical fodder for boycotters. Thus, not only do the governed have distinct and sometimes contentious relations to government agencies, but they also do not encounter or confront a uniform and coherent “state.”²⁵ In this context, nonstate leaders assumed the task of mediating complex relations between the census and local populations. It is worth noting here that the need for nonstate consent builders will likely increase in the upcoming 2020 census. Indeed, both the uptick of anti-Latino and anti-immigrant rhetoric and practice in the wake of the election of Donald Trump and the proposed changes to how the census collects data on ethnicity and race (see U.S. Census Bureau 2017) may become challenges to cooperation.

The final concern pertains to tactics. With support from the Census Bureau, RILCCC promoters crafted and circulated various rhetorical appeals

²⁵ For critiques of the reification of the “state,” see Abrams (1988), Mitchell (1999), Trouillot (2001), and Morgan and Orloff (2017).

to enroll communities. These ranged from efforts to convince local residents that the census would translate into increased federal funds to the invocation of legal statutes to persuade that the census posed no risk. Analysis of RILCCC tactics reveals that, while the group sponsored its own events and press conferences, it also used other local entities as conduits to reach beyond its immediate networks and constituencies. For example, the group collaborated with other leaders and organizations to insert the 2010 census into Latin American ethnic festivals and enlisted procensus church leaders to combat the boycott. This leveraging of other local leaders invites a more layered, even cascading, image of consent building. In addition, RILCCC efforts not only promoted the census, they also sought to protect the census from attack. For instance, although the Census Bureau largely refrained from directly responding to the boycott, its local collaborators assumed the role of publicly defending the census. But most importantly, the analysis suggests that popular perceptions of state projects are a major target of consent building. Among the RILCCC, promotional rhetoric was not heavily geared toward influencing how potential census takers self-identified. Instead, it focused on persuading residents to perceive the census, the Census Bureau, and the federal government in ways that encouraged participation. Although it is well documented that censuses have allowed state actors to *see* populations (Scott 1998) and shaped how individuals see themselves through state categories (Rodríguez 2000), prior scholarship has neglected to study how this synoptic vision is contingent on the ways in which the state itself is popularly imagined during knowledge production. Indeed, as anthropologists have shown, encounters with state projects can serve as a powerful vector through which social actors come to perceive—that is, interpret—state agents and agencies (Gupta 1995; Corbridge et al. 2005; Yang 2005). Consent building is thus one of the ways that nonstate leaders can manage or attempt to manage how the “state comes into view” (Corbridge et al. 2005, p. 7).

Beyond these substantive insights, this article joins a recent wave of scholarship that has moved state knowledge—its production and effects on social life—toward the center of research and theorizing on modern statecraft. This topic is no longer a “research frontier,” as Evans et al. (1985) described it decades ago. To the contrary, political sociologists and their interlocutors in neighboring fields have demonstrated that knowledge made the state, and the state made knowledge, if I may twist Tilly’s (1975, p. 42) influential adage about war and state formation. In particular, this article has challenged the state-centered orientation that pervades the scholarship on state legibility and knowledge. Heeding recent invitations for a society-centered approach (Emigh et al. 2015), I have argued conceptually and illustrated empirically that the state production of social knowledge cannot be entirely captured with a narrow focus on state actors or popular resistance to state interventions. Expanding the analytic horizon, I have

foregrounded the consent-building work of nonstate leaders. This move departs from Scott's top-down account of state legibility. For Scott, nonstate leaders were largely obstacles, intent on preserving local monopolies of knowledge. Although this depiction has empirical support, it fails to appreciate that state legibility has, in some cases, hinged on the consent-building work of nonstate leaders. By focusing on these actors and how they have worked with state authorities to produce social knowledge, this article offers a bridge between society-centered and state-centered approaches—a bridge with the potential to generate a more “interactive” account of the orchestration of state legibility (Emigh et al. 2015).

This article also opens up more terrain for the study of collaborations and partnerships between state and nonstate actors. Scholars of the U.S. “welfare state” have, for instance, stressed its delegated or associational nature (Mayrl and Quinn 2016; Morgan and Orloff 2017). As Clemens (2017, p. 37) has argued, the U.S. federal government is “symbiotic, dependent on the organized efforts of private persons and groups to advance its projects and implement public policy.” And yet, while state actors may invest in “associational forms” out of material, organizational, or symbolic need (Mayrl and Quinn 2016), nonstate leaders may pursue or accept partnerships to advance their own political agendas (Owens 2007). Take, for example, collaboration and cooperation between Latino civil rights leaders and the U.S. Census Bureau over the category “Hispanic.” As Mora (2014) narrates, both entities—after a period of tension—came to see collaboration as mutually beneficial. For these civil rights groups, collaboration was a means to ensure the production of official knowledge about the Latino population, and for the Census Bureau, it provided a way to lessen political controversy over the census. Complicating the idea that the category “Hispanic” was solely a government invention (cf. Oboler 1995), Mora's analysis points to “inherently relational and interdependent aspects of history” (2014, p. 10). In this manner, state-nonstate collaborations push against the notion that the state, as Mitchell (1999, p. 95) once put it, is a “freestanding entity, whether an agent, instrument, organization, or structure, located apart from and opposed to another entity called economy or society.” Indeed, these collaborations are one of the ways that the boundaries between “state” and “society” are erected and contested (Mayrl and Quinn 2016; Clemens 2017). To this growing conversation, this article contributes the concept of consent-building. Nonstate actors can collaborate with state agencies to accomplish a wide range of objectives, such as the distribution of resources and social services. But among these is consent building. Anchored in Gramsci's assertion that consent is never automatic, permanent, or wholly encompassing, this article facilitates empirical investigation (rather than philosophical rumination) into deliberate—although not necessarily successful—attempts to secure popular consent for state projects.

As a site of collaboration, the consent building has a wider field of application than censuses or other legitimacy projects. Historians have, for example, described how nonstate leaders have labored to secure recruits and ensure that the public holds a positive image of the military (Palmer 1980; Grandstaff 1996; Padilla and Laner 2001). For instance, in the post–World War II period, civic and veteran organizations, such as the American Legion and the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution, collaborated closely with the military to shape public perceptions of military service (Grandstaff 1996, p. 305). Nonstate leaders and organizations have also partnered with police departments to increase resident cooperation with police officers (Owens 2007). In addition, they have collaborated on policy implementation. For example, the federal government has used “health navigators” to enroll individuals and families in the Affordable Care Act. These temporary workers, often based in local communities, have faced numerous obstacles. Vargas (2016) has found that among the most serious obstacles have been illegitimacy and distrust. In a fashion similar to the consent-building rhetorics used by census promoters, health navigators have employed various rhetorical strategies in attempts to convince local populations to enroll in the program.

These brief examples show that the aims, political content, and effects of such collaborations are highly variable and demand close examination. Future research could explore consent-building collaborations for these and other aspects of modern statecraft, such as electoral campaigns and voter registration. Such work would create opportunities to compare the character and consequences of collaborative relationships between nonstate and state actors across different historical moments, national contexts, and projects of statecraft. Why, for instance, do certain state projects seem to require more consent building? What factors inform the willingness to work with state officials? How does this activity shape social and political relations? Even more broadly, how do such engagements and entanglements contribute to the maintenance or transformation of existing power asymmetries and exclusions? These and many other questions await exploration.

To conclude, in this article I offer evidence to correct the tendency to overstate or to presume the unilateral power of state actors and agencies. Instead, this work urges sociologists to consider how the willingness to heed “calls to order” (Bourdieu 1994)—whether the census or otherwise—may be, to some extent, an effect of the ongoing and locally mediated cultivation of consent.

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