

8 *Institutional Mobilization in a Transnational Context*

*H*istorically, U.S. immigrant communities have maintained strong connections with their countries of origin (Rosenblum 1973; W. Thomas and Znaniecki 1984; Jacobson 1995; Portes and Rumbaut 1996; Guarnizo and Smith 1998; Foner 2000). Immigration specialists underscore European immigrants' attachment to their countries of origin by documenting their remigration to their homelands.¹ During the first half of the twentieth century, fully one-third of all immigrants to the United States remigrated from the United States (Guarnizo and Smith 1998, 16; see also Morawska 2001; Wang 2001).

Non-European immigrants have also maintained ties with their countries of origin. As Madeline Hsu (2000) documents, Chinese migrants from Taishan (Toisan) County in Guangdong, in southern China, who arrived in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century helped to forge and sustain a transnational community through their "commitments to close relatives, such as wives, children, parents, and siblings" (5). For news and communication from their homeland, they relied on *quiakan*, Chinese magazines produced in Taishan and Hong Kong and distributed to the Taishan diaspora, and "Gold Mountain" firms were established to deliver remittances and letters between Taishanese migrants in the United States and people in Taishan.

Are contemporary Asian American and Latino immigrants who engage in transnational activities more or less likely to participate in U.S. politics than their counterparts who lack transnational connections? This remains an open question. One popular perspective asserts that immigrants who pursue transnational activities are too preoccupied with interests in their country of origin to pay attention to U.S. politics. A competing perspective suggests that immigrants in the U.S. may find themselves in a unique

position that allows those who engage in transnational activity to take part simultaneously in their country of origin and in the U.S. political system.

Transnationalism

Transnationalism is defined as “the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Basch, Schiller, and Blanc 1994, 7). Today, individuals who migrate to the United States have myriad ways to maintain connections to their country of origin. The very diverse ties that contemporary immigrants have to their homelands are often powerful. Immigrants maintain links to their country of origin by sending individual and collective financial remittances (Pessar 1987; Rogers 2000a; Georges 1990; Hamilton and Chinchilla 2002), investing in projects and property in their former hometowns (Robert Smith 1996, 1998), building cross-border social networks and communities (Basch, Schiller, and Blanc 1994; Robert Smith 1997; Smart and Smart 1998; Levitt 2001), communicating regularly with friends and relatives (Basch, Schiller, and Blanc 1994), making frequent trips back to the homeland (Rouse 1992), sharing, maintaining and creating popular culture (Iwabuchi 2002; Aparicio, Jáquez, and Cepeda 2003), and constructing multiple and overlapping identities and notions of citizenship (Jones-Correa 1998; Munch 2001, Verma 2002; Joppke and Morawska 2003). As has been well documented, immigrants continue to make economic contributions to their countries of origin long after migrating to the United States (Massey et al. 1987; Levitt 2001; Hamilton and Chinchilla 2002). Interwoven into these transnational activities, immigrants exhibit an interest in politics, in some cases related to the homeland, in others related to the United States, and on occasion explicitly related to the existence of a transnational community (Portes and Rumbaut 1996; Robert Smith 1996, 1997, 1998; Jones-Correa 1998; Karpathakis 1999; Hockenos 2003).

To help us understand the role of transnational attachments in the political lives of U.S. immigrants, we can turn to the body of literature on transnationalism, a topic that is receiving increasing scholarly and popular attention. Peggy Levitt's (2001) study of Dominican immigrants in Boston and their economic, social, political, and religious ties to their Dominican sending communities represents one of the most comprehensive among those that have emerged from various fields, including anthro-

pology, sociology, and history. This body of work lets us examine how individuals maintain connections across national borders as well as their motivations for doing so (see, for example, Massey et al. 1987; Basch, Schiller, and Blanc 1994; Portes 1996; Robert Smith 1996, 1998; Guarnizo and M. Smith 1998; Hamilton and Chinchilla 2002; Espiritu 2003). Transnationalism has even merited popular attention, as evidenced by a series on transnational migration published in the *New York Times* on July 19–21, 1998.

The literature on transnationalism explicitly critiques the traditional immigration models that have posited a “straight-line” trajectory for assimilation, which starts with migration from the country of origin and ends with settlement in the destination country. In those models, when immigrants move from one place to another, they eventually shed their old identities and connections to the homeland and take on the traditions, identities, values, and practices of the new one (Handlin 1951). In contrast, researchers of transnationalism assert that migrants seldom sever connections with their countries of origin and that migration is often circular rather than linear (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Pessar 1997).

There is some debate in the literature over whether transnationalism is a phenomenon unique to the contemporary period (Foner 1997; Morawska 2001). Some scholars argue that circular migration and the forging of multiple connections to the homeland among present-day immigrants is quite different from the one-way migration of the past (Lie 1995). In particular, technological innovations such as air travel, electronic telecommunications, electronic funds transfers, and satellite television have enabled migrants to forge ties across national boundaries in ways that were not possible during the last great wave of migration. Others claim that transnational connections were a central feature of life for past waves of immigrants (Morawska 2001). Many European immigrants who initially arrived in the United States in the early 1900s exhibited circular migration patterns. Others, such as Italian migrants, sent money to their hometowns. Nevertheless, most scholars agree that some distinctions exist between the transnational lives of past and present immigrants. Notably, contemporary transnationalism is facilitated by technological advances that “heighten the immediacy and frequency of migrants’ contact with their sending communities and allow them to be actively involved in everyday life there in fundamentally different ways from the past” (Levitt 2001, 22).

Research on transnational attachments and political participation in the

United States among contemporary Asian and Latino immigrants has emerged only recently (see Basch, Schiller, and Blanc 1994; Ong and Nakanishi 1996, 289; Moreno 1997; Rogers 2000a and 2000b; Lien 2004; Lien 2005). Some scholars argue that strong ties to the homeland depress immigrants' participation in U.S. political life. Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut suggest that many European immigrants did not return to their countries of origin but nevertheless remained uninterested in American politics because they focused on the idea of returning: "Commitment to American political causes, especially those of a radical sort, was not particularly attractive to Hungarian, Italian, or Norwegian peasants whose goal was to save in order to buy land in their home villages" (1996, 101). And John C. Harles claims that immigrants generally direct their political interests exclusively toward the country of origin and that "ethnic reinforcement" in the form of media, communication, and cultural symbols supplied by the homeland depresses interest in American politics (1993, 111, 116).

In contrast to this body of work, the literature on transnationalism contends that transnational activity leads to additional political activity in the United States. Matthew Jacobson (1995) argues convincingly that an orientation toward the homeland can compel immigrants to become involved in American politics. He cites Stefan Barszczewski, a Polish immigrant activist, to illustrate how strong homeland ties informed Polish immigrants' political expression toward U.S. policies. According to Barszczewski, based on their own experiences in the homeland, Polish immigrants in the United States were compelled to speak out against American colonization of the Philippines and Cuba. Several researchers studying distinct populations in New York suggest that the most active participants in New York local politics are also the most active in organizational activities directed toward their countries of origin (Basch, Schiller, and Blanc 1994; Graham 1997; Robert Smith 1997). Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc report that transnational migrants from Grenada became involved in the U.S. political process to promote desired outcomes in Grenada. The immigrants they observed "had been in the United States a minimum of ten years and were as involved in the local politics of New York City as they were in the political life of Grenada" (1994, 226). Anna Karpathakis's description of Greek immigrants in New York City suggests that concern for homeland politics may lead to involvement in U.S. politics: "Greek immigrant community

leaders began creating relations with American political institutions and mobilizing immigrant incorporation into the American polity with the aim and hope that the immigrants and their organizations would then act on behalf of the home society's territorial concerns" (1999, 64).

Transnationalism and Political Involvement

The 2000–2001 Pilot National Asian American Survey (PNAAPS), the 1999 *Washington Post*/Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University National Survey on Latinos in America (LAT), and the 1989–1990 Latino National Political Survey (LNPS) show the degree to which some migrants maintain transnational ties. In general, both Latino and Asian American immigrants exhibit a high level of transnational activity. The LAT found that 59 percent of Latino immigrants regularly send money back to their homelands, including 44 percent of Mexican immigrants but only 21 percent of Cuban immigrants.²

The extent to which a particular national-origin group participates in homeland politics is likely to vary by the type of political regime that characterizes the country of origin (Lien 2004). The specific laws governing dual citizenship and presence or absence of mechanisms to facilitate voting by citizens living abroad are also undoubtedly influential. Excluding Cuban and "other Latino" immigrants, between 24 percent and 33 percent of those interviewed in the LAT reported having voted in their homeland since migrating to the United States (table 10). Cuba's lack of a democratic system and historical restrictions on travel to the island may account for the small percentage of people who say that they have voted in Cuba since migrating to the United States.

A number of structural factors not related to individual immigrants' level of interest in politics can shape their political involvement in homeland politics, including proximity to the homeland, whether it has a democratic government, specific electoral regulations and mechanisms for voting by nonresident citizens, the availability of dual citizenship, and the general openness of the homeland political regime to emigrants' political involvement. For example, the Mexican government's requirement that its citizens cast ballots in person in their Mexican place of residence on Election Day diminishes the possibility that immigrants can participate in homeland electoral politics.³

Asian Americans in the PNAAPS were not asked about remittances but

were asked about how much contact they maintained with people in their home countries. Fully 44 percent of the immigrant respondents claimed to have contact at least once a month with someone in the country of origin. With the exception of the small number of Japanese immigrants in the sample who exhibited lower rates of contact, 40 percent or more of each national origin group kept in frequent contact with people in their homeland (table 10). In contrast, only 6 percent of all Asian American immigrants were active in homeland politics, although the proportion varied by national origin group (table 10). Because they are based on two different surveys using two distinct questions, Asian American and Latino immigrant participation in homeland politics cannot be compared directly.

The PNAAPS asked respondents specifically about their homeland-

TABLE 10. Transnational Activities among Asian American and Latino Immigrants

Latinos (N)	Regularly send money to homeland (%)	Voted in homeland since migrating to United States (%)
Puerto Rican (137)	29	29
Mexican (461)	44	24
Cuban (244)	21	12
Other Central or South American (500)	52	33
Other Latino (132)	65	17
Total Latino immigrants (1,477)	59	25
Asian Americans (N)	Homeland contact ^a (%)	Active in politics related to the homeland (%)
Chinese (279)	43	4
Korean (157)	45	5
Vietnamese (135)	41	10
Japanese (41)	32	7
Filipino (180)	42	6
South Asian (121)	44	7
Total Asian immigrants (913)	44	6

Source: PNAAPS, LAT.

Note: Statistics reported in each column are column percentages.

^aReported having contacted people in the homeland by phone, mail, or in person at least once a month during the twelve months prior to being interviewed.

related political activity (“After arriving in the United States, have you ever participated in any activity dealing with the politics of your home country?”). The LAT asked, “Since you have moved to the U.S., have you voted in country of origin/the country where you were born?” The LNPS included a question asking about concern for politics in the respondent’s country of origin: “Some Mexicans/Puerto Ricans/Cubans are more concerned about government and politics in Mexico/Puerto Rico/Cuba than in the U.S. Others are more concerned about government and politics in the U.S. How about you?”⁴ For all analyses of registration and voting, eligibility is taken into account (that is, those who are not eligible are excluded).

Asian American Immigrants and Transnational Politics

In the PNAAPS, 83 percent of citizens who were active and 77 percent of those citizens who were not active in homeland politics were registered to vote in the United States in 2000 (table 11). For turning out to vote in the 2000 presidential election, a similarly slim gap exists between those who were active in homeland politics and those who were not. The differences between registration and voting between the two groups (transnational and nontransnational) are not statistically significant, and involvement in homeland politics is not related to registration or voting, at least at the bivariate-level. (The small sample sizes prevent disaggregating the data on voter registration and voting by specific Asian American national-origin group.)

As noted, many researchers have assumed an inverse relationship between homeland political activism and U.S. political activism. Harles, for example, claims that, “For birds of passage, individuals whose orientation is consistently toward the country of origin, any sense of identification with, and thus inclination to participate in, American politics is extremely limited” (1993, 111). Yet the data analyzed here show that the relationship between activity in homeland politics and registration or voting in the United States is not negative but neutral—that is, no statistically significant differences exist (table 11). Those Asian Americans who are active in homeland politics are no less likely to register or vote in the United States than are those who are not active.

If one examines participation in political activities other than voting (writing or phoning a government official, donating money to a campaign, signing a petition for a political cause, taking part in a protest or demon-

TABLE 11. Transnational Political Orientations and Political Participation in the United States

Asian Americans (<i>N</i>)	Active in homeland politics	Not active in homeland politics
Percentage registered to vote (540)	83	77
Percentage who voted in 2000 (417)	88	83
Percentage who participated in political activities other than voting		
Chinese (276)	75*	33
Korean (155)	83*	36
Vietnamese (128)	58*	31
Japanese (38)	33*	20
Filipino (173)	100*	45
South Asian (118)	100*	52

Latinos (<i>N</i>)	Voted in homeland since migrating to United States	Has not voted in homeland since migrating to United States
Percentage registered to vote (639)	72	73
Percentage who voted in 1996 or 1999 (466)	77	83
Percentage who participated in nonvoting activities (supporting a Latino candidate or cause)		
Puerto Rican (137)	39	37
Mexican (461)	27	28
Cuban (244)	29	32
Other Central or South American (503)	34	28
Other Latino (132)	39	28

Source: PNAAPS, LAT.

Row percentages * $p \leq .10$

stration, and other types of activities), the results are even more surprising.⁵ Asian Americans who are active in homeland politics are more likely to be involved in nonvoting political activities than those who are not active in homeland politics. Further, the positive association is remarkably consistent across Asian American subgroups. (It is possible to examine specific subgroups in this case because the number of Asian American respondents included in the analysis of participation in activities other than voting is not restricted by citizenship or registration, as was the case for the voting and registration analyses.) The differences in participation in political activities other than voting between those who do and do not participate in homeland politics are statistically significant, except for Vietnamese immigrants. Additional multivariate analysis (appendix, table A7) confirms that activity related to politics in the country of origin is associated strongly with participation in political activities other than voting in the United States, even when other variables, such as socioeconomic status, political interest, and English language use, are taken into account.

The question that asked respondents if they had participated in political activities other than voting does not specify whether those activities involved political demands related to the United States or their country of origin. Thus, it may be that certain activities, such as contacting a U.S. government official or protesting in the United States, provide a vehicle for some immigrants to express political views related to their homelands. For example, immigrants might write letters to their congressional representatives about U.S. foreign policy toward their country of origin. However, even if that activity indicated an interest in homeland politics and a lack of interest in U.S. politics apart from issues relating specifically to the homeland, the act of contacting a U.S. representative may be related to one aspect of political socialization for immigrants. As they become more familiar with and experienced in interacting with U.S. government institutions, it is likely that they would also participate in activities aimed at influencing U.S. domestic politics.

Latino Immigrants and Transnational Politics

Is there an association between transnationalism and U.S. political participation among Latino immigrants? Portes and Rumbaut (1996, 95, 125) claim that immigrants are preoccupied with homeland politics, often at the expense of their U.S. political participation. Based on this argument, we could infer that those with strong ties to their homeland would be the

least likely to participate in U.S. politics. Analysis of the LAT data does not support that assertion, however (table 11). Those who report voting in their country of origin after migrating to the United States are no less likely to register or to vote than are those who have never done so. Moreover, regardless of national-origin group, Latino immigrants who have voted in their homeland since coming to the United States participate in political activities other than voting at about the same rates as Latino immigrants who have not voted in their homelands. (The LAT defines "participation in political activities other than voting" as working or volunteering for a Latino political candidate, attending a public meeting or demonstration regarding Latino concerns, or contributing money to a Latino candidate or organization.) Multivariate analysis shows that these patterns remain true even after controlling for other factors such as socioeconomic status, political interest, and use of the English language (not shown in tables).

Voting in one's country of origin may be too limited a measure of transnational political participation to capture any association, either positive or negative, with U.S. political participation. In comparison to the LAT, the LNPS asked a more general question about respondents' interest in government and politics in both their homelands and the United States. Many LNPS respondents had an interest in U.S. politics. For example, 40 percent of Mexican immigrants reported that they were more concerned with U.S. than with Mexican politics, and 35 percent claimed that they were equally concerned with politics in both countries. Puerto Rican immigrants reported similar rates, while 55 percent of Cuban immigrants were more concerned with U.S. than with Cuban politics, and 27 percent were equally concerned with politics in both countries.

The LNPS measured participation in political activities other than voting by asking respondents if they had done any of seven possible activities within the past year: (1) signed a petition; (2) written a letter, telephoned, or sent a telegram to a newspaper editor or public official (3) attended a public meeting; (4) worn a campaign button, put a campaign sticker on the car, or placed a sign in the window or front yard; (5) attended any political meetings, rallies, speeches, or dinners in support of a particular candidate; (6) worked for pay or as a volunteer for a party or candidate; or (7) contributed money to an individual candidate, a political party, or some other political organization supporting a candidate or an issue in an election. The bivariate relationships suggest that those immigrants whose

primary interest is in U.S. politics rather than homeland politics are more likely to participate in nonvoting political activities in the United States than are immigrants whose primary interest is homeland politics. Thirty-one percent of Mexican immigrants who claimed to be more concerned with U.S. than with Mexican politics had participated in U.S. political activities other than voting, compared to just 18 percent of those who were primarily concerned with Mexican politics. Similarly, 42 percent of Puerto Rican immigrants who said they were more concerned with U.S. than Puerto Rican politics participated in political activities other than voting in the United States, but only 24 percent of those who were primarily concerned with Puerto Rican politics took part in those activities. Finally, 27 percent of the Cuban immigrants who were primarily interested in U.S. politics participated in U.S. political activities other than voting, whereas 19 percent of those whose primary interest lay in Cuban politics were active in nonvoting political activities in the United States.

These bivariate relationships suggest that immigrants who are more interested in U.S. than homeland politics are also more likely to participate in U.S. political activities. However, multivariate analysis controlling for such factors as socioeconomic status, political engagement, and English-language dominance shows that for Latinos in the LNPS sample, the direction of the relationship between concern for homeland politics and participation in U.S. political activities varies by national-origin group. A dummy dependent variable was created from the seven questions about political activities other than voting, with respondents receiving either a score of 0 (participated in no activities) or 1 (participated in at least one of the seven activities).⁶ When control variables are included, greater interest in homeland than U.S. politics is not strongly associated with activity in U.S. politics for Mexican immigrants (table 12). For Puerto Rican immigrants, after socioeconomic status and other variables likely to be related to political participation are accounted for, greater interest in homeland politics is negatively associated with U.S. political participation. For Cubans, the relationship runs in the opposite direction—being interested in Cuban politics is associated positively with activity in U.S. politics. Furthermore, the relationship is statistically significant. The relationship between the measures of transnational ties used here and political participation in the United States is both inconsistent across Latino groups and weak in some cases.

What might explain these differences in the relationship between inter-

TABLE 12. Regression of Political Participation Other than Voting on Interest in Homeland Politics among Latino Immigrants

Independent variables	B	Standard error
Mexican Immigrants (<i>n</i> = 560)		
Age	-1.15	1.07
Education	1.87**	0.57
Income	-0.13	0.48
Female	0.20	0.24
Follow politics	0.74*	0.44
Strong partisan	-0.27	0.47
Ideology	-0.32	0.47
Member of Hispanic organization	1.83**	0.86
Party mobilization	1.69**	0.84
Individual mobilization	0.32	0.55
Religious attendance	0.67	0.45
Citizen	0.10	0.15
English language dominance	0.25	0.50
Experience with discrimination	0.49**	0.24
Years in the United States	0.03**	0.02
Interest in homeland politics	0.01	0.35
Constant	-3.98***	0.65
-2 (Log-Likelihood) Initial = 565.95		
-2 (Log-Likelihood) Convergence = 497.55		
Chi-Square 68.40 (df 16)		
<i>p</i> < .00		
Puerto Rican Immigrants (<i>n</i> = 352)		
Age	-0.28	1.03
Education	2.20***	0.73
Income	0.37	0.58
Female	-0.28	0.29
Follow politics	0.72	0.50
Strong partisan	-0.13	0.28
Ideology	-0.17	0.46
Member of Hispanic organization	0.77	0.58
Party mobilization	0.79	0.96
Individual mobilization	0.62**	0.29
Religious attendance	0.21	0.41
English language dominance	1.07*	0.63
Experience with discrimination	0.34	0.30
Years in the United States	0.01	0.02
Interest in homeland politics	-0.69*	0.40
Constant	-3.33	0.75

TABLE 12.—Continued

Independent variables	B	Standard error
-2 (Log-Likelihood) Initial = 421.96		
-2 (Log-Likelihood) Convergence = 385.19		
Chi-Square 63.79 (df 15)		
<i>p</i> < .00		
Cuban Immigrants (n = 485)		
Age	-1.15	0.80
Education	-0.23	0.67
Income	1.39***	0.53
Female	0.15	0.27
Follow politics	1.10**	0.54
Strong partisan	-0.05	0.37
Ideology	0.65	0.48
Member of Hispanic organization	1.61***	0.41
Party mobilization	0.40	0.83
Individual mobilization	1.53**	0.64
Religious attendance	0.15	0.42
Citizen	0.33	0.19
English language dominance	1.54***	0.56
Experience with discrimination	0.12	0.36
Years in the United States	0.00	0.02
Interest in homeland politics	0.85**	0.43
Constant	-4.18	0.86
-2 (Log-Likelihood) Initial = 496.28		
-2 (Log-Likelihood) Convergence = 403.19		
Chi-Square 93.09 (df 16)		
<i>p</i> < .00		

Source: LNPS.

Dependent Variable: Dummy variable for political participation other than voting.

p* ≤ .10 *p* ≤ .05 ****p* ≤ .01

est in homeland politics and participation in U.S. politics? The analysis here accounts for individual factors, such as socioeconomic status, organizational membership, and length of residence. Factors that are not included in the analysis, such as U.S. foreign policy toward the homeland or whether homeland policies invite participation among emigrants, might help explain the distinctions among the national-origin groups. For example, some Puerto Rican immigrants interested in homeland politics may

disapprove of U.S. policies toward the island, feel negatively toward the U.S. government, and consequently choose not to participate in U.S. politics as much as do those who are uninterested in Puerto Rican politics. Refugees who have fled the Cuban communist regime but remain interested in Cuban politics might also take part in U.S. politics to help shape policies toward the Cuban government. These observations are speculative, but they reveal the necessity of additional research on how transnational attitudes and behaviors affect immigrants' political participation (Pantoja 2005).

The LAT and LNPS survey data suggest that, contrary to popular rhetoric and some academic claims, having an interest in homeland politics generally does not make an immigrant less likely to participate in U.S. political activities than an immigrant who lacks that interest. Instead, among Latino immigrants, little association exists between U.S. political participation and involvement in homeland politics (defined as voting in homeland elections). In terms of attitudes toward involvement in homeland politics, measured by having a greater interest in homeland than in U.S. politics, the association with participation in U.S. politics is inconsistent and varies by national origin.

Transnational Political Participation: Qualitative Data

Because the quantitative data from the three surveys allow us to examine only a limited range of transnational attachments, it is especially important to consider other data as well. The qualitative information collected for this book sheds additional light on the relationship between transnationalism and U.S. political participation. All of the immigrants interviewed during the research for the book were asked about their transnational activities and attachments. Almost all Chinese and Mexican immigrants maintained some kind of contact with their homelands, especially staying in touch with friends or relatives and sending them gifts and money. Respondents also regularly followed the news in their countries of origin. In addition, many reported that after moving to the United States, it was still "easy" to stay current on homeland issues because of new communication technologies, such as the Internet and television.

Many of the immigrants felt that their ability to participate in U.S. politics was limited by their lack of understanding of the political system, the

time it took out of their daily schedules to get involved, lack of mobilization and other barriers. However, a preoccupation with life and politics in their countries of origin did not seem to be one of the factors that limited participation in U.S. politics. One Mexican immigrant woman who had lived in Los Angeles for twenty-two years said that she maintained strong ties to Mexico, following Mexican political and social issues, visiting Mexico at least once a year, and keeping in touch with and sending money and gifts to friends and relatives. Furthermore, she said she would be interested in pursuing dual nationality. Yet she also claimed to be more interested in U.S. than Mexican politics because “U.S. political issues are important” and they affect her life and decisions. She felt that it was “important to get involved, but obstacles, such as language barriers, ma[d]e it difficult.”

A Chinese woman who had immigrated to New York City in 1969 also exhibited strong transnational ties. She had made several trips back to Hong Kong and kept in touch with friends and relatives living there. She also followed major news from her homeland, having found that it was easy to get information through the Internet. However, these ties to Hong Kong did not inhibit her interest in U.S. politics. She was involved in a Chinese American community organization because “in order for other people to learn about the Chinese people, you need to get out there and participate so they can get past stereotypes.” Furthermore, she reported, “I am registered to vote and read the newspapers, watch TV, and read magazines to get information about United States politics because it is my responsibility to know what is going on before I vote.”

These examples and the survey data discussed earlier show that immigrants maintain a variety of strong ties with their countries of origin. However, transnational ties do not necessarily mean that immigrants are preoccupied with their homelands and therefore uninterested in the U.S. political system. Some U.S. community organizations, including the Asian Immigrant Women’s Advocates and a growing number of hometown associations, have embraced their immigrant members’ transnational concerns. These organizations help to facilitate transnational political involvement by organizing such things as fund-raisers in the United States for hometown projects and by bringing workers together across borders to fight exploitation, for example. The skills and experience these organizations provide to their members can then be transferred to their U.S. political participation, enhancing their ability to take part.

Dual Citizenship e³ Transnational Government Structures

Opportunities for immigrants in the United States to participate in politics in their homelands are expanding. One of the ways that immigrants can maintain links with their country of origin is through dual nationality. Taiwan recognizes dual nationality in many cases, but the People's Republic of China does not. In March 1998, Mexico's consulates in the United States began to allow Mexican immigrants and their children to apply for dual nationality, meaning that people could retain or regain their legal rights in Mexico while simultaneously holding U.S. citizenship. Because foreigners have been able only to lease rather than buy land in Mexico, dual citizenship was very important in terms of property ownership and investments. Mexican immigrants interviewed in Los Angeles seemed much more enthusiastic about opportunities for dual nationality than those interviewed in New York. When asked if they were taking advantage of this opportunity, none of the immigrants in New York responded positively, although several of the Los Angeles respondents indicated that they were definitely planning to apply for dual nationality. This suggests that because Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles are more likely than those in New York to be legal U.S. residents or citizens, travel back and forth regularly between the two countries, and own property in both—that they were more likely to see dual nationality under Mexican law as a real advantage, preventing them from having to choose between U.S. citizenship and rights granted only to Mexican citizens. For immigrants who were not legal residents, however, the dual-nationality option was a moot point because they would have to take steps to regularize their status so that they could apply to undergo the U.S. naturalization process before the issue of dual nationality would come into play. A thirty-three-year-old immigrant man without legal documents who was interviewed in New York responded that the Mexican dual-nationality law “doesn't affect me because it doesn't help with my stay here in the U.S.” In contrast, a naturalized Mexican immigrant who came to Los Angeles as a child in 1983 said that he would apply because it would allow him to have “equal rights in both countries.” A naturalized Mexican woman who had immigrated to Los Angeles in 1982 claimed that she would be interested in holding dual nationality because she wished to legalize her property ownings in Mexico. It is likely that the differences between Los Angeles's and New York's

proximity to Mexico also account for the level of interest among Mexicans in the two localities.

Another development in Mexican politics that likely affects that country's immigrant population is the possibility that Mexican migrants to the United States and other countries will be allowed to vote in the 2006 Mexican presidential election. Enrico Marcelli and Wayne Cornelius (2005, 433) estimate that by 2006, expatriates will make up about 14 percent of the Mexican electorate, giving them significant influence over the election outcome. Vicente Fox, whose election to the presidency of Mexico broke the Partido Revolucionario Institucional's seventy-year hegemony, has long supported giving immigrants in the United States the right to take part in Mexican elections. Although Mexican expatriates currently have the right to vote in Mexican elections, no mechanism exists to allow them to exercise that right. Instead, expatriates must register to vote several months before an election and return to Mexico to cast their votes. Proposals have been put forth to allow Mexican citizens in the United States to vote at consulates or over the Internet, but both ideas have been rejected because of concerns relating to staffing and fraud.

The Mexican state of Zacatecas has led the country in encouraging transnational political participation. In August 2003, the state legislature unanimously approved a state constitutional amendment allowing Zacatecan expatriates to vote in state and municipal elections. Moreover, the legislation allows for campaigning in the United States and for emigrants and their children (even those not born in Zacatecas) to run for office. The Zacatecan population in the United States is about 1.5 million, equal to state's current resident population. In 2004, Andrés Bermúdez, a native of Zacatecas who had emigrated to California and become a successful businessman, won election as mayor of his native town, Jerez. Two other U.S. residents won seats in the Zacatecas legislature reserved for overseas citizens.

Furthermore, Fox's 2000 campaign was truly transnational in scope. He campaigned in several U.S. cities, urging Mexican immigrants to help persuade friends and family back home to vote for him: "We come to recommend that the best way to participate at this time is to phone your friends and family, to write letters" (quoted in Anderson 2000, A-20). During his visit to Los Angeles, he said he would consider allowing Mexican immigrants in the United States to cast absentee ballots in Mexican elections.

California has a population of at least 3 million Mexican immigrants, and the Los Angeles metropolitan area alone is home to the largest concentration of Mexicans outside of Mexico City (Dillon 2003, A-12).⁷ If Mexican immigrants were fully to exercise that right, California could become one of the most significant blocs of voters in Mexican elections.

Implications for American Civic Institutions

Immigration scholars often assume that first-generation immigrants are uninterested in U.S. politics because they are preoccupied with life in their countries of origin (Harles 1993). Portes and Rumbaut's influential review of contemporary immigration embraces that assumption: "For the most part, the politics of the first generation—to the extent that such politics have existed—have been characterized by an overriding preoccupation with the old country" (1996, 95). They go on to suggest that the "early political concerns of the foreign born today seldom have to do with matters American. Instead, they tend to center on issues and problems back home" (108). Not until the second generation comes of age does this orientation change, as "time and the passing of the first generation inexorably turn immigrant communities toward American concerns" (124).

Better measures of transnational activities and attachments are needed to understand fully their effects on political participation in the United States. The findings in this chapter, which draws on both quantitative and qualitative methods, compel one to question the popular assumption that immigrants' interest in or concerns related to their homelands imply their indifference toward U.S. political life. By assuming that immigrants are concerned primarily with homeland politics, the standard models too easily dismiss first-generation immigrants' political participation. The data do not support the widespread belief that immigrants focus solely on homeland issues at the expense of interest in American politics.

To maximize their appeal to the growing numbers of immigrants living in the United States, civic institutions should adopt a more transnational view of immigrant political mobilization. This might mean learning more about immigrants' homeland concerns and helping immigrants to communicate with the public and to organize around those concerns. Such an approach would help to build immigrants' communication and organizational skills, thereby, in turn, helping to facilitate their participation in

U.S. politics. Systematic analysis of survey data reveals little evidence to support the notion that immigrants are preoccupied with homeland politics at the expense of involvement in American politics. Rather, for immigrants from Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Cuba, active involvement or interest in homeland politics exists completely independently of their level of U.S. political participation. Furthermore, for some immigrant groups, including Asian Americans and most Asian American subgroups, those who are active in homeland politics tend also to be the most active in U.S. politics.

Some community organizations such as workers' centers, advocacy organizations, ethnic voluntary associations, and religious institutions incorporate immigrants' transnational orientations into strategies for organizing. For example, approximately seven hundred Mexican hometown and migrant associations operate in the United States (Jonathan Fox and Rivera-Salgado 2004). These organizations, based on social networks forged among migrants from the same village or town, work explicitly to strengthen their ties to the community living abroad with the goal of improving social, economic, and political conditions for all members of the transnational community—that is, the population living in the American as well as the Mexican communities. Mexican hometown associations (a form of ethnic voluntary association) and U.S.-based local and national ethnic advocacy organizations are only beginning to collaborate, but signs indicate that the two types of organizations are working together on behalf of U.S. immigration policy reforms and on specific political issues for immigrants, such as access to driver's licenses for those without legal residency. The League of United Latin American Citizens, a national-level advocacy organization, is forging closer ties with local hometown associations in regard to shared policy concerns (Americas Program, Interhemispheric Resource Center 2003). In their study of organizational strategies used by indigenous and mestizo Mexican immigrants living in Los Angeles, Jonathan Fox and Gaspar Rivera-Salgado predict that as groups of hometown associations increasingly organize into formal federations, they will become “the political intermediaries between the migrants, the Mexican government, and varied political actors in the United States (from local, state, and federal politicians to unions, NGOs, and academic researchers)” (2004, 1).

Political parties, especially local party organizations, may benefit if they can reach out to immigrants by paying more attention to their transna-

tional concerns. Local party organizations could staff and sponsor information booths at the many festivals and celebrations sponsored by hometown associations in the United States. They could also develop internal educational programs that would help to inform party activists about the transnational concerns that are part of the daily lives of the immigrant members of their communities. For example, local party organization leaders in New York City might meet with Fujianese immigrants in Chinatown to discuss conditions and political issues in the sending communities and how these conditions are shaping political commitments and divisions within the Fujianese community in New York City.

These recommendations do not imply an oversimplified or utopian view of transnational politics. In his book on the homeland political activism of immigrants from the former Yugoslavia, Paul Hockenos (2003) points out that although many observers might assume that transnational politics contributes to the eradication of national borders and traditional conceptions of the nation-state, those involved in transnational politics often engage in political agendas promoting nationalism. Transnational communities tend to be ethnically homogenous, and in some cases, he claims, powerful members of the community may react with hostility to attempts to integrate the homeland or promote more ethnic inclusion.

Nevertheless, the findings presented in this chapter suggest that participation in transnational politics may actually lead some immigrants to participate more fully in American politics. Although participation in transnational politics has little impact on whether an immigrant votes in U.S. elections, that participation may contribute to greater involvement in other types of political activities in the United States and to more engagement in civic life generally. Thus, actors in American civic institutions could strengthen their ties with Asian American and Latino immigrants if those institutions would foster rather than dismiss participation in homeland politics by U.S. immigrants.