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ABSTRACT

The immigrant rights movement in the United States evolved from largely localized and grassroots struggles in the 1990s into a coherent and coordinated national social movement in the late 2000s and 2010s. Scaling up in this way is challenging because grassroots organizations tend to lack the resources needed to operate at the national level over an extended period. This paper examines how this movement overcame the obstacle by focusing on role of national organizations in concentrating key resources (money, political capital, discursive power) and developing a national social movement infrastructure. The consequences of this process are shown to be paradoxical: While it enabled potent advocacy in the national political arena, the concentration of resources generated constraints on strategies and tactics, inequalities, and conflicts between different factions of the movement. This paper describes the process by drawing on interviews with participants and documents.
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Going national: how the fight for immigrant rights became a national social movement

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To cite this article: Walter J. Nicholls, Justus Uittermark & Sander van Haperen (2020) Going national: how the fight for immigrant rights became a national social movement, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 46:4, 705-727. DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2018.1556450

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1556450

Published online: 28 Jan 2019.