



American University's Annual Latino Public Affairs Forum: Prospects & Implications of Immigration Reform Policies, 2015-2016

Thursday, January 15, 2015

Abramson Family Founders Room, AU School of International Service

Speaker Biographies

Cristóbal J. Alex is President of the Latino Victory Project and the Latino Victory Foundation. Founded by Eva Longoria and Henry Muñoz, the Latino Victory Project engages Latino voters and Latino donors to support candidates and policy campaigns that reflect and advance American values such as immigration, education, healthcare, good jobs, a clean environment, and ultimately opportunity. Previously, Mr. Alex spent more than five years in philanthropy serving at both the Open Society Foundations and the Ford Foundation. While at the Ford Foundation, he managed the Promoting Electoral Reform and Democratic Participation initiative, working to increase voter participation through voter registration and mobilization, and by removing structural barriers to political participation. While at George Soros' Open Society Foundations, he managed the civic engagement portfolio and supported a range of strategies to inspire public participation in underrepresented communities. Mr. Alex received his J.D. from the University of Washington School of Law.

Jeanne M. Atkinson is the Executive Director of the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC). She holds a J.D. from American University's Washington College of Law and is a member of the Pennsylvania bar. Ms. Atkinson's passion for immigration was sparked while interning with Catholic Charities in 1987, during which time she focused on legalization. Prior to joining CLINIC, Ms. Atkinson served as the long-time Director of Catholic Charities' Immigration Legal Services (ILS) program for the Archdiocese of Washington, where she directed their highly active and successful legal services program, as well as the Catholic Charities' Refugee Center. Ms. Atkinson was a partner in establishing the Family Justice Center in Montgomery County and is a member of the board of directors of Catholics for Family Peace.

Vanessa Cárdenas is Vice President of Progress 2050 at the Center for American Progress. Her work focuses on the intersection of policy and race with particular attention to demographic changes, immigration, and issues relevant to the growing Latino community in the U.S. Previously, Ms. Cárdenas served as Policy/Communications Associate and Outreach Coordinator at the National Immigration Forum. She was profiled as one of the "100 People to Watch in the Next Century" by *Washingtonian* magazine and is a regular guest on CNN en Español, Telemundo, Univision, and BBC, among others and has been widely quoted in various print publications such as *U.S. News & World Report*, *The Washington Post*, and *La Opinión*. She is a 2010 fellow of the National Hispana Leadership Institute and alum of Leadership Arlington and the Sorensen Institute for Political Leadership at the University of Virginia. She holds a B.A. in government and politics and an M.P.A. from George Mason University.

Wendy Cervantes is Vice President of Immigration and Child Rights Policy for First Focus. She holds an M.A. in Latin American studies and political science from the University of New Mexico and a B.A. in communications from the University of Southern California. At First Focus, Ms. Cervantes is responsible for leading the organization's work in cross-cutting policy areas that impact children of immigrants and their families including child welfare, immigration, education, human rights, family economics, and health. Before joining First Focus, Ms. Cervantes was Director of Programs at La Plaza, a Latino community-based organization in central Indiana. Prior to La Plaza, she managed the Annie E. Casey Foundation's national immigrant and refugee families portfolio and the District of Columbia portfolio. She currently serves on the Associate Board of the Latin American Youth Center and as the Policy Co-chair of the Migration and Child Welfare National Network. In 2011, she was selected as an ALL IN Fellow with the National Hispana Leadership Institute.

Gregory Chen is Director of Advocacy for the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA), a national network of more than 13,000 attorneys and law professors who practice and teach immigration law. Mr. Chen is a graduate of Harvard College and received his law degree from New York University. Prior to joining AILA, Chen served as Director for Legislative Affairs at Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) and Director for Policy and Advocacy at the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI). In addition to serving as law clerk for the Honorable Stephen Reinhardt of the U.S. Court of Appeals, Mr. Chen spent five years at the Legal Services for Children in San Francisco where he represented children in detention and removal proceedings as well as in other immigration matters, child welfare, juvenile delinquency, and educational law proceedings.

Eric Hershberg is the Director of the Center for Latin American & Latino Studies (CLALS) and Professor of Government at American University. Dr. Hershberg received his Ph.D. in political science from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is a frequent commentator on U.S. electoral trends and the impact of public policies on Latino communities. Dr. Hershberg specializes in the Latin American political economy, and has taught at New York University, Southern Illinois University, Columbia, Princeton, and the New School. His most recent publications include two co-edited volumes, one with Maxwell A. Cameron, entitled *Latin American Left Turns: Politics, Policies, and Trajectories of Change* (Lynne Rienner, 2010) and the second, *New Institutions for Participatory Democracy in Latin America: Voice and Consequence* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), with Maxwell A. Cameron and Kenneth E. Sharpe.

Ted Hesson is Immigration Editor for ABC News-Univision. Prior to joining Univision in 2012, he served as Online Editor for Long Island Wins, a non-profit organization focusing on local and national immigration issues. Mr. Hesson has written extensively about international, national, and state-level politics and policies affecting the Latino community for a variety of magazines, newspapers, and online publications, including *The Huffington Post*, *Time Out New York*, and the *Philadelphia City Paper*. Mr. Hesson also currently writes for Fusion, a start-up English-language cable network partnership between ABC and Univision that targets Hispanics in the United States. Fusion aims to serve the fastest growing demographic in America by providing information about the economy, entertainment, immigration, education and politics. He holds an M.S. in journalism from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism and a B.A. in English from Boston College.

Jayesh Rathod is Associate Professor of Law at American University's Washington College of Law (WCL), and founding Director of the law school's Immigrant Justice Clinic. He is a graduate of Columbia Law School and Harvard College. His areas of expertise and scholarly interests include immigration law, labor and employment law, occupational safety and health, and clinical legal education. Prior to joining the faculty, he was a Staff Attorney at CASA of Maryland, representing low-wage immigrant workers on employment law and immigration matters, and participating in worker education, organizing, and advocacy efforts. He also practiced in the litigation section at Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering LLP, and was law clerk to the Honorable Louis F. Oberdorfer, of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia. His scholarship has been featured in a variety of prominent journals. Professor Rathod has been invited to speak on these topics at institutions across the United States, and has served as a commentator in local and national media, including CNN, NBC News, and National Public Radio.

Audrey Singer is Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution's Metropolitan Policy Program. Dr. Singer holds a Ph.D. in sociology, with a specialization in demography, from the University of Texas at Austin. She has written extensively on U.S. immigration trends, including immigrant integration, undocumented migration, naturalization and citizenship, and the changing racial and ethnic composition of the United States. Her co-edited book, *Twenty-First Century Gateways: Immigrant Incorporation in Suburban America*, focuses on the fastest growing immigrant populations among second-tier metropolitan areas including Washington, DC, Atlanta, Dallas, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Sacramento, and Charlotte. Her articles have been published in academic journals such as *International Migration Review*, *Demography*, *Urban Geography*, *Geographical Review*, and *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, and her commentary has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, CNN.com, *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Seattle Times* and *La Vanguardia Dossier*.

Ali A. Valenzuela is Assistant Professor in the Department of Politics at Princeton University, and currently a Research Fellow at American University's Center for Latin American & Latino Studies (CLALS). He received his Ph.D. in political science from Stanford University, and has centered his teaching and research on American electoral politics with a focus on Latino public opinion, immigrant socialization, voter turnout, religion and politics, and the politics of racial and ethnic identity in the U.S. His current work uses surveys and geographic data to investigate contextual and institutional sources of politicized group identities. This work is complemented by field and survey experiments that test the consequences of identity appeals on voter turnout and support for public policies. His research has been published in the *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, *American Politics Research* and *Presidential Studies Quarterly*.

Michele Waslin is Manager at The Pew Charitable Trusts in Washington, DC. Dr. Waslin holds an M.A. in international relations from the University of Chicago and a Ph.D. in government and international studies from the University of Notre Dame. As lead on Pew's work on immigration, Dr. Waslin oversees the organization's Immigration and the States Project, which examines the intersection of federal, state, and local immigration laws and policies and its impact on all levels of government. She is the author of numerous publications on immigration policy and has appeared in both English- and Spanish-language media. Previously, she served as Senior Policy Analyst at the Immigration Policy Center, Director of Immigration Policy Research at the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), and Policy Coordinator at the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights.

Janelle Wong is Associate Professor of American Studies and Director of the Asian American Studies Program at the University of Maryland. Prior to joining the faculty at the University of Maryland, Dr. Wong taught at the University of Southern California and served as Executive Director of the Institute of Public Service at Seattle University. She was a Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC, in 2006-2007. Her publications include *Democracy's Promise: Immigrants and American Civic Institutions* (2006, University of Michigan Press) and the most recent, *Asian American Political Participation: Emerging Constituents and their Political Identities* (2011, Russell Sage Foundation). Her current book project focuses on how growing numbers of Asian American and Latino evangelical Christians will impact the traditional conservative Christian movement and immigrant political participation.

Matthew Wright is Assistant Professor in the Department of Government at American University's School of Public Affairs. Dr. Wright received his Ph.D. in political science from the University of California, Berkeley in 2010 and spent one year as a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. His research has explored numerous topics relevant to American politics and comparative politics more generally, including the causes and implications of political identity, immigration, assimilation and citizenship policies. He also researches the politics of ethnic diversity, national identity and patriotism; religion and politics; political culture; and U.S. voting behavior. His work has been published in a number of peer-reviewed journals, including *Comparative Political Studies*, *Political Psychology*, and *Perspectives on Politics*, among others.

Andrea Zuniga is Legislative Representative for the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). Ms. Zuniga holds a J.D. from the George Washington University Law School and a B.S. in political science from American University. Ms. Zuniga advocates on the AFL-CIO's behalf for immigration, state employees, and wage theft legislative issues. Prior to joining AFL-CIO, she was Legislative Affairs Specialist for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). At AFSCME, she covered a broad array of legislative issues; lead primary campaigns in Nevada, California, Texas and Puerto Rico; and coordinated Hispanic voter outreach efforts. She also serves on the Executive Boards of the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement and the Hispanic Lobbyists Association.