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Emigrants and the Body Politic Left Behind: Results from the Latino National Survey

Roger Waldinger, Thomas Soehl and Nelson Lim

There is a duality at the heart of the migration phenomenon, as the very same people who are immigrants are also emigrants, making a living and possibly setting down roots in the receiving society, but still connected to and oriented toward the home society where their significant others often reside. While research has shown that home-country political conditions and experiences affect immigrant political behaviour in the receiving society, scholarship has yet to ask how those same factors affect the ways in which emigrants relate to the body politic left behind. This paper seeks to fill that lacuna. We find that pre-migration political experiences impart a lasting post-migration interest in home-country politics and that such effects are substantial compared with the impacts associated with other cross-border connections, such as remittance sending or return travel.

Keywords: Emigrants; Transnationalism; Diaspora; Cross-Border Politics; Migrant Political Engagement

International migration is an inherently political phenomenon, raising the question of the migrants' attachment to body politics left behind as well as newly encountered. Current scholarship is largely focused on the receiving society, asking about the degree to which *immigrants* can orient themselves to the new political system that they have entered, adopting beliefs and behaviours that align with those of established citizens. The emerging discussion is influenced by long-standing research on political socialisation, where debate has pivoted around the question of whether political orientations acquired early in life persist across contexts or instead change as adults acquire new experiences. For the most part, research shows that immigrant behaviour

Roger Waldinger is Professor of Sociology at the University of California Los Angeles. Correspondence to Prof. R. Waldinger, Department of Sociology, UCLA, Haines Hall 264, 375 Portola Plaza, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1551, USA. E-mail: waldinge@soc.ucla.edu. Thomas Soehl is a Doctoral Candidate in Sociology at UCLA. Nelson Lim is a Policy Analyst at the RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, California.

in the political sphere evolves in ways quite similar to the changes taking place in the social or economic sphere (Alba and Nee 2003): as exposure increases, voting turnout grows and partisanship deepens, just as does competency in the dominant language or the skills that can generate higher incomes (Ramakrishnan 2005; Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001; Wong 2006). But it is not always a matter of immigrants learning the ropes and deepening their roots, as triggers may come from exogenous events: in the United States, for example, efforts at immigration restriction have propelled immigrants toward greater political involvement (Pantoja and Segura 2003).

While highlighting immigrants' political malleability, this research nonetheless begs the question of how and to what extent pre-migration political experiences affect behaviour and attitudes in the new context. Linking aggregate data on *home* country political conditions to individual-level data collected in the *host* society, a number of scholars have shown that pre-migration political conditions yield later effects. Thus, McAllister and Makkai (1992) demonstrated that Australian immigrants from countries with a shorter history of democracy are more likely to have authoritarian attitudes than those coming from countries with more established democratic traditions. Cain *et al.* (1991) found that characteristics of the polity of origin affected partisan loyalties in the polity of destination, with US voters born in Russia, Cuba, Vietnam (all then communist countries) and Korea (threatened by a communist country) more likely to be Republicans. Simpson Bueker (2005) showed that immigrants coming from non-democratic regimes are less likely to turn out to vote than those from democratic societies. Finally, Bilodeau *et al.* (2010) showed that immigrants from authoritarian regimes are as supportive of democracy as the rest of the population, but are more likely to support alternative, non-democratic forms of government, with the more authoritarian the country of origin, the greater the acceptance of authoritarian government. Though highly suggestive, these studies rest on inferences regarding the impact of prevailing, macro-level, pre-migration political conditions on post-migration political attitudes and behaviour: they lack *direct* information on migrants' political views and behaviour *prior* to leaving home.

That *lacuna* is likely to be significant, as the three exceptions indicate that pre-migration political experiences yield post-migration effects. Black's (1987) survey of immigrants in Canada shows that self-reports on pre-migration political activities and interest in politics were positively related to later involvement and interest in Canadian politics. Similarly, Finifter and Finifter's (1989) study of American immigrants to Australia shows that prior party identification affects both whether or not the migrants adopt an Australian party identification and the particular parties they select. Most relevant to the concerns of this paper, Wals (2010), analysing a survey of Mexican immigrants living in the United States, has shown that pre-migration partisan identification increases the probability of political engagement in the United States and, further, that higher levels of trust for the Mexican government are associated with higher levels of trust in the US government.

Although there is thus good reason to think that political experiences in the country of destination are influenced by earlier political experiences in the country of origin, focusing on the destination country leaves half the story untold. After all, every immigrant is also an emigrant, which is why immigration and emigration are 'indissociable aspects of a single reality', as Abdelmalek Sayad pointed out (2004: 1). As a growing body of scholarship has shown, the people moving across national boundaries are not 'the uprooted' nor even 'the transplanted', but rather 'the connected', keeping up ties to people and places left behind. For most, the crucial ties extend to the significant others still at home: information and money regularly flow back and forth through channels linking 'here' and 'there', with in-person visits a regular phenomenon for those with the resources and legal status needed to go back and forth across borders at will. A significant minority, however, almost always remains engaged with politics at home. These activities, generally subsumed under the label of 'diaspora politics' or 'political transnationalism', range the gamut: expatriate activists may seek to create new states, overthrow home regimes, lobby host governments on behalf of home states, participate in home-state elections, change home-state electoral and citizenship laws so as to allow for expatriate voting and dual citizenship, or simply engage with the local communities where they were born. Moreover, given the many forms of migrants' involvements with their home communities and the resources they mobilise, sending states are increasingly responding, launching programmes of 'diaspora engagement' that seek to reconnect the emigrants with both the social and political institutions left behind.

But if, as *immigrants*, the people who crossed national boundaries find themselves increasingly oriented toward the polity in which they currently live, what does this imply for the attachments to the polity from which, as *emigrants*, they left? While networks connecting sending and receiving places can be persistent, underlying sociological pressures tend to shift key social relations from the place of origin to the place of destination. The same motivations impelling migration—the search for a better life (Zamudio Grave 2009)—also encourage the adoption of new competencies and behaviours, which yield rewards in the places where the migrants live (Alba and Nee 2003) but are likely to complicate interactions with home-society contacts. Because *international* migration inherently involves a change in institutional context (Zolberg 1999), the new jurisdiction also presents migrants with a framework that encourages engagement with the receiving state, whether via 'ethnic' or 'mainstream' organisations. By contrast, the infrastructure connecting migrants and their descendants to the home state is often weak and incomplete, which is why homeland involvement is selective (Guarnizo *et al.* 2003), entailing significant effort.

Yet, just as political experiences acquired *before* migration affect post-migration political integration into the *host-society* polity, those experiences are likely to influence post-migration political connectedness to the *home-society* polity. After all, migrants with a prior taste of politics are likely to enjoy an understanding of the political world left behind that others who never engaged are unlikely to share. Unlike the uninitiated, those who once learned about politics at home may be able to

continue learning from long-distance, in a different environment, where signals are weaker and organised triggers are few and far between. And prior involvement is also likely to be a source of persistent interest, providing the motivation needed to remain focused on home events, when other pressures are directing attention in the opposite direction.

This paper seeks to assess the impact of pre-migration political experiences on emigrants' connections to their polity of origin. Focusing on Mexican immigrants in the United States, we ask how the experiences of voting and non-electoral civic engagement in Mexico affect migrants' interest in Mexican politics *after* they have crossed the border into the United States. Toward that end, we analyse data from the Latino National Survey (Fraga *et al.* 2006), one of the few, if only, sources of information on political behaviour undertaken prior to migration. A recent, large-scale, nationally representative survey of Latino immigrants living in the United States, the Latino National Survey (LNS) contains both an unusually rich battery of items relating to migration and to ongoing cross-border connections, as well as a unique set of questions about pre-migration political experiences, making it ideal for the purposes at hand.

In the next section, we develop a perspective on the factors that might both retain *and* attenuate migrants' connection to their homeland polity. We then provide more information on the dataset used, review dependent and independent variables, describe our analysis, and then present results. A last section reviews findings in light of the theoretical issues at stake.

Migrants and Politics across Borders

Cross-Border Social Connections

In opting for life in a new country and leaping over the borders separating home and host societies, international migrants paradoxically knit those societies together. Cross-border ties form part and parcel of the migration experience itself: the things that flow across political frontiers—information, resources and support—provide the glue needed to bind family members now separated in space. While those ties tend to erode with time, for many migrants the interval between the short and the long run turns out to be quite extended. Even after settlement, large numbers maintain ongoing connections to the people left behind, sending back remittances, making the occasional trip back home, purchasing ethnic products made in the home country, and communicating with relatives and friends at home. Moreover, connections produce greater connectedness, swelling the size of the market, creating economies of scale and opportunities for specialists in the provision of here–there connections, lowering the cost and increasing the convenience of maintaining home-society ties (Guarnizo 2003).

Those connections could explain why all politics need not necessarily be local, but can, under the circumstances generated by migration, extend across borders. After all,

the types of dislocation envisaged by the scholars who earlier thought of the migrants as 'the uprooted' would leave no place, in the cross-border sphere, for the social interdependencies on which political behaviour so frequently depends. By contrast, the continuing contacts between movers and stay-behinds—whether involving long-distance communication or the in-person encounters entailed in the visits made by migrants returning home or by relatives travelling to see the migrants in their new homes—provide the context in which political information can be transmitted or simply gleaned.

Hence, homeland political interest is likely to be at its lowest ebb among those who entirely fall out of the cross-border circuit. Moreover, levels of interest in homeland matters may vary with differences in the type and intensity of cross-border contacts. Since not all types of cross-border exchange involve communication—remittance sending, for example, can be done electronically—some of the interactions across borders may be entirely devoid of political content. Likewise, contacts that take place long-distance may not yield political information of the same quality or with the same content as exchanges occurring in-person. Politics might well filter into the course of weekly communications typically focusing on other matters. In-person visits, however, will yield opportunities for the transmission of indirect information that can only be gleaned *in situ*, as when a visit coinciding with a homeland political campaign brings the migrant face-to-face with the politics that he or she had left behind.

Moreover, migration itself may trigger homeland responses that *directly* transmit political signals. Thus since long-term, large-scale migrations frequently yield return visits that are recurrent and patterned, as in the annual pilgrimages made by countless Mexican migrants for a one-week celebration of their hometown's patron saint (Massey *et al.* 1987: 143–5), they can also lay the basis for institutionalised contact with homeland political leaders, who make their presence known to the otherwise absent sons and daughters (Fitzgerald 2009). And while politics may generate little interest among the rank and file, the resources actually or potentially mobilised by the minority of migrant activists are likely to gain the attention of homeland political leaders—giving them all the more reason to connect with migrants whenever given the chance. Last, the migratory circuit itself may yield a strong sense of home community membership, as exemplified by the growing number of hometown associations; though these organisations are locally focused, oriented towards philanthropy, and sometimes abjure partisan politics altogether, they necessarily connect migrants with politics, sometimes transforming engagements that are meant to be purely civic into involvements of a more distinctively political sort (Fox 2005).

Receiving Society Political Incorporation—Positive Effects

Arriving as aliens, some international migrants gain citizenship in the country where they have settled. Once seen as conflicting with persistent sending-society member-

ship, receiving-society citizenship may instead solidify home-country connections of various sorts. As citizenship, once acquired, cannot be withdrawn, naturalised citizens may be prepared to express homeland loyalties more forthrightly than non-citizens lacking the same entitlement, which would explain why some research indicates that naturalised citizens are more, *not* less involved in cross-border engagements (Guarnizo *et al.* 2003). Opportunities for engagement with homeland matters might also grow once receiving-society citizenship is obtained, since ethnic lobbying provides both a socially approved means of maintaining dual home and host connections, as well as motivation for sending states to keep up the connection with nationals who also enjoy host-country citizenship.

Knowledge and the Social Logic of Politics

Other factors, however, may work in the opposite direction. To begin with, younger, not older, people are the more likely to depart for a foreign land. As most electoral systems bar minors from voting, many migrants are likely to leave with little, if any, experience in formal politics and limited prior exposure. Political conditions at home are also an influential factor: undemocratic, partially democratic, or even democratising nations may provide limited opportunities for engagement with electoral politics, even for those eligible to vote prior to migration, as is the case with many of the Mexican-born respondents surveyed by the LNS.

Moreover, even for migrants with experience in and exposure to homeland politics, the mechanisms facilitating engagement when 'in country' lack force in the expatriate context. As noted, some migrants fall out of contact with kin and friends back home, but most keep up the connection. However, as those ties often connect to particularised sets of significant others, but not to political communities, they may *not* provide the vehicle by which home-country-relevant political stimuli cross borders. Furthermore, by providing migrants' associates with remittances that effectively substitute private for public resources, cross-border linkages might foster political *disengagement* among the *stay-at-homes* (Goodman and Hiskey 2008) which, in turn, might lead the flow of political information and stimuli moving from home to host country to shrink.

No less important is the local social environment in the receiving country. Political life has a fundamentally social core, with participation responsive to the level and intensity of political involvement in one's own social circles, through which political information also flows (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Migrants who arrive detached from homeland politics need a trigger that would engage them; in the absence of the political organisations that might mobilise participants, disengagement is likely to be self-reinforcing, with the circumstances of settlement possibly producing spiralling effects. Though geographic convergence is the modal pattern, areas of high ethnic density may not *all* possess the ethnic institutional completeness needed to stimulate engagement with home-country matters; political messages are likely to be still weaker in areas of lower ethnic density. Regardless, the migrants' status as *immigrants*

may orient them toward receiving state institutions, and media practices—even if conveyed via a mother tongue—provide at best modest coverage of home-country developments. In the absence of powerful inducements, clear signals and the examples of significant others, remaining motivations to attend to home-country political developments, let alone participate, may not suffice.

Receiving Society Political Incorporation—Negative Effects

As noted above, immigrants begin as foreigners, undergoing an extended period of exclusion from the polity. Nonetheless, non-citizens, including those lacking in legal status, are exposed to political messages broadcast to the wider audience to which they often belong (e.g. the viewers of foreign-language television); like citizens, non-citizens are affected by government policies, motivating them both to attend to receiving-society politics and to participate (Leal 2002; Verba *et al.* 1995), whether by communicating with political officials, going to meetings, or engaging in protests (like the 2006 immigrant rights demonstrations), even if electoral participation is barred. Thus, even before entering the receiving-country polity, immigrants receive political signals and encounter opportunities for political participation, which might focus attention on host-society receiving matters. Subsequent acquisition of citizenship might open the gateway to deeper, more extensive engagements which, in turn, may generate a deeper sense of receiving-society membership. If, as Zolberg and Woon) have argued, immigrants ‘change themselves’ under conditions in which the nationals ‘hold the upper hand’ (1999: 9), and the latter continue to view persons with foreign loyalties as suspect, new citizens may be motivated to discard home-country for host-country political identity. In that case, a two-fold capture could ensue, with receiving states ‘caging’ the populations residing on their territory and constraining ties beyond the territorial divide (Mann 1993), while also ‘embracing’, creating incentives and opportunities for civic and political participation in host-country institutions, as the result of which still deeper attachments to the new national people are likely to be made (Torpey 1999).

Sociological Factors

In addition to these distinctively *political* factors, changes in the social structures linking migrants to their home communities might further curb involvement in expatriate voting and interest in home-country matters. As noted, international migrations inherently yield ties and flows extending back from receiving to sending states. Over time, however, for all but a minority, those ties decline. Living in two different societies, migrants and stay-at-homes undergo experiences that the other group cannot completely share, which in turn may pull them apart. Despite distance-shrinking technologies, cross-border engagement remains costly, reducing the population motivated to keep up home-country ties. Since settlement often leads social relations to shift from home to host societies, on-location costs also grow, in

turn raising the burden of cross-border exchanges. As connections attenuate and migrants realise that they have moved for good, exposure to and interest in home-society matters may also dwindle.

Pre-Migration Political Experience

Given this mix of factors both orienting migrants toward their home-country polity but also pulling them away, political experience obtained prior to migration may be the crucial factor distinguishing those who retain a connection from those who remain detached from politics in the country where they were born. Since present and future patterns of political engagement are shaped by prior experiences, whether involving the institutions that transmit political ideas, values and norms, or the practice of political participation itself, those who bring a prior political experience with them across borders may be importing a political resource, hard to obtain in the migrant setting. The experience of voting typically entails a symbolically important act undertaken in public, often receives positive reinforcement from kin and other associates, and may itself produce a higher level of political knowledge and understanding of politics' impact (Plutzer 2002); hence, an experience of voting *prior* to migration might sustain interest in home-country politics *after* migration, when life in a new country would otherwise lead it to flag. Still more influential would be some pre-migration history of institutional involvement. Any such effect will be strongest if the migrants had some prior experience in political organisations, which tend to impart political dispositions, skills and knowledge, a legacy that should help to direct migrants' attention toward home-country issues. Involvement in non-political organisations can also matter, as they can stimulate interest in public matters while also providing a forum in which public issues can be discussed.

Data

We proceed via analysis of the Latino National Survey (LNS), a large-scale nationally representative telephone survey of the US Latino population conducted in Spanish and English in 2006 and released as a public use sample in 2008. In addition to its large size, the survey contains many questions related to immigration experiences and, most importantly for our purposes, a large and unusually useful battery of items pertaining to home-country political involvements. Given our interest in pre-migration political experiences, we limit the analysis to foreign-born persons who emigrated when they were 18 or older. To isolate the impact of pre-migration political experience from effects related to variations in political systems, nation-state-level differences in national identity or nationhood, or pre-migration political conflicts, we focus on migrants from a single source country, Mexico (N = 2,719), one that has sent a decades-long flow of economically driven migrants to the United States.

Variables

Dependent Variables

While many migrations generate a cadre of involved homeland-oriented activists, this typically involves a small proportion of the migrant population, though in the case of a migration like Mexico's, even a small proportion means large absolute numbers. Despite the influence exerted by activists seeking expatriate voting rights and the burgeoning interest among scholars and policy-makers in hometown associations, this survey, like many others, shows that there is limited evidence of direct engagement with homeland matters. Less than 4 per cent of the Mexican immigrants queried by LNS reported participating in a hometown club or association; a similarly small proportion answered yes when asked whether they had ever voted in a home-country election after having been in the United States; barely 1 per cent reported having made a contribution to a Mexican political candidate or party after having come to the United States.

Thus, active engagement in homeland politics is rare. However, many more immigrants pay at least *some* attention to homeland matters. Attending to, and obtaining information about homeland politics is less demanding than campaigning or voting or providing material contributions. On the other hand, it requires an effort that is almost surely greater than getting information about hostland politics; as more-resource-demanding forms of engagement presume at least some degree of political knowledge and concern, immigrant attentiveness to homeland politics provides a baseline indicator of connectedness to the homeland polity. The analysis that follows focuses on two questions:

- 'How much attention would you say you pay to politics in (country of birth). Would you say you pay a lot of attention, some attention, a little attention, or none at all?'
- 'Some people believe that it is appropriate for [Answer to country of birth] living in the United States to be able to cast their ballot in [country of birth] from the United States. Would you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree, or haven't you thought much about that?'

The first question explicitly asks about interest in homeland political matters; by contrast, the second item asks about attitudes toward a particular homeland issue. However, by providing the response option of '*haven't you thought much about that?*', this second question also picks up on the attentive dimension addressed by the first query. To keep the analysis focused on *interest in homeland politics*, we create a two-category variable, collapsing all of the agree and disagree responses into one single category contrasted to the response option of '*haven't you thought about it?*'¹

Independent Variables

Pre-Migration Political Experiences

As noted above, we measure pre-migration political experiences with two variables: voting and participation in a political, civic or social organisation. Voting is a dichotomous variable, coded 1 if the respondent voted before migrating, 0 otherwise. Pre-migration activism is an ordinal variable, with response categories as follows: very active, somewhat active, a member in a political party but not active, not active at all, never joined. We enter each response category of pre-migration activism as a dummy variable, with 'never joined' as the omitted category.

Post-Migration Connectivity

Ongoing contacts between immigrants in the host country and friends and relatives in the home country are a salient feature of the immigrant phenomenon. We employ three indicators to measure connectivity. The first comes from responses to the question 'How often are you in contact with friends and family [in the country of origin]?', allowing for the response categories of once a week or more, once a month or more, once every few months, or never. The second comes from a question asking about the frequency of remittance sending, with respondents selecting from: more than once a month; once a month; once every few months; once a year; less than once a year; never. The third provides an indicator of in-person contact, via a question about the frequency of return travel to Mexico, since arrival in the United States, with the six responses categories of more than once a year, once a year, once in the past three years, once in the past five years, more than five years ago, never.

Settlement

As first emphasised in Piore's classic book (1979), settlement is distinct from assimilation, referring to the locus of key social relationships and activities. As argued by Piore, and later demonstrated by Massey *et al.* (1987), settlement transfers social relations from home to host societies, focusing activities on the receiving country, while diminishing the frequency of cross-state interactions. However, return, *not* settlement, is the goal that frequently impels international migration, a pattern that has historically characterised Mexican migration to the United States. While many migrants end up settling, the 'myth of return' has long-lasting power and may well outlast the re-location of key social relationship and commitments from home to host societies. We pick up these two dimensions of settlement—home-country commitments and plans to return—with three variables. The first is a question asking 'Do you have plans to go back to (country of origin) to live permanently?'. We enter a dummy for those who say they plan to return. The second is a query about property ownership in the home country; while the initial query focused on the different types of property that might be owned—whether land, a house, or a business—we recorded

the variable to a dichotomy, coded 1 for ownership of any type of property in the home country. The third is a variable indexing respondents who have a child in the country of origin to whom remittances are sent.

Receiving Society Exposure

The huge corpus of research on assimilation shows that social and affective attachments to the home country weaken as the migrant's experience of life in the receiving country grows. We measure the impact of experience in the receiving country with two sets of variables. First we include the number of years that the respondent has lived in the United States. To capture non-linearities we also include the square term. Secondly, we include variables that capture language use. The convention, which describes assimilation as a 'decline in an ethnic difference', implies that convergence toward US patterns of language and media use will weaken interest in home-country matters. We used information about the language in which the interview was conducted by language ability to classify respondents into three mutually exclusive categories: interviewed in English only; interviewed in Spanish only; switched language during the course of the interview. Finally, as the foreign-language media has historically devoted considerable attention to home-country matters, we expect that the effects of residence and language use on interest in home-country politics will be mediated by the patterns of media consumption. We include a dummy variable differentiating all those respondents who use Spanish media as least as much as English media sources.

Citizenship

As suggested above, citizenship acquisition could either deepen emigrant detachment from home-country politics or facilitate reconnection. While unauthorised ('undocumented') migrants represent a large proportion of the foreign-born population, the LNS, like most other such instruments, did not inquire into legal status. However, the survey did ask both about citizenship and about efforts to apply for citizenship. Consequently, our models include four legal-status dummies: non-citizens currently applying for citizenship; those planning to apply for citizenship; those not planning to apply for citizenship; and those who refused or don't know. Naturalised citizens are the omitted category.

Political Knowledge and Interest

To differentiate the effect of political experiences in the home country from general political interest and possible effects of political incorporation in the host society, we introduce a variable indexing political incorporation into the host polity. As a concise summary measure of connectedness to the host polity we develop a summary score of the following five indicators: knowing which of the two major parties is more

conservative, which party has the majority in congress, which presidential candidate won the respondent's home state in 2004, whether the respondent ever contacted an elected official, and identifying with a political party. This gives a measure that ranges from 0 to 5, which we enter as a linear predictor.²

Other Control Variables

Since migration selects on the basis of youth, whereas age increases the opportunities for home-country voting and political participation, we include controls for age at migration, and the related quadratic. Since homeland political interest might be a sub-dimension of a more general interest in politics, we include this question, differentiating between those who are 'somewhat interested in politics and public affairs', very interested, and not interested or didn't give an answer (which together comprise the omitted category). We also include a set of additional standard controls: education, entered as a set of ordinals (primary, some high school, high school, some college, college degree and higher); and religion—contrasting Catholics with all others.

Survey Weights and Missing Data

The Latino National Survey (LNS) collected data on both foreign- and native-born Latinos from a variety of origins (total N = 8,634)—for this analysis we only use foreign-born Mexicans who emigrated when they were 18 or older (N = 2,719). The LNS provides sample weights to representatively project the sample to different levels of geography. We use the revised national weights provided in the latest release (26 May 2010) of the data. To correctly reflect the weights even though we only use a sub-sample of the data, we use the subpopulation analysis routines in the analysis module for complex survey data implemented in Stata.

Missing data were limited on most variables (generally less than 5 per cent); however, on two of the independent variables, years living in the US and age at immigration, 8 and 13 per cent of the cases respectively are missing. Listwise deletion not only reduces the available sample and discards information, thus decreasing the efficiency of the estimation, but can also lead to biased results (King *et al.* 2001). To avoid this we used multiple imputation, which is the preferred method for dealing with missing data. Using the 'ice' package written by Patrick Royston (2009), we created

20 imputed datasets. We then pooled the analysis for the 20 datasets using the *mim* suite which implements 'Rubin's rules' to obtain correct point estimates and standard errors (Carlin *et al.* 2008).

Results

Table 1 summarises key characteristics of the survey respondents in our sub-sample calculated from our imputed datasets and using survey weights as described above.

Dependent Variables

Most respondents pay little attention to Mexican politics: 36 per cent (the modal category) report paying no attention at all; just over a quarter report that they pay a little attention to Mexican politics and another quarter answer ‘some’. By contrast, only 13 per cent of respondents say they pay ‘a lot’ of attention to Mexican politics. In addition, when asked whether ‘it is appropriate for Mexicans living in the United States to cast their ballot in Mexican national elections from the United States’, a quarter of respondents either had not thought about the matter or did not know whether they agreed or disagreed.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of dependent and independent variables. Calculated from imputed dataset (m = 20) using survey weights

Dependent variables			
Has an opinion about voting	0.76		
Attention to Mexican politics			
None	0.36		
Little	0.26		
Some	0.25		
A lot	0.13		
Independent variables			
Voted in Mexico	0.46	Years in the US (mean)	13.60
Participation in Mexico		Language of interview	
Never joined	0.58	English	0.08
Not active	0.27	Switched language	0.23
A member but not active	0.02	Spanish	0.69
Somewhat active	0.09	Uses Spanish media	0.94
Very active	0.03	Citizenship	
Contact back home		Naturalised	0.20
Never	0.06	Applied for citizenship	0.05
Once every couple of months	0.07	Plans to apply	0.30
Monthly	0.29	Does not plan to apply	0.45
Weekly	0.58	US political integration score (mean)	1.34
Remits		Interested in politics	
Never	0.31	Not at all/No answer	0.41
Less than yearly	0.03	Somewhat interested	0.47
Yearly or more often	0.23	Very interested	0.11
Monthly or more often	0.43	Education	
Visited		Primary	0.38
Never	0.40	Some high school	0.17
5+ years ago	0.11	High school or GED	0.29
3–5 years ago	0.20	Some college	0.10
Yearly or more often	0.29	BA or more	0.06
Plans to move back	0.34	Catholic	0.80
Owens property in Mexico	0.35	Male	0.46
Has children in Mexico	0.14		

Independent Variables

Pre-migration political experience characterises only a minority of respondents. Activism is relatively rare: more than half answered ‘never joined’, and more than a quarter answered ‘not active’. Just over a tenth reported activism, with only 2.6 per cent describing themselves as having been ‘very active’. In contrast just under half of the respondents had voted prior to moving to the United States.

The LNS captured a relatively newly arrived population, with years of residence in the US averaging 13.6, with a median of 9 years. Not surprisingly, respondents report regular contact with friends and relatives still living in Mexico, with 58 per cent in contact once a week or more and 29 per cent in contact several times a month. Only 7 per cent report never having contact with friends and relatives in Mexico. In-person contact, however, is much less common: about 40 per cent had *never* returned to Mexico since arriving in the United States and 11 per cent made their last trip more than five years prior to the survey. On the other hand, almost a third return every year or more often. Remitting takes a similar pattern: while 31 per cent report *never* sending money home, 43 per cent remit monthly or more often. On the other hand, just 14 per cent report that they send remittances to children of their own living in Mexico. Recency of arrival and intensity of connection notwithstanding, just one third reports plans to return. In a pattern consistent with these responses, a similar share of respondents (35 per cent) reports some form of home-ownership in Mexico.

Control Variables

Schooling levels in the sample reflect the pattern characteristic of this population, with 38 per cent reporting some primary-school education or less, 17 per cent some secondary education, 10 per cent some post-secondary schooling, and 6 per cent reporting completion of a bachelor’s degree or more. The vast majority, 94 per cent of respondents, uses Spanish language media, with only 6 per cent reporting mainly English media use. Some 69 per cent of respondents were interviewed in Spanish only, with another 23 per cent switching language during the course of the interview, mainly from Spanish to English. Less than one fifth of respondents were naturalised; the modal category was comprised of persons who responded ‘no plan to naturalise’, a group that probably includes many undocumented persons. Fifty-four per cent of respondents were women and 80 per cent were Catholic. When asked about their interest ‘in politics and public affairs’, almost half of the sample responded ‘somewhat interested’; 41 per cent said ‘not at all interested’ or ‘not sure/didn’t know’; 11 per cent reported being ‘very interested’.

Regression Results

We estimate interest in Mexican politics (ranging from none to a lot) with an ordinal logistic regression model. As discussed earlier, we only distinguish between those who

have an opinion about expatriate voting and those who do not. We model this dichotomous outcome using a logistic regression model.³

Table 2 summarises the regression results in detail. But since the coefficients of discrete regression models cannot be easily interpreted in a substantive way, we present results as changes in predicted probabilities. As the link-functions of these models are non-linear, the point at which we evaluate changes in predicted probabilities also matters. Following convention, Table 3 presents the effect of changes in statistically significant variables for a 'typical respondent' having the most frequent (modal) value for each independent variable. This 'typical respondent' is a migrant with no pre-migration history of political or social activism and who did not vote in Mexico. Our typical respondent maintains a relatively high level of ongoing connectivity, sending remittances once a month and keeping up weekly contact with relatives in Mexico, although with no experience of return travel, after moving to the United States. In addition, the typical respondent does not plan to return to Mexico and does not own property there. Our model predicts a 0.35 probability that this typical migrant reported having 'no interest' in Mexican politics; by contrast, it predicts a 0.09 probability that this migrant would have expressed 'a lot' of interest in Mexican politics. Likewise, the results from the logistic regression model show that the probability of this same typical migrant having 'no opinion' about expatriate voting is 0.25. In the discussion below, we examine the effects of the independent variables, varying one characteristic while retaining all other 'typical' traits. Thus, the otherwise uncommon migrant, who reports having had a high level of pre-migration political experience, shares all the other traits of the 'typical' migrant (e.g. sends home remittances monthly, contacts relatives weekly, has never travelled back to Mexico, etc.).

Interest in Mexican Politics

Differences in pre-migration political involvement yield strong effects on levels of interest in Mexican politics. Disengagement drops sharply among those with prior political experience: reports of 'no interest at all', relatively common ($p = .35$) among the typical migrant (a non-voter who never joined a civic or political organisation in Mexico), were a good deal less common among prior voters ($p = .26$) and those who had been organisation members, but inactive ($.27$), and still more so among those who had been somewhat active or very active ($p = .22$ and $.20$ respectively). The probability of reporting a high level of attentiveness more than doubles for those who were members in political organisations—though even among this select group it is still under 20 per cent. Overall, prior political experience, regardless of type, made migrants more likely to report a lot of interest in politics, as contrasted with the typical migrant, for whom the probability was only $.09$.

Differences in connectivity have no consistent relationship with either political interest or the probability of having an opinion on expatriate voting. Looking at contact with friends and family back home, only the contrast between those migrants

Table 2. Summary of coefficients of discrete regression models. Logistic regression for opinion about voting and ordered logistic regression for attention paid to Mexican politics

	Attention to Mexican politics			Has opinion about expat voting		
	Coef.	SE	t	Coef.	SE	t
Voted in Mexico	0.43	0.12	3.65**	0.12	0.14	0.88
Party in Mexico						
Not active	0.15	0.11	1.31	0.38	0.14	2.76**
Member but not active	0.39	0.34	1.15	-0.58	0.41	-1.41
Somewhat active	0.67	0.19	3.51**	0.81	0.28	2.88**
Very active	0.81	0.30	2.72**	0.97	0.47	2.05*
Contact w. friends/family in Mexico						
None or infrequent	0.12	0.29	0.41	-0.16	0.29	-0.56
Once a month or more	0.48	0.26	1.88	0.36	0.25	1.46
Weekly	0.66	0.26	2.56*	0.32	0.25	1.27
Send money						
Less than yearly	0.54	0.30	1.83	-0.60	0.36	-1.68
Yearly or more often	0.21	0.13	1.55	0.19	0.17	1.12
Monthly or more often	0.15	0.13	1.16	0.13	0.17	0.76
When last returned						
5+ years ago	-0.31	0.18	-1.68	0.30	0.20	1.49
3-5 years ago	-0.29	0.15	-1.99*	-0.10	0.18	-0.56
Yearly or more often	-0.09	0.14	-0.61	-0.02	0.17	-0.11
Intends to move back	0.23	0.11	2.08*	0.20	0.14	1.36
Owens property in Mexico	0.32	0.11	2.96**	0.09	0.14	0.62
Has children in Mexico	-0.36	0.14	-2.50*	0.26	0.19	1.40
Years in the US	-0.03	0.01	-2.11*	0.01	0.02	0.50
Squared	0.00	0.00	1.23	0.00	0.00	-0.54
Language of interview						
Switched	0.22	0.21	1.03	-0.01	0.25	-0.05
Spanish	0.24	0.20	1.19	-0.02	0.23	-0.09
Uses Spanish media	0.16	0.21	0.79	0.73	0.25	2.88**
Citizenship						
Applied for citizenship	-0.36	0.27	-1.37	0.47	0.32	1.47
Plans to apply	-0.21	0.17	-1.25	0.16	0.19	0.84
Does not plan to apply	-0.43	0.17	-2.48*	0.02	0.19	0.10
US political integration score	0.18	0.04	4.48**	0.27	0.06	4.63**
Interest in politics						
Somewhat	0.69	0.11	6.33**	0.38	0.13	2.97**
Very much	1.12	0.16	6.88**	0.77	0.21	3.72**
Age at immigration	-0.07	0.03	-2.23*	-0.05	0.04	-1.27
Squared	0.00	0.00	2.05*	0.00	0.00	1.32
Education						
Some high school	-0.15	0.14	-1.04	-0.18	0.18	-1.00
High school	0.01	0.13	0.09	-0.01	0.16	-0.08
Some college	-0.11	0.19	-0.57	-0.07	0.23	-0.29
BA +	0.39	0.19	2.07*	0.64	0.32	1.97*
Catholic	0.28	0.13	2.12*	0.47	0.14	3.36*
Male	-0.11	0.10	-1.10	0.10	0.13	0.78
Constant				-0.63	0.77	-0.81
Cutpoint 1	-0.15	0.65				
Cutpoint 2	1.10	0.65				
Cutpoint 3	2.73	0.66				

Results are pooled from multiple imputations ($m = 20$). Omitted categories are: (a) Never joined, (b) never, (c) never sends money, (d) never returned, (e) English interview, (f) is naturalised citizen, (g) primary education or less. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table 3. Changes in predicted probabilities for select independent variables ($p < 0.05$). All other variables held constant at their modal or mean values

	Change in predicted interest in Mexican politics		Change in predicted probability of having opinion on expatriate voting
	p (no interest at all)	p (a lot of interest)	
Voted in Mexico			
No → yes	0.35 → 0.26	0.09 → 0.14	ns
Participation in Mexican party politics			
Never joined → not active	ns	ns	0.75 → 0.82
Never joined → member but not active	0.35 → 0.27	0.09 → 0.13	ns
Never joined → somewhat active	0.35 → 0.22	0.09 → 0.17	0.75 → 0.87
Never joined → very active	0.35 → 0.20	0.09 → 0.19	0.75 → 0.89
Contact with friends and family in Mexico			
Weekly → never	0.35 → 0.51	0.09 → 0.05	ns
When last returned			
Never → 3–5 years ago	0.39 → 0.34	0.08 → 0.10	ns
Years in the US			
14 → 24	0.35 → 0.39	0.09 → 0.08	ns
14 → 4	0.35 → 0.30	0.09 → 0.11	ns
Age at immigration			
25 → 35	0.35 → 0.39	0.09 → 0.08	ns
Citizenship			
Does not plan to apply → citizen	0.35 → 0.26	0.09 → 0.14	ns
Uses Spanish media			
Yes → no	ns	ns	0.75 → 0.59
Intends to move back			
No → yes	0.35 → 0.30	0.09 → 0.12	ns
Owens property in Mexico			
No → yes	0.35 → 0.29	0.09 → 0.12	ns
Has children in Mexico			
No → yes	0.35 → 0.44	0.09 → 0.07	ns
Interest in politics			
Somewhat → none	0.35 → 0.52	0.09 → 0.05	0.75 → 0.68
Somewhat → a lot	0.35 → 0.26	0.09 → 0.14	0.75 → 0.81
Political integration score			
Min (0) → mean (1.34)	0.41 → 0.35	0.08 → 0.09	0.68 → 0.75
Mean → max (5)	0.35 → 0.22	0.09 → 0.16	0.75 → 0.89
Education			
Primary or less → BA+	0.35 → 0.27	0.09 → 0.13	0.75 → 0.85
Religion			
Catholic → non-Catholic	0.35 → 0.42	0.09 → 0.07	0.75 → 0.65

who never have contact and the majority who are in contact on a weekly basis or more often is statistically significant at conventional levels. Among the respondents who disengage from interaction with friends and family in Mexico, one out of every two is likely to report no interest in politics in their country of origin and high levels of interest are correspondingly uncommon ($p = .05$). However, the typical respondent, contacting friends and family weekly, is no more interested in Mexican politics than respondents who reported having contact on a monthly basis only. Remittance sending yields no statistically significant effect. Travel to Mexico, on the other hand, does have a relationship, though the pattern is not straightforward. Those who never travelled back to Mexico since migrating, likely to include those who disengage from the homeland as well as those who arrived recently, are slightly more interested in Mexican politics than those who return occasionally. However, those who return yearly are no more likely to have an interest in Mexican politics than those with no experience of return travel.

Interest levels also do prove responsive to migration and settlement variables. Years spent in the United States depress interest even controlling for connectivity variables. Recent immigrants, with only four years of US residence, are a good deal less likely than most to have no interest in Mexican politics ($p = .30$) and somewhat more likely ($p = .11$) to express a lot of interest. By contrast, long-term US residents (with 24 years of life in the United States) display diminished attention, as shown by higher probabilities of reporting no interest ($p = .39$) and a decrease in the probability of finding in Mexican politics 'a lot of interest' ($p = .08$).

Settlement plans worked in the same direction, though with more modest effects: unlike the typical respondent, who has no concrete plans to return to Mexico, those intending to return were less likely to report no interest ($p = .30$) and a bit more likely to express a lot of interest ($p = .12$). A very similar pattern appears among respondents owning property in Mexico. However, political interest was significantly lower among respondents answering positively to a separate prompt regarding the transmission of remittances to children in Mexico. Similarly, age at migration has a negative effect on interest levels, a surprising result since the older one was when one left Mexico, the greater the exposure to politics, as well as opportunities for participation.

While, net of other factors, putting down roots in the United States diminishes interest in politics, indicators of US political integration have some countervailing effects. Compared to the modal respondent who had no plans to apply, naturalised US citizens are more likely to report higher levels of interest in Mexican politics. Net of other factors, our model predicts them to be very interested with a probability of .14 and no interest at all with a probability of .26. Net of citizenship and citizenship plans, those better integrated into US politics turn out to also be more interested in Mexican politics. Thus, among those respondents scoring 0 on our scale of US political integration, comprising just under a third of the sample, interest in Mexican politics is low (no interest: $p = .52$; a lot of interest $p = .05$). By contrast, the few respondents (1.5 per cent of the sample) scoring at the top of the scale are a good

deal less detached from home-country politics (no interest: $p = .26$; a lot of interest, $p = .14$).

The variables on language use yield no relation to interest in Mexican politics; for the educational variables only the contrast between the lowest category (primary or less) and the 6 per cent with a BA or more is statistically significant. Religion also yields effects, with non-Catholics a good deal more likely than Catholics to think that Mexican politics is 'of no interest' ($p = .42$ v. $.35$). Not surprisingly, persons generally more interested in politics are also more interested in politics in Mexico. Thus, among those reporting no interest in politics generally (41 per cent of the sample), roughly half were also detached from politics at home (no interest: $p = .52$); by contrast, among those very interested in politics generally (11 per cent of the sample), 'no interest' probabilities were a good deal lower ($p = .26$) and reports of 'a lot of interest' were a good deal above the sample median ($p = .14$).

Opinions on Expatriate Voting

Although most respondents expressed an opinion about the appropriateness of voting in Mexican elections while living in the United States, almost a quarter of the sample reported that they either had no opinion or had never thought about the matter. The regression finds fewer effects. In particular, voting yields no significant impact; neither do most indicators of cross-border connection or settlement. However, respondents reporting some pre-migration political involvement or with high levels of integration into the US political system are particularly likely to express an opinion. Respondents lacking opinions were also those least connected to the Spanish-speaking world, as suggested by the fact that those making no use of Spanish language media were a good deal more likely than the typical migrant to lack an opinion on this matter. Catholics were again more likely to hold an opinion as were those who were generally interested in politics.

Discussion

Though international migration is an inherently political phenomenon, the study of migrants' political behaviour is only now moving from the field's periphery to a more central place in the research agenda. For the most part, scholarship is focused on receiving societies and, hence, *immigrant* politics. Here, the central questions concern the means and mechanisms by which immigrants engage in political activity and possibly acquire citizenship, foreigners learn the rules of a new national political situation, and foreign-born, naturalised citizens gain political incorporation and acceptance. Echoing the long-standing interest in the retention of cultural beliefs or practices imported from the society of origin, students of *immigrant* politics have sought to understand the impact of political experiences and conditions in the society of origin *on* political behaviour in the society of destination.

But this preoccupation with receiving-society matters ignores the duality at the heart of the migrant phenomenon. The people opting for life in another state are not just *immigrants*, but also *emigrants*, retaining ties to the people and places left behind, as emphasised by the vast literature on migrant networks and the burgeoning scholarship on transnationalism. More likely to comprise the 'connected' than the 'uprooted' or possibly even the 'transplanted', the migrants find themselves among their fellow-foreigners, a co-presence that produces a *familiar*, rather than an alien, environment—one that also facilitates the maintenance of cross-border activities. While, for many migrants, cross-border involvements are strictly social and highly particularistic, directed at their kin and no one else, these private actions undertaken *abroad* have profoundly public consequences *at home*, as demonstrated by the huge flow of migrant remittances transferred from rich to poor countries, in turn triggering sending-state responses. As all migrations also include at least some migrants who keep up political as well as social connections, research on migrant politics needs to encompass the study of *emigrant* politics and the factors reinforcing or weakening attachment to the body politic left behind. This is the goal that we have sought to pursue in this paper.

The paper provides ample evidence of the extensive, ongoing nature of the cross-border connections maintained by the migrants who have moved from Mexico to the United States. Almost 90 per cent are in contact with friends and family in Mexico once a month or more, with a sizeable majority contacting friends and relatives at home once a week or more. Other forms of connectivity are more resource-demanding; nonetheless, return travel and remittance-sending are widespread activities, even though many migrants are hindered by low incomes and a legal status that impedes cross-border travel.

While the typical respondent is tightly connected to friends and family in Mexico—calling or contacting weekly and sending home money remittances—that same migrant takes little interest in home-country politics. When asked about the amount of attention paid to politics in Mexico, more than a third answered none and another quarter said little; almost a quarter report having never thought about or having no opinion about the appropriateness of expatriate voting, a matter of great contention in Mexico and among organised expatriates in the United States. As expression of disinterest is the socially undesirable reaction, the face validity of these responses, as reflections of underlying opinion, would seem to be high.

More detailed information on home-country political engagement would, of course, be desirable. However, as noted earlier, the survey's other relevant items—on membership in a hometown association, on actual voting in Mexican elections and on political donations—show that involvement in resource-absorbing political activities is significantly lower still. Homeland politics may involve a minority of migrants, but the rank-and-file does not engage.

Seeking to understand why that minority may attend to homeland politics, this paper hypothesised that the roots may lie in political experiences occurring *before* migration, in this case voting and participation in political or civic organisations. As

we argued in the introduction, those prior political experiences may comprise an important resource that the migrants brought with them, providing the knowledge, motivation and interest to maintain a long-distance political engagement, in the absence of any contextual incentives to keep up that connection. As we have seen, both types of pre-migration political experience leave post-migration effects, though some form of prior activism is the stronger and more consistent force. Though a general interest in politics is also strongly (and unsurprisingly) associated with an interest in home-country politics, pre-migration experiences remain powerful even after controlling for this factor, indicating that we are capturing something beyond an underlying predisposition to be interested in politics, whether in the country of reception *or* of origin.

Although connectivity is certainly not irrelevant, its impact is limited, since the typical migrant is at once little interested in politics, but also highly connected. Not surprisingly, those unusual migrants who have fallen out of contact with relatives in Mexico show markedly lower levels of interest in Mexican politics than those of the typical, highly connected migrants. Remitting and return travel, on the other hand, show no consistent association with interest in politics. Moreover, migrants who are especially connected are not especially concerned with homeland matters, as illustrated by the finding that respondents who visit Mexico every year pay no more attention to homeland politics than those who have yet to return after migrating. Finally, none of the connectivity variables predicts the likelihood of having an opinion about expatriate voting.

As noted in the introduction, receiving-country political incorporation could be a factor increasing or dampening interest in home-country politics. This analysis provides no evidence to suggest that host-country political incorporation leads migrants to distance themselves from home-country political concerns. By contrast, we do find modest support for the view that incorporation in the country of destination may stimulate interest in politics back home. Thus, respondents scoring 0 on the index of US political incorporation are almost twice as likely as those few respondents who reach the top score to report *no* interest in Mexican politics at all. As the positive, statistically significant coefficient for this variable is also net of general political interest, the analysis shows that incorporation yields an effect, in and of itself. Similarly, formal integration into the host polity entailed in the acquisition of US citizenship is positively associated with political interest in political affairs in Mexico (no interest: $p = .26$, a lot of interest: $p = .14$).

Acculturation has relatively modest effects, as language and media use exercise no influence on levels of interest in Mexican politics, but media use does yield impacts on the probability of having an opinion about the appropriateness of expatriate voting. As the typical migrant has no interest in Mexican politics, but does have an opinion about expatriate voting, the contrast suggests that even minimal levels of attention to political matters in Mexico are contingent on persistent involvement in a Spanish-speaking world. Somewhat similarly, the lower levels of interest reported by non-Catholics may reflect the effects of a post-migration *break* in religious practices

and beliefs and a conversion towards the concerns of the society in which the migrants actually live.

Conclusion

Noting that prior research has uncovered a link between pre-migration political experiences and *immigrants'* political behaviour in the society of destination, this paper sought to look at the other side of the coin, asking how these same experiences affect *emigrants'* ties to the polity left behind. We find that, while pre-migration political experiences strongly influence post-migration interests in homeland politics, the most politicising pre-migration experiences are shared by only a few. For most migrants, rather, settlement is the prevalent factor influencing interest in home-country matters. Net of other factors, settlement exercises a more important influence than connectivity, with property owners and respondents planning to return to Mexico a good deal more likely than the typical migrant to register higher levels of interest in home-country politics. By contrast, long-term settlers show far less interest in homeland political matters than do the relatively recent arrivals.

Though years of residence and settlement plans each yield net negative effects, in reality they proceed in tandem, deepening the impact of changes that disconnect immigrants from political matters on the other side of the border. Thus, although the emigrants most actively connected to kin and friends in Mexico are also more likely to be interested in Mexican politics, those connections diminish with settlement. For example, a separate regression of the frequency of contact on years in the US (not shown here) reveals that the probability of having weekly contact with Mexico declines from 74 per cent for the just-arrived, to about 55 per cent after 15 years of residence and reaches 38 per cent after 30 years. Conversely the probability of reporting no contact back home goes from just under 3 to around 6 per cent after 15 years and almost quadruples to 11 per cent after 30 years. This implies that settlement will probably also indirectly exert a negative effect on political interest via its association with connectivity to the home country. Likewise, growing levels of US political incorporation are also driven by settlement, which means that any net positive effects of growing attention to receiving-country matters on interest in politics in Mexico are offset by other simultaneous changes that weaken home-country ties.

Moreover, even prior political experiences fail to inoculate migrants against the disconnecting impacts of the new environment. If those experiences were protective, interest in Mexican politics would decay more slowly among migrants who had voted before or who had engaged in a political or social movement than among those with no prior political experience at all. However, interacting voting as well as the participation dummies with years in the United States yields coefficients not statistically significant from zero. Hence, prior political experience does generate a higher level of interest, but one that nonetheless declines as years of residence in the United States grow.

A complex of factors may explain why settlement yields such profound effects. To begin with, migration generally selects on youth, which is why so many migrants leave home with limited exposure to and/or involvement in formal politics. But as migration is an implicitly political action, whereby the emigrants opt to take things into their own hands, rather than wait for government to act, it may also select for those *least* likely to find virtue in home-country political engagement. As noted by Mexican sociologist Arturo Santamaría Gómez, ‘the deepest experience, the most strongly felt discomfort of the migrants toward the Mexican government was the conviction that, with a “good government”, they would not have had to leave their country’ (1994: 165). Though the migrants may be more disaffected than most, their behaviour also reflects widespread cynicism toward political action, institutions and leaders. Surveys of the Mexican population show ‘very low levels of respect for political institutions of any sort and the persons associated with them’, indicating ‘a general lack of trust in government’ (Camp 2006: 73). And though, worldwide, politics is rarely a matter for intense engagement, Mexicans are particularly unlikely to talk about politics, with political discussion still less common among those in the rural areas from which most migrants come (Baker 2009).

If some degree of detachment from politics prevails on the Mexican side of the border, politics is a matter of particularly low salience after movement to the US side. While incorporation in US politics does have positive effects on interest in Mexican politics, the crucial fact is that the great majority of respondents remain in a state of *non-incorporation*, a condition unlikely to change soon in light of the thick wall between this largely non-citizen, heavily undocumented population on the one hand, and the US polity on the other. As four-fifths remain Mexican citizens, with the modal respondent (almost half of the sample) reporting no plans to apply for American citizenship, this group remains outside the American polity and hence at some distance from the efforts at mobilisation that so often trigger political interest. Nearly a third of the sample scores *zero* on our scale of political integration, which means that they could correctly answer *none* of the questions about political knowledge, nor had ever contacted an elected official in the US, nor identified with a US political party. To be sure, most respondents were a little more engaged, but not by much, as another 30 per cent achieved a score of just 1 on the same scale. And for a sizeable minority, politics—whether home- or host-land focused—holds absolutely no interest at all.

If the US *polity* is closed, as a *society* the US is relatively open. Its labour market is flexible and better-established kin and co-ethnics are there to help out. Migrants who learn the ropes find that their prospects brighten, facilitated by the fact that *internal* geographic mobility is unhindered, letting opportunities be pursued wherever the migrants’ dollars and preferences allow. Ethnic boundaries are also increasingly fuzzy; for legal residents, most citizenship rights are also within hand, albeit not the franchise nor an absolute guarantee of continued residence in the United States. Hence, the migrants can put down roots in American *society* without ever engaging in its *polity*. And as the homeland yields few of the stimuli and possesses few of the

mechanisms that could draw the migrants' attention to politics in the place left behind, disinterest in homeland matters steadily grows as time spent in the United States lengthens.

But one should not dismiss the off-diagonal phenomena too soon. Although activists, motivated by strong homeland concerns, may be a small minority, the size of the denominator—10 million, in the case of Mexican immigrants—is huge. Consequently, any cause that engages the energies of 1, 2 or 3 per cent of all migrants can impel significant numbers into action, a group that is all the more important since their concerns resonate more broadly. As we know, the activists can mobilise resources that augment the impact of their numbers, drawing on ties to materially successful immigrants, activating connections to influence in both home and host country, and exploiting the freedoms found in the host country to pressure leaders back home. In the end, many immigrants do not care about home-country matters. But those who do care—remaining connected to Mexico and drawing on political experiences acquired before migration—happen to count.

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Notes

- [1] To ensure that our results were not an artifact of the estimation technique, we also ran the regressions using a three-category variable, collapsing each of the two agree and disagree responses into separate categories each, leaving 'Haven't you thought about it?' as the third response option. A multinomial regression produced results substantively similar to those produced by the binomial logistic regression reported on in the paper.
- [2] Entering the variable as a set of dummies does not substantively alter our results but produces a more unwieldy table.
- [3] To assess the fit of the models we calculated predicted values for each observation and compared them to the observed dependent variable. For the logistic regression model on having an opinion about expatriate voting we follow convention and use $p = 0.5$ as the cut-off, meaning each individual with a produced probability greater than 0.5 is classified as having an opinion and those with $p < 0.5$ are classified as not having an opinion. By this measure our model correctly classifies 76 per cent of the observations. For ordered logistic regression models there is no straightforward way to assess model fit. Calculating predicted probabilities for each outcome and classifying individuals by their model predicted probability gives us a correct classification rate of 43 per cent. The polychoric correlation

between the categorised and observed outcomes is 0.47 for the ordered logistic model and 0.41 for the logistic regression model, indicating a good fit.

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