Activist Gentrifiers: Transforming Urban Politics in Latinx Communities

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Abstract

In marginalized communities where traditional political channels are often inaccessible, social movements and protests have emerged as vital platforms for voices seeking to challenge established power structures. This study reveals a compelling shift in recent decades as these neighborhoods undergo economic transformation. It uncovers a distinct pattern of activism characterized by the emergence of middle-class ethnic entrepreneurs and business owners who engage in activism from within the urban economy and political systems. This qualitative case study, conducted within a Latinx community in the U.S., delves into the activism of this actor, providing a deeper understanding of how this pattern, which both challenges and engages with the system, gives rise to local political conflicts and accusations of "class betrayal", and cooptation. By utilizing a "place-based" mobilization model and examining the interplay between ethnic and class affiliations, this study enriches our understanding of political protests and activism in ethnic/racial communities.

keywords: Urban Politics, Protest, Activism, Ethnicity, Chicano Movement, Gentrification, Latinos

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Introduction

Political Science scholars have extensively documented political protests and unrest occurring in marginalized urban areas and ethnic/racial communities[1] (Barreto, 2004; Eggert & Pilati, 2014; Gillion, 2012; Lawless & Fox, 2001; Michener, 2021; Eisinger 1973; Pressman & Devin, 2023; Tiratelli, 2018; Sbicca & Perdue, 2014). In marginalized urban areas where traditional political avenues are often inaccessible, anti-establishment protests serve as vital platforms for marginalized voices to challenge existing power structures (Lipsky, 1968). One noteworthy example of such oppositional political participation is observed in Mexican-American *Barrios*. Mexican-American Barrios, marked by discrimination, uneven development, high rents, reliance on low-wage labor, and issues like immigration, housing shortages, and gentrification, have spawned protests and social movements (Garcia, 2015; Diaz and Torres, 2012; Acuña, 1972; Muñoz, 2007; Amezcua, 2023; Barreto et al., 2009; Schildkraut, 2005; Walker, 2020).

However, in recent decades, Mexican-American Barrios, much like other historically working-class ethnic neighborhoods, have become more diverse economically. The influx of second-generation immigrants and minorities achieving economic mobility has attracted ethnic entrepreneurs to these areas for cultural ties and economic opportunities (Ahrens, 2015; Huante, 2021; Delgado, E. & Swanson, 2019;

[1] E.g. from social and political movements founded in the last century, such as The Chicano Movement between the years 1940s to 1970s and Black Panther Party between 1966 and 1982 and including contemporary movements and protests such as Ferguson Unrest (2014), Baltimore Uprising (2015), Black Lives Matter Protests (2013-present), London Riots (2011) and Grenfell Tower Protests in London (2017)

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Shmaryahu-Yeshurun, 2023; Dávila, 2004). Despite differing class interests, these entrepreneurs, while engaging in politics, demonstrate solidarity with the ethnic community (Boyd, 2005; Moore, 2009; Sandoval, 2021; Dávila, 2004; Pattillo, 2007).

The ethnic neighborhoods' transformation, driven by the influx of ethnic entrepreneurs and business owners, provides a unique opportunity to explore activism within minority communities. The middle-class ethnic entrepreneur's distinctive positionality, shaped by their ethnic background and entrepreneurial socio-economic status, offers insight into their political behavior. As ethnic enclaves globally diversify in class and witness the mobilization of second-generation immigrants and minority entrepreneurs, it becomes crucial to identify the evolution of political activism and diverse strategies aimed at enhancing minority political power. The research questions are: 1. What patterns of political activism can be observed among ethnic entrepreneurs and business owners? 2. How do activists and residents, mostly lower-income, respond to these patterns of activism?

The study focuses on Barrio Logan in Southern California, a Latinx neighborhood with a history of socio-spatial struggles and ongoing protests. It examines the emergence of middle-class Latinx entrepreneurs over the past decade, exploring their specific patterns of activism. These entrepreneurs, with their solidarity, ethnic identity, class affiliation, and access to the political arenas, engage in both business and urban politics while expressing opposition to socio-spatial policies. This pattern, which simultaneously challenges and participates in the system, engages in negotiations within it, and derives economic benefits from it, triggers ambivalence and resistance reactions among residents and activists. local criticisms like "class betrayal," cooptation, community-washing, cultural exploitation, and gentrification create

contentious urban politics. By employing a "place-based" mobilization model and exploring the complex interplay of ethnic and class ties, this study adds to the political science literature on protest, activism, and mobilization within ethnic/racial minority communities (Nuamah & Ogorzalek, 2021; Carlos, 2021; Lawless & Fox, 2001; Michener, 2021; Barreto, 2004; Bedolla, 2005; Shukra et al., 2004; Sbicca & Perdue, 2014).

The article is organized as follows: Section two explores existing literature on social movements and protests within marginalized Barrios. Section three introduces the chosen research case study. Section four outlines the research methods. Section five presents primary findings, including the activism patterns of Latinx business owners and responses from residents and activists. The article concludes in section six, summarizing contributions and implications.

2. Social Movements and Protest in Minority Communities

Much of the literature on political participation relies on the socioeconomic status (SES) and/or resource model. Income, education, and occupation provide individuals with the resources, knowledge, civic skills, and opportunities to engage in political activities (Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba et al., 1993). In urban marginalized contexts, due to the lack of access to traditional channels of political influence, particularly protests and organized resistance serve as valuable political resources and platforms for marginalized voices to be heard in the political arena and to challenge existing power structures (Lipsky, 1968). Protests are seen as 'rational attempts by excluded groups to mobilize sufficient political leverage to advance collective interests through non-institutionalized means' (McAdam, 1982, p. 37).

Protests can be part of a broader resistance within social movements that thrive in neighborhoods with dense social networks and efficient connective structures (Tarrow, 1994; Tilly, 1978). Organizational networks could potentially serve as a means to offset the absence of local opportunities and resources, thereby promoting the utilization of protest by minority groups (Eggert & Pilati, 2014). Moreover, in a highly mobilized setting, structural economic disadvantages cease to be a hindrance to political involvement through protest activities (Häusermann & Enggist 2019). Despite the limited economic resources, social movements and protests influence legislative behavior (Gillion, 2012; Gause, 2022). It can disrupt the normal functioning of society and the economy or the status quo, drawing attention to their grievances and creating pressure for change. Consequently, they are recognized as a strategy of the powerless (Cress and Snow, 2000; Gamson, 1975; Lipsky, 1968; Piven and Cloward, 1977; McAdam and Su, 2002).

Oppositional participation is prevalent in Mexican-American *Barrios*, marked by historical segregation and repression. These neighborhoods face challenges such as discriminatory policies, uneven development, inflated rents, low-wage labor, environmental pollution, housing shortages, and the severe consequences of urban renewal (Diaz and Torres, 2012). These hardships, including perceptions of political discrimination, strong national identity, distrust in the political system, and limited resources, have led to the prominence of protests and resistance as key political tools in Latino communities. Particularly Barrios in California function as organizing hubs for cultural solidarity, self-determination, political mobilization, and capital for Latino communities and The Chicano Civil Rights Movement (Garcia, 2015; Bedolla, 2005; Pantoja and Segura, 2003; Ramakrishnan, 2005). The Chicano Movement, aligning

with the broader civil rights movement in the 1960s, aimed for representation, empowerment, and rights for Mexican-Americans in the United States (Acuña, 1972; Muñoz, 2007). Over the years, protests have remained a potent tool within Latino communities, evident in widespread demonstrations and grassroots support for immigrant rights (Barreto et al., 2006; Cruz and Valdéz, 2020; Zepeda-Millán, 2017).

Latinx communities resist spatial policies like urban redevelopment and gentrification through social movements, demonstrations, protests, and economic boycotts. Examples include the "Defend Boyle Heights" and "Boyle Heights Alliance Against Artwashing and Displacement" (BHAAAD) movements in Los Angeles, protesting with slogans like "Gentrification is Class Warfare" (Huante, 2022). The Save Wyvernwood group in Los Angeles opposed tenant displacement (Aharns, 2015), while Barrio Logan in San Diego saw activism through organizations like Barrio Station, Chicano Park Steering Committee and the Environmental Health Coalition (Sandoval, 2021; Le Texier, 2007), Similar efforts occurred in El Barrio in New York and Pilsen in Chicago (Amezcua, 2023; Anderson and Sternberg, 2013; Dávila, 2004). Pilsen's Latinx activists engaged in "long resistance" for affordable housing (Curran and Hague, 2023), aligning at times with Black Lives Matter protests against police brutality, as seen in the San Francisco Bay Area (Maharawal, 2017). Despite these actions, the increasing presence of Latinx entrepreneurs introduces unique avenues for activism, often resulting in tensions in local politics.

3. Activism in Barrio Logan

Barrio Logan in San Diego exemplifies the link between urban marginalization, discrimination, and the political organization of the Latino minority in the USA. The neighborhood faced historical challenges like "redlining," discriminatory labor

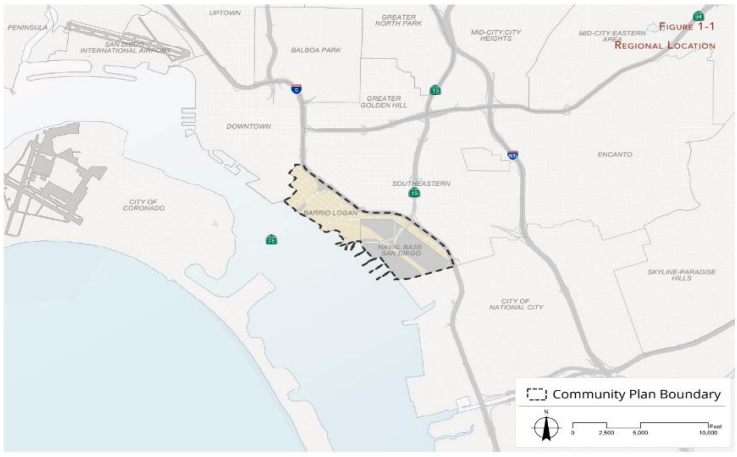
markets, and racialized residential segregation, leading to high unemployment and poverty (Le Texier, 2007). Further degradation occurred with the construction of Interstate 5 in 1963 and the San Diego-Coronado Bridge in 1969, displacing residents and dividing the community. Activists resisted the planned California Highway Patrol Substation under the bridge, leading to the establishment of Chicano Park during the Chicano Movement (see Fig. 1). This park, home to over 100 political and cultural murals, symbolizes powerful resistance against spatial injustice and serves as a hub for Latinx rights advocates. Designated a National Historic Landmark in 2016, Chicano Park remains central to various organizations, including the Chicano Park Steering Committee (CPSC), Union del Barrio, and Brown Beret activists. The activism in Barrio Logan also responds to heightened law enforcement presence, with the neighborhood often experiencing tension between the community and police, including ICE, due to crime, proximity to the border, and a significant undocumented immigrant population.

Barrio Logan experienced another form of spatial activism related to urban planning, particularly the mix of residential and industrial areas. Following a neighborhood rezoning in 1978, heavy industrial and commercial companies started releasing toxic waste into the community. Led primarily by the Environmental Health Coalition, residents engaged in a decades-long struggle for a community plan update to protect them from these pollutants. This initiative was successfully approved in 2021.

Since the late 2000s, Barrio Logan has grappled with gentrification due to urban redevelopment and rising real estate values in San Diego (Delgado & Swanson, 2019). Government initiatives, like its designation as a California Enterprise Zone in 1986 and inclusion in the San Diego Renewal Community, provided tax advantages, and attracted

commercial and industrial businesses (ERA, 2008). In 1992, Barrio Logan became a San Diego Redevelopment Project Area, fostering additional real estate development, fueled by its proximity to downtown. This transformation led to middle-class real estate projects, such as the Mercado del Barrio, causing demographic shifts with rising property values, incomes, and rents, displacing lower-income residents (Delgado & Swanson, 2019; Sandoval, 2021; see Appendix 1). In response, activists and residents engaged in political activism, protesting and boycotting developers and gentrification initiatives (Diaz and Torres, 2012; Le Texier, 2007). However, the past decade has seen the entry of Latinx business owners into Barrio Logan, further diversifying activism patterns, a topic I'll explore next.

Figure 1. Map of Barrio Logan, San Diego, and Chicano Park Activism in the 1970s and nowadays



Source: City of San Diego, 2023

Source: Chicano Park Museum, 2023

Source: the author

4. Methods

I used a qualitative in-depth case study approach (Yin, 2003), including four sources to collect data. First, I conducted 68 semi-structured interviews with 40 Latinx business owners and entrepreneurs, in Barrio Logan, including restaurants, art galleries, coffee shops, bars, etc.; six government agency representatives (including a California Assembly member, city council member assistant, urban planners, the community planning group chair, and the Promise Zone & Special Projects manager in the city council's Economic Development Department); and 22 Latinx activists in social movements (CPSC, Brown Beret and Chicano movement) and residents (see Appendix 2 for participants' demographics).

Participants were recruited through local community meetings of relevant organizations, direct approaches to business owners, and engagement with stakeholders. Sampling strategies included snowball sampling (Noy, 2008) to identify additional relevant participants. Interviews, lasting around sixty minutes, were conducted in English or Spanish through face-to-face meetings, audio-recorded, and transcribed. Participant identities were anonymized for confidentiality following Institutional Review Board protocols. Policymaker interviews sought insights into neighborhood development policies, with a specific focus on the community plan process and business owners' involvement. Interviews with business owners and residents aimed to analyze business owner activism and understand residents' reactions. Questions were tailored to these focal points.

Furthermore, I conducted participant observations spanning 2022-2023. This involved attending monthly meetings of local movements and organizations (All For Logan (AFL), Barrio Logan Association (BLA), and the CPSC), as well as a community planning group. I observed cultural, political, and arts events in Barrio Logan, including Chicano Park Day, national holidays (Dios de la Muertos, Cinco de Mayo, Memorial Day), "Walk the Block" initiative events like a Barrio art crawl, Union del Barrio political events and rallies (1st of May march, demonstrations), the opening of Chicano Park Museum, and social activities (LaVuelta, Women's Day celebration). Additionally, I participated in business owners' events such as shows, art exhibitions, and workshops. Informal observations in Chicano Park included a guided tour by a CPSC activist and Aztec dances with food giveaways. Detailed reports were recorded, outlining the event's objectives, participants, progression, with a focus on the role of business owners.

Thirdly, I visually documented political activism, with a focus on murals, signs, and products in stores. Touring neighborhood streets and businesses, I also examined businesses' social media pages (with consent) to capture photographs of community developments, murals, signs, and notable products. This resulted in a photographic database[2] of over 300 photos, aiding in the identification of additional patterns of political activism among business owners in the neighborhood.

Fourthly, I conducted document analysis to gain insights into neighborhood development processes, resident organization, and the role of business owners from various perspectives. This involved analyzing city council policy documents, including the "Barrio Logan Community Plan" from the San Diego Planning Department published between 2010 and 2022, as well as monthly meeting agendas and minutes (in 2022), reports, and publications of relevant organizations.

I used thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2016) by using the qualitative analysis software NVivo, for identifying, analyzing, and reporting the various patterns of political activism and the perceptions of interviewees.

5. Findings

In the following sections, I will examine various patterns of political activism within both the political and economic systems. The first section will center on activism stemming from participation in the urban economic system, which manifests through store design, product offerings, employment and customer service policies, and the use of in-store and public spaces for political engagement. In the second section, I will delve into activism originating from engagement within the urban political system, encompassing participation in community planning groups, establishment and

[2] Database URL, pending

involvement with and collaborations with policymakers and politicians. I will refer to activism stemming from the economic system as associated with business-related activities, while political system activism as involves direct engagement with policymakers and politicians in urban politics[3].

5.1. Political Activism from Within the Economic System

Barrio Logan has a rich history of protests and rallies, now complemented by a unique form of political expression in its Latinx-owned businesses. Signs like "Chicana owned," murals, and products with messages such as "El Barrio No Se Vende" [the neighborhood is not for sale], "First generation but not the last," and "abolish ICE" (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement) adorn storefronts, showcasing the owners' collective political influence. This phenomenon emerged in the 2010s, with approximately 85% of businesses on Logan Avenue and 26th Street now being Latinx-owned[4].Latino-owned businesses are revitalizing Barrio Logan, filling previously abandoned spaces. Owners, whether native or from outside the neighborhood, are motivated by cultural ties, community bonds, economic opportunities, and affordable rent amidst ongoing gentrification.

Store names in Barrio Logan carry political protest significance. For instance, "Aztalan" gallery embodies Chicano indigenous identity and asserts the space as Aztlan, the Aztec people's ancestral home before the U.S. occupation in 1848. "Por Vida" coffee shop symbolizes unwavering resistance to gentrification, while "Border X Brewing" bar celebrates Barrio Logan's proximity to the Mexico-U.S. border and

[3] Note that there is an overlap between the patterns of activism in the systems. Therefore, this distinction between the systems is made for analytical purposes.

[4]The information is based on street mapping I conducted, analysis of information from the City of San Diego, interviews with business owners and the Google Maps engine (database URL, pending).

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promotes Mexican culture. Latinx business owners also sell products as protests against gentrification, displacement, immigration policies, and racism, including items featuring political messages and Mexican symbols. These items include pictures, knickknacks, and clothing featuring Mexican symbols and political messages such as "Viva Raza no mas gentrification: self-determination" (celebrating the community and opposing gentrification), "Aztlan gatekeeper," "Viva Mexico" (long live Mexico), "Abolish ICE," "F*** the police," "Daughter of an immigrant," "We want fundamental human rights," "Chicana power," "Chicanas," "Chingona," and more.

Barrio Logan galleries frequently feature exhibitions addressing political issues like resistance to gentrification, Chicano movements and identity, and opposition to racism and immigration policies. Notably, the Aztlan Gallery showcased an art piece depicting white gentrifiers restraining an indigenous Mexican individual and another painting with the slogan "Barrio Si. Yonkes No!" recalling a 1970s protest against auto junkyards. The gallery owner contributed her artwork, including pieces highlighting the historical struggle for Chicano Park, with messages such as "La Tierra Mia Aztlan—DESPIERTA" ("My Land Aztlan—WAKE UP").

Certain Barrio Logan businesses show solidarity by offering subsidized services like printing and assistance with bureaucratic tasks. They also offers free workshops cover topics such as resume building, counseling, academic preparation, and youth employment training. Some businesses also serve as community spaces for activism, hosting events on the Chicano Movement, community organizations, and issues like air pollution and affordable housing. They collaborate with organizations such as the CPSC, Union del Barrio, United Farm Workers, and the Brown Berets. Some Latinx business owners actively prioritize employing locals and those of Mexican descent,

expressing solidarity and making political statements against immigration and gentrification policies.

Diego, a 43-year-old art gallery owner who grew up in an activist family and serves as the chairman of the CPSC, explained their commitment to activism:

> Gentrification is a political issue because for a community like ours, Chicanos, it's not just people who come into [it] pricing us out. It's the city directing industry this way and trying to control what our area looks like...So this shop is more like a community space, to sustain the community... We view these businesses as getting that type of political power, a strong sense of identity. As Chicano, we have a sense of political power within ourselves... we're not looking for customers, but partners... We want to help our brothers and sisters who are getting displaced, be a roadblock. A gatekeeper. We make sure we are not being priced out of our land.

Diego played a pivotal role in organizing significant community events, including Chicano Park Day and the Annual Unión del Barrio Conferences, monthly educational movie nights, delving into the history of the Chicano civil rights movement and other revolutionary struggles. Diego's store also actively participates in the dissemination of opinion pieces and brochures on Latinx politics and nationalism.

In addition, in public spaces, business owners often display signs, Mexican flags, art sculptures, or murals that assert their ownership of the space. Outside their stores and on windows, these entrepreneurs hang signs with messages like "Mexican Owned" (Figure 2), "Fight gentrification," "local artist store," "Chicana Art," "brown woman-owned," "Productos Mexicanos," and statements such as "Respect existence or

expect resistance." These visuals stake their claim in the space and convey messages to the community.

Figure 2. *Sign and Mural*

Note. Photographs taken by the author.

On one of the trees an entrepreneur knitted wool that says, “Logan is Home” and another entrepreneur hung a chain of flags that says, “Brown is beautiful,” and “Todo por la raza” (we are all for the race/community). Nearby someone painted Mexican immigrants trying to cross the border with police blocking their way. Likewise, on a wall outside a local VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) bar, there is a large mural featuring portraits of deported Mexican-American soldiers accompanied by the message "Leave No One Behind" (Figure 2). This mural is a part of The Leave No One Behind Mural Project (LNOBMP), which was initiated in 2001 and combines art with political advocacy on this issue." (https://leavenoonebehindmuralproject.org/). Next to this mural, there is another one that reads:

> When our country merged into World War 1 and World War 2, “Logan Heights [Barrio Logan] boys,” the first generation, were there to volunteer and help defend our great nation in its hour of need. This first generation earned their

> place in history and proved to the city of San Diego, the state of California, and to the nation that our first Mexican American generations fought and died to make this a free nation. There is no greater price to pay by making the ultimate sacrifice. The Mexican-American Logan Heights veteran has dedicated his life and soul to his country and is proud to be from Logan Heights.

The mural not only claims space amid gentrification but also delivers dual political statements. It internally reminds the Barrio Logan Latinx community of their contribution to American society through military service and externally portrays Mexican American immigrants as patriotic.

While political activity within the economic system represents distinct patterns of activism differing from protests and anti-systematic resistance, some of these expressions are not necessarily less radical in their messaging or consequences. For example, some Latinx entrepreneurs refuse to serve police or border guards and have displayed signs on their business doors and windows stating, "Racist Cops and ICE Not Welcome Here." (figure 3) Carlos, a business owner, elaborated:

> There's a lot of systemic racism. And you feel it on the streets, in low-income neighborhoods, at the border… especially with the gentrification... So if the local residents have a political agenda that needs to be addressed, we're on their side... a local told us that they didn't feel safe in the presence of cops and asked us to not serve them…so we are not allowing people in law enforcement to be in uniform inside our establishment.. We politely ask them to leave. They're not welcome here. (Carlos, personal communication, 2022).

Similar to anti-system protests, Latinx business owners resist spatial injustices and gentrification by asserting ownership over their spaces. Unlike traditional methods such

as rallies or boycotts, they actively participate in the urban economy through their businesses. Encouraging political engagement within their communities, they view it as a demonstration of agency, responsibility, and leadership for Latinx economic mobility. Essentially, Latinx business owners they effectively hold the stick from both ends - protest and resist from within the economic system, leveraging their active participation as a form of political dissent.

Figure 3. *Aztlan Flag and Sign: "Racists Cops ICE Not Welcome Here"*

Note. Photograph taken by the author. (2022).

5.2. Political Activism from Within the Political System

Latinx business owners in Barrio Logan engage in political activism not only within the economic system but also within the political system, institutions, and organizations. Many have actively engaged in urban politics, notably participating in the community planning group, advising the City Council, contributing to the Barrio Logan Maintenance Assessment District (BL MAD or BLA) advisory committee, and founding organizations (AFL). Monthly meetings of these groups, including the community planning group, BLA, and AFL, take place at local businesses such as the

museum, a neighborhood café, and a bar. Latinx business owners hold both official and unofficial positions in these organizations.

The Barrio Logan community plan, stagnant since 1978, faced obstacles in updating due to conflicts between residents and industrial companies. Despite previous unsuccessful attempts by politicians, a 2019 initiative, backed by the City Council, established a planning group. Unlike a 2013 group, this one saw active involvement of business owners, some holding formal role on behalf of the city council's planning department. These business leaders, alongside other informal Barrio Logan representatives, successfully advocated for the 2021-approved updated plan. The diverse community planning group included members from NGOs, industry, the navy, residents, politicians, council members, and urban planners.

The approved plan marked a notable success by mandating that new residential or mixed-use projects allocate a minimum of 15% for affordable housing, surpassing the typical 10% in other San Diego neighborhoods. It also acknowledged the neighborhood's cultural distinctiveness and proposed altering city housing regulations to prioritize Barrio Logan residents for 75% of newly developed affordable housing. In observed planning group sessions, business owners championed the preservation of cultural identity, support for the underprivileged, and the advancement of resident concerns like parking, accessibility, lighting, and safety.

Business owners are active participants in the Barrio Logan Association (BLA), established in 2014 alongside activists, residents, and city council representatives. While not exclusively founded by business owners, the BLA, serving as the advisory committee for the Barrio Logan Maintenance Assessment District (BL MAD), includes them among official officers and meeting attendees. The BLA aims to revitalize the

community by enhancing public spaces, promoting safety, and organizing educational and cultural events. For instance, during the organization's meetings, I observed business owners partner with the organization to promote cultural events, aiming to stimulate local businesses and provide opportunities for resident vendors.

Business owners in Barrio Logan are not only active in urban politics and city organizations but also proactively establish organizations to bolster the political influence of the Latinx community and safeguard local ownership amidst concerns of gentrification. For example *All For Logan (AFL)*, a nonprofit organization actively organizes neighborhood events, maintains consistent communication with policymakers and district representatives, and mediates between them and residents to seek solutions to issues such as gentrification, security, crime, homelessness, street lighting, trash disposal, and traffic lights installation. The association board also encourages community engagement in city politics by facilitating petitions to policymakers, promoting activism, encouraging participation in elections, and assisting in the application process for public grants.

AFL co-founder Camila, a 38-year-old second-generation immigrant from Mexico, moved to Barrio Logan in 2013, establishing her business. Holding official roles in BLA and the community planning group, she highlighted her political motivations and the benefits of business owners organizing:

> Growing up as Mexican-American I didn't have this role model outside... I found these people here…I wanted to be part of this community and give back, not just make money...It's really important to be involved in local politics. We speak to our local representatives and let them know about the issues that we're having here…We want to use our platform as the business community, to

> amplify the voices of residents who are unable to speak for themselves. The residents do not generate income for the city as we do, so we have a stronger voice because, let's be honest, money talks. When we initiated our activities in the neighborhood, policymakers began including us in their meetings… we formed a relationship and constant communication with our district councilmember… we want to make sure that our elected officials understand that they work for us (Camilia, personal communication, 2022).

Camila, alongside fellow Latinx business owners, underscores that their economic influence, connections, and access to policymakers, coupled with unified demands as a business community, have brought about improvements in various community challenges. This mobilization was particularly evident during local and national elections, with business owners hosting events and fundraisers, prominently displaying support for candidates dedicated to advocating for the Latinx community in Barrio Logan. Latino business owners argue that their establishments serve as a meeting place for residents and politicians. Daniel, a 47-year-old bar owner and first-generation immigrant, further explained:

> I'm very connected to city council members, the mayor, Congress, people both at the state and the federal levels. We've posted fundraisers for many local politicians...We host political events all the time. State senators and Congress people at the federal level came to this bar to speak. If this block was empty and there were no businesses on it, it could have been difficult for politicians to connect with their constituents, going from house to house...But now they have a way to plug into the community... It's a win-win situation. They care more for the neighborhood now. (Daniel, personal communication, 2022).

Business-oriented activism is depicted as a proactive involvement in local politics, fostering collaboration with municipal authorities for community betterment. While some view it as instrumental cooperation, it's seen as an expansion of traditional anti-systemic protest approaches in the area. Juan, a 60-year-old native San Diegan and middle-class business owner in Barrio Logan, had a long history of community politics and protest involvement before entering business. As a member of "Toltecas en Aztlan" and a participant in Chicano Park's mural creation, Juan joined the business community in 2018 with an art gallery on Logan Avenue. He sees art as a form of political and cultural empowerment, asserting ownership in the face of gentrification. Juan, also an AFL member, discussed in the interview how business establishment opened new avenues for activism, diverging from traditional protests, and highlighted the benefits of such engagement.

> If you want to make a change, you must do it yourself...but is it important to go out there and raise your fist and protest? What is it that you're protesting? Gentrification happens in every town in America. You can't stop progress, but you can steer it in the proper direction. You got to work with the system, you got to use the proper channels to make changes. Otherwise, it's you wasting your time, and your energy. I can be running and racing signs and things like that, but I'd rather deal in a different fashion. I have to pick my fights. Well, you can protest in a different way, legal fashion, sit at a table and talk about it. Now that we have businesses, organizations, and the 'All For Logan'…we have more power…It's gone through a metamorphosis; we are providing business economic development to better the community. (Juan, personal communication, 2022).

According to Juan, establishing businesses and actively participating within the urban political system, rather than resorting to 'street protests,' is perceived as a more effective political strategy. This approach is aimed at minimizing harm to the community while achieving their goals.

Finally, in a notable case, the involvement of a business owner named Isabella in urban politics was so intense that she made a professional transition from a business owner to a city politician, representing her neighborhood on the city council. As she described:

> I had our business in the neighborhood, so I was on that street for years every day...We hand-made a variety of items, primarily Latinx and food and culture workshops...it was an investment in community welfare and health...I've been a community activist for many years...I was also working at nonprofits, and then the council member called one day and asked me to join the team...As a Mexican American, I feel responsible for advocating for the residents

Latino business owners navigate a complex activism pattern, balancing economic and ethnic interests within their neighborhood. While deeply connected to local struggles, they use their businesses to voice protest on issues like housing, policing, immigration, pollution, and gentrification. Simultaneously, as business owners, they protect their economic interests by collaborating with development processes, policymakers, and politicians. The combination of ethnic identity, community solidarity, and economic influence makes their activism effective. However, this intermediary role leads to dilemmas and tensions between residents and business owners, as the intricate interplay of ethnicity, social status, and activism patterns often sparks contentious local politics.

5.3. "Mind Your Own Business!": Activists-Latinx business dynamics

The depiction of Latinx entrepreneurs as political actors doesn't uniformly reflect the political positions and interests of residents. While some view their involvement in urban politics as a statement of community ownership and resistance against gentrification, others express concerns about economic motives, collaboration with development, and ties to the local political system. Accusations of 'class betrayal,' paternalism, and cultural exploitation are not uncommon, revealing tensions and stratification beneath the apparent unity in the Barrio Logan Latinx community's struggle. Gabriel, a 50-year activist in Barrio Logan, has participated in various movements, including the Chicano movement and the CPSC. Born near the American-Mexican border, he described how he joined protests in support of Chicano Park at age 12 and has remained active in the neighborhood:

> I was born and raised in San Ysidro, right on the border, during the peak of the civil rights movement. there was a lot of activism...we were struggling for our own identity. we're seen as immigrants that don't belong here... then in the 1970s I experienced the second day of the takeover of Chicano Park... what I saw there really impacted me, I saw the people staying there that refused to leave.. I think I became an activist right there. Just like I landed there, I never left...because of a lot of the injustices that were happening in our communities, we don't trust. As far as our politics, our politicians, not to mention the police. there's zero trust.. we mostly protest, and organize rallies.. The frame of mind is, if we work within the system, they're gonna let you work with them until they get what they want from you. And then they turn around, spit you out.

Gabriel emphasizes that historical injustices have profoundly shaped the Barrio Logan community's activism, leading to protests and demonstrations as expressions of deep-

seated distrust in the political system. This perspective aligns with previous research (Schildkraut, 2005; Oskooii, 2020; Walker, 2020) indicating that perceptions of political discrimination among Latinos foster behavioral and attitudinal alienation, such as non-voting and a lack of trust, motivating collective action against institutions. Within this context, it becomes clearer why activists often criticize the involvement of business owners, as Gabriel elaborated:

> Their actions and presence here becomes a controversial issue because the average businessperson will negotiate with the politicians… Why? Because he has an interest in ensuring that the city doesn't shut him down. As much as they want to resist, they're preoccupied with running their small businesses and safeguarding them from harm in any way. So, their activism is quite limited. You can't trust it.

This form of activism is sometimes perceived as limited and co-opted, resembling assimilation to those in power and raising doubts about its ability to bring substantial changes to local politics. One major point of contention is the presence of signs in certain establishments refusing service to the police. While some residents support police collaboration, others vehemently oppose it, citing allegations of police brutality. Samuel, a resident, criticized the anti-police service signs displayed in stores:

> This neighborhood suffers from a lot of crime and murders, so we want and need the police here. Did this shop owner who claims to speak for us consult with us? No, he didn't. We can't act like we're above the law. We must remain humble and considerate. Law enforcement should be respected in our community because they sacrifice their lives to protect us.

Samuel, much like other residents, voices criticism of the activism undertaken by business owners, asserting that such political engagement might potentially harm the already delicate relationship between the community and the police. Residents also raise concerns about business owners creating a misleading impression that they speak for the entire local community. Martin commented on the political involvement of a business owner, stating, “They shouldn't act like they speak for the whole community.. mind your own business“. In contrast, Pablo, another resident, defended the business owners' stance regarding serving the police:

> The police shoot our people. If you're white and you commit a crime, they take you to Burger King. It's a double standard... The laws aren't applied the same way in different neighborhoods.

Similarly, business owners can face severe criticism and boycotts if perceived as cooperating with the police. In 2020, a resident recorded police officers during a patrol, and when a Latino business owner suggested letting the police do their job, he faced controversy among activists. The incident went viral on a Facebook page, prompting calls for a community boycott of his business. Boycotts also occur when business owners are seen as exploiting the community and its culture for financial gain. While some owners believe their activism enhances local culture and political power, some residents view it as "Community washing" or a marketing strategy, as explained by Gabriel:

> Business owners here do not share their profits with their employees; what makes you think they will share it with the community? They are looking at the neighborhood from a business perspective. There is also a certain degree of cultural exploitation and commercialization. The average person who dines at

> their restaurants is attracted to the food and culture, but if you ask them about the community's history or the park, they have no clue…some of them become Hispanics. Hispanics, in our community regarded as they're more white than brown. They might be brown on the outside, but they're white inside. That's how you become labeled because you do whatever it takes to succeed.

Some residents argue that this activism reveals a problematic duality or even hypocrisy because business owners appear to profit from what they claim to oppose. On one hand, these business owners resist gentrification resulting from the commercialization of the neighborhood, while on the other hand, they financially benefit from the influx of external capital, tourists, and consumers into the neighborhood. Gabriel underscores that the fight against gentrification has a class-based aspect, suggesting that Latino business owners can inadvertently contribute to gentrification and are labeled as "white on the inside," thus not truly representing the interests of the local community. Residents have also expressed mixed feelings about the impact of establishing businesses in the neighborhood on the political and cultural empowerment of the community. Hector, for instance, elaborated on the advantages of this activism:

> I've lived in this neighborhood my entire life…there are new businesses and cafes here...finally, we have a place where we can go to.…they celebrate our culture. It's a good thing. Sure, what's the alternative? This street used to be [filled] with drugs, crime, you couldn't walk around here at night...we also deserve development.

Other residents on the other hand expressed feeling marginalized due to the development of small businesses in the neighborhood. Adriana, a long-term resident, pointed out:

> I don't benefit from all this development. Who can open a business here? Only those with time and money. I have kids. How does it make my life better if tourists or rich folks come here?.. in the past few years, renting has gone up a lot, and that's making some people leave because living here is getting too expensive... We need to make sure that this place stays a neighborhood where people live, and not turn it into a place for factories or businesses, because we already have enough of those.

While businesses I interviewed either filled vacant spaces or replaced retiring owners over the past decade, some argue that the proliferation of businesses, especially on Logan Avenue, has turned it into a commercial area with parking issues, increased litter, and rising rents, making it difficult for residents to stay. Political involvement through businesses is seen as accessible mainly to those with financial means, and the expectation for lower-income residents to start businesses and engage in local politics is considered patronizing. In response to criticism, some business owners justify economic gains by citing political activism and contributions to the community as underlying motivations, as expressed by Luis, a 35-year-old restaurant owner:

> We are not gentrifiers, we are *gentefiers* [a play on words from the Spanish gente or "people"] because we are from the neighborhood doing this for the neighborhood… "gentrification," means that you're building something to attract others from the outside to come and share. That's not our focus. Our focus is to preserve our culture…We're taking ownership (Luis, personal communication, 2022)

Similarly, Diego noted:

> We are gentrifying, yes. But we are here because we want to help out and give back to the community, not just to make money… We have a political message.

Latinx business owners acknowledge both their class privilege and active participation in and benefit from gentrification, making them susceptible to criticism from local residents. Despite solidarity, there's also criticism and a desire for change in the 'traditional dynamics' of protests in Barrio Logan. This perspective sees protests as perpetuating a sense of victimization, as expressed by Sofia, a 45-year-old business owner who grew up in Barrio Logan:

> Gentrification is here, what do you choose to do with it? Do you choose to let everybody else take over or do you want to advocate, get informed, and find out how you can be also a part of it? We can be the victims forever and let our life go by. honestly, to me this is victimization...racism still exists, but I refuse to be a victim of that. You want to shut your door on me? That's fine. I'll find three other doors to open...Growing up here, I got into gang life, so for me, to come back as an entrepreneur, as an educated woman, as a positive role model that's already had an impact...I have a sense of responsibility, I am a voice for a lot of these people who can't speak up… we can fight in other ways (Sofia, personal communication, 2022)

Some business owners I interviewed expect the community to adopt what they see as a more effective form of activism instead of what is labeled as "victimization." Some business owners see themselves as catalysts for change, serving as a model for demonstrating how economic mobility can drive transformation in political activism within the neighborhood. These contrasting viewpoints underscore the intricate challenges and tensions within the community, exacerbated by the impacts of economic

development and urban transformation. In the end, the dynamic between minority entrepreneurs and residents mirrors the broader intricacies of activism and urban politics.

6. Conclusion

Political science scholars have extensively examined political protests and social movements in the context of marginalized urban areas and ethnically or racially segregated communities. In this case study of Barrio Logan in Southern California, I have demonstrated how the influx of ethnic entrepreneurs and business owners has paved the way for distinctive avenues of minority activism. By adopting a "place-based" mobilization model (Nuamah & Ogorzalek, 2021; Carlos, 2021) and delving into the intricate intersection of ethnic and class affiliations, this study contributes to the existing body of literature on activism and mobilization within ethnic and racial minority communities (Carlos, 2021; Nuamah & Ogorzalek, 2021; Lawless & Fox, 2001; Michener, 2021; Barreto, 2004; Bedolla, 2005; Shukra et al., 2004; Sbicca & Perdue, 2014). It discerns unique patterns of activism that transcend anti-system protests by intersecting the class diversity, and local processes impacting these populations.

The research reveals that within a marginalized neighborhood, the transformation and class diversity have given rise to unique patterns of activism. Latino entrepreneurs and business owners adeptly navigate the complex intersection of their economic and ethnic interests and affiliations within the neighborhood. Their economic influence, access to politics, and financial gains from the process, coupled with the fear of losing their ethnic community, experiencing cultural marginalization, and their solidarity with their ethnic group, lead them to adopt a unique pattern of activism.

Within the sphere of business and the economic system, the political activism of Latinx business owners is manifested through politicizing store design, the products they offer, their employment and customer service policies, and the utilization of in-store space for community and political engagement, as well as adjacent public spaces. In the realm of the urban political system, Latinx business owners participate in community planning groups, are involved with organizations such as the BLA, establish political organizations, and collaborate with policymakers and politicians. In essence, these entrepreneurs find themselves in the unique position of holding the metaphorical "stick from both ends" as they protest against the very economic system from which they derive profit, effectively channeling their dissent into a form of political protest.

The findings of this study shed light on several essential insights and their broader implications for the issue of activism in minority communities worldwide. Given the similarities between Barrio Logan and other Latinx and Black communities in the United States (Sandoval, 2021; Pattillo, 2007; Shmaryahu-Yeshurun, 2023), as well as ethnically segregated communities worldwide, I believe this research holds broader significance for debates on minority activism. As ethnic enclaves across the globe become more diverse in terms of class and witness the rise of second-generation immigrant mobilization and minority middle-class entrepreneurs, it becomes increasingly crucial to identify the evolution of political activism and the development of diverse political strategies aimed at enhancing minority political power.

Recognizing minority activism from within the urban economy and political system may further encourage the inclusion of minority individuals, specifically middle-class entrepreneurs and business owners, in urban politics and economic development policies. While minority marginalization and displacement following

urban redevelopment and gentrification can sometimes appear inevitable, the minority can exert influence from within the process to make it more inclusive and bolster their political power. Understanding the motivations and solidarities of ethnic entrepreneurs and business owners, which often extend beyond economic factors, enables politicians and policymakers to engage and collaborate with them. However, it is equally important to acknowledge that some lower-income residents experience physical displacement due to gentrification and may not always participate in urban politics or voice their concerns. Consequently, entrepreneurs do not necessarily represent the political voice and interests of lower-class individuals or other neighborhood groups.

In essence, Latinx business owners' activism reveals a multifaceted narrative concerning voice and political representation. While it presents a unique method of activism, it raises intra-class issues, not only regarding the minority's ability to adopt such a pattern but also regarding the question of whom it ultimately represents. Therefore, the activism of ethnic business owners should not negate the relevance of anti-system resistance and protests as widespread actions among minority populations in general and Barrio Logan residents, specifically. As such, the potential promised by this unique pattern of activism for ethnic representation in urban politics and other means of gaining political influence should be combined with efforts to address class representation.

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Appendix 1. Barrio Logan and San Diego Characteristics

	Barrio Logan (Tracts 50 and 51.03)		**San Diego County**
	2000	**2020**	**2020**
Total population	3,636	4,234	3,298,634
Median Household Income[5]	$20,604	$37,120	$91,003
Median Rent	$436	$1,113	$1,732
Median age	25.7	31.4	36.1
Race and Ethnicity % Latinx/Hispanic	83	73	34.8
% White	6	16	43.8
% Asian	2	2.8	12.9
% Black	5	4	5.6
% Other	4	6	2.9
% Unemployed	15	15.8	5.4
% Poverty Status (Population for whom poverty status is determined)	41	38.1	10.9
Household	976	1,235	1,130,703

[5] Median Household Income is adjusted for Inflation.

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Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2016-2020 American Community Survey five-year estimates and Sandag, 2000, 2020.

Appendix 2. Participants' Demographics

		Interviewees	
Variable		*Business owners*	*Residents and Activists*
Gender	% Male	57	59
	% Female	43	41
Average age		38	45
Place of birth	% Born in the neighborhood	15	59
	% Born in the city	45	4
	% Born in the USA	20	10
	% Born in Mexico	20	27
	% Married	57	59
Income	% Middle-class	95	31
	% College graduate	42	27
Property Status	% Owner Occupied	7	13
	% Renter Occupied	93	87
Business average lifespan		7	NA
N		*40*	*22*