

Making the connection: Latino immigrants and their cross-border ties

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Abstract

This paper uses the Pew Hispanic Center's 2006 National Survey of Latinos to study the everyday, routine cross-border activities of travel, remittance sending and telephone communication among Latin American immigrants in the United States. We ask how migrants vary in the intensity of their cross-border connections, distinguishing among the transmigrants, those captured by the host-country national social field, and those who maintain some ongoing home-country tie. We then examine the characteristics associated both with variations in the intensity of connectedness and with each specific type of connection. We show that most migrants maintain *some* degree of home-country connectedness, with a minority severing ties and a still smaller minority maintaining ties at a high degree of intensity. Connectivity is highly responsive to the location of key social ties, acculturation, and citizenship status, as well as the costs associated with the different types of cross-border activity.

Keywords: Transnationalism; immigration; cross-border activities; remittances; assimilation; return visits.

Immigrants were once known as 'the uprooted'. Later they were called the 'transplanted', reflecting the new, scholarly appreciation of the ways in which social networks lubricated migration. Today, with scholars agreeing that international migration generates ideas, goods, and civil and political engagements spilling across national boundaries, 'transnational' is the concept more likely to be invoked.

If migration recurrently yields cross-border ties, the questions of how to understand those connections and the factors that sustain them remain a matter of considerable dispute. One view, introduced by the

anthropologists who launched the transnational perspective, focused attention on the 'transmigrants': those movers who 'develop and maintain multiple relations – familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that span borders' (Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1992, p. 1). By contrast, other migrants were seen either as sojourners, returning home for good after a stint abroad, or as conventional immigrants, cutting off ties from those left behind. Writing more than a decade after a transnational perspective on migration had become well established, Glick Schiller insisted that 'distinguishing transmigrants from migrants who have very different experiences of connection and incorporation has proven useful', contrasting those who are 'truly immigrants, cutting their ties and refusing to look behind them' with the transmigrants who 'live their lives across borders, participating simultaneously in social relations that embed them in more than one nation-state' (Glick Schiller 2003, pp. 105–6).

Though differing from the anthropologists on methodological grounds, Portes and his collaborators similarly emphasized the bounded nature of the group involved in host-home interactions: 'it is the rise of a new class of immigrants, economic entrepreneurs or political activists who conduct cross-border activities on a *regular* basis, that lies at the core of the phenomenon' (Guarnizo, Portes and Haller 2003, p. 1213, first emphasis added). Consequently, these scholars focused on institutionalized cross-border activities engaging a selective minority, as among political activists or entrepreneurs. Other immigrant cross-border activities fell out of view, characterized as 'occasional ... neither novel enough, nor sufficiently distinct, to justify a new area of investigation' (Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt 1999, p. 219).

Defining transnationalism narrowly and focusing on the relatively small group of 'transmigrants' maintaining regular home country connections ironically heralds the 'transnationals' as a distinct, new class of migrants and yet moves transnationalism to the periphery of the migrant experience. By drawing hard lines between the 'transmigrants' and the much larger, migrant rank and file, scholars also miss the pervasive nature of the everyday cross-border activities entailed in travel, communication and remittance-sending. These periodic, but large-scale exchanges also swell the size of the market, lowering the cost and increasing the convenience of maintaining home society ties and providing the infrastructure on which any 'transmigrant' activists or entrepreneurs might depend.

The competing formulation of 'transnational social field' more successfully captures this broad range of cross-border activities. Defined as a set of interlocking networks across national boundaries, this concept moves 'beyond the direct experience of migration into domains of interaction where individuals who do not move themselves maintain social relations across borders' such that individuals 'with

direct connections to migrants will connect with those who do not' (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, p. 1009). Although this formulation frames the concept in sending society terms, it can easily be extended to the receiving society context: since migrants engaged in intense, ongoing cross-border connections will be the neighbours, friends or acquaintances of migrants engaged in more occasional or evanescent contacts, high densities of migrants with *varying* degrees of home-country connectedness can facilitate connections for any and all that might be interested. Consequently, the transnational social field will encompass many different cross-border practices, including highly institutionalized, recurrent activities as well as 'broader' cross-border practices involving 'only sporadic physical movement ... a low level of institutionalization, or just occasional personal involvement' (Itzigsohn *et al.* 1999, p. 323).

While usefully directing attention to a broader range of ongoing cross-border activities, the concept of 'transnational social field' leaves those activities, and the migrants who sustain them, undifferentiated. First, the intensely connected themselves engage in cross-border activities of a varied sort: sometimes cultural, sometimes economic and sometimes political (Levitt 2001). Second, cross-border social connections are unlikely to be maintained in uniform fashion: some will send remittances; others may travel; others will stay in touch by phone. Yet which types of migrants will engage in which types of activities remains largely unstudied, as does the question of which of activities get packaged together.

Though the transnational social field encompasses migrants with both direct and indirect ties to the stay-at-homes, *some* migrants are likely to detach. As pointed out by Levitt and Glick Schiller, transnational social fields coexist with 'national social fields ... that stay within national boundaries' (2004, p. 1009). Contending that neither domain is 'privileged', Levitt and Glick Schiller also recommend that 'ascertaining the relative importance of nationally restricted and transnational social fields should be a matter of empirical analysis' (2004, p. 1009). To date, that agenda is a matter of exhortation, not implementation: the literature has yet to determine how many migrants, and of what sort, fall out of the 'transnational social field'. Furthermore, the concept is descriptive, furnishing a characterization of the immigrant social world, without providing a framework that would illuminate the factors retaining immigrants within the transnational social field or instead connecting them to the national social field.

These are the questions pursued in this paper, using the Pew Hispanic Center's 2006 National Survey of Latinos to study the everyday, routine cross-border activities of travel, remittance sending and telephone communication. We ask how migrants vary in the intensity of their cross-border connections, distinguishing among the

transmigrants, those captured by the host-country national social field, and those who maintain some ongoing home-country tie. We then examine the characteristics associated both with variations in the intensity of connectedness and with each specific type of connection.

The conditions of cross-border activity

Assimilation

At its inception, transnationalism was posed as an alternative to assimilation. Later, scholars concluded that assimilation and transnationalism might in fact be compatible. Understood as a 'decline in an ethnic difference' (Alba and Nee 2003), assimilation *could* shift identifications and attachments from home to host country, thereby weakening home-country involvement; on the other hand, by yielding incorporation, whether entailing socio-economic mobility or access to citizenship, it could also provide the resources needed to maintain ongoing cross-border activities (Portes 2003).

Settlement

Settlement is distinct from assimilation, referring to the locus of key social relationships. As argued by Piore (1979), and later demonstrated by Massey *et al.* (1987), settlement transfers social relations from home to host societies, moving members of a migrant's key network from a place where costs are low to one where costs are high. Consequently, disposable resources that can be sent back across the territorial boundary dwindle; the migrants' standards of consumption rise as their expectations converge with levels prevailing in the place where they reside. As demands for on-site consumption grow, providing the stay-at-homes with financial support becomes a source of growing strain. Settlement therefore focuses activities on the receiving country, while diminishing the frequency of cross-state interactions.

Politics and policy

The distinctively political nature of international migration speeds this transition. Policies designed to control migration often deter return movements, paradoxically hastening settlement. Legal status is a crucial factor conditioning migrants' *physical* ability to 'live lives across borders', and all the more so given the intensified border controls put in place since the turn of the twenty-first century. In moving to a new jurisdiction, immigrants encounter an institutional environment encouraging engagement with the receiving state and, in

particular, the acquisition of host-society citizenship. While citizenship yields unconstrained movement across borders, it may also generate broader engagements with the host country and its institutions, thereby speeding the decline of home-country connections.

Acculturation

The ability to communicate shared meanings and taken-for-granted understandings is likely to be a precondition of recurring and sustained cross-border contact. While the foreign-born tend to add competence in the new language to their existing competence in the native, some shift to the dominant tongue. Moreover, immigrants inevitably pick up the everyday habits and tools that make it easier to fit into the new environment, as well as host-country values and expectations; in turn, these can disrupt taken-for-granted understandings, even when the technical ability to communicate in the mother tongue persists.

Technology

Many analysts insist that the technological changes of the current age of mass migration 'permit easier and more intimate connections' among migrants and stay-behinds (Levitt 2001, p. 22), thereby providing 'the basis for the emergence of transnationalism on a mass scale' (Portes *et al.* 1999, p. 223). Thanks to such innovations as the low-cost calling card, the volume of international telecommunications has increased exponentially; likewise, air travel between the US and key emigration countries has boomed. On the other hand, access is unevenly spread. In the United States, Latinos are much less likely than Whites to use the internet, with still lower levels among the Spanish dominant. In Latin American sending societies, telephone service is generally widely available but sparse in Cuba and in rural Mexico. Moreover, telephone service is cheap, but air travel requires both significant resources, a likely constraint for many low-income migrants, and tight identification requirements which may put it off limits for those without legal status. Last, the impacts of technological change may differ, depending on the type of activity involved: 'time-space compression' technologies can reduce the cost of communication, but not offset the costs entailed in sending remittances, which have to be subtracted from ongoing consumption.

Summary and hypotheses

As students of transnationalism rightly remark, international migration inherently generates spill-overs that connect migrants to the stay-at-homes.

However, migrants subsequently undergo contradictory pressures that both sustain *and* attenuate those ties, while also affecting the mix of cross-border activities in different ways.

On the one hand, telecommunications technology provides easy and cheap connectivity for virtually all immigrants. Moreover, by moving to a rich country migrants gain access to resources that can make a difference to their significant others remaining at home. Commonly deployed survival strategies allow poorly paid and recently arrived migrants to save some portion of their earnings for transmission back home. Access to secure legal status facilitates travel for those who successfully gain incorporation.

On the other hand, many forms of cross-border engagement involve significant costs, reducing the population motivated or able to keep up cross-border ties. Likewise, resource constraints will compel many of those committed to ongoing cross-border ties to pick among available options. The relocation of social ties from home to host societies and the adoption of preferences and behaviours that diverge from home-country patterns further reduce the motivation to invest in home-country connections, as on-site consumption absorbs an increasing proportion of disposable income. Moreover, the full array of cross-border connections is limited to those migrants equipped both with the material resources *and* the legal entitlements that allow them to move back and forth across borders as they choose. As acquisition of citizenship is a process that often occurs after loyalties and key social ties have shifted to the host country, migration control policies limit the potential for face-to-face contact among precisely those migrants with the strongest home country commitments. Finally acculturation distances the migrants from the stay-at-homes; with shifts in language use changing both the means and meanings of communication, the benefits to cross-border connectivity also drop.

In this light, we hypothesize that:

1. The modal immigrant maintains *some* degree of home-country connectedness, having neither lost home-country ties nor maintaining the type of intense connections characteristic of the 'transmigrants'.
2. As everyday cross-border activities are resource-absorbing, they are unlikely all to be complementary; in particular, migrants are least likely to maintain costlier activities simultaneously.
3. The correlates of everyday cross-border engagement vary from one activity to another, reflecting the distinctive mix of costs and benefits entailed in each activity as well as the specific constraints that a migrant faces.
4. While migrants are likely to *combine* home- *and* host-country attachments, the constraints on home-country connections will

circumscribe the size of the 'transnational social field', leading some migrants – most notably, the most acculturated, longest settled and most integrated into the host-country polity (via citizenship acquisition) – to restrict activities to the 'national social field', while sharply constraining the number of migrants who engage in cross-border activities of high intensity.

Data and correction

We now move to our analysis of the Pew Hispanic Center's 2006 National Survey of Latinos, conducted by telephone from 5 June to 3 July 2006, among a nationally representative sample of 2,000 Hispanic adults, who could choose to be interviewed in English or Spanish. Our analysis focuses on the 1,429 foreign-born respondents. The survey employed a stratified RDD sample design, including over-samples of Salvadorans, Dominicans, Colombians and Cubans; the data are weighted to reflect the actual distribution among Latino adults by country of origin, age, sex, region and year of arrival in the United States.

Table 1 shows the unweighted count of *all* respondents (including US-, Puerto Rico- and foreign-born) as well as counts for the five largest nationality groups represented in the survey and on which we subsequently focus: Mexicans, Cubans, Dominicans, Salvadorans, Colombians, (listed in order of their size in the sample). Comprising the major streams of Latin American migration to the United States, each is distinct, both with respect to history and organization of the migration stream.

As is the case with most surveys, values were missing on some variables. Non-response was very limited on the key dependent

Table 1. Breakdown of sample by national origin

Country of origin	Count	Percentage unweighted	Percentage weighted	Percentage weighted – all foreign-born
Mexico	513	26	36	66
Cuba	203	10	2	4
Dominican Republic	151	8	2	4
El Salvador	109	5	3	5
Colombia	93	5	2	4
Other	360	18	9	17
Total foreign-born	1,429	71	55	100
Born in US or Puerto Rico	571	29	45	
Total	2,000	100	100	

variables and most independent variables – between 2 and 5 per cent. However, reflecting the prevailing pattern, almost one-third of the respondents refused to answer the question about family income. To maintain sample size and avoid bias we use multiple imputation which is now the statisticians' preferred method for handling missing data. Using the ICE package written by Patrick Royston (2007) we created ten imputed datasets.

Measuring cross-border activities

The 2006 National Survey of Latinos was specifically designed to collect information on a variety of cross-border activities. We focus on three, routine cross-border activities: travel, the sending of remittances and telephone communication.

- *Travel to home country*: The survey asked respondents: 'When did you last travel to your country of origin?' with answers recorded in months and years. We recoded this information to create a dichotomous variable identifying those people who travelled to the country at some point within the previous twenty-four months.
- *Remittances*: The survey asked whether respondents sent money to anyone in the country of origin during the prior year, yielding a dichotomous variable.
- *Telephone communication*: Respondents were asked how frequently they spoke by telephone with friends or family in the country of origin. We recoded the variable to four levels: those who call weekly or more often, those who call monthly, those who call occasionally and those who rarely or never call anyone in their country of origin.

As discussed above the literature has been less interested in these routine cross-border activities than in persons engaged in regular and recurrent cross-border activities. But, as also noted, separating out the 'transmigrants' does not exhaust the range of possibilities, since some migrants maintain at least some degree of homeland connectedness while others seem largely or entirely cut off from home-community ties. Pulling together the information on the three types of cross-border activities described above, we group respondents into three mutually exclusive categories, classifying them by intensity of cross-border engagement.

- The '*transmigrants*' are those with the most intense cross-border connections. These are respondents who engaged in all three of the activities: they sent remittances within the past year, call

persons in the home country at least once a week and engaged in recent travel to the home country.

- The '*bordered*' are respondents who have dropped out of all three forms of regular and recent cross-border exchange: they called relatives and friends *less* frequently than once a month; they did *not* send remittances; and they had *not* travelled recently.
- The '*connected*' are those in between the two extremes. This category groups all who engaged in *at least one* of the three main activities we defined, but *not* all three.

As Table 2 shows, *some* form of cross-border activity is common.¹ Calling is the most frequent and prevalent activity: 42 per cent call weekly and roughly another quarter calling monthly. Fifty-two per cent sent money home in the prior year, an impressive proportion considering the modesty of family incomes (sixty-three per cent of those providing income data were in households where income was \$30,000 or less). Recent travel is least common: 21 per cent travelled home within the twelve months prior to the survey and another 12 per cent made a trip in the prior year. On the other hand, given the time, costs and legal restrictions entailed in travel, these self-reports again point to a willingness to commit resources in order to maintain ongoing home-country contacts.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for dependent variables

	Percentage (unweighted)	Percentage weighted	Missing	Imputed dataset weighted
<i>Remitting</i>				
Remitted in last year	54	52	1	53
<i>How often phones home</i>			3	
Weekly	42	42		42
Monthly	25	24		24
Less than monthly	8	10		10
Never/almost never	22	24		24
<i>When last travelled to home country</i>			6	
Past 12 months	17	20		20
Prior year	11	12		12
<i>Type of migrants</i>			4	
Bordered	18	20		20
Connected	68	71		71
Transmigrant	10	10		10

Consequently, the great majority of respondents – almost 71 per cent – qualify as ‘the connected’, undertaking at least one of these activities, but not all three. By contrast, not quite 20 per cent of the sample falls into our category of the ‘bordered’, consisting of persons who neither sent remittances in the prior year, nor travelled at least once in the prior two years, nor call monthly or weekly. The ‘transmigrants’, defined as those who engaged in all three activities, represent a still smaller minority, accounting for 10 per cent.

Patterns of cross-border activity

To explore how cross-border activities might be combined we calculated the correlations² between the different cross-border activities of migrants for the sample overall and broken down by country of origin. As Table 3 shows, there is *no* correlation between remitting and recent travel to the country of origin: the estimate in the overall sample is close to zero. Disaggregating by country shows small to moderate positive correlations between remitting and travel among Cuban and Dominican migrants; due to small sample size, the standard errors are too large to allow substantive conclusions. By contrast, among Salvadorans the relationship is negative, though the standard error is almost the same magnitude as the coefficient. In contrast the frequency of phone calls to the country of origin is significantly and positively correlated to both remitting *and* recent travel, a pattern that holds for the overall sample as well as for each national origin group.

These correlations suggest that the simple telephone call, like the letter during the heyday of trans-Atlantic migration, plays a central role for the majority of migrants. Moreover, phoning complements remitting and travelling: those who send money home regularly will want to know that their remittances have been received by their intended recipients (and are also likely to have an interest in how those

funds are spent); those who travel home frequently will likely use the phone to coordinate trips with the significant others still in the home country. As phone calls are cheap, phoning and maintaining one other form of cross-border activity entails little trade-off. By contrast, remitting and travel are resource-taxing activities, which is why opting to pursue one activity is likely to preclude the other. In the next section we analyse the determinants of these three cross-border activities, which gives some insight into the specific factors driving this trade-off.

The determinants of cross-border activity

This initial assessment suggests that each type of cross-border activity is likely to be associated with a different set of migrant characteristics: frequent phoning is less selective than either frequent travel or frequent remitting; furthermore, frequent travel and frequent remitting tend to be mutually exclusive. In this section, we move to multivariate analysis to estimate how different aspects of settlement, assimilation and acculturation are related to, first, the different types of cross-border activity and, second, differences in the intensity of the overall cross-border connection.

Independent variables

We use the information on time since migration, settlement, acculturation and legal status, along with select demographic and socio-economic variables available in the survey, to model the probability of engaging in each of the three activities and the probability of falling into one of the three categories of trans-border engagement we defined.³

Assimilation. We index this concept using information on years of residence in the United States; while we note that the concept is multi-dimensional, years of residence yields a strong influence on all aspects of assimilation and thus serves as an appropriate indicator. We include the squared term to allow for the possibility of a non-linear relationship. We also add a dummy variable for persons who came to the United States at the age of 12 or younger, to allow for the possibility that the impact of residence takes a different form among child immigrants.

Settlement. We operationalize settlement with two variables indexing the location of personal or material commitments: the place of residence of respondents’ children and property ownership in the country of origin. We create variables that indicate whether the respondent has any children living in the home country and an indicator for persons owning property in the country of origin.

Table 3. Polychoric correlations between cross-border activities

	Remit/travel		Remit/calls		Calls/travel	
	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Sample Overall	0.02	(.05)	0.51	(.03)	0.30	(.04)
Mexico	0.05	(.07)	0.51	(.05)	0.12	(.06)
Cuba	0.25	(.16)	0.63	(.07)	0.38	(.11)
Dominican Republic	0.11	(.13)	0.34	(.11)	0.48	(.10)
El Salvador	-0.27	(.18)	0.55	(.11)	0.19	(.14)
Columbia	0.00	(.17)	0.52	(.12)	0.48	(.13)
Other Country	-0.15	(.09)	0.45	(.06)	0.15	(.08)

Acculturation. We operationalize acculturation with two indicators. To capture language use, we draw on responses from four questions regarding reading and speaking ability in Spanish and English. We classify respondents by language ability, distinguishing bilinguals from English dominants and from Spanish dominants (the omitted category). We defined as English dominant those who were interviewed either fully or mostly in English and who spoke Spanish less than very well. Bilinguals were those who speak both languages 'very well' and who can read at least 'pretty well' in both languages. To capture other cultural changes induced by residence in the United States, we used data on media exposure, classifying respondents who received *all* of their news in English as 'English media users'; those who received *all* of their news exclusively in Spanish only as Spanish media users; and those consuming news in both languages in a third, residual category.

Legal status and incorporation. While unauthorized migrants represent a large proportion of the foreign-born population, the Pew Hispanic survey did not inquire into legal status. However, the survey did ask about acquisition of US citizenship, yielding a dichotomy coded 1 for naturalized US citizens, 0 for all others.

Social and economic resources. Higher levels of education and income may yield direct effects on resource-demanding cross-border connections or indirect effects on those aspects related to knowledge of technology or access to bureaucratically controlled resources, such as citizenship. The regressions enter education as a set of dummy variables (primary – the omitted category, some high school, high school degree, some college or vocational training, college degree and higher). Data on income were collected in categorical form, with an initial query to identify broad income categories, followed by more specific prompts. We created three dummy variables of low, lower-middle, upper-middle income – omitting low income (the modal category) from the regressions.

Some prior research points to a relationship between employment type and cross-border involvement: Portes, Guarnizo and Haller (2002) found that entrepreneurs were significantly more likely than the employed to meet their definition of transnationalism. We used information on employment status to divide the sample into four categories: those unemployed or not in the labour force (omitted), students, employed wage and salary workers and the self-employed.

Other demographic characteristics. As previous research, focusing on more institutionalized activities involved in politics and entrepreneurship, has found that men are more likely than women to engage in cross-border activities, we control for gender. We also control for age to adjust for potential differences in the age composition of migration streams.

Analysis and results

For remitting and recent travel, dependent variables that are both dichotomous, we use logistic regression. We model the frequency of phone calls home (ranging from never to weekly) with an ordinal logistic regression model. We use a multinomial logistic model to estimate how our independent variables influence the probability of a migrant falling into one of the three categories – 'bordered,' 'connected', 'transnational'.

Since the coefficients of discrete regression models cannot be easily interpreted in a substantive way, we present results as changes in predicted probabilities.⁴ As the link-functions of these models are non-linear, the point at which we evaluate changes in predicted probabilities also matters. Following convention we present all changes relative to a 'typical migrant' having the most frequent value or the central value (mode for categorical variables, median for all others) for each independent variable. Table 4 summarizes the predicted probabilities corresponding to changes in those independent variables that are theoretically interesting and for which the coefficients are statistically significant at the 10 per cent level or higher.

The first row of Table 4 shows predicted probabilities of the four dependent variables for the typical migrant: a married, employed, 39-year-old, Spanish-dominant, primary-schooled, Mexican-born woman without children or property in the home country, residing in the United States for fifteen years, still possessing Mexican citizenship and living in a household where annual income is under \$30,000. Our model predicts a .45 probability that this migrant remitted in the prior year (implying that the typical migrant was more likely *not* to send home money than to remit). By contrast, this typical migrant was less likely to have travelled back to Mexico at some point in the prior *two* years. That same migrant was still less likely to call Mexico at least once a week. Not surprisingly, given the fall-off from remitting to travelling to calling, this typical migrant had a very low probability of falling into the 'transnational' category. Rather, this typical migrant was very likely to belong to the ranks of the connected, maintaining at least one ongoing cross-border tie.

In the discussion below, we examine the effects of the independent variables, varying one characteristic while retaining all other 'typical' traits. Consequently, the 'typical Salvadoran' immigrant is *not* 'typical' of Salvadoran immigrants, but is rather a Salvadoran *all* of whose other traits (married, female, primary schooled, etc.) *are* 'typical' for the sample as a whole. Similarly, the 'typical bilingual' is a primary-schooled, 39-year-old Mexican woman, etc., who, however, is bilingual, rather than being Spanish dominant.

Table 4. Predicted probabilities for changes in select independent variables

	Frequency of calls				Type of migrant		
	Remit	Recent travel	Calls weekly	Calls never/rarely	Bordered	Connected	Trans-migrant
Typical migrant (Mexico)	.45	.30	.27	.29	.14	.82	.04
Ctry: Cuba		.05	.18	.41	.14	.86	.00
Dominican Republic	.57		.47	.15	.06	.90	.05
El Salvador	.72	.14					
Colombia	.62		.52	.12	.05	.87	.08
Male	.54						
Age (10 yrs younger)	.53	.25	.33	.35			
Child-migrant			.14	.48			
Yrs in US (10 yrs less)	.48	.23	.39	.19	.08	.89	.03
Citizen	.59				.15	.77	.08
Children abroad	.57		.63	.08	.06	.84	.09
Property in HC	.56		.42	.17	.08	.84	.07
Lang.: Bilingual	.26	.22	.19	.39	.22	.76	.02
Engl. Dominant	.17	.07	.09	.62	.38	.61	.01

Country of origin

Net of controls, we find significant differences in the level of specific cross-border activities between migrants from different countries. These country-of-origin variables capture the ways in which the political context and the history and circumstances of migration shape cross-border connections.

In many respects, the predicted probabilities converge with our expectations: Cubans and Salvadorans, both of whom face significant legal hurdles to travel, are less likely to have undertaken recent travel home than migrants from Mexico or the Dominican Republic. In the case of Salvadorans the fact that many of the immigrants arrived in the United States as unauthorized immigrants makes crossing the border a risky endeavour; in the case of Cubans, travel home, while legal, is tightly restricted.

Country rankings also vary across activities. Though the least likely to travel and to call home, the typical Cuban migrant was *not* significantly less likely to have remitted than the typical Mexican. The typical Colombian and typical Dominican migrant was no more or less likely to travel home than the typical Mexican migrant. However, the former two were much more likely than the typical Mexican migrant to call home weekly and were also much *less* likely never to call home. In addition, they were somewhat more likely to have remitted in the prior year. As compared to the typical Mexican migrant, the typical Salvadoran was much more likely (by almost 30 percentage points) to have sent home remittances within the prior two years.

Regardless of national origin, the typical migrant is likely to fall into the category of the 'connected', maintaining some type of cross-border involvement, but not all three. By contrast, falling into the transnational category is a highly improbable outcome: though twice as likely to occur among Colombians as among Mexicans, in no case is it common. Cubans, confronting high obstacles to travel, have an extremely low probability (practically 0) of falling into the category of transmigrants. However, even for this group, falling out of the cross-border connection altogether is no more likely than for the typical migrant. Net of controls, Dominicans and Colombians are the least likely to fall into the 'bordered' category.

Assimilation

Accounts of institutionalized forms of cross-border activity (whether socio-cultural or economic) contend that transnational activity is most common among well-established immigrants, whose years of residence

in the host country have generated the resources and given them the skills needed to maintain involvements in two societies.

Our analysis of everyday cross-border activities does not support this point of view. Figure 1 displays the marginal effect of length of stay in the US on the three activities we analysed. We see that both the frequency of phone calls home and the probability of remitting decline with length of stay, with phone calls declining steeply in early years and bottoming out with extended US residence. In contrast, the probability of recent travel, on the other hand, increases in the first fifteen to twenty years of residence and then declines.

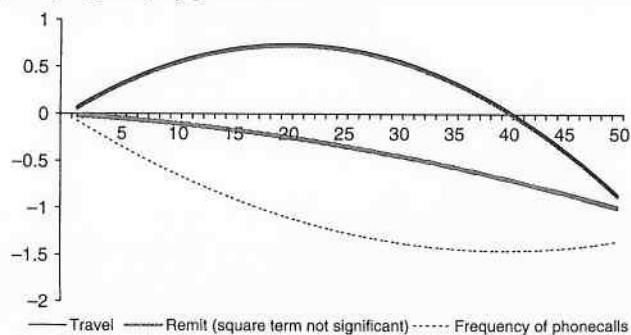
As shown in Table 4 an otherwise typical migrant with only five years (instead of fifteen) of residence in the United States has a slightly *higher* probability of remitting than her more settled counterpart and is also a good deal more likely to call home weekly. However she is *less* likely by 5 percentage points to have travelled back to Mexico at some point in the prior two years. This finding probably reflects the fact that the most recently arrived immigrants are also the most likely to be unauthorized, thus making border-crossing a risky endeavour.

Migrants who came as children to the US remit and travel in ways that are no different from their counterparts; however, they are much less likely to call weekly and much more likely to never call at all. Indeed, the typical child migrant is more likely to never call than to call at least once during the prior year.

Acculturation

Our models strongly suggest that acculturation weakens home-country ties, though largely through changes in language use, rather than media consumption, which yields no significant effects. Across the board, cross-border activities are far less likely among English dominants than among Spanish dominants holding other variables

Figure 1. Marginal effect of years in US on probability of recent travel, remitting and frequency of phone calls



constant. Remitting, for example, is an unlikely occurrence among the English dominants, as our model predicts a probability of .17. Disengagement, by contrast, is common: though calling home is virtually costless, the typical English dominant is likely *never* to call home ($p = .62$). While just 3 per cent of the sample is English dominant, a much larger proportion (15 per cent) are bilinguals, reporting proficiency in both Spanish and English. In their cross-border engagements, these bilingual respondents resemble their English dominant counterparts, a pattern that is all the more interesting given the view that bilingualism facilitates the retention of home-country and ethnic ties. While not quite as disengaged as the English dominants, the bilinguals are consistently less likely than the Spanish dominants to keep up home-country connections. Thus, our model predicts a .26 probability of remitting for the bilinguals, as opposed to a .45 probability for the otherwise similar Spanish dominant; similarly, the bilinguals are 10 percentage points more likely *never* to call home.

Not surprisingly, language use yields very powerful effects on our measures of the intensity of home-country connections. As opposed to the typical migrant, for whom our model predicts a .14 probability of falling into the bordered category, the otherwise comparable English dominant migrant has a .38 probability of falling into that category. While bilinguals are more likely to retain some connection, the probability of falling into the 'bordered' category is close to one in four.

Settlement

Migrants with key engagements located in the home country are generally, though not consistently, more likely to engage in cross-border activities. Migrants with a child still in the home country are more likely to remit and also to call weekly than the otherwise comparable migrant whose child lives in the United States. A very similar pattern holds for the migrant owning property (though without the equally strong probability of calling weekly). Surprisingly, however, neither property owners nor persons with children still abroad are more likely to travel home than is the typical migrant. This pattern may again reflect differences in legal status, as persons with ongoing home-country engagements are most likely to be undocumented; however, we cannot accurately measure this possibility with this survey.

Those impediments notwithstanding, migrants with children or property in the home country are about twice as likely to be transmigrants as the typical migrant. Nonetheless, as the probability of recent travel is only one in three: persons with children or property

in the home country are much like the typical migrant in the probability of falling into the category of the 'connected'.

Socio-economic resources

Previous research suggested that entrepreneurs are more likely to be transmigrants. For example, Portes, Guarnizo and Haller (2002, p. 285) found that only 5 per cent of the total CEIP sample qualified as transmigrants according to their definition, but that 58 per cent of the self-employed did. In our models, self-employment was *not* associated with any type of cross-border activity even though approximately 13 per cent of the foreign-born described themselves as self-employed. Similarly, we found no systematic association between income and cross-border activity.

Citizenship

Contrary to our expectations, citizenship yielded effects on only one activity: remitting. Naturalized citizens were actually more likely to send money home than those who had not obtained US citizenship. On the other hand, citizenship paradoxically *increases* the probability of falling into the categories of *both* the 'transmigrants' and the 'bordered'. As noted earlier, this survey did not involve any additional inquiries into the legal status of non-citizen respondents, thus preventing us from comparing non-citizens across legal statuses or some proxy for those characteristics (for example, those applying for citizenship versus those who are not). We suspect that controlling for differences of these sorts would yield different results, but, given the data at hand, we can only speculate.

Demographic controls: gender and age

In contrast to the typical migrant – a woman – an otherwise comparable man is more likely to send home remittances; we find no other differences between the two genders. Age yields inconsistent effects, as younger migrants are more likely to remit and more likely to call weekly than their older counterparts, but less likely to travel and *more* likely to never call. However, neither age nor gender affects our measures of the overall intensity of the homeland connection.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper uses data from a recent, nationally representative survey of Latin American immigrants to examine patterns and determinants of cross-border activity. While 'the uprooted' is clearly not the right way

to describe today's immigrants, our analysis shows that applying the label of 'transnational' does no better in capturing the social reality of migrants' cross-border ties. Though ongoing home-country connections are a salient aspect of the immigrant phenomenon, the proportion 'living lives across borders' is small. For the 'typical' Latin American immigrant in our sample – a Spanish-dominant Mexican woman, residing in the United States for fifteen years – the probability of remitting in the prior year, travelling at some point in the prior two years and calling home weekly was .04. A few selected traits – being Colombian, being a US citizen, having a child or owning property at home – increased the likelihood of maintaining these regular and recurrent cross-border activities, but in no case did the probability rise above one in ten.

Rather, the typical migrant is 'connected': the probability of *selectively* maintaining *some* form of ongoing home country activity is .81. Various factors lower or increase the probability of keeping up these selective connections, but generally the impacts are slight. Only in the case of bilingual and English-dominant respondents does connectivity seriously erode; even so, the English-dominant respondent, of whom there are very few, is more likely to fall into the connected category than either of the two alternatives.

Thus, in many ways, the concept of transnational social field provides an accurate characterization of the social world of contemporary Latin American immigrants: the typical migrant is keeping up at least *some* home-country connection, a pattern that makes it easier for others to do the same. Just how this social field may be structured and delimited, however, are matters that prior researchers have not explored. This paper fills that lacuna.

Examining the correlations among the three types of cross-border activities, we highlighted the central role of the simple telephone call that typically accompanies both remitting *and* travel back home. However remitting and travel are not systematically correlated; in general, the choice as to whether to travel or remit appears to entail a significant trade-off.

Thus, migrants seem to be picking and choosing among possible cross-border activities; moreover, the transnational social field does not seem to be all encompassing. Rather, responses to the survey show that the national social field both impinges on the capacity to maintain ongoing home country ties and *selectively* pulls migrants out of the home-country connection altogether. Migrants are a good deal more likely to be bordered than to be transnational, both before and after controls. As indicated by the data on travel, regular face-to-face contact – the type of cross-border activity most likely to reinforce ties between migrants and stay-at-homes experiencing very different realities – is difficult to sustain, as the probability of a recent trip is .32. Though there is a lot

of cross-border communicating, the survey shows that everyday contacts falter, even though telephone communication occurs at low cost and legal status has no bearing on one's ability to pick up the phone. Thus, the typical migrant – a Spanish-dominant person who has lived in the US for less than two decades – has a one in three chance of rarely or never calling home. For English-dominant migrants and child migrants the probability of never or rarely calling home is over one in two.

Our results also shed light on the mechanisms by which immigrants retain attachments to the transnational social field or instead fall under the influence of the host-society national social field. Our language use variables provide the most compelling results: shifts away from the foreign tongue consistently yield diminished home-country attachment. Language, of course, is the essence of communication: it is difficult to feel at home or believe that the stay-at-home other is just like oneself if the meanings of speech can no longer be taken for granted. Migrants who have adapted to the new, national society in which they reside by adopting its language are likely to experience exactly these effects.

The effects of our settlement variables point in the direction of opposing, retentive mechanisms. Cross-state connections are often part and parcel of the familial survival strategies that propel migration in the first place. That pattern holds best for labour migrants, who move in order to generate resources in a wealthy society for use in the poorer society of origin. The results for respondents with personal or material commitments located at home suggest that these are the migrants who remain impelled by survival strategies of precisely this sort. Migrants who have shifted commitments from home to host society are likely to lack either the motivation or the resources to maintain home-country connections of the same intensity.

By contrast, policies and politics appear both to connect migrants to the transnational social field and to detach them. Country-of-origin results point to the mechanisms yielding detachment. Among Salvadorans, the probability of remitting is exceptionally high – no surprise, as these are immigrants from a country where remittances account for over 10 per cent of GDP. On the other hand, the probability of recent travel is less than half the rate predicted for the typical migrant. While the greater distance between the US and El Salvador may be one factor, the much lower prevalence of legal status among the Salvadorans is likely to be highly influential. While Cubans remit like the Mexicans, they show a far lower propensity to travel. Here, the issue is not lack of legal status, but rather US restrictions on travel to Cuba. Either way, political constraints on international travel make it particularly hard to 'live lives across borders'. These impediments are likely to have long-term effects, as the longer one is bordered and the more time elapses before face-to-face contact is renewed, the greater the difficulty in renewing or maintaining the cross-border connection.

By contrast, migrants who obtained US citizenship are more likely to remit than otherwise comparable respondents who have retained a foreign nationality; they are no less likely to have engaged in recent travel or to have called weekly. However, acquiring US citizenship increases the probability of being both 'bordered' and 'transnational', at the expense of falling into the connected category. This paradoxical pattern, we suggest, reflects the dual effects of citizenship. On the one hand, it gives migrants the same freedoms as nationals, allowing those so inclined to cross borders as they please (and as their resources allow). On the other hand, naturalization draws some of the new citizens into the national social field, reflecting its role as one of the means by which states 'embrace' their peoples.

As of this writing, however, the cross-border connections entailed in travel, communication and remitting are widely shared. But as put into practice every day, they stand at some distance from what may be implied by 'transnationalism', a concept whose etymological roots imply a condition of being beyond the nation. Rather, we find a bundle of discrete activities, each following its own logic, associated with specific migrant characteristics. The ties linking migrants to their homelands are multifaceted, driven by a myriad of factors and independent of any one aspect of migrants' lives. While *some* level of homeland connectivity seems ubiquitous so too is *some* degree of detachment; just how long the persistent ties will last, and how binding they will prove to be, are matters for further research.

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Notes

1. Means and percentages are for the weighted data.
2. Since our variables are ordinal, normal Pearson correlation would not be appropriate. Instead polychoric correlations assume that the observed ordinal variables are discrete realizations of underlying continuous variables. The maximum likelihood estimate of the correlations between the underlying hypothesized variables is the polychoric correlation (Olsson 1979).
3. Descriptive statistics for the independent variables are available from the authors.
4. Full regression results are available from the authors.

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