POLITICAL TRANSNATIONALISM AND ASSIMILATION: A CASE STUDY OF DOMINICAN AND MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of The School of Continuing Studies and of The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

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April 24, 2010
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ABSTRACT

Dominican and Mexican immigrants are increasingly participating in forms of political transnationalism such as voting, contributing to foreign candidates, or attending rallies of candidates campaigning for office in their county of origin. Affordable transportation and communication technologies allow immigrants to stay in touch with relatives and be apprised of political happenings in their country of origin. This is a major public policy concern as these immigrant groups are consistently demonstrating lower levels of political participation than other Americans of similar socioeconomic status. Political participation in U.S. politics is important because it plays a vital role in their incorporation into mainstream society and to the overall success of these immigrant groups. However, leading assimilation theorists do not include political participation into their models of assimilation; they instead only analyze other socioeconomic factors. It is my belief that political participation should be a measured variable in the assimilation equation.

The effects of political transnationalism on assimilation will be evaluated by
the usage of two methodologies: historical and political. I will trace the evolution of political transnationalism to policies, laws, and political movements within Mexico, Dominican Republic, and the United States. I will compare and contrast the orthodox approach to immigration in the 20th Century to that of today. Next, I will discuss findings on Dominican and Mexican immigrant’s participation both in the U.S. and abroad in their country of origin. Then I will analyze the encouragement of dual-citizenship laws by politicians of the immigrants’ homeland, the sending of remittances, the beneficiaries of these policies in the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and the U.S.

Based on analysis of various literary sources and studies conducted on Dominican and Mexican political participation, it is concluded that political transnationalism discourages immigrant participation in U.S. politics and prolongs their assimilation into mainstream culture.
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CHAPTER 1: POLITICAL TRANSNATIONALISM

What is Political Transnationalism

Political transnationalism is a more recent concept being developed in the field of immigration studies, and as such scholars have not yet agreed upon a universal definition. However, one can arrive at a general agreement of what a political transnationalistic activity is by coupling the definition of transnationalism with political participation. According to political scientist Margaret Conway, political participation “…means those activities of citizens that attempt to influence the structure of government, the selection of government officials, or the policies of government.”¹ According to this definition, these activities can be supported by the existing structure, officials, or policies. Alternatively, citizens can also take actions that oppose the current structure, officials, or policies. Passive involvement such as attending rallies or paying attention to what is happening in the government or in politics by watching television or reading newspapers that cover local, state, or federal issues can also be included. For the purposes of this thesis, I will refer to political transnationalism when an immigrant or government participates in or promotes in any way the aforementioned activities.²

² Conway, Political Participation, 4.
The Changing Face of Assimilation

The relative ease and accessibility of mass transportation, new globalized communication, and information technologies makes possible a more massive back-and-forth movement of people, goods, information, and symbols than ever before. In Chapter 2, I will evaluate the historical differences between the various waves of immigrants who migrated to America. Compared to Dominican and Mexican immigrants today, the Irish and Eastern European immigrants of the last century simply could not have maintained the level of intensity of contact with the Old Country that we are now witnessing. There is also a fundamental problem with how assimilation into the mainstream is measured.³

Many prominent scholars such as Elliott Barkan consider a wide variety of variables such as economic and social status but do not explicitly discuss the political engagement of minority groups. Just as immigrant’s social and economic mobility over the first, second, and third generations must be analyzed to gauge assimilation into the main stream culture, so must those immigrants involvement with the American democratic process.⁴

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Political Transnationalism and Dominican and Mexican Immigrants

Next in Chapter 3, I will discuss case study evidence of Dominican and Mexican immigrants’ political participation. In the Dominican Republic, political candidates regularly campaign amongst expatriates to gain political favor and monetary support. Migrants’ financial contributions constitute as much as 15% of the major Dominican parties fund-raising revenues. The president of the Dominican Republic is a product of this system and as a result the Dominican Government has made the pursuance of political transnational activities such as requesting dual citizenship one of its top policy priorities. There are various reasons for this policy focus, including economic and political gain for the Dominican Republic. Mexican Americans also demonstrate political activism in both their home villages and within the U.S. However, much of Mexico’s political transnationalistic activity springs from a more local source. HTAs (Home Town Associations) are at the forefront of this political activity and activism in Mexico. HTAs encourage expatriates to donate or vote in campaigns for candidates who promise to improve the community through philanthropic activities or other community improvement projects, such as building roads or obtaining a clean water source. In addition to participating in political transnationalistic activities to promote the public good, sending governments can also use this activity for their own benefit. “It has been argued that one reason that some are


encouraging their nationals to become U.S. citizens is their desire to nurture a group of advocates to serve the home country’s interest in the American political arena.”

Many governments view their migrants as potential lobbyists for U.S. policy or sources of revenue.

In the same manner, an increasing number of countries including Columbia, El Salvador, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic have introduced constitutional reforms to provide dual citizenship rights and formal political representation to their expatriates. “Such a panoply of initiatives has transformed the way in which migrants incorporate themselves into the societies where they reside. Incentives provided by sending countries are designed to maintain the loyalty of their expatriates and keep political contributions flowing”.

Political transnationalism is an important national and international policy issue that must be addressed.

**Political Participation**

In Chapter 4, I will discuss immigrants' participation in the American political process which is a key factor when gauging their overall assimilation to the mainstream culture and is a major public policy concern as immigrants are consistently demonstrating lower levels of political participation than mainstream Americans of

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similar socioeconomic status. Political participation plays a key role in assimilation and thus to the success of these immigrant groups. Political participation should not only be measured by voting, but by volunteering for a favorite candidate or sending remittances to another country to affect election outcomes. Political participation of immigrants must be reviewed as their involvement influences the structure of government, the actions of officials, the legal system, and other public policies.

**Methodology**

Historical and political analysis will be employed to study the implications of political transnationalism. Historical analysis will provide a deeper view into the beginnings of this public policy issue which can be traced to policies and political movements within the United States, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic that promoted migration, some of which had the purpose of preventing full assimilation to U.S. culture. In this way, the country of origin benefits more than the destination country. I will also discuss how the nature of immigration in general has changed as a result of increased communication with the country of origin. It is agreed upon by most scholars that that the notion of the “clean break” of past immigrants is no longer relevant. This is in contrast to the orthodox approach to immigration in the 20th Century. These were immigrants who settled abroad and were eventually expected to

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assimilate into the dominant society’s sociocultural and economic systems. At the same time, the immigrants were simultaneously shedding their old cultural practices and political loyalties.¹¹ I will also explain and analyze political transnationalism in context with Elliott Barkan’s traditional model of assimilation, as well as the updated assimilation model, the multicultural perspective, and the segmented assimilation model so that I can offer the most inclusive explanation of the assimilation process.¹²

Political analysis will serve to detail benefits and disadvantages for individuals and governments, as well as describe the pull and tug between constituents and political leaders that encourages voting or running for office in both the country of origin and host country. In Chapter 3, case studies will be discussed pertaining to: politician’s encouragement of dual citizenship laws, the sending of remittances, and the beneficiaries of these policies in the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and the U.S., and how political transnationalism discourages U.S. immigrants from participating in the U.S. political process. These concepts will be examined through the lens of Margaret Conway’s Models of Political Participation: socioeconomic status model, civic voluntarism model, and the rational choice model in relation to Mexican and Dominican immigrants.¹³

¹² Barkan, “Model of Ethnicity,” 38-75.
¹³ Conway, Political Participation, 17-57.
In addition to these two methodologies, in Chapter 4 I will present a study by the Tomas Riveria Policy Institute (TRPI). The purpose of this study was to gauge Latino’s political participation in their communities here in the United States as well as their political participation abroad in their communities/countries of origin both before and after their migration to the United States. The researchers focused on the political participation of the four major Latino immigrant groups within the United States: Mexicans, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, and Salvadorans. Researchers believe that if transnational politics among immigrants and their children becomes common, that it could drastically impact the politics and public policy of both nations at the crossroads of political transnational activity.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{Conclusion}

In Chapter 5 the research gathered for Chapter 2, 3, and 4 will be synthesized, explaining further my hypothesis that political transnationalism is elongating and discouraging assimilation, as well as why political participation should be included in assimilation models. By examining the histories of the U.S./Mexican and U.S./Dominican Republic political and cultural relationships, immigration laws, case studies, political movements, and various assimilation theories, I will uncover the

underlying issues at the root of the problem as well provide possible solutions to this emerging public policy issue.
CHAPTER 2: THE CHANGING FACE OF ASSIMILATION

Assimilation Defined

Assimilation is defined by one prominent immigration scholar as the process by which “...individuals’ ethnic origins become less relevant in relation to members of another ethnic group”, (in this case to the white Anglo-Saxon protestant majority), and “individuals on both sides of the boundary see themselves more and more alike.”¹

Assimilation can take place over one generational level, and on individual and group levels. By the third generation, most Mexicans hold similar cultural and political beliefs as the rest of Americans. However in enclaves where there is high political transnational activity, the homogenization of political beliefs may not occur until the forth generation. However, in today’s scholarship, assimilation no longer means that immigrants must conform entirely to “American” ideas. Immigrants bring their own social and economic concepts with them, altering notions of what is considered mainstream in the community in which they live. Assimilation is generally understood to be a non-linear process that occurs in stages, with some individuals reaching or groups reaching more advanced stages then others.² Assimilation “…offers legitimization of the preservation of sub-national communal life and some cultural differences for the nation’s various ethnic groups, and justifies the result as providing a


more democratic, more interesting, and more dynamically fruitful culture for all Americans than one in which uniformity was the norm.”

This means that while immigrants will adopt certain “American” characteristics, they will retain certain traditions from their homeland.

Elliott Barkan, a leading assimilation theorist, contends that an immigrant is fully assimilated when they are “…largely blended or melded into the larger society, culturally, socially, and institutionally, and identificationally.”

Barkan describes assimilation as the shedding of “…cultural, linguistic, behavioral, and identification characteristics of their original group as well as disengaged from the associational or structural activities that set them apart from others.”

Barkan points out that assimilation does not mean that one completely loses their cultural memory; just that they fit in better or identify with the larger or core society. Barkan also points out that assimilation happens in integrals and that some steps may even be skipped depending on the ethnicity, educational level, or religious beliefs of the incoming immigrant. It should be noted that political participation is not explicitly mentioned by Barkan as a factor when considering whether or not an immigrant has “fully assimilated”.

Despite its weaknesses, Barkan’s model of assimilation still informs current scholarship.

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5. Ibid., 189.

6. Ibid., 38-75.
because it deals with the fundamental question of how immigrants become part of the larger U.S. culture.

Assimilation does not occur rapidly and is contingent upon the host society to accept the new immigrant. Barkan describes assimilation through a six step model. The phases in this model include: (1) Contact; (2) Acculturation; (3) Adaptation; (4) Accommodation; (5) Integration; and (6) Assimilation.

Contact is the first phase when the newcomer focuses overwhelmingly on the cultural and social norms of their homeland, and often do not interact with persons from their host society as they may face extreme hostility. Citizenship is not yet an option.

In the acculturation phase, native language publications may emerge, ethnic identities and communities emerge, part of the younger second generation may begin to interact more with the larger society. The focus of most of the group members however is still toward the homeland.

During the adaptation phase, a greater use of English usually occurs especially after the second and third generations are born. Discrimination is less frequent, and more foreign born persons acquire citizenship.

In the accommodation phase, there is a smaller proportion of foreign born citizens, there has been considerable geographic mobility, occupational, social class, educational mobility and more intermarriage.7 There are substantial identification

shifts and more breaks within the diagram. More persons exit their groups and move towards greater assimilation into the larger society. Some ethnic organizations may begin to fade and definitely wane in influence.

By the integration stage persons have more education and socioeconomic mobility. We also see more shifts in religious affiliations and practice. Most persons of this group identify with the core society though there are still some sub-groups that perpetuate cultural bonds.

By the time assimilation occurs, the group’s cultural memory has waned significantly and the majority of persons have melted into the larger society culturally, socially, intuitionally, and identificationally. At this stage according to Barkan, the person is fully assimilated to Anglo-American core society.8

**Segmented Assimilation Theory**

In addition to Elliott Barkan’s traditional model of assimilation, the Segmented Assimilation Model can be used to describe the assimilation process. Segmented assimilation theorists believe that mainstream culture is fragmented along socioeconomic lines, meaning that various sub-cultures shaped by socioeconomic standing co-exist. Immigrants can be part of any of these socioeconomic groups as they adjust to their new culture, however this does not necessarily mean that the immigrants

will experience upward social and economic mobility. Some immigrants, especially those in the inner-city, may experience downward mobility. Upward mobility can be achieved by attaining a higher education level. This can be seen in case study examples provided in Chapter 3 of the Dominican Immigrants.

Some immigrants move ahead to better jobs and lifestyles while others stagnate though their cultural ties remain close. Factors such as English proficiency, age of migration, family, personal aspirations, and place of residence also come into play when determining successful assimilation or upward mobility. The segmented assimilation model does an excellent job of accounting for the psychological factor that affects assimilation.

W.E.B. DeBois called this factor a “public, psychological wage” In the 1930’s. DeBois observed that poor southern whites got a “public, psychological wage” that made them feel superior to blacks living in similar squalid conditions. In “How the Irish became White”, Roediger uses the same insight to describe how the Irish learned that it was not enough to “not be black,” they must be “anti-black.” The “blackness” of a person often depended on what level they exist on the social hierarchy. Mexicans do not fit neatly into this hierarchy but still face substantial obstacles. The racialization process is currently not considered to be part of immigrant incorporation into the larger

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10. Ibid., 984.

society. Strong evidence exists however, that racialization is a strong part of children’s experience in the United States. “Given this kind of pervasive racial dynamic in the process of incorporation, racialization merits inclusion as an important theory in social science tool kit for studying immigration today.”\textsuperscript{12} Alejandro Portes, Ruben Rumbaut, Min Zhou and others who developed Segmented Assimilation Theory describe three possible paths for second generation immigrants, and are especially concerned with the upward mobility of Mexicans and other Latinos.

The first path is assimilation to the white middle-class, thus surrendering their ethnicity, and taking the path of upward social mobility (classic assimilation theory). The second path immigrants can choose is assimilating to “inner-city culture” which is what Paul Willis called “the second generation decline.” This is when the second generation experiences downward social and economic mobility. This can be achieved by dropping out of school and the labor market. The third path immigrants can take is to “circumvent discrimination and define themselves as different from both the white mainstream and their less successful inner-city counterparts.”\textsuperscript{13} Though this model is intricate and inclusive it does not explain where immigrant’s political activity falls in accordance with their assimilation.

\begin{enumerate}
\item Smith, \textit{Mexican New York}, 14.
\item Ibid., 25.
\end{enumerate}
Assimilation in a Historical Perspective

We have recently seen a shift in scholarship from the clean break theory to a new era of assimilation. It is helpful to understand the clean break theory’s historical significance in order to compare and contrast its relevance in relation with today’s immigrants.

The clean break theory underlies the “canonical view” of how the process of assimilation was traditionally played out. The main assumption is that immigrants who settle abroad are eventually expected to assimilate into the dominant society’s socio-cultural and economic systems while simultaneously shedding their “old” cultural practices and political loyalties. The main hypothesis that can be derived from this perspective is that the longer immigrants live and are socialized into the ways of the host society, the greater the likelihood of their becoming thoroughly absorbed in it. “Longer periods of U.S. residence should lead to progressive disengagement from old country loyalties and attachments.”14 The extent of modern immigrants’ social, cultural, and political involvement in their country of origin is a stark contrast to the Orthodox approach to immigration in the 20th century, though beneficial lessons can still be derived from its review and study.15


During the 19th and 20th century, education programs for new immigrant populations were more prevalent. Settlement houses, schools, and progressive reformers put pressure on immigrants to abandon the ways of the old world. They advised immigrants to set aside customs and old world ideas. This message varies greatly from the one offered today in many situations, including that of Dominican and Mexican immigrants. However, on a more positive note, society is becoming more accepting of new cultures and there are many more accepted norms for what it means to be an American. In this manner, it is highly unlikely that we will see legislation passed such as the Exclusionary Acts that discouraged Chinese Americans from assimilating in the early part of the 19th Century and to set up separate “Chinatowns.” U.S. policy leaders must enact laws to encourage successful assimilation while at the same time respecting vital aspects of a person’s culture, political leanings, and religious beliefs. Even though times have changed immigrants still face many of the same difficulties that earlier generations did, including identity, opportunity, and generational change.16

When considering what role and implications political transnationalism plays in assimilation, it is also important to look at current and past immigration patterns. The new immigration from places such as Latin America and the Caribbean can best be characterized as an uninterrupted “flow” rather than delineated “waves” typical of the

earlier European transatlantic immigration. This ongoing, uninterrupted migratory flow continually replenishes social practices and cultural models that would otherwise tend to be lost to assimilation. Examples abound in the American southwest and northeast. “Indeed, in certain areas of the southwest, Latin American immigration is generating a powerful infrastructure dominated by a growing Spanish-speaking mass media (radio, television, and print), new market dynamics, and new cultural identities.”

Communication technologies encourage a transnational lifestyle for many immigrants and as a result today’s immigration process is not linear but segmented. Political activity is a major component of that process.

**Additional Factors that Affect Assimilation**

In addition to examining the history of assimilation and assimilation models it is also important to discuss in more detail various individual factors including education of immigrants and gender, the context in which the immigrant migrated and was received, and their status of citizenship that affect the assimilation experience in terms of routes taken or time taken to become fully assimilated the mainstream culture.

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A) Education

As mentioned briefly above education is a valuable component of assimilation. Notably, Hispanics have consistently had low-education levels in the last several generations. This is important to note as education promotes a swifter integration into the host society. Assimilation theory also concludes that education speeds upward mobility. Education has been proven to increase political participation worldwide. Education of immigrants should especially be considered in its context to political transnationalism because when an immigrant becomes educated he or she is more likely to have less ties with the homeland and shift their allegiance to their new country. 19

B) Gender

Another key aspect that must be considered when discussing assimilation is the role of gender. According to Guarnizo, recent literature has pointed out that women and men often view their receiving and sending countries in a different light. Women traditionally experience upward mobility while the reverse is true for men, who often lose social and economic status in the United States. This is true because many women become paid workers for the first time in the U.S. "Women’s labor market

incorporation brings about significant changes in how they (women) perceive themselves and are perceived by men within and outside of the household.”

Jones-Correa introduced a gendered view of political participation that points out that men are more likely than women to remain politically active or participate in political transnational activities than are Latin American women. Jones-Correa believes that this participation is linked to men’s loss of status in America. Women are more likely to shift their worldview towards the U.S. In Latin America, as in many countries, men have typically dominated politics. Jones-Correa believes that political transnationalism for men is a way to reassert their traditional hegemony by continuing to fixate on the politics on their country's of origin. This perspective also allows us to examine the role that gender has on downward mobility for some new or preceding generation immigrants.

C) Context of Migration

Assimilation is not only affected by individual characteristics but also by events surrounding the immigrant's departure and the reception that the immigrant had when first coming to this country. The greater the differences, whether they be a language barrier, difference in appearance, or religious affiliation, between the immigrant and the majority the more likely the chance that the immigrant will meet difficulty in the

21. Ibid.
assimilation process. Those immigrants who move to a rural community where there are not many of their immigrant group may have a more difficult time integrating than those who move to a metropolitan area. Social and political behavior is also affected by the expectations that the immigrant has gained through interactions with family members or friends who have already made the journey. “The socially expected durations (SED’s) were originally theorized by Merton as a decisive element of social life affecting a wide range of individual and collective activities.”

The context in which the immigrant was received to the U.S., both by the government and in a social context, significantly affects how easily they are able to adapt politically and economically.

D) Citizenship Status and Assimilation

The status of an immigrant’s citizenship is also a significant component in gauging their assimilation to mainstream culture. Once immigrants have assimilated it is generally believed that they hold a “…single identity, national allegiance, and representation in one polity.” Political membership and cultural identity are defined as “…well bounded characteristics, such that acquiring new ones implies abandoning those previously held.” It can be derived from this explanation that once an immigrant has become a naturalized citizen they are less likely to be involved in transnational


23. Ibid., 1216.
politics. The act of becoming a naturalized citizen should in theory act as a “natural barrier” to the continuation of political transnationalism.\textsuperscript{24} This however is not the case in many instances as supported by evidence that will be presented in the next chapter concerning studies of Dominican and Mexican Immigrants political activities here and abroad.

\textsuperscript{24} Guarnizo, “Assimilation and Transnationalism,” 1216.
Latin American Immigration and Transnational Citizenship

In 1965, when Congress amended the Immigration and Nationality Act, it was oblivious to the large scale migration that would occur over the next 40 years from Latin America. On October 3, 1965 when Lyndon Johnson signed the amended Immigration Act beside the Statute of Liberty he stated with calm assurance, "This bill that we will sign today is not a revolutionary bill. It does not affect the lives of millions. It will not reshape the structure of our daily lives, or really add importantly to either our wealth or our power. Yet it is still one of the most important acts of this Congress and of this administration as it corrects a cruel and enduring wrong in the conduct of the American nation."¹ At the time, the signing of this bill was seen as an extension of civil rights to would-be Americans wanting to migrate. Law makers saw little indication of the massive migration that would follow from our southern neighbors.

The 1965 Act abolished the quota system that had structured American immigration policy since the 1920’s and created a foundation for this massive

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migration of people to immigrate and become involved in the shaping of U.S. culture.² Though presently the electoral impact of these immigrants is small, their influence will continue to grow and impact U.S. public policy. Most recently, among Latin American immigrants has emerged a trend of transnational political involvement with their communities of origin.³

Many immigrants in the United States from communities across the globe maintain political and social networks with their communities of origin, especially immigrants from Latin America. Political transnationalism is made easier by a decrease in travel costs and an increase in communication resources between the United States and our southern neighbors. Concurrently, there has been an increase in supranational institutional networks that challenge conceived notions of state sovereignty and the rights associated with national citizenship. Some scholars depict the activities of “....international human rights agencies and the development of supranational authority structures such as the European Union as signs of a new international order premised on the creation of plural authority and transnational citizenship.”⁴ Political practices and networks that span across borders could eventually

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3. DeSipio et. al., Immigrant Politics at Home and Abroad, 1.

affect the status of the nation state. How the status of the nation state will be affected is
difficult to predict.

Mexicans: The Evolution of Political Activity

In *Citizenship across Borders*, Michael Smith and Matt Baker dissect the issue
of political transnationalism in the context of what it means to be a transnational
citizen in Mexico and the U.S. by detailing findings from five years of case studies.
The researchers’ analysis includes interviews with Mexican transnational activists and
migrants about their home town and state associations, their electoral candidates and
additional information of regional and local governments, as well as the laws
governing citizenship and political activity. Smith and Baker provide us with a
historical narrative explaining the increase in political transnationalism between the
U.S. and Mexico, and how new political spaces have been created for candidates,
advocates, and interests groups.\(^5\)

The Importance of HTAs in Promoting Political Activism

HTAs (Home Town Associations) are at the forefront of this political activity
and activism in Mexico. HTAs have evolved since their inception in the 1950’s.
When HTAs were originally created their stated goal was “socio-cultural purposes” of

community solidarity. At that point, HTAs abstained from political activity as the Mexican political system was deemed too corrupt to deal with.⁶

HTAs were also discouraged from becoming involved in U.S. politics because it would take away their tax exempt status as a non-profit organization. Before the last twenty years, HTAs obtained their funds primarily from local community fund-raising activities and soliciting voluntary donations from their “paisanos”, or compatriots in the United States. This money was then used to carry out a wide variety of philanthropic functions for the improvement of immigrants' communities of origin.⁷ HTAs might use money raised to provide emergency assistance to victims of natural disasters, send money to indebted families, to construct sports or recreation facilities, to renovate public plazas and churches, to contribute to public works projects such as building roads, or health clinics.⁸ “These and other philanthropic activities, which were organized by HTA leaders not only generated resources for community betterment projects but helped to bring a much larger pool of paisanos together, reactivating the sources of their cultural identity and strengthening their claims to community membership in the localities they left behind.”⁹ In the early 1980’s, elected Mexican state officials took notice of the success of the HTAs and began to develop a coherent set of migrant reincorporation polices. Most significantly, the Mexican state began to

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⁷ Ibid., 3.
⁸ Ibid.
⁹ Ibid., 7.
notice the inroads opposition parties were making in the U.S. and what effect these organizations were having as a result on the improvement of their community. The point of the policies was to increase and consolidate HTA with larger state-level federations, and to "...channel them into transnational public-private partnerships."

The government became fearful of the success opposition parties where have in immigrant communities in America. Mexicans who had relocated in America still supported their hometown HTAs because they felt it would make inroads to fighting corruption within the Mexican government. The immigrants who supported the HTAs remained members of the political party that was in opposition to the government. The international interest generated from this political activity brought light to corruption in Mexico and encouraged a more open political atmosphere better suited for much needed reform.

The state of Zacatecas formed a very successful federation of HTAs. The Zacatecan leaders were able to pressure then Governor Genaro Borreg to promote legislation that would increase the rights, both human and social, of migrants and their families. This led to the creation of the Paisano Program which encouraged migrants leaders to become involved in politics. Mexico’s changing political system has ushered in an increase in political activity from migrants across the border. Mexico’s political system, once centralized and authoritarian, has now become more open to creating

10. Smith and Bakker, El Migrante, 7.
additional opportunities for grassroots activism.\textsuperscript{11}

**Voting Legislation**

Mexican migrants were first granted the right to vote from abroad in Presidential elections in 2005. Activists wanted the vote as early as 1929 when a California delegation opposed to the re-election of Jose Vasconcelos sought to expand voting rights to Mexicans living in the United States. “The demand for the right to vote from abroad has been a recurring theme among Mexican migrants throughout post-revolutionary Mexican political theory.”\textsuperscript{12} However, the vote-from-abroad movement did not really gain momentum until the 1980’s. During the 1988 election cycle, thousands of migrants rallied in Los Angeles, California and agricultural regions for the right to vote in Mexico. These events were organized by Cuauhtemoc Cardenas who wanted to use their vote to further democratize Mexico and help end corruption in his homeland.

A slew of electoral reforms were put in place during the 1990’s in what came to be termed the “right-to-vote movement”.\textsuperscript{13} These reforms were created by the Mexican government to strengthen migrants' ties to the homeland. In 1996, a constitutional barrier was eliminated that maintained that Mexican citizens could only vote in their

\begin{footnotes}
\item[12] Ibid., 132.
\item[13] Ibid., 133.
\end{footnotes}
local residential districts. This made it possible for Mexican citizens to vote abroad, primarily affecting immigrants in the United States, the destination country for 99% of all Mexican citizens. This coupled with the “Non-Loss in Mexican Nationality Legislation” encouraged those who were citizens of the U.S. to obtain dual citizenship and full political rights. However, in the 2006 Mexican Presidential election, only 55,000 expatriate Mexican voters applied for an expatriate voting ballot. Of those, 32,632 voted in the election. For perspective, 39,058,075 voted in the 2006 presidential election. However small this expatriate voter turn-out was, voting is only one aspect of political transnationalism.

One key program which serves as an obstacle for Mexican Immigrants in the U.S. working towards obtaining full political rights is the Guest Worker Program. The Guest Worker Program was modeled on the earlier Bracero program, which was a labor agreement between the United States and Mexico beginning in the early 1940’s to replace workers who were overseas fighting in World War II. According to Bakker and Smith, guest worker programs “…delink Mexican migration from the normal routes to U.S. citizenship, trapping migrants in a permanent non-immigrant status with little or no political rights.” This is despite the United State’s continual demand for labor workers. Immigrants who enroll in the Guest Worker Program must rely on their employer to renew their visa and are therefore discouraged from forming or


15. Ibid., 6.
participating in any type of union or other political activities. Guest workers are socially stigmatized and cannot compete for the best jobs available or ask for better wages.\textsuperscript{16}

**Remittances as Agents of Political Change**

A U.S.-Mexican Bi-National Study on Immigration estimates that remittances to Mexico were the equivalent to 57 percent of the foreign exchange available through direct investment of 1995, and 5 percent of the total income supplied by exports.\textsuperscript{17} Remittances can play a positive role in boosting global economies, especially since half of all Latin American immigrants send remittances home to their community of origin. Due to this revenue effect, the issue has become increasingly political in nature, with government officials of the receiving country often working to secure this transnational participation. Politicians work to secure funds for their own elections and for public works projects that positively impact their constituents' everyday lives.

In Robert Courtney Smith’s book, *Mexican New York, Transnational Lives of New Immigrants*, he details how expatriates from the town of Ticuani who now live in New York actively participate by video tape in transnational public meetings in order to collect money for a water project.


\textsuperscript{17} Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco, “Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Assimilation But Were Afraid to Ask,” *Daedalus* 129 (Fall 2000): 1-17.
Council members were able to fly back to the country for a weekend to confer with contractors and authorities when they learned that the new tubing had been delivered. Community leaders were effectively able to gain both monetary and political support from many immigrants in New York who had family members living in Ticuani who would suffer without the repairs. Smith argues that new technology and ways of organizing economic life compress time and space so that distances no longer have the same meaning, and international transactions such as sending remittances that previously took weeks now takes seconds.¹⁸

**Dominican Americans: Trends of Political Transnationalism**

In the Dominican Republic, political candidates regularly campaign among expatriates to gain their political favor and monetary support. Guillermo Linares, who was running for city council in New York City, visited the Dominican Republic to campaign among those who held dual citizenship. Thousands of New Yorkers voted in the recent Dominican presidential elections. Guanzo explains further: “In fact, migrant’s financial contributions constitute for as much as 15% of the major Dominican parties fund raising revenues. New York City also boasts the Dominican

Republic’s second largest voting group, only second to that of the capital city of Santo Domingo.\footnote{19}

These figures are astounding when compared to other Latin American statistics of political involvement. The current President of the Dominican Republic, Lionel Fernandez Reyna (who grew up in New York City), recently delivered a long and rousing speech at an Upper West Side High school which articulated reasons for the pursuit of dual citizenship. President Fernandez was born in the Dominican Republic but moved to the U.S. with his family in the 1970’s to the Washington Heights area in New York City. Even when he was attending law school in Santo Domingo he still returned each summer to work at his family’s corner store in New York. This life experience helps put into context the following quotation from the aforementioned speech:\footnote{20}

If you, young mother, or you, elderly gentleman, or you young student, feel the need to adopt the nationality of the United States in order to confront vicissitudes of that society stemming from the end of the welfare era, do not feel tormented by this. Instead do it with a peaceful conscience, for you will continue to be Dominicans, and we will welcome you as such when you set foot on the soil of our Republic.\footnote{21}


\footnote{21. Foner, “Transnationalism Then and Now,” 47.}
As can be gathered from the above quote, the President of the Dominican Republic is in no way promoting assimilation to American culture, he is proposing a strategy that would be most beneficial to the citizens of Dominican Republic. While he may be attempting to persuade a unified group of Dominicans of the economic benefits of dual citizenship he is also suggesting segregation from the general American population. The promotion of such ideas pose a great threat to assimilation and thus generally to the idea of the U.S. as a melting pot.

**Evolution of Dominican Political Activity**

In order to understand how this modern attitude towards immigration evolved, we must go back through Dominican political and governmental history and to the beginnings of the Dominican Republic’s modern relationship with the United States.

During Rafael Trujillo’s reign, Dominican citizens were kept from receiving radio and television transmissions from the United States and towards the end of his reign were even prevented from receiving any foreign radio broadcasts. Trujillo preferred to listen to music that celebrated his rule and his brother Petan Trujillo favored Cuban and Mexican music performed live. After the Dominican dictator’s death in 1961, radio and television networks quickly picked up U.S. broadcasts such as “Willie con la Juventud” (Willie with the Youth). Radio Santa María suddenly made

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foreign songs and dances available to young Dominicans.\textsuperscript{23} American clothing, hair styles, and entertainment rapidly spread throughout the Dominican Republic, and New York City became the number one destination for Dominican immigrants.\textsuperscript{24} By the end of the century as result of this new awakening and increased U.S. intervention in the region, it is estimated that there were 1.12 million Dominicans living in the United States while there were only 8.27 million citizens living in the Dominican Republic.\textsuperscript{25}

In addition to the Dominicans’ voluntary migration to the U.S., political exile has also historically been used as a tool to expel persons from the Dominican Republic. To the many Dominicans who began to see U.S. influence as highly unfavorable, exile to the nation that caused this distress was unduly painful. Dominicans viewed the U.S. as an imperial threat (mostly because of its corporate and media outlets) and its influence reminded them of the Trujillo dictatorship in the way that cultural policy was directed by threatening their idea of what a national Dominican culture should be like.

As a result, exiles exerted a very strong influence on the development of Dominican political associations in New York. “The experience of exile, though numerically small, had a profound influence on the way that Dominicans expressed their national identity in New York, and on the ways that leftists and intellectuals left

\textsuperscript{23} Hoffnung-Garskof, \textit{A Tale of Two Cities}, 81.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 4.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
behind in Santo Domingo would perceive their missing comrades.”26

The majority of immigration from the Dominican Republic continued to move to New York City throughout the 1970’s and 1980’s. However in the 1990’s, smaller settlement cities, around 200,000, began to sprout up in places such as New Jersey, Rhode Island, and South Florida. More than half of all immigrants, 650,000, continue to live in New York City. The Dominicans in New York City primarily live in the neighborhoods of Washington Heights, Corona, the Upper West Side, Lower East Side, and West Bronx. To these areas, “Migrants brought notions of racial belonging, their language, their political parties, their religious practices, music, and their proliferation of street vendors to these newly Dominican spaces.”27

Among the many groups that lived in these areas, the only group that had a greater representation was Puerto Ricans. Dominicans who were black, but who also spoke Spanish, worked to distinguish themselves from the black African American community and from other Latinos. Dominican immigrants, both legal and illegal, sought this distinction after facing discrimination. The *New York Daily News*, in September of 1971, printed the first of a five-part expose on the destructive influences of illegal aliens to the economy, citizens, and general well being of New York City.28

Just a few months earlier, the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on

27. Ibid., 5.
28. Ibid., 185.
Immigration and Naturalization had held hearings on the problems of illegal aliens and called for a shift in U.S. policy from being directed to border control with Mexico to focusing on the growing problem of illegal immigrants in New York. Even though the committee did not speak as harshly about the Dominicans as it did concerning Mexican Americans, it still issued a warning to the Dominican and Haitian communities. “In theory the focus on illegal aliens ratified the rights of legal immigrants, but talk of an illegal crisis was also a way of blaming social problems on immigrants who were universally understood as poor, dark-skinned Latin Americans.”

Arguments were made that these immigrants were bleeding the state dry of much needed funds and also that they were taking the jobs of American citizens. J. Velazquez, a concerned citizen, wrote a letter to the Daily News contending that, “As for putting Americans out of jobs, bunk. In most cases, the jobs these aliens take are refused by our needy citizens who prefer welfare.” Officials in the Partido Revolucionario Dominicano interviewed in a feature in the New York Times made clear that it was nearly impossible for illegal Dominicans to collect public assistance and that statistics showed that blacks and Puerto-Ricans were more likely to receive assistance than Dominicans. The Coalition for the Defense of Immigrants also staged a protest outside of the Daily News building to protest papers general negative treatment of Hispanics. Even so, with these

distinctions made clear by leaders of the community, Dominicans still shared any of the same political views with minorities groups of the same socioeconomic status.\textsuperscript{30}

Involvement in politics in New York often led to a leadership role in Dominican political parties at home. Activists often were fighting a two pronged war, one in the U.S. against discriminatory news coverage and laws facing Dominican immigrants and one in the Dominican Republic against outside imperialist influences. Those who branded themselves “Domincanos ausentes” (absent Dominicans) led campaigns to obtain the right to vote in Dominican national elections. The promise of political rights was a commonly employed tool of politicians to gain support in elections during the 1980’s. The Dominican President from 1982-1986, “...made strong overtures to the New York constituency, presenting bills in favor of voting rights for Dominican Ausentes while in Congress while President.”\textsuperscript{31}

It was not until the early 1990’s that this promise materialized, when the Dominican Republic offered dual citizenship for those who were already naturalized U.S. citizens. Polling places were opened in San Juan, New York, and Florida so that Dominicans or persons of Dominican descent could vote in the 1994 residential election of Leonel Fernandez. President Fernandez’s life could be seen as a

\textsuperscript{30} Hoffnung-Garskof, \textit{A Tale of Two Cities}, 6.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 216.
model for transnational citizenship.\textsuperscript{32}

As can be seen by the summary information on the historical and political context, Mexican and Dominican immigrants participate in political transnational activities to varying levels. Much of their political involvement is based on the political environment of their country of origin, previous activities therein, and the immigrants' acceptance or assimilation into mainstream political structures. Having examined historical trends and current case studies gathered on individual political figures, immigration laws, and political movements, the next section examines the transnational political activities of the average Mexican and Dominican immigrant based on the TRPI Immigrant Political Participation Survey.

**TRPI Immigrant Political Participation Survey: Current Political Participation of Latin American Immigrants**

The TRPI Immigrant Political Participation Survey was conducted by the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute. Their self-stated goal was to produce neutral immigration studies. The purpose of this study was to gauge Latino’s political participation in their communities here in the United States as well as their political participation abroad in their communities/countries of origin both before and after their migration to the United States. The researchers focused on the political participation of

\textsuperscript{32} Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 243.
the four major Latino immigrant groups within the United States: Mexicans, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, and Salvadorans. 33

Researchers believe that if transnational politics among immigrants and their children becomes common, that it could drastically impact the politics and public policy of both nations at the crossroads of political transnational activity. In order to gauge and analyze political transnational activity, researchers sought to find the answer to three primary questions: (1) Do Latino immigrants participate in transnational politics?; (2) among the Latinos who participate, do they also participate in U.S. politics in higher numbers than do other, comparably situated, Latino immigrants?; (3) are there variations in transnational political behaviors across Latino national origin groups and if there are, do they have any effect on the Latino immigrants engaging in U.S. politics? 34

According to the institute this first question is asked because it has been left out by other researchers in the field of immigration research. The second question seeks to measure the policy consequences of political transnationalism; whether or not participating in one country's political process means that they are neglecting the other. The final question was asked to permit a comparative analysis between the four main Latino immigrants groups in the U.S. The focus will primarily be on the comparison


34. DeSipio et. al., *Immigrant Politics at Home and Abroad*, 2-8.
between Mexican and Dominican immigrants. In order to provide answers to these and other questions the Institute conducted interviews with 209 Mexican immigrants and 299 Dominican immigrants who were over the age of 16. Interviews were conducted over the phone so that immigrants could be identified from various regions of the U.S., primarily from larger cities, in New York, New Jersey, California, and Texas. These are the areas with the largest concentrations of Latino immigrant population. The average respondent had resided for 20 years in the United States.

The survey was then broken down into four parts. The first set of questions dealt with immigrant’s participation in country of origin political activities in the period since their migration to the United States, the second gauged their participation in political activities in their country of origin a year prior to the survey. The third set of questions dealt with political behaviors prior to migration, and the fourth set of questions dealt with the immigrant’s participation in U.S. political activities since migration in order to determine if participating in politics of their country of origin detracts from participating in U.S. politics.\textsuperscript{35}

**Immigrant Participation in Country of Origin: Political Activities in Time since Migration**

The first set of questions dealt with the Latino immigrant’s participation in their country of origin political activities in the period since their migration. The findings concluded that 63.6\% of Mexican immigrants followed politics of Mexico in the

\textsuperscript{35} DeSipio et al., *Immigrant Politics at Home and Abroad*, 2-8.
Spanish language media while 67.1% of the Dominicans surveyed followed Dominican politics in the Spanish language media. Both of these groups are on average comparable to the rest of the Latino’s surveyed; 6 in 10 of the Latino’s surveyed still paid attention to the politics in their country of origin. As for voting in elections in their nation of origin, 9.5% of Mexicans voted in comparison to 15.0% of those surveyed Dominicans. This is an astounding number considering that these immigrants have been in the U.S. for at least 20 years. To put this in perspective only one in nine of all Latino immigrants surveyed participated in elections in their country of origin so the Dominicans are the highest on average for any of the four groups surveyed. The next question asked in this set of inquiries was if the immigrant had contributed financially to a candidate running for office or political party in country of origin. On average few Latinos surveyed participated in this type of political transnationalism, even though nearly half of all Latinos in general send money as remittances. Often as mentioned in the previous examples, money is directed at HTAs instead of political candidates to achieve goals for their community of origin. This could be one reason why direct contributions to political candidates are so low.36

Only 2.0% of Mexicans and 6.3% of Dominicans contributed to candidates abroad. Few Latinos also attended rallies in the U.S. on average with 2.7% of Mexicans. However, 17.3% of Dominicans surveyed attended a rally at which a home country political leader spoke, thus setting the curve for the rest of the respondents to

this question. The majority of Dominicans reside in New York City and this is where politicians from Santo Domingo come to campaign. Mexican immigrants are more spread out throughout the nation making it more difficult for major candidates from Mexico to travel to various states to campaign. In the same fashion, to the final question which asked if the respondent had been contacted by representative of their home nation to become involved in home nation political or cultural affairs, 11.5% of Dominicans said yes in comparison to 3.0% of Mexicans. Candidates contacting immigrants before a visit to the U.S. to gauge interests is vital before actually coming to campaign because the two are interconnected in purpose. However, generally the majority of Latino respondents engaged in limited “…transnational electoral and partisan activities.”

It should also be noted that the Dominicans and the Puerto Ricans, who are both from the Caribbean region, were more likely than Mexicans or Salvadorans to respond that they had voted in their nation of origins elections in the last year. Between 8.5 and 9.5 percent of Mexicans and Salvadorans had voted in their nation of origin elections compared to 15% of Dominicans and 14.6% of Puerto Ricans. Thus the Dominicans and Puerto Ricans were 50% more likely to vote in country of origin elections. In conclusion, “…in terms of the electorally focused home-nation activities-voting, giving money, or attending a rally approximately 80% of respondents had taken part in none of these activities. Of the remainder approximately one in four had

participated in two or more.”

However, the questions asked concerning voting, attending rallies, and contributing to candidates abroad must be looked at with the whole of other political transnational activities in order to gauge the actual amount of participation. As 15% or more of Dominicans who live in the U.S are still participating in political activities of the Dominican Republic, their assimilation to U.S. culture must be more carefully considered.

Immigrant Participation in Country of Origin One Year Prior to Survey

The second set of questions asked to respondents concerned immigrant participation in country of origin focused political activities in the year prior to the survey. Approximately one third of those surveyed told researchers that they had attended a meeting to discuss at home politics. Once again Dominicans were the most active, followed by Puerto Ricans, then Salvadorians and lastly Mexicans. Specifically, 26.6% of Dominicans attended a meeting to discuss home country politics versus only 6.2% of Mexicans. For the second question, concerning attending cultural or educational events in the last year, approximately one third of all respondents answered in the positive. Of this one third, 26% of Mexicans attended compared to 43.9% of Dominicans. Dominicans were also more likely then any other groups to have been a

38. DeSipio et al., Immigrant Politics at Home and Abroad, 10-13.

member of an organization promoting cultural ties between the U.S. and their home country. Only 6.7% of Mexicans offered yes while Dominican 12.8% affirmed their involvement. The Dominicans were also far more likely be a member of an organization of people from respondents’ hometown; Dominican 22.6% compared to Mexicans 8.5%. In simplest terms this means that one in five Dominicans were a member of an organization of people from their hometown, which in most cases meant the capitol city of Santo Domingo. To conclude the second questionnaire, respondents were asked if they sought assistance from an embassy or a consulate. Only Mexican 6.0% and 3.0% of Dominicans sought assistance from their embassy or consulate. Many respondents pointed out that they would instead contact family members or old neighbors when seeking advice or other assistance. Upon reviewing the data from this and the last questionnaire it appears that Dominicans are generally more politically active as a population than any of the other Latino groups.40

Despite the fact that the share of immigrants participating in political transnationalistic activities is small, it still represents a large number of immigrants. “In a 2000 the Current Population survey found that there was 8.4 million non-U.S. citizen Latino Adults and about 3.5 million naturalized citizens.”41 Thus the 13% of immigrants that reported that they had been a member of a home organization from their country or origin/community could number 1.6 million people.

40. DeSipio et al., Immigrant Politics at Home and Abroad, 13.
41. Ibid., 15.
Immigrants Political Behaviors Prior to Migration

The third set of questions that were asked in the TRPI Survey concerned Latino immigrants' political behaviors prior to migration. These questions were only asked of the immigrants who had migrated to the U.S. after the age of 16. The survey found generally that respondents who migrated after the age of 16 had more likely than not followed the political happenings of their homeland. Accordingly, 51.0% of Mexicans and 65.6% of Dominicans did so by following politics on the news. Respondents were also asked if they had wore a button for a candidate running for office. Again Dominicans, at 25.8% were far more likely than Mexicans at 10%. The next questions concerned writing letters to government officials. Only 4.5% of Mexicans wrote their government officials compared to 8.4% of Dominicans. Next respondents were asked if they distributed literature for candidates. Of those asked, 6.2% Mexican’s participated in this type of candidate promotion in comparison to 12.7% of Dominicans. When asked if they had canvassed or marched, 13.8% of Mexicans did so in comparison to 29.1% of Dominicans. Only 2.1% of Mexican’s and 7.0% of Dominicans contributed money to a candidate. A larger percentage, 6.9% of Mexicans and 24.1% of Dominicans, were members of a political party. Upon reviewing this data we can see that these respondents were far more likely to have direct political participation prior to migrating. Amount of political participation in the country of origin would have most likely have been diminished if those surveyed had moved to

42. DeSipio et al., Immigrant Politics at Home and Abroad, 15-19.
the U.S. when they were children or if this was a survey of second generation
immigrants.

**Participation in Political Activities within the U.S.**

The fourth set of questions that were asked to respondents dealt with
immigrants' participation in political activities within the United States. The survey
found that on average respondents were more involved in political activities within the
United States than in their country of origin. However, it is difficult to gauge to what
extent one detracts from the other. The extent of an immigrant’s political participation
also depended on their legal status. Even although some are ineligible to vote, they
may still be allowed to contribute to a political candidate or party, to volunteer for a
campaign, or to attend a rally. However, citizens in general are far more likely than
non-citizens to participate in political activities within the U.S. “Despite their
eligibility, however, previous studies of immigrant political adaptation and
organizational participation have shown that immigrants are less likely than
comparably situated U.S. citizen Latinos to be so engaged and, overall participate at
rather low rates.\(^43\) In the next chapter, comparisons will be drawn further on general
immigrant political participation versus Mexican and Dominican participation in

\(^{43}\) DeSipio et al., *Immigrant Politics at Home and Abroad*, 19.
accordance with Margaret Conway’s Models of Political Participation; socioeconomic status model, civic voluntarism model, and the rational choice model.\footnote{44} Respondents were asked in this fourth and final questionnaire if they followed U.S. politics in the news. A large percentage of those surveyed answered in the affirmative, along with 76.0\% of Mexicans compared and 88.6\% of Dominicans. Next respondents were asked if they wore a campaign button for a candidate running for U.S. office, in which 9.0\% of Mexicans stated they had and 18.8\% of Dominicans. As for more interactive forms of political participation such as writing letters to U.S. government officials, the response was 7.7\% of Mexicans compared to 10.5\% of Dominicans. As can be seen from the earlier survey dealing with respondents' political activity in Mexico and the Dominican Republic prior to migrating, it should be noted that there was an increase in Mexicans writing officials here in the U.S. by 3\%.\footnote{45} However, there is a 2\% decrease for Dominicans writing U.S. officials. Numbers remain relatively the same as they had when asked if respondents distributed literature for Dominican or Mexicans candidates while in the U.S. as for doing the same for U.S. candidates for office; 5.7\% of Mexicans and 12.3\% of Dominicans.

Numbers dropped significantly when asked if respondents had canvassed for marched for U.S. candidates. Only 5.0\% of Mexicans vs. 11.5\% of Dominicans had marched for U.S. candidates after migrating to the U.S. This is a stark contrast to the


\footnote{45. DeSipio et al., \textit{Immigrant Politics at Home and Abroad}, 19.}
responses given earlier when asked if respondents participated in political transnational activity by promoting candidates running in elections abroad. However, Mexicans were 1.2% more likely to contribute to U.S. candidates, instead of candidates in their country of origin. Mexicans contributed money to a U.S. political candidate or political party at a rate of 3.2% of Mexicans while Dominicans donated to U.S. and Dominican candidates at virtually the same rate 6.3%.

Results can also be broken down further, as those surveyed that were citizens were far more likely to participate in U.S. political activities then those that were not. For example, of those surveyed 23% those who were citizens helped register persons to vote in elections. However just 5% of those who were not citizens engaged in this type of activity. Of Mexicans surveyed 14.1% had helped register people to vote in comparison with 28.3% of Dominicans. This discrepancy may be partially related to the fact that more Dominicans percentage wise have acquired citizenship and immigrants that are citizens are more likely to be involved in political activities.46

The majority of Mexicans and Dominicans surveyed voted, 72.9% of Mexicans and 81.3% of Dominicans voted in U.S. elections while only 46.3% of Mexicans and 46.5% of Dominicans had been a member of a church while in the United States. In addition, only 9.0% of Mexicans versus twenty four percent of Dominicans were part of a labor Union in the U.S.47 There were 28.7% of Mexicans

46. DeSipio et al., Immigrant Politics at Home and Abroad, 19-26.
47. Ibid., 21-23.
who attended a parent-teacher organization and 35.8% of Dominicans. As far as being a member of a fraternal order, 2.8% of Mexicans vs. 3.3% of Dominicans were members. Additionally, responders were asked if they were a member of any other social club and 9% of Mexicans responded yes versus 11% of Dominicans.

The survey found that among all Latino immigrant groups, Dominicans were more likely then any other Latino group to be involved in political transnational activity. Dominicans were more likely to report having attended a rally in the United States for a candidate from the Dominican Republic. Dominicans were also more likely to have been contacted personally by a candidate running for office from the Dominican Republic. Generally, and not unlike other immigrants most respondents were disengaged from politics. Overall, it was found that respondents were more engaged in U.S. politics than in their country of origin. However, whether or not being involved in one detracts from the other is up to speculation. The effects of political participation here and abroad must be discussed in conjunction with assimilation.

Political transnationalism has sparked much debate among immigration researchers, especially how it pertains to assimilation and in its role in the creation of public policy in both countries involved. Critics of political transnationalism, such as Samuel Huntington, argue that the increasing prevalence of dual-citizenship laws weakens “…the capacity of receiving nations to orient the lives, loyalties, and


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identities of such categories of newcomers as transnational migrants and guest workers.\textsuperscript{49} Political scientists like Huntington and anthropologists Arjun Appadurai argue that immigrants, especially those from Mexico, are not assimilating to U.S. culture in many Latino enclaves. Huntington seeks to establish his point by presenting a list of several attributes of “…the Mexican Problem of cultural isolation and non-assimilation.”\textsuperscript{50} Huntington’s attributes include: (1) the contiguity of the two-thousand-mile land border between Mexico and the U.S.; (2) the spatial concentration of Mexican immigrants in the Southwest, particularly in southern California; (3) the large scale of Mexican migration; (4) a persistent Mexican migration, uninterrupted by war, economic change, or restrictive legislation; (5) their historical presence, a shorthand marker for his unsupported claim that today’s Mexican migrants can make a claim to American territory; and (6) the illegality of contemporary Mexican immigrants.

Huntington proposes that political transnational legislation such as dual citizenship and voting rights laws pose a threat to the U.S. national identity.

\textsuperscript{49} Smith and Bakker, \textit{El Migrante}, 10.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
CHAPTER 4: POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Introduction

Mexican and Dominican immigrants' participation in the American political process should be considered a key factor when gauging their overall assimilation to the mainstream culture. It is a major public policy concern as these immigrant groups are consistently demonstrating lower levels of political participation than other Americans of similar socioeconomic status. At the same time however, many of these immigrants are showing significant participation in political activities abroad in their country of origin. Political participation in U.S politics plays a vital role in assimilation and thus to the overall success of these immigrant groups. Political participation, as mentioned in Chapter Three, should not be measured only by voting, but should also include a number of other activities including volunteering for a favorite candidate or sending remittances to another country to affect election outcomes there. Political participation of immigrants, their reason for participation or lack there of, must be examined, compared, and contrasted with native-born citizens as the involvement of both influences the structure of government, the actions of officials, the legal system, and other public policies. Current assimilation models fail to acknowledge or gauge the importance of political participation’s relevance to assimilation theory.\(^1\) In the previous chapter, the specific types of political activities in which the Dominicans and Mexicans

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were engaged here and abroad were discussed. The significance of political participation in the assimilation process and why it should be incorporated into assimilation theory will now be considered.

What is Political Participation?

According to political scientist, Margaret Conway, political participation “means those activities of citizens that attempt to influence the structure of government, the selection of government officials, or the policies of government.”²

According to this definition, these activities can be supported by the existing structure, officials, or policies. Alternatively, citizens can also take actions that oppose the current structure, officials, or policies. Passive involvement is also a part of political participation. Passive involvement can include attending rallies or other ceremonial activities or paying attention to what is happening in the government or in politics by watching television or reading newspapers that cover local, state, or federal issues. In the TRPI, evidence indicated that few Latinos attended rallies in the U.S., including only 2.7% of Mexicans. However, 17.3% of Dominicans surveyed attended a rally at which a home country political leader spoke. The survey found generally that respondents who migrated after the age of 16 had more likely than not followed the political happenings of their homeland. Accordingly, 51.0% of Mexicans and 65.6% of Dominicans did so by following politics on the news. These activities, while

seemingly insignificant when taken at face value, offer insight on one stop on the road to assimilation. Gauging the extent of political activity can be an arduous task, but is necessary to illuminate the dialogue on political transnationalism.\(^3\)

### Problems with Measuring Political Participation

Conway points out that defining political activity is not in itself difficult. However, measuring the frequency in which persons engage in various political activities can be daunting. Voting is the most obvious and easiest form of political participation to measure. Voter turnout is simply the percentage of the voting age population that turns out to the polls or sends in absentee ballots to vote. There are several ways to measure voter turnout. The usual method of measurement is sum the number of votes cast for an office, such as a senate seat or the presidency, and divide by the number of people eligible to vote in the populace. The U.S. Census, which is most commonly used in this measurement, is generally thought to underestimate the population. Other problems with relying on the Census for voting data is that it is only taken every 10 years, so the years in between must be estimated. In addition, the Census also includes citizens from other countries or resident aliens who are living in the U.S. legally. The Census also includes some proportion of illegal aliens.

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Notwithstanding the problems that exist with trying to measure what part of the voting age population actually voted, this is the still the best way to predict voter turnout.\(^4\)

However, political scientists also have other tools at their disposal for measuring voter turn-out, such as drawing from a representative sample of the voting age population. This method is most notably used by the Bureau of Census. The Bureau of the Census conducts its research with a sample by surveying 50,000 households. The Bureau asks each person surveyed whether or not each person in their household who is of voting age voted in the last election. The Bureau of the Census concludes that voter turnout is predicted to be 5 to 12% higher than the true number because interviewees often over-report their frequency of voting under pressure to appear more civic minded.

Political scientists can also draw samples from a much smaller selection of participants. These samples of passive political participation can be gathered from the group of somewhere between 1,500 to 3,500 respondents. One of the most notable groups to conduct political participation studies is the University of Michigan’s Center for Political Studies for the American National Election Studies.

The university conducts "In-depth research on beliefs, attitudes, and the political participation of the electorate."\(^5\) The University of Michigan Center for Political Studies also conducts surveys on passive forms of political participation as

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5. Ibid., 5.
well such as the frequency in which respondents follow the news or attend political functions.

Unfortunately, the majority of surveys or studies conducted focused solely on voting activity or political campaign contributions given to a particular candidate or party. Conway explains further:

Our knowledge of citizen's engagement in other forms of political participation other than voting depends on their responses to survey questions about various types of political activity. National surveys conducted around election years frequently ask about campaign related activities; however, collection of information about other kinds of participation, such as contacting public officials or engaging in political protest activities, is done much less frequently. 

As political participation and civic engagement should be a vital component of gauging assimilation, it is important that these activities be monitored with greater frequency.

Models of Political Participation

A) Socioeconomic Status Model

Social circumstances determine the type of and frequency in which citizens participate in politics. Social circumstances influence educational attainment, the type of jobs, and the income earned from that job. In the same manner, what neighborhood the person lives in which determines the quality of schools their children may attend as well other opportunities for upward mobility.

Where you live and where you work often determine your extent of political involvement as some neighborhoods have more resources to engage the community and certain jobs allow more free time to pursue civic activities. 7 “Indicators of social circumstances include age, race, gender, ethnicity, the social class, and education attainment level of individuals and their parents, place of residence in the community, marital status — these are referred to as social characteristics.” 8 Life experience can also not be downplayed. The extent to which an immigrant was involved in politics in Mexico or the Dominican Republic often influences the amount of engagement here. Those immigrants who were involved abroad are more likely to be active in U.S. politics. Dominicans have both been historically involved to a greater extent then all other Latino immigrants both before and after immigrating by continuing to vote in the Dominican Republic and financially supporting Dominican parties financially from abroad. Poverty can also influence one’s political behavior, as those who were once poor value economic security more strongly then those who have never faced the challenge of poverty. “Life experiences, which color individuals evaluations of the past and expectations about the future, also vary according to social circumstances such as social class, race, gender, ethnicity, level of educational attainment, employment patterns, and career opportunities and choices”. 8 Conway contends that life experiences are especially influential for swaying or engaging a certain community on political

7. Conway, Political Participation, 16.
8. Ibid., 17.
issues. As citizens’ life experience changes, so does the frequency and type of an individual’s political activity. As communication technologies have improved and travel costs decreased, news of politics or community problems from the homeland travel faster then ever, giving incentive for immigrants to send money or vote in important elections back in their country of origin. In addition, as it becomes more acceptable in social circles for immigrants to participate in political transnationalistic activities it only makes sense that sometimes these behaviors would be inherited by the next generation. As travel between the U.S. and the Dominican Republic is cheap many second generation Dominican’s have traveled to the Dominican Republic several times in their lifetime to visit family. Second generation Dominican’s are also recruited by Dominican political parties to assist in elections here and abroad to campaign, raise funds, and sometime to run as a candidate in the Dominican Republic. This could explain why some second generation Mexican and Dominican Americans are participating in political activities of their parents’ country of origin even though they were born in the United States.

A variety of explanations exist for the effects of social characteristics on political participation. The first explanation offered by Conway is that “variables that influence socioeconomic status help to determine the social roles that people play, influencing their expectations both for others and for themselves.” A second explanation is that socioeconomic status can also aid in the flow of political

communications. This might explain why certain people receive more political stimuli than others. When persons are exposed to a large amount of political information, regardless of type, that person's desire to be involved increases.

Another reason is that “…socioeconomic status affects both citizens’ stakes in political outcomes and their perceptions of those stakes.” Socioeconomic status can also determine the lens through which an individual views government decisions and how those decisions affect everyday life. Government benefits exist for members of both the middle and lower classes. A person in the middle class can partake of programs that offer insured mortgage loans, a variety of grants, or low interest loans that could be used to pay for their children’s education or their continuing education or training. Other benefits are also available for income tax deductions for such things as interest payments on mortgage loans, real estate property taxes, and contributions to retirement pension plans. Lower income qualifying persons might receive housing subsidies, assistance to provide food for themselves and their family, or help with medical expenses. In addition, both groups are part of a larger community that provides safety through means of local law enforcement, public education (elementary and secondary), and in the case of many urban areas public transportation. Unfortunately, there is often a lack of awareness of the connection between the quantity and quality of

government programs and political participation among those of a lower socioeconomic status.\textsuperscript{11}

The socioeconomic model is a good tool to use in order to know who participates in politics; however this model does not allow us to understand why a person chooses whether or not to participate in political activities within their community. Another model, the Civic Volunteerism model, builds upon the socioeconomic model but goes further on to explain why someone participates in political activity.\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{B) Civic Volunteerism Model}

The second model of political participation Conway offers is the Civic Volunteerism Model. Proponents of the Civic Volunteerism Model contend that persons exclude themselves from political activity because they are unable to procure the necessary resources of money, time, and skills. Another component is that persons have simply never been asked to participate in a political activity or function. Socioeconomic status often determines workplace responsibilities, which can result in the development of leadership or organizational skills conducive for civic involvement. The degree to which occupation and other factors influence political involvement depends on the type of activity. Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E.

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\textsuperscript{11} Conway, \textit{Political Participation}, 17.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 18.
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Brady, the developers of this model of political participation, stress the importance of education for political engagement. These scholars point out “that a significant path for resource development is through paternal education, for this can effect the child’s educational attainment and subsequent life opportunities and resources.”

Even though public education is provided for elementary and secondary children, it would be beneficial for new Latino immigrants who are generally in a lower socioeconomic class to receive education training for personal and professional enrichment. Education is also an important aspect for assimilation. As discussed in chapter two, education has been shown to decrease ties with immigrants’ country of origin. Many Mexican American immigrants and other immigrant groups also gain skills useful in political participation by being involved in religious institutions. These institutions provide a secure and especially welcoming environment in which new immigrants can become civically involved in beneficial community projects. Attitude towards government is also a very important determinant that effects the individual’s participation in politics. For example, older Dominican immigrants who grew up under the dictatorship of Trujillo and Mexican immigrants who experienced corruption are less trusting of government officials whom they may feel generally are unresponsive to constituents' concerns. Discrimination of immigrant groups also perpetuates political inactivity. Citizens must feel that their individual actions matter to those that legally


Besides considering what keeps immigrants from participating in politics in the U.S., we must also consider what drives immigrants to participate in transnational activities. The majority of immigrants seek economic opportunities. Having a political voice in their country ensures the protection of their economic interest. The sending country also works to ensure loyalty of its citizens by providing opportunities and rights of nationality and citizenship.\(^{16}\)

**C) Rational Choice Theory**

Along with examining other influences on political participation such as a person’s social environment, attitude, and belief, we can also analyze how different types of political participation fits into Rational Choice Theory. A rational person is defined as “one who moves towards his goals in a way which, to the best of his knowledge uses the least possible input of scarce resources per unit of valued input”.\(^{17}\) To be rational then is to be efficient in the allocation and use of scarce resources to achieve a goal. A rational person weighs all choices before making a decision; this can be applied to voting as well.

If the rational to vote was based on the assumption that one vote would determine the outcome of an election, most citizens would conclude that voting would

\(^{15}\) Conway, *Political Participation*, 18.

\(^{16}\) DeSipio et al., *Immigrant Politics at Home and Abroad*, 2.

\(^{17}\) Conway, *Political Participation*, 137.
be an efficient use of resources, unless the cost was high. The majority of Americans do vote in Presidential elections so the benefit of voting outweighs the cost, time, and effort of gathering information to make an informed choice, registering to vote, and traveling to the polls. Conway outlines for propositions with regards to voting: (1) when voting is costless, every citizen who is indifferent abstains, and any citizen who has a preference votes; (2) If voting is costly, it is rational for some indifferent citizens to vote and for citizens with preferences to abstain depending on the voter’s economic status; (3) When voting costs exist, small changes in the size may radically alter the distribution of power as overall voting declines; (4) The costs of voting act to disenfranchise lower-income citizens; (5) It is sometimes rational for citizens to vote when their short-run costs exceed the short run returns, because social responsibility produces long-run return. The higher one’s education level, the more likely that this person will be informed of political issues. The costs of voting are different for each person. Those who are employed may have to take off work to vote or find a babysitter to make it to the polls. In addition, as those costs decrease and it become easier to register and vote then voting should increase. Voting reforms in the Dominican Republic, in Mexico, and in the U.S. have decreased the cost of voting and encouraged voting across boarders.\(^{18}\)

\(^{18}\) Conway, *Political Participation*, 139.
Examination of Models of Political Participation and Assimilation Models

Some political scientists such as John Aldrich argue against the rational choice theory that many citizens view voting as a low cost, low benefit activity and that many aspects of the American electoral system violate the assumptions upon which rational choice theory is based. Some evidence exists for at least part of Aldrich’s theory, in that in the U.S. there is low voter turnout in almost all elections except those for the Presidency. Aldrich goes on to argue that voting decisions are not costly because political parties provide information necessary to make an informed choice. Costs still exist though for many who don’t vote absentee to get to the polls.\(^{19}\)

The Socioeconomic Status Model and the Civic Volunteerism Models of political participation generally focus on host country activity failing to acknowledge to any extent migrants' political activities abroad or the reasons for it. However, the model can be adapted to gain further insight into immigrants’ political habits. In addition, Elliott Barkan’s traditional Assimilation Model and the Segmented Assimilation Model focus only on socioeconomic factors instead of political participation as measurement for varying levels of assimilation.\(^{20}\) “Moreover, these models claim that as incorporation into the host-country occurs the links to the home country recede: they see political and cultural incorporation in the home and host

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19. Conway, Political Participation, 142-144.

countries as a zero-sum game, one has to decrease or stagnate in order for the other to increase or be maintained”.  

Political transnationalistic activities run counter to this assumption, as immigrants political activities are shown to continue years after immigration and sometimes even into the second generation. This is in stark contrast to traditional assimilation theories that promoted the shedding of cultural norms and practices as well as disengagement from associational or structural activities of the country of origin.  

In addition to examining the significance of key theories related to how political transnationalism and assimilation is measured, the practical and legal structures that exist that perpetuate this type of political transnational activity must be considered.

**The Influence of Legal Structure on Political Activity**

An increasing number of states have introduced constitutional reforms to provide dual citizenship rights as well as formal political representation to their expatriates. These laws have transformed the way that immigrants assimilate to their host society. “Incentives provided by sending countries are designed to maintain the


loyalty of their expatriates and keep their remittances, investments, and political contributions flowing. At the same time, such incentives provided a new and stronger voice for organized immigrants in the politics of their country of origin and home communities.”

The structure of a country’s legal system affects the type and amount of political participation by its citizens. Rules that determine eligibility for voting as well as the laws and procedures that govern the conduct of elections significantly affect electoral participation. Some political scientists believe that voter registration laws in the U.S. deter voter participation. Persons who have recently moved to a different jurisdiction must re-register or file a change of address form if they have moved within the same city or county. Conway points out that on average 17% of the electorate in the U.S. moves at least once within a two year period. “Almost one-third of all eligible voters between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine move within a two year period.”

Difficult registration procedures and the mobility of the U.S. population decreases voter turn-out. Persons who have less education, who have moved recently, or who have low political interest are effected by registration procedures most of all. Others contend that current U.S. voter registration practices decrease the occurrence of voter fraud.


25. Ibid., 123.
Individual attitudes or beliefs towards political participation hold much sway in the U.S. because in this country the burden of voter registration is placed on the individual or political parties who seek to register voters for elections. In the majority of democratic countries, the burden of voter registration is placed on the government. Governments often verify a person’s eligibility with door to door visits or other similar methods. A study was conducted of twenty-four democratic nations; of these only five required a citizen to apply to be listed on a voter registration list. In the other nineteen countries surveyed, persons that were on another list were automatically registered. Governments generally draw from citizenship or tax payer lists to see who is eligible. Other democratic governments send out representatives to actively register citizens. The Dominican Republic’s government is one of these countries, which has historically had aggressive voter registration programs. These programs have now been extended across borders. The Dominican government has taken drastic steps to facilitate the incorporation of Dominicans living abroad into domestic Dominican politics and society:

In 2007, the Central Electoral Board of the Dominican Republic and the Airports Department announced the installation of offices in the airports to issue birth certificates and election identity cards to Dominican citizens living abroad. In addition to facilitating the process of attaining birth certificates and registering to vote, the President of the Central Electoral Board also announced the opening of new polling stations in Holland, Milan, Zurich, and Washington D.C. where Dominicans abroad can vote; these are in addition to the offices already operating in Canada, Venezuela, New York, New Jersey, Boston,

Philadelphia, Puerto Rico, Madrid, Barcelona, and Miami.\textsuperscript{27}

One of the reasons given for the promotion of the Dominican Republic’s political transnational policy is that 17.6\% of persons born in the Dominican Republic live outside of the country. However, many of these immigrants have lived away from the Dominican Republic for several decades, yet are enabled by legal reforms to vote and donate to political campaigns for domestic policies that will have no affect on these particular immigrants’ daily lives. Money that could be used to donate to American candidates, who promote public policies that directly effect Dominican immigrant’s daily lives, is sent abroad. “Migrant’s financial contributions constitute for as much as 15\% of the major Dominican parties fund raising revenues. New York City also boasts the Dominican Republic’s second largest voting group, only second to that of the capital city of Santo Domingo.”\textsuperscript{28} Voting has also become very accessible for Dominicans as they are no longer required to travel to the Dominican Republic to participate in elections. Mexican citizens living in the U.S. can send absentee ballots, but the Mexican Government does not have offices like the Dominican Republic does. The offices are set up for the Dominican Republic to activity solicit voting to expatriates. HTAs instead serve as key organizations for political transnationalistic activities for Mexican American citizens.

\textsuperscript{27} Acosta, “Building Trans-migrant Citizenship”, 4.

\textsuperscript{28} Guarnizo, “Assimilation and Transnationalism”, 1212-1213.
Within the legal structure of the government, citizens cannot only participate “by voting, contacting public officials, contributing money to a candidate, political party, or political action committee; or running for public office, but also indirectly through interests groups, which have a significant impact on public policy in each step of the policy process.”

Public policy making can be organized into five stages:

1. enacting the law; (2) writing the regulations to put into effect the intent of the law; (3) developing the implementation procedures for carrying out the law and its accompanying regulations; (4) developing and putting into effect enforcement mechanisms to make sure that the policy is carried out and the relevant laws and regulations are enforced; (5) creating and using evaluation procedures to determine whether the law is having the desired effects.

The extent to which citizens can be involved in this process greatly depends on the policy making structure of the organization and that organization’s or agency’s attitude towards involvement.

Both Dominican and Mexican immigrants have worked within the legal structures of the U.S. and their country of origin to expand their political rights here and abroad. For example, in the 1990’s, Dominicans immigrant groups successfully pressured politicians in New York City to have representatives in the state legislature and city assembly, thus creating a political district within the city. At the same time, Dominican activists articulated demands for the Dominican migrant community for civil and political rights in the Dominican Republic for Dominicans living in the U.S.

and other countries. They especially wanted for the right to vote and other political rights associated with dual-citizenship.\textsuperscript{31}

\textbf{Political Transnationalism and the Concept of Citizenship}

As we just considered the legal structures in which political transnationalistic activities occur we should now examine the individual citizen’s role and how that role is changing. The formal and informal expansion of citizenship rights and duties are not easily placed within the traditional framework of citizenship.

Traditional theories of citizenship claim that that citizenship is territorially bound within the borders of a nation state. However, political transnationalism and its emerging laws challenge this concept. “A citizen is, most simply, a member of a political community, entitled to whatever prerogatives and encumbered with whatever responsibilities are attached to membership.”\textsuperscript{32} There are two main conceptions of citizens: the liberal and the republican.

According to the liberal perspective, individuals as members of a political community, have rights and liberties. The republican concept focuses on members of the political community’s duty, civic commitments, and individual virtue. The liberal and republican concept focuses on varying aspects of a citizen’s place within the nation state. For both conceptions, citizenship is seen as “a national project in which


\textsuperscript{32} Acosta, “Building Trans-migrant Citizenship,” 2.
individuals in fact will transcend their particular affiliations, towards full and foundational membership in a wider community.”

It can be argued that modern citizenship “means membership in a large-scale republic that has boundaries roughly conforming to some partly preexisting national community, and it thus is a feature of nation-states.”

Sociologist T.H. Marshall breaks down citizenship into three dimensions: civil, political, and social. Marshall presents citizenship as the expansion of individual rights: civil rights are those necessary for individual freedoms—these grant citizens freedom of speech, thought and faith, right to own property, to conclude contracts, and the right for valid justice. “Political rights provide citizens political equality in terms of greater access to the parliamentary process. In this area political citizenship requires the development of electoral rights and wider access to political institutions for the articulation of interests.”

Within this framework, citizenship also grants citizens social rights in the form of claims to entitlement programs such as social security or Medicare.

With Marshall’s idea of citizenship, there is a direct link between the state and citizen as citizenship rests squarely on the concept of the nation-state. State institutions, such as the justice system, protect the rights of citizens, and these institutions are linked with the nation state. As can be seen in an examination of


citizenship literature, it can be postulated that traditionally theorists “demarcate membership in a spatially defined nation-state.” This approach proves problematic when examining the transnational citizenship of immigrants who have legal rights in two countries which may be contradictory or inclusive.

According to Conway, the idea of citizenship is that it is a right and is legally based. These rights are supported by bureaucratic forms of authority. The kind of knowledge citizens need to be active in their community has changed over time in America. It has changed from the knowledge of relative social position in the post-colonial era to “knowledge gained by political parties and the acceptance of authority from electoral outcomes in the democracy era to knowledge of citizens’ entitlements and rights, as well as forms of victimization in the current era.” It is also noted that there may exist, at the same time, the conception of one or more of these ideals. Situations arise in the constituency that occasionally determines a person’s idea of the concept of what a citizen should be.

**Types of Political Representation**

Representation can be divided into four categories: descriptive representation, representation of political views, collective representation, and trusteeship.

Descriptive representation is “…a resemblance to or reflection of the

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sociodemographic characteristics of those who are represented.”^38 An example of this is when the Democratic Party in 1972 decided that women, minorities, and young people should be represented in a proportional manner. However, the rules were eventually changed so that only women received proportional representation and not minorities or young people. The second type of representation is a presentation of political views. Representation of political views is when the attitudes, beliefs, and policy preferences of the constituency are the same as those of the representative. It is assumed that a representative votes in accordance with the majority’s perspective however, what exactly the majority is; this often difficult to tell. As political participation is generally low, a representative could vote based on the opinions of those who elected the individual or on the opinions of the people, as a whole, in the representative’s district. Constituents should write and make phone calls to their representatives to voice opinions on important issues as they arise and not just at election time. In the same way, it is the representatives’ duty to solicit those opinions.

Collective representation is the third type of representation. Collective representation “…focuses not on the congruence of views between individual public officials and their constituencies but on the congruence between the distribution of policy preferences among the electorate and the distribution in the representative body

as a whole.” In this model, congruence of political views between the representative and the constituency are not needed as long as the constituency's views are represented somewhere in the legislature. This pattern of funding political campaigns became common place in the 1970’s. Representatives began to vote in accordance with the attitudes, beliefs, and policy preferences of those who contributed to their campaign, not necessarily those of their district.

Trusteeship is the fourth form of representation. Trusteeship means acting for the benefit of others on their behalf. In this model, active members of the constituency help shape the actions of the representative. Active participation is necessary so that representatives are attuned to changing concerns of the citizens.

**Political Participation Impact on Policy Outcomes**

Political participation is important because it affects the nature of representation and public policies instituted by those representatives. Representatives depend on citizens for feedback on policy issues. It is important not to group persons in a similar demographic together. Those who work in similar jobs, those who are of certain gender, or religious group do not necessarily hold the same beliefs or share the same concerns and this is why active participation in politics is vital.

40. Ibid., 195.
Latino citizens have lower rates of voter registration and turnout than do either white citizens or black citizens. Researchers give several possible explanations for this, including the language barrier and the fact that a high percentage of Latino citizens are young. “Chicano (Mexican Americans) especially, have a rather high percentage of younger citizens and younger citizens are less likely to participate in politics.” Levels of education attainment are also lower among Latinos then the rest of the population.41

If Mexican and Dominican immigrants continue to be less active in politics here in the U.S., then representatives will most likely continue to group them into a single demographic. Passive representation is often employed for groups who do not speak out on important issues or vote in elections. The passive view of representation is based on the assumption that political socialization experiences are largely determined by the demographic group of which a person is part. Secondly, when a person of a certain demographic makes a decision that decision will positively impact the interests of that persons group whether that be women or an immigrant group.42

Effectiveness of political participation on policy outcomes depends on quantity, quality, and context in which that participation occurs. For example, one obvious and necessary move to increase policy impact is to replace representatives. This changes the context and ensures that representatives are more receptive to constituent concerns. By participating extensively in political activities abroad,

42. Ibid., 194.
immigrants are stretching their time and resources which could be used to integrate and improve their new community in the United States.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{43} Conway, \textit{Political Participation}, 204.
CHAPTER 5: POLITICAL TRANSNATIONALISM AND ASSIMILATION

Introduction

The effects of political transnationalism on assimilation of new immigrants and on U.S. policy have sparked much debate among immigration scholars. Critics argue that political transnationalism is prolonging and disrupting the assimilation process by encouraging immigrants to redirect their time, money, and other resources to the public policy concerns of their sending nation instead of becoming involved in the politics of their new communities within the United States. Opponents also believe that the phenomena of political transnationalism are changing the very fabric of citizenship as well as the fundamental concept of the nation-state.

Evidence presented in Chapter 3 suggests that Mexican citizens surveyed were indeed participating just as much if not more in some areas in political transnationalism by attending rallies and voting for candidates in their native land while residing in the U.S. Upon review of models of political participation elucidated by Margaret Conway, it is apparent that immigrants’ engagement in political activities is primarily a result of their socio-economic status along with opportunities that are provided by the legal structure along with other cost incentives provided for by the rational choice theory of their local community and country of origin.
Political Transnationalism: The New Face of Assimilation?

In the 1950’s, Americans came to believe that the era of immigration was over. The leading historian of American nativism, John Higham, would write in his 1955 classic, *Strangers in the Land*, that: “Although immigration of some sort would continue, the vast folk movements that had formed one of the most fundamental social forces in American history had been brought to an end. The old belief in America as a promised land for all who yearn for freedom had lost its operative significance.”¹

Higham’s idea of America’s great migration fit the time in which it was presented but is now outdated. Americans have previously and will continue to experience the largest wave of migration per capita since the founding of the nation. As a result of increased communication technologies and cheap travel to and from their country of origin, Mexican and Dominican immigrants are able to stay in touch with friends and relatives in ways that previous generations of immigrants could have only dreamed. The nature of immigration has changed greatly since the days in which the original or “orthodox” assimilation theories were first created. It is not surprising that in a world where people do business internationally and travel more frequently that their ideas of government and political participation would change with them.

The new wave of immigration from places such as Latin America and the Caribbean can best be characterized as an uninterrupted “flow” rather then delineated “waves” typical of the earlier European transatlantic immigration. This ongoing,

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uninterrupted migratory flow continually replenishes social practices and cultural models that would otherwise tend to be lost to assimilation.\(^2\) It seems as if the inherent nature of today’s immigration patterns along with the promotion by sending countries’ governments of political transnationalism militate against the traditional concept of assimilation, and as result policy makers too must adapt to find more inclusive and creative ways to promote acculturation.

**Political Participation and Assimilation**

In order to develop policy strategies that promote assimilation scholars must change the way in which we view the theories fundamental components. Political participation is an indispensable aspect of the democratic process; an undeniable part of the American experience. Most importantly it can be used as a tool for immigrants to secure equality in many areas of their lives. The TRPI study examined in Chapter 3 demonstrated that immigrants participated to some degree in political activities within the United States but that some groups such as the Dominicans were more likely to participate in political functions or voting activities for candidates from their native land.

TRPI Study researchers measured political transnational activities with the same method used by other political scientists to measure domestic political participation. These activities included voting, registering others to vote, contributing

to candidates, attending rallies, watching the news or reading the newspaper, campaigning for a candidate, or writing an elected official.

Mexicans demonstrated lower political participation in both transnational and domestic political activities. Even though respondents had been in the U.S. for upward of twenty years there still existed a disconnect or feelings of being ostracized from mainstream political culture.³

The research presented in Chapter Three concerning Dominicans’ and Mexicans’ political experiences before and after migration explains this disconnect. These immigrant groups lived under corrupt governments in their native lands and then upon arrival often immediately fell subject to discrimination and other struggles associated with moving to a strange land with a different culture and primary language. Having negative experiences with their native governments helps to explain their lack of political activity, while their negative experiences here in the U.S. offers some evidence perhaps as to why they would not feel welcome in our political institutions. In addition to circumstances that provided the context of their migration, other aspects must also be considered in relation to their affect on assimilation. Education level, gender, and citizenship status are other variables that effect the duration and experience of assimilation.

Lack of education and low political participation are inextricably linked; Hispanics demonstrate low levels of both. Assimilation theory concludes that education leads to quicker integration and upward mobility. Education has also been proven to increase political participation worldwide. It is also an effective tool of assimilation as persons that are more educated are less likely to participate in political and other activities of their native land. Gender is another variable that affects the assimilation process. Immigrant women traditionally experience upward mobility while the reverse is true for immigrant men, who often lose social and economic status in the United States. This occurs when many women become paid workers for the first time in the U.S. To compensate for this lose of status, men are more likely then women to remain politically active or participate in political transnational activities. Thus immigration can lead to downward mobility for men and transnational activities can reinforce their social status in their new country.  

According to assimilation theory, citizenship status is also a significant component in gauging a person’s assimilation to mainstream culture. According to this logic, persons who are naturalized citizens are less likely to be involved in transnational politics. In the case of Dominicans surveys in the TRPI study this was not the case. There was virtually no difference in the political participation of a citizen vs. non-citizen. This is a result of the strong social ties within the Dominican community.

as well the Dominican Government's institutionalized approach to the promotion of transnational politics.

Let us examine this further by placing the results of the TRPI Study within the constructs of Conway’s Socioeconomic Model and the Rational Choice Theory of political participation. Social circumstances determine the type of and frequency in which citizens participate in politics. Social circumstances influence educational attainment, the type of jobs, and the income earned from that job. In the same manner, what neighborhood the person lives in determines the quality of schools their children may attend as well other opportunities for upward mobility. Where you live and where you work often determine your extent of political involvement as some neighborhoods have more resources to engage the community. Both the Dominican and Mexican communities have been very effective in organizing transnational political activity which has resulted in voting rights abroad and the acceptance of dual citizenship provisions.

The rational-choice theory perspective on political participation can also help explain the findings of the TRPI study. A rational person is defined as “…one who moves towards his goals in a way which, to the best of his knowledge, uses the least possible input of scarce resources per unit of valued input”.5 The benefit of voting outweighs the cost, time, and effort to vote. This concept can be applied to Mexican and Dominican voting in their native country because Dominicans and Mexicans can

simply request an absentee ballot or vote at one of the many voting stations located in cities such as New York or Washington D.C. where a large enclaves of immigrants reside. This could explain why 9.5% of Mexicans and 15.0% Dominicans voted in elections for their country of origin. Voting reforms in the Dominican Republic, in Mexico, and in the U.S. have decreased the cost of voting and encouraged voting across boarders.⁶

The legal structure of both the sending and receiving country also has significant impact on political activity. The majority of the questions asked in the TRPI survey concerning political activity were affected one way or another by the legal structure of the U.S., the Dominican Republic, and Mexico. As an increasing number of states have introduced constitutional reforms to provide dual citizenship rights to immigrants political transnationalism is increasing. These laws have transformed the way that immigrants assimilate to their host society. Laws provide incentives and allowance for participation in political functions; a new and stronger voice for organized immigrants in the politics of their country of origin and home communities. Conway’s explanation of the legal structure helps us understand the reasons to why and to which types of activities immigrants are eligible to participate in, which are same as those presented in the TRPI study. Rules that determine eligibility for voting as well as the laws and procedures that govern the conduct of elections significantly affect electoral participation. Legal structures can also work to discourage political

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participation as is the case with the U.S. Mexico Guest Worker program whom some scholars believe acts as block on the path to citizenship. Guest workers are discouraged from participating in union or political activities and are often socially stigmatized.  

Even with this legal structure in place, however, it is generally socioeconomic concerns that drive participation. As mentioned in the TRPI study, most immigrants speak with relatives or friends in the U.S. before they consider migrating. Decisions are often made on informal information, not information obtained from a government or political source.

**Political Transnationalism: Effects on the Concept of Citizenship, Assimilation, and to the Receiving Country**

The increased prevalence of dual-citizenship arrangements along with the general increased cultural and political interconnectivity between nations has caused some scholars concern about national identity of the immigrants and where their political loyalties subside.

Others warn that these “…imagined communities are promoting unaccountable long-distance nationalism.” In other words, transnational activists are promoting policies in countries they may never live in and effecting elections whose results may not have sway on their the operations of their daily lives.

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8. Ibid., 10.
As mentioned in Chapter 3, political scientist Samuel Huntington and anthropologist Arjun Appadurai argue that immigrants, especially those from Mexico are not assimilating to the U.S. Huntington seeks to establish his point by presenting a list of several attributes of the Mexican problem of cultural isolation and nonassimilation. Huntington’s attributes include: (1) the contiguity of the two-thousand-mile land border between Mexico and the U.S.; (2) the large concentration of Mexican immigrants in the southwest, especially in southern California; (3) the immense scale of Mexican migration; (4) a continuous Mexican migration, uninterrupted by war, economic change, or enforced legislation in addition to other previously mentioned factors. Huntington proposes that political transnational legislation such as dual citizenship and voting rights laws pose a threat to the U.S. national identity.\(^9\) Huntington fails to acknowledge several other issues that aid in determining the amount of time it takes to become fully assimilated, including the language barrier, poor education levels, and discrimination. However, Huntington’s attributes do bring to light to other challenges affecting this multi-faceted issue.

**Conclusion**

The literature surveyed along with the TRPI study presented have offered insight into political transnationalism among Dominican and Mexican Immigrants. During my research it became evident that among all Latino immigrant groups,
Dominicans were more likely then any other Latino group to be involved in political transnational activity such as attending a rally in the United States for a candidate from the Dominican Republic or voting for that candidate. Overall, Dominicans exhibited high levels of political participation. The Dominican case study is also different from that of the Mexican case study because the Dominican government has generally been a leader in the promotion of political transnationalism by creating a legal structure necessary to carry out its activities. In contrast, the Mexican government while involved in passing voting legislation and other related functions has not been the primary instigator of political transnationalism in the country. Historically it was shown that political transnationalism grew out of the need for governmental reforms within Mexico which in turn proved to successfully benefit from transnational political activities. Transnational activists were able to pressure the often unresponsive and corrupt Mexican government to make changes by bringing international attention to community issues. Political transnationalism in Mexico is mostly conducted by regional HTA offices. Conway’s socioeconomic model of political participation best describes these two immigrant groups motivations for participation, though the legal system also encourages political activities by providing eligibility to participate, immigrant activists groups, social circles, and aspiring politicians all share in a grassroots effort to promote political transnationalistic agendas.

Generally, and not unlike other immigrants, most respondents were
disengaged from politics, which is often a result of low levels of education or discrimination as explained in the models of political participation. Overall, it was found that respondents were slightly more engaged in U.S. politics than in their country of origin on average with the exception of some engaged from the Dominican Republic. Their level of participation was however significant for the fact that those surveyed had been in the U.S. for over 20 years and that there were also a few second generation respondents who were still participating in political activities from their native land.

Mexican and Dominican immigrants' participation in the American political process should be considered a key variable when gauging their overall assimilation to the mainstream culture. It should not be ignored that these immigrant groups are consistently demonstrating lower levels of political participation in the U.S. than other Americans of similar socioeconomic status, while at the same time showing significant participation in political activities abroad in their native country.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


