

Transnational Politics and Civic Engagement: Do Home Country Political Ties Limit Latino Immigrant Pursuit of U.S. Civic Engagement and Citizenship?¹

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Over the past decade, the number of immigrants naturalizing has surged. According to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, naturalizations grew from an average of 146,000 annually in the 1970s, to 221,000 annually in the 1980s, to 562,000 annually in the 1990s. In the years since 1996—the

with the 12 to 15 years of legal residence that often precedes naturalization among Latinos (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service 2003: Tables M and 54, and *INS Statistical Yearbooks*, previous years).

The rapid increase in the number of immigrants naturalizing should not obscure the fact that there is also an increase in the number of immigrants eligible to naturalize who have not. Data on the emigration and deaths of the legal permanent residents is not maintained, so it is not possible to provide an exact number of citizenship-eligible immigrants. A recent estimate of 2000 census data conducted by the Urban Institute's Jeffrey Passel for the NALEO Educational Fund estimated that there were 7.7 million legal permanent residents in the United States 18 years of age or above with sufficient residence (generally, five years) to be eligible to naturalize. Of these, 4.2 million were Latinos (NALEO Educational Fund 2004). Legal permanent residents under 18 years of age can naturalize only as part of their parents' naturalization.

This large pool of immigrants, including a significant share of longer-term immigrants, raises a recurring question for the polity. Will these immigrants join the polity and participate as equals with the U.S. born? The United States has faced this question before, but the cyclical nature of large-scale immigration makes it particularly pressing now. The roots of much contemporary immigration can be traced to the 1965 changes to immigration law. The dramatic effects of that law on the numbers of immigrants were not felt until the 1980s. So, we are now in the era of a mature immigration where there are large numbers of recently naturalized citizens, many long-term permanent resident immigrants, and an even larger pool of short-term immigrants many of whom are undocumented. This variety offers an analytical opportunity, exploited here, but also a pressing policy challenge.

change its core values (Huntington 2004, as a contemporary example). The reality, of course, has been somewhere between these poles historically and continues to be today. In this chapter, I examine three measures of immigrant civic, residential, and political engagement in U.S. politics. Specifically, I assess community organizational involvement among Latino immigrants, long-term residential intentions, and naturalization behaviors. Community organizational

politics, of course, is not a characteristic unique to the Latino community (Skocpol 2003), but the decline is more dramatic in the Latino U.S. citizen population because organizations played a relatively more important role in the era before the VRA reduced the manipulation and exclusion of Latino voters.

For immigrant Latinos, who are largely precluded from direct participation in electoral politics, organizations retain their more traditional role as a centerpiece of community politics. Despite the importance of organizations to Latino immigrant politics, the majority of immigrants do not participate in organizations (a characteristic also true of U.S.-born Latinos) (de la Garza, with Lu 1999). The dynamics of who among Latino immigrants participates in organizations and who does not is relatively understudied. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995: chapter 8; Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001: chapter 11) find that Latino immigrants are generally less likely than U.S.-born Latinos as well as Whites and Blacks to be organizationally involved.

Immigration has steadily increased in the 1980s and 1990s as has naturalization, so there are consistently a higher share of recent Latino immigrants relative to longer-term, non-naturalized immigrants. A few characteristics of the Latino immigrant population are worth noting. First, Latinos generally, and Latino immigrants specifically, are younger and have lower levels of education and income than non-Hispanic whites. Also, the longer the length of residence in the United States, the higher is the likelihood of community organizational participation among Latino immigrants (DeSipio et al. 1998).

Not all permanent residents naturalize. What distinguishes those who do from those who don't? As previously indicated, the single most important predictor of naturalization among immigrants is length of residence: immigrants who reside in the United States longer are more likely to naturalize than those with shorter periods of residence. This is true today and was true

of turn-of-the-century immigrants (Gavit 1922; U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service 2003: Table 54). Speed of naturalization, however, varies by nationality and by region of origin. In the contemporary era, Asian immigrants naturalize the fastest and immigrants from the Americas naturalize the slowest. Traditionally, the nationalities with the longest wait between immigration and naturalization are nationals of the two countries that border the United States—Mexico and Canada.

At the individual level, several factors explain diverse rates of naturalization, among them demographic characteristics, attitudinal and associational variables, immigration and settlement characteristics, and inconsistent bureaucratic treatment. Of these, demographic characteristics of immigrants are the most studied and have been shown to have the most reliable and most sizeable impact on naturalization. Income, white-collar employment, professional status, home ownership, years of schooling, and English-language abilities increase the likelihood of naturalization (Barkan and Khokolov 1980; Portes and Mozo 1985; Jasso and Rosenzweig 1990; Yang 1994; DeSipio 1996*a*; Johnson et al. 1999). The married are more likely to naturalize than the unmarried, and women more likely than men. Immigrants who arrived as young children are more likely to naturalize than are those who arrived as teenagers or adults, controlling for length of residence.

Attitudinal and associational variables have also been shown to shape the likelihood that an immigrant will naturalize. Roots in the United States, attitude toward life in the United States, and social identification as an American each has been shown to have a positive impact on the likelihood of naturalization (García 1981; Portes and Curtis 1987). Immigrants who associate mostly with non-citizens are less likely to naturalize (DeSipio 1996*a*). Jones-Correa (1998) finds that an “ideology of return [to the home country]” discourages naturalization.

Finally, permanent residents who state an intention to stay in the United States are more likely to express an interest in pursuing naturalization and in successfully naturalizing (DeSipio 1996a).

Immigration and settlement experiences also shape naturalization propensity. Immigrants who entered as refugees, skilled workers, or for political reasons are more likely to naturalize (Jasso and Rosenzweig 1990; Portes and Mozo 1985). The higher the sending country's GNP, the lower the likelihood of naturalization (Yang 1994). National-origin differences persist after controlling for other factors shown to influence naturalization. Jasso and Rosenzweig (1990) find that

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country society and of politics and of immigrant settlement in the United States. For the most part, the case studies of active political transnationalism examine a specific immigrant sending community (e.g. Levitt 2001) or a specific form of transnational behavior across multiple immigrant-ethnic populations, e.g. migrant remittances (de la Garza and Lowell 2002). Some transnational scholarship theorizes about the opportunities for the creation of sustained transnational connections between immigrants and their sending communities (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992; Smith and Guarnizo 1998).

The new scholarship of transnational politics has also explored the administrative structures and political implications of sending-country efforts to extend nationality or citizenship to emigrants abroad (de la Garza and Velasco 1997; González-Gutiérrez 1999; de la Garza and Pachon 2000; Jones-Correa 2001). Scholars have also begun to explore whether transnational political attachments extend into the second generation (Fouron and Glick Schiller 2001; Levitt and Waters 2002). Finally, political theorists have also begun to explore the impact of new transnational political formation among émigrés on traditional conceptions of citizenship (Guarnizo 1997*b*; Ong 1999). As more émigrés and, perhaps, their children begin to maintain political ties in both the United States and the country of origin/ancestry, traditional country-bound notions of citizenship may have to be recast (Soysal 1994; Bosniak 2001).⁵

This burst of scholarship and the underlying phenomenon that it documents highlights what might be a weakness in existing study of civic engagement and naturalization propensities among immigrants in the United States. While certainly not a new phenomenon, the volume of

⁵ This emerging scholarship of immigrant transnational politics does have some recurring weaknesses, however. First, there is no effort to assess the overall frequency of transnational politics among immigrants. Second, the scholarship of transnational political often assumes, often uncritically, that such transnational political activity is durable over time and offers immigrants resources that they can use to shape not just the politics of their sending communities/countries, but also their communities in the United States. Finally, most analyses focus only on a single sending community or a single country of origin. As a result, it is more difficult to identify general patterns in the exercise of or significance of transnational political activity among immigrants.

contemporary immigration and the relative ease of international communication and transportation make it much easier for immigrants to be transnational. The transnational scholarship shows that some subset of immigrants – approximately 20 percent of Latino immigrants and few in the second generation, by my estimate – engage the civic and political life of their sending communities or countries after emigration (DeSipio et al. 2003). Yet, this scholarship does not, for the most part, ask about the consequences of transnational engagement for civic engagement in immigrant-receiving societies, in residential plans of immigrants, or in naturalization.

Transnationalism raises questions about what we know about immigrant civic engagement and immigrant naturalization propensity. One possibility (hypothesis one) is that transnational engagement in the civic and political life of the sending country reduces the likelihood that immigrants will become involved in U.S. civic life or seek naturalization. If the transnational engagement allows a space for immigrants to achieve their political goals in their countries of origin and reduces the bonds that have developed in the past between immigrants and the United States, then immigrants who are transnationally engaged will be less likely to manifest civic or political attachment to the United States, controlling for other factors. A second possibility (hypothesis two) is that the transnational engagement offers a resource for immigrants who have engaged in transnational activities and that they can translate the skills,

engaged in civic and political life. For immigrants, these interests are more likely to first manifest themselves in home-country focused community and civic activities because those are more pressing and more attainable. The interests of these more civically/politically engaged immigrants, however, soon shift to their communities in the United States. Clearly, the null hypothesis is that transnational behavior is irrelevant to immigrant civic engagement or naturalization. If this is the case, then the measures of transnational behavior will not prove significant and traditional predictors of civic and political engagement will assume their traditional roles.

In the analysis that follows, I test three models of civic and political engagement in the United States among contemporary Latino immigrants. The first model measures Latino immigrant propensity to participate in U.S. civic organizations. The second looks at long-term residential intentions. Finally, the third analyzes naturalization among Latino legal permanent residents eligible for naturalization. These models include factors shown to influence the likelihood of organizational participation and naturalization. I add to these predictors two measures of transnational political behaviors and two measures of attitudes toward political opportunities in the sending country and in the United States.

Data

The analysis is based on the results of a telephone survey with 1,602 Latino immigrants conducted by the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute in July and August 2002. In order to ensure that we could analyze between Latino national-origin groups, TRPI targeted the survey to four nationality groups—three of the four largest Latino immigrant populations (Mexicans,

Dominicans, and Salvadorans)⁶ as well as Puerto Ricans. Although not immigrants because of the Jones Act, TRPI hypothesized that Puerto Ricans experience a political adaptation as migrants that parallels most experiences of immigrants. Puerto Ricans have, for the most part, been neglected in the scholarship on transnational politics. That said, they are U.S. citizens by birth and, consequently, are excluded from my analysis of U.S. naturalization propensity.⁷

The survey includes at least 400 respondents from each national origin group. In

U.S. Civic and Residential Attachment Among Contemporary Latino Migrants

I test the relationship between transnational political engagement and U.S. residential and civic attachments using multivariate models of this engagement. The first model tests for the predictors of engagement in at least one of seven U.S. civic organizations (a church, a labor union, a parent-teacher organization, a sports club, a fraternal order, a home-town association, or any other club). Approximately 28 percent of respondents reported *no* memberships in any of these organizations. This is a straightforward test of participation in organizations that immigrants can participate in regardless of legal status and that are reliable predictors of other forms of political activity. The second model tests for the predictors of intent to make a permanent home of the United States. Overall, approximately 61 percent of respondents reported that they did plan to make a permanent home of the United States. Although this is probably an underestimate of the actual long-term residential patterns of these migrants, it offers an indication of where immigrants see their long term future and captures a nascent sense of connection between immigrants and the United States, regardless of immigration status. Finally, the third model focuses on predictors of naturalization. Since naturalization is limited to permanent residents with five years of legal residence, I exclude respondents without legal status and permanent resident respondents with fewer than five years of permanent residence from this model. I also exclude Puerto Ricans. This diminishes the sample somewhat to 710. In the TRPI Immigrant Participation Survey, approximately 28 percent of residents from Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador reported that they were not permanent residents or naturalized U.S. citizens. Of the remainder, 62 percent were permanent residents and 38 percent had naturalized.

The models I tested included three components: respondent demographics, respondent immigration and settlement characteristics, and respondent transnational political engagement and evaluations of political opportunities in the United States and the sending country.

As I have indicated, demographic characteristics have long been known to influence naturalization and civic engagement. I include four demographic traits in this model: age⁹, education, household income, and gender. Based on the available scholarship, I anticipate that older, more educated, and higher income respondents are more likely to be civically engaged in the United States and to be naturalized. I would also expect these demographic characteristics to be positive predictors of intending to reside permanently in the United States, though there is no scholarship on this question to substantiate this expectation. Latina immigrants have been shown to be more likely to be engaged in community organizations and to pursue naturalization (Alvarez 1987, DeSipio 1996a; Pardo 1998).

I also control for the impact of several immigration and settlement-related characteristics: length of residence in the United States, respondent immigrant legal status, location of the respondent's immediate family, experience of discrimination in the United States, and country of origin. Based on the previous scholarship, I anticipate that migrants who have resided in the United States for longer periods will be more likely to be engaged in U.S. civic activity, more likely to anticipate spending their lives in the United States, and much more likely to be

⁹ As is the case in many surveys, a large share of respondents to the TRPI Immigrant Political Participation Survey fail to provide answers to some specific questions, particularly demographic questions on age and household income (14 percent and 16 percent, respectively). The final question that resulted in high non-response rates was year of initial migration to the United States (13 percent). As will be evident, these non-responses reduce the overall sample size by as much as one-third. It is reasonable to assume that these non-respondents are not randomly distributed. Assuming these respondents are similar to those of other surveys, higher income respondents and older respondents are more likely to be excluded. These respondents are generally more likely to have higher than average levels of civic engagement and naturalization rates. The respondents who did not offer year of initial immigration were more likely than average to report that they were neither permanent residents nor naturalized U.S. citizens. These respondents are generally less likely to have higher than average levels of civic engagement and would be ineligible for naturalization (and excluded from the model).

naturalized. Those with legal status or who had naturalized would also be more likely to be

Just 60 percent of Salvadorans had participated in transnational organizational activity in the year before the survey.

With the exception of following politics in the news, very few Latino immigrants engaged in transnational electoral or partisan activities. No more than one in nine, for example, had voted in home-country elections. Few had contributed money to candidates or parties in the home country, attended a rally in the United States for a home country party, or had been contacted by a representative of the home country to become engaged in home country political or cultural affairs. Overall, just 19 percent had participated in some electoral behavior in the country of origin since migration. Puerto Rican migrants and Dominican immigrants were the most likely to have participated in home-country electoral behaviors and Mexicans and Salvadorans were the least likely. Nearly 30 percent of Dominican immigrants had been electorally active in the Dominican Republic since immigration to the United States.

The final two variables in the model test respondents' perceptions of political opportunities in the United States and in the country of origin. The first is a question of how much influence the respondent perceives that s/he has on home country politics. I report it as a three-point scale from "none" to "a great deal." I include this as a control to make sure that the reported transnational behaviors do not over-signify a sense of influence. In other words, it is possible that immigrants who are engaged at home are doing so for family or social reasons and do not perceive their activities to be politically influential. Few respondents believe that they have no influence (less than 10 percent for each nationality group); the majority of each nationality group reports that they have "some" influence on the home nation. Between 24 percent (Puerto Ricans) and 36 percent (Salvadorans) perceive that they have "a great deal of influence."

that I am making between U.S. organizations and home country-focused organizations is not so rigid.

The factors shaping migrants' long-term intentions about whether to reside in the United States or the country of origins are shaped by a combination of immigration and transnational engagement factors. Demographic characteristics other than, possibly, age had little statistically significant impact on a reported intention to stay in the United States—each additional year of age increased the likelihood of reporting an intention to stay in the United States by about 1 percent in the specification of the model that excluded length of residence in the United States.

[Insert Table Two Here]

In terms of immigration characteristics, more recent immigration diminished the likelihood of reporting an intention to stay in the United States (each additional year reduced this likelihood by 4 percent), respondents with most of their family in the United States were more likely to report an intention to stay as were permanent residents and naturalized citizens relative to migrants without legal status. Salvadorans were more likely than Mexicans to report an intention to stay (by a factor of more than 1.5). Puerto Ricans and Dominicans were about half as likely as Mexicans to report an intention to stay in the United States. Perceived discrimination had no effect on residential intentions.

The transnational factors had a consistent impact. Respondents who reported engagement in home-country electoral activities were approximately 25 percent less likely than those who did not to report an intention to stay in the United States permanently. Involvement in home country organizational activities was signed negatively, but did not achieve statistical significance. Respondents who perceived that they had more political influence in the United States were more likely to report an intention to remain in the United States permanently.

Because expectations about long-term residential patterns are so strongly shaped by one factor—

in the other models, this finding should offer some solace to critics of U.S. naturalization policy. Immigrants who naturalize are distinguished from those who do not based on individual characteristics and their family relationships (as has, arguably, always been the case) rather than because of newly emerging relationships with their countries of origin.

For reasons discussed earlier, I tested a second specification of the model excluding year of immigration. As with the second specification of the residential intentions models, this specification had less overall predictive value. In this model, age attained statistical significance. The highest level of education remains significant, though the coefficient of the variable declined

organizationally active are likely to be active in many arenas. Finally, transnational engagement does shape naturalization propensity, but in a civically encouraging manner. Those who feel the most influence in the United States are the most likely to have naturalized. This indicates that there remains a political dimension to decisions to naturalize. Home country electoral or organizational involvement are not statistically valid predictors of naturalization suggesting the Latino immigrants are not using transnational opportunities in ways that some scholars anticipate of a fully realized dual citizenship.

The final lesson of this survey of Latino immigrant transnational attitudes and behaviors is that this new set of resources for immigrant politics must be accounted for as scholars continue to analyze the contemporary process of immigrant incorporation in the United States. The contemporary scholarship analyzes the story of immigrant social and political adaptation as one that occurs primarily in the United States. While transnationalism is the exception in immigrant communities today, and will probably remain so in the future, it nevertheless offers an opportunity (and a new one, for the mass of immigrants) for political socialization and an outlet for individuals' civic energies. As the number of immigrants grows and the concentrations of immigrants from specific parts of the world deepen, it is likely that some will have political experiences shaped by a transnational engagement that are distinct from the majority and that these engagements will lead them to different political and civic outcomes. As the data here suggest, that difference can serve as an encouragement to increase connections to the United States and to U.S. civic institutions. It is also possible, however, to envision a scenario where these transnational engagements act as a further barrier to informal and formal connections between immigrants and U.S. politics.

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Table One. Predictors of Respondents' Involvement in U.S. Organizations.

Independent Variable	Odds Ratio	<i>SE</i>
<i>Demographics</i>		
Age	0.998	0.008

Table Two. Predictors of Respondents' Prediction of Long Term Residence—Home Country or the United States.

Table Three. Predictors of Respondent Naturalization (Among Legal Permanent Residents with Five or More Years of Residence).

Independent Variable	Full Model		Model Excluding Length of Residence	
	Odds Ratio	SE	Odds Ratio	SE
Demographics				
Age	1.008	0.011	1.051***	0.008
Education (Grade School or Less)				
Some high school	1.565**	0.305	1.406	0.273
HS graduate	1.931*	0.349	1.491	0.298
Post-high school	3.827***	0.345	3.048***	0.301
Household Income	1.000***	0.000	1.000***	0.000
Gender (Men as control)	1.712**	0.224	1.548**	0.197
Immigration Characteristics				
Year of immigration	0.879***	0.018	Excluded	
Location of family (Most in home country)				
Equally divided	1.494	0.316	2.086***	0.280
Most in United States	1.693*	0.317	3.234***	0.279
Country of Birth (Mexico)				
El Salvador	1.105	0.289	0.641*	0.251
Dominican Republic	1.219	0.298	0.729	0.256
Experience of discrimination in U.S.	1.081	0.245	1.152	0.213
Transnational Political Engagement				
Home country electoral behaviors	1.067	0.220	0.989	0.196
Home country org. behaviors	0.965	0.099	0.770	0.085
Home country political influence (none)				
Some	0.887	0.365	0.699	0.332
A great deal	1.261	0.386	0.835	0.349
Where does respondent have more influence (home country)				
About the same	0.884	0.343	0.948	0.303
More in the United States	1.787*	0.304	1.949**	0.266
Constant	(B)252.177***	36.181	(B)-4.505***	0.685
Total cases	546		611	
Predicted correctly	74.0%		72.8%	
	R ² =.384		R ² =.269	

Key: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.10$.

Source: The TRPI Immigrant Political Participation Survey, 2002.