

# Transnational Linked Fate and Identity in Support for a Mexico-U.S. Political Union

## El destino vinculado transnacional y la identidad en el apoyo de la unión política México-Estados Unidos

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### ABSTRACT

This study is an empirical analysis using survey data on the attitudes and orientations of the Mexican diaspora in the United States to explain its support for a political union between the two countries. The author articulates a theory of identity and shared affinity to explain their views on this issue. Regression analysis reveals that transnational linked fate, the belief that what happens to Mexicans in Mexico affects the lives of people of Mexican origin in the U.S., and Latino identity are significant independent predictors of support for a Mexico-U.S. political union. These findings signal the importance of the experiences of Mexicans in the U.S. to our understanding of attitudes toward North American politics.

**Key words:** North American integration, linked fate, Mexican-Americans, public opinion, transnationalism.

### RESUMEN

Este estudio consiste en un análisis empírico que emplea datos de encuestas sobre las actitudes y orientaciones de la diáspora mexicana en Estados Unidos para explicar su apoyo a una unión política entre los dos países. El autor articula una teoría de identidad y afinidad compartida para explicar las visiones de esa población sobre esta cuestión. Un análisis de regresión revela que un destino vinculado transnacional, la creencia de que lo que les sucede a los mexicanos en México afecta la vida de las personas de origen mexicano en Estados Unidos y la identidad latina son factores independientes y significativos que predicen el apoyo a una unión política de México y Estados Unidos. Estos hallazgos señalan la importancia de las experiencias de los mexicanos en Estados Unidos para conocer las actitudes hacia la política norteamericana.

**Palabras clave:** integración norteamericana, destino vinculado, mexicoamericanos, opinión pública, transnacionalismo.

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## INTRODUCTION

Over two decades after the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) integrated the economies of Canada, Mexico, and the United States, the degree to which the people of these three sovereign states have come to identify with one another socially and politically has lagged behind state-level economic commitments. In as many years as trade and investment in North America have gone largely unencumbered by political interests, the people of the three countries have yet to forge a truly “North American” identity (Pastor, 2011). As recent U.S. public opinion research reveals, even just among African-Americans, Latinos/Hispanics, and Anglo-Americans, attitudes toward the construction of a border wall between Mexico and the U.S. and a pathway to citizenship for millions of unauthorized immigrants are sharply divided. A large majority of Latinos in the U.S. support a pathway to citizenship and oppose a border wall, while a plurality of Anglo-Americans holds opposing views, and African-Americans are the most ambivalent toward both actions (Medina Vidal, 2017). Given the polemical turn in the tone and tempo of Mexico-U.S. and North American relations now, over two decades after NAFTA was enacted, it has become apparent that understanding North American bonds in social, cultural, and identity-driven ways has failed.

In this study, I analyze the intersection of identity and North American politics and policy through the lens of the attitudes and orientations of people of Mexican origin in the U.S. One point of departure for understanding the importance of identity and transnational linked fate to the public support of deeper North American integration is an understanding of the lengths to which elite-level activism and scholarship have taken the idea of deeper integration. As a trade agreement, proponents of NAFTA and economic integration have concerned themselves almost exclusively with the agreement’s effects on trade and investment in the three member countries. Only a few exceptions to this general rule exist. Some scholars of North American integration seek common ground among all North Americans (residents of Canada, United States, and Mexico) beyond the more ubiquitous economic cooperation frame. Evidence suggests that all three publics of the three NAFTA-member countries are becoming more alike in terms of their values (Pastor, 2001; 2011). Basáñez, Inglehart, and Nevitte find more evidence of convergence or parallel movement than divergence in values among the three NAFTA country publics (2007). Indeed, the “NAFTA-plus” argument for political integration, advanced most vociferously by Pastor (2001; 2011) and former President Vicente Fox Quesada, have expressed the most concern for identity and transnationalism by querying whether a common North American identity is possible. Yet, Pastor concludes that the lack of institutional support in

North America with which to foment a North American identity and deeper political integration are what make that identity impossible to achieve.

In this study, I emphasize and focus on the importance for the Mexican diaspora in the U.S. of these common identity and values questions raised by previous research. I contend that neither convergent values nor institutional capacity, but rather affinity via linked fate and ethnic identity are what inform attitudes among Mexican-origin people in the U.S. about North American politics. Drawing on the transnational view of immigration and assimilation, which asserts that the processes of cultural and values dissemination across international boundaries are two-way, mutually reinforcing phenomena, I argue that transnational political behavior and identities forged in the U.S. shape individuals' views of regional political integration. In articulating a theory of transnational linked fate, ethnic identity, and support for political integration, I argue that Mexican-origin people with a transnational linked fate with Mexicans in Mexico and a strong Latino identity forged in the U.S. are likely to support a political union between the Mexico and the U.S.

The remainder of this article is organized into five main sections. Section 2 briefly situates this study in the larger body of research into North American public opinion and transnational political behavior. Section 3 outlines a framework and hypotheses relating Latino pan-ethnic identity forged in the U.S. and the transnational linked fate value to agreement with a political union between Mexico and the United States. In Section 4, I introduce the data used in this study and present a statistical analysis. In Section 5, I discuss the substantive significance of the statistical findings and their broader implications for our understanding of regionalism, Mexican identity, public opinion, and the politics of North America. In the final section, I conclude with some discussion of potential avenues for future research.

## Public Opinion Regarding North American Integration

Decades after NAFTA was implemented, U.S. public opinion toward North American relations is still mostly defined in terms of individuals' assessments of the trade agreement's effects on the economy (English, 2008) and views about the perceived direction of bi- and multilateralism in specific policy arenas (Smeltz and Kafura, 2013). A 2008 Gallup poll of U.S., Canadian, and Mexican views about NAFTA reveals that a majority (53 percent) of those in the United States see it as having a "mainly negative" impact on the U.S. economy, while a majority of Canadians (51 percent) perceive the agreement as having a "mainly positive" impact on the Canadian economy. Mexican opinion is much less sharply divided; 20 percent of Mexicans view

NAFTA as “mainly positive,” 23 percent as “mainly negative,” 18 percent as “neither positive nor negative,” and a plurality, 39 percent reported not knowing or /refused to respond (English, 2008).

Together with the Gallup poll’s design and findings, a recent U.S.-based survey of U.S. Americans conducted by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and the Mexico Institute of the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars (Smeltz and Kafura, 2013) reveals two important shortcomings in our general contemporary understanding of North American politics. For one, the focus of public opinion among U.S. Americans has been on the views and orientations of Anglo-Americans, the majority population. Smeltz and Kafura acknowledge that their survey sample does not include Spanish-speaking households and contains a very small sample of Hispanic respondents (2013: 7). Another more thematic problem concerning contemporary views of North American politics is the almost exclusive attention to economic matters (that is, trade and investment) and, to the extent that political matters are queried, they mainly involve matters of [mostly trade] policy and mimicking the institution-building model of the European Union (for example, Pastor, 2001; 2011).

Not since De la Garza and DeSipio’s (1998) analysis of Mexican-American opinion, based on survey data from the mid-1990s, around the time of NAFTA’s implementation, have the views of Mexican-Americans about policies within the scope of U.S.-Mexican relations been focused on. Drawing on policy preference data, De la Garza and DeSipio (1998) conclude that, in terms of their policy concerns, Mexican-Americans are following a model of assimilation similar to that of Italian-Americans, whereby Mexican-Americans have abandoned their concern for Mexican politics and their identity with Mexico is strictly cultural and not policy-based.

From 2004 to 2014, researchers at the Center for Economic Research and Teaching (CIDE) have measured the state of the Mexican mass- and elite-level support for a Mexican-U.S. political union if it means a better quality of life for them. Gerardo Maldonado, Rodrigo Morales Castillo, Guadalupe González González, David Crow, and Jorge A. Schiavon (2016) report that 53 percent of the Mexican mass public has agreed with joining the U.S. if it would improve their quality of life. This statistic shrinks to 43 percent support when researchers ask the same question without the benefit to quality of life attached to the political union. Elites, on the other hand, are much less supportive of a political union. Only 29 percent of the sample of Mexican political leaders surveyed supported joining the U.S. in a political union (Maldonado et al., 2016). The only comparable survey of U.S. elite opinion on North American politics identified is a 2011 study comparing Latino to non-Latino state legislators, in which respondents rated the importance of ten policy areas to the districts they

represent. Trade/NAFTA was among the ten, but is only marginally more important than “agriculture,” which was the least important issue. As a study of the policy preferences and salience of Latino and non-Latino elites, it is worth noting that the survey reveals “trade/NAFTA” to be an issue marginally more important to non-Latino lawmakers than to Latino lawmakers, whereas Latino lawmakers are more concerned than their non-Latino counterparts with worker protections, healthcare, crime, and education (Medina Vidal, 2012).

The aim of this study is to link what we know from Mexican public opinion regarding Mexicans’ views about sovereignty and their openness to a Mexico-U.S. political union with the views toward the same among Mexican-origin people in the U.S. To move toward a theory to explain the sources of support for political integration, I introduce a theoretical grounding based on identity shaped in the U.S. and transnational political behavior via transnational linked fate.

### **Transnational Political Behavior and Linked Fate**

A thorough assessment of the literature reveals that the confluence of the concepts of linked fate and transnational political behavior has yet to be investigated. Though convergence of values and the transmission of ideologies and attitudes toward government tell us a great deal about Mexican-American political behavior in the U.S., to my knowledge, no research into Mexican political behavior explores linked fate as a dimension of identity that could also tell us a great deal about these phenomena. Further, to the extent that transnational political behavior is understood from the U.S. perspective, research in this area reveals only a limited view of behavior, with no attention paid to phenomena that are not more than materially transactional. The idea of a linked fate (Dawson, 1995), based on transnational ties to the people in their home or ancestral countries, informs how closely Mexican and other Latin American-origin individuals in the U.S. view themselves relative not only to U.S. society but also to Latin Americans outside the U.S.

The transnationalist view of migrant Latino politics defends the compatibility of transnational ties and multiple, overlapping national identities with higher levels of civic engagement among Latino migrants in the U.S. (Jones-Correa, 2001; Gershon and Pantoja, 2014). From this school, we know that many positive changes occur as a function of exchanges among people who are adaptable to fostering transnational exchange. For instance, migrants from Mexico to the U.S. are agents of democratic dissemination, whose behavior strengthens democracy in their country of origin, especially when transmitted directly from migrant friends and family abroad (Pérez-

Armendáriz and Crow, 2010). And to be sure, Mexican influences on the U.S. also wield significant clout *vis-à-vis* the ideas and political behavior patterns among Mexican migrants there. Pre-migration political socialization in Mexico, including partisan attachment, is a strong predictor of political engagement in the U.S., while the level of trust in government in Mexico corresponds to how much trust Mexican migrants have in U.S. political institutions (Wals, 2011). Ideas developed in Mexico also have a profound effect on how Mexican migrants incorporate themselves into their new U.S. political environment. Their “imported ideology” shapes the direction of the formation of their political ideas and electoral participation in the U.S. (Wals, 2013). As I argue below, a favorable view of a Mexico-U.S. political union and a better quality of life is a function of previously unstudied dimensions of transnational and identity politics among Mexican-Americans.

## **MEXICO-U.S. POLITICAL UNION FORGED THROUGH IDENTITY AND LINKED FATE**

I endorse the transnationalist approach to understanding the political behavior of Latino immigrants in the U.S. and amend it by suggesting that a linked-fate dimension of transnational and identity-based politics operates in the same way for U.S.-born Latinos as it does for immigrants. Drawing from the literature on transnational political behavior and on the study of race and ethnicity in the U.S., I challenge the claim that Mexican-Americans have so abandoned their interest in Mexican politics or in Mexico-U.S. relations that their only connection to Mexico is based on a modest cultural affinity (De la Garza and DeSipio, 1998). Situating my theory of transnational linked fate and Latino identity on the spectrum of the shared interests and affinity among all Mexican-origin people in North America, I argue that the idea of a political union between the U.S. and Mexico is, for Mexicans in the U.S., an important arbiter of whether Mexican-Americans imagine themselves and their experiences in the U.S. as more than simply cultural.

According to Blair Center Poll data, when asked whether they think what happens generally to people in their country of ancestry affects them, Mexicans feel more of a transnational kinship than Latinos of other ancestries. Seventy-five percent of Mexican-origin Latinos in the U.S. believe that what happens in Mexico affects them at least a little, compared to the 63 percent of non-Mexican Latinos in the U.S. who believe that what happens to people in their own countries of ancestry affects their lives. To be sure, the proximity of Mexico and the U.S. and their shared history provide a meaningful explanation for this relative difference.

As an informer of shared interests and the structure of life chances for ethno-racial minority group members in the U.S., the idea that one's individual fate in life is somehow connected to that of the group to which an individual belongs already tells us a great deal about the connections between public opinion and many other dimensions of individual political behavior.

Thus, I predict:

Hypothesis 1: Individuals with higher levels of transnational linked fate are more likely to support a political union between Mexico and the United States.

Further, acknowledging the significance of lived experiences in the context of U.S. ethno-racial politics, which entails the racialized exploitation and marginalization of Mexican-origin people and all Latinos/Hispanics (García Bedolla, 2005; Schmidt et al., 2010), I contend that Latino identity is an important informer of the views Mexicans in the U.S. have toward North American politics. The primordial associations of all Latinos in the U.S. are also compatible with a pan-Latin American political philosophy. Thus, I also predict:

Hypothesis 2: Individuals with a stronger Latino/Hispanic ethnic identity are more likely to support a political union between Mexico and the United States.

In the following section I discuss the data used to test the theory of transnational linked fate and Latino identity fomenting support among Mexicans in the U.S. for the political integration of Mexico and the U.S.

## EMPIRICAL TESTS

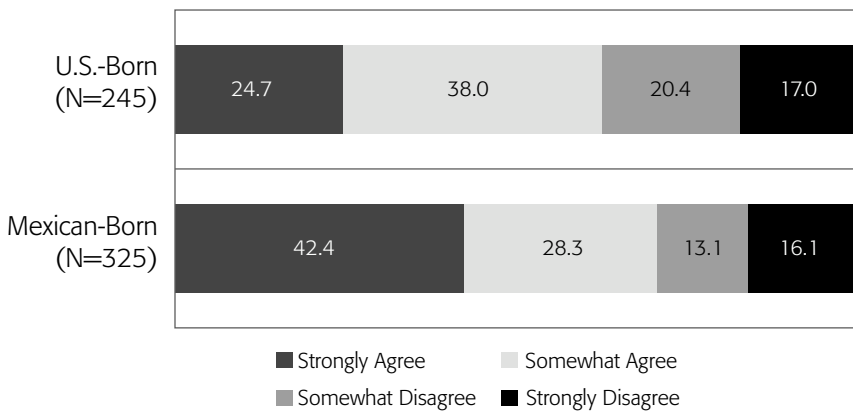
The data used in this analysis are from the Blair Center Poll (Diane D. Blair Center of Southern Politics and Society, 2016), a national survey fielded immediately following the U.S. November 2016 general election. The Blair Center Poll is a national, comprehensive survey of attitudes regarding a broad range of political and public policy issues, with special focus on the socio-cultural influences on the political values of African-Americans, Latinos, and white U.S. Americans in the U.S. South. The poll was administered by Knowledge Networks, an Internet survey company that includes a representative sample of U.S. Americans in its proprietary database, including representation of the roughly 30 percent of U.S. households without Internet access. In addition, it covers the growing number of cell-phone-only households

(recently estimated at 23 percent of all households) through address-based sampling. The survey was conducted in both Spanish and English and took an average of 20 minutes to complete. With a total sample of 3 668 individuals aged 18 and over, it included 1 021 Hispanic/Latino adults currently residing in the U.S. This research examines the attitudes and orientations of the 570 respondents of Mexican ancestry, 245 of whom are U.S.-born, and 325 of whom were born in Mexico.

### Dependent Variables

The main dependent variable of interest to this study, agreement with a Mexico-U.S. political unification, is coded from responses to the survey question, “How would you feel about Mexico and the United States forming one country if this meant a better quality of life for you?” In Figure 1, I report the distribution of agreement and disagreement with a Mexico-U.S. political union by birthplace. Mexican-born immigrants in the U.S. have a higher level of overall agreement with political union (70.7 percent strongly or somewhat agree) compared to the 62.7 percent of U.S.-born Mexican-Americans who agree. For explanatory simplicity, I code the dependent variable dichotomously, where 1 = agrees and 0 = disagrees with political unification.

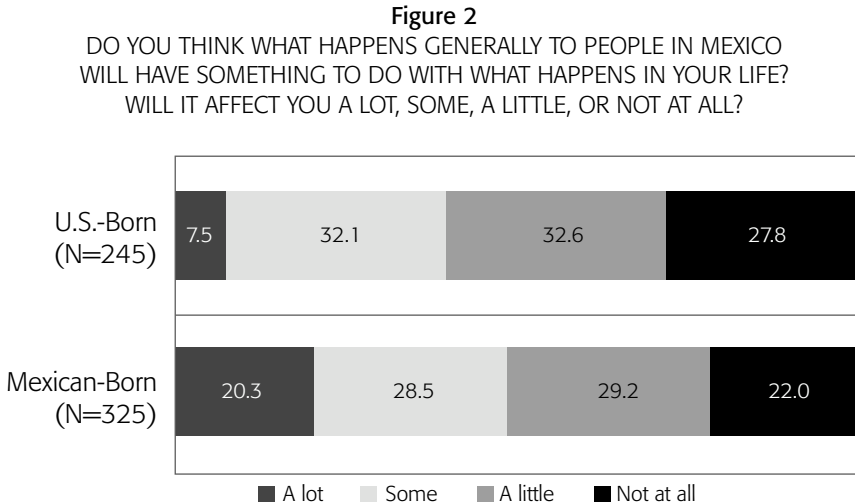
**Figure 1**  
MEXICO AND THE UNITED STATES SHOULD FORM ONE COUNTRY





## Independent Variables

I operationalize *transnational linked fate*, a deeply held value, as survey responses to the question, “Do you think what happens generally to people in Mexico will have something to do with what happens in your life? Will it affect you a lot, some, a little, or not at all?” Figure 2 illustrates the levels of transnational linked fate, again by U.S. and Mexican birthplace. Mexican-born respondents have a higher level of transnational linked fate than Mexicans born in the U.S. I code the levels of transnational linked fate as 0 = none, for those who believe what happens in Mexico does not affect them “at all”; 1 = low for “a little”; 2 = moderate for “some”; and 3 = high for “a lot.”



The pan-ethnic *Latino identity* variable is dichotomous and derived from a question “In general, how strongly do you think of yourself as Hispanic/Latino?” I code the responses of “strongly” and “very strongly” identify as “1”; and “neutral,” “not strongly,” and “not at all” as “0.” The two independent variables of interest are correlated with one another thus:  $r = 0.13$ ,  $p < .01$ . Transnational linked fate is correlated with agreement with Mexico-U.S. union  $r = 0.19$ ,  $p < .01$ , and Latino identity is correlated with the dependent variable  $r = 0.07$ ,  $p < .10$ .

## Covariates

To control for other possible effects and explanations of agreement with Mexico-U.S. unification I include another political identity variable in the statistical test. The same measuring and coding scheme producing the Latino identity variable is used to account for the strength of [U.S.] *American identity*, where 1 = strong U.S. American identity and 0 = weak U.S. American identity. As a check on the social, identity-based explanations I posit, I control for the economic factors that might inform a preference for unification. *Personal economic outlook* is an ordinal variable ranging from a “worse” = 0 future personal economic outlook to a “better” = 2 future personal economic outlook. Other controls of theoretical importance to any study of Mexicans in the U.S. include *U.S. Citizen* (0 = non-citizen, 1 = citizen), *birthplace/U.S. Born* (0 = Mexican-born, 1 = U.S. born), *Spanish-language dominance* / language of survey (0 = English, 1 = Spanish). The common socioeconomic factors controlled for are sex (*female* = 1), age, level of *education*, and self-assessed *socioeconomic status* (1 = lower class...4 = upper class). The descriptive statistics for all variables used in the statistical analysis are reported in the Appendix.

## Statistical Tests

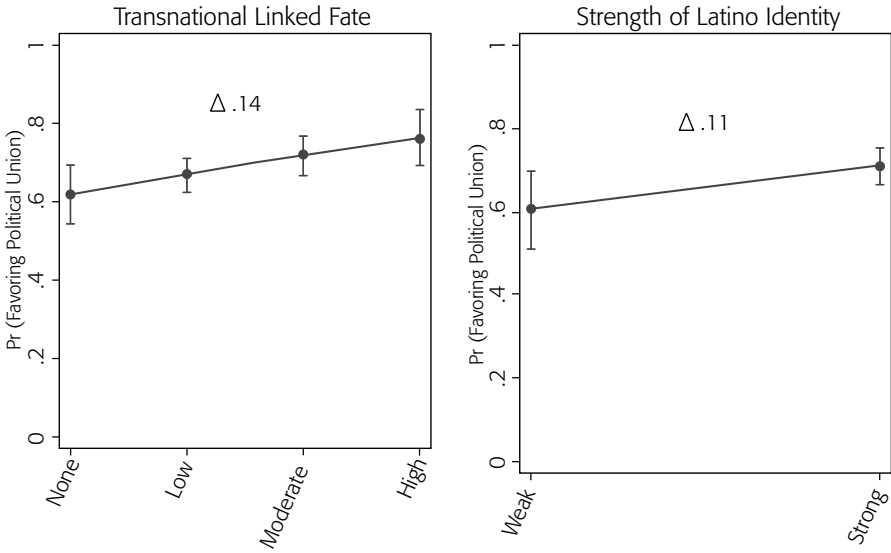
To test for the hypothesized effects of Mexicans’ transnational linked fate and their pan-ethnic Latino identity on the binary measure of agreement with a Mexico-U.S. political union, I use logistic regression to generate estimates of their independent effects. These are presented in Table 1. In the first model, a bivariate model of the effects of birthplace, I observe a statistically significant difference between Mexicans born in Mexico and U.S.-born Mexican-Americans in their agreement with political union ( $p < .05$ ). However, as the results of the multivariate logistic regression reveal, this difference is significantly muted by factors of more theoretical importance. Here, I observe positive and statistically significant independent effects of both transnational linked fate ( $p < .05$ ) and Latino identity ( $p < .05$ ) on agreement with a Mexico-U.S. union when controlling for U.S. American identity, economic outlook, and other factors. With the regression coefficients reaching a level of statistical significance, this provides corroboration for the hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 predictions. With respect to the question of whether Mexican-born or U.S.-born Mexicans are more or less likely to agree with political union, the reversal of the sign in the coefficient for birthplace,  $\beta = -.365$  in the bivariate model and  $\beta = .290$  in the multivariate model, renders it a less useful factor through which to understand agreement with Mexico-U.S. political union.

**Table 1**  
LOGISTIC REGRESSION ESTIMATES OF AGREEMENT  
WITH A MEXICO-U.S. POLITICAL UNION

	Bivariate Model	Multivariate Model
Birthplace (0 = Mexico, 1 = U.S.)	-0.365 (0.172)*	0.290 (0.290)
Transnational Linked Fate		0.228* (0.104)
Latino Identity		0.476* (0.235)
American/U.S. Identity		-0.001 (0.233)
Personal Economic Outlook		-0.172 (0.150)
U.S. Citizen		-0.304 (0.290)
Age		-0.020** (0.007)
Education		0.004 (0.039)
Socioeconomic Status		-0.322* (0.154)
Female		0.073 (0.195)
Spanish Language		0.747** (0.264)
Constant		1.481* (0.649)
Observations	570	527
Pseudo $R^2$	0.01	0.08
$\chi^2$	4.51*	56.79**
Log Likelihood	-389.2	-326.3
Standard errors in parentheses* $p < .05$ , ** $p < .01$		

Figure 3 illustrates the marginal effects of transnational linked fate and Latino identity when holding all other variables at their means, by plotting the predicted probabilities of support for Mexico-U.S. unification at each value of the independent variables. Mexicans in the U.S. with no transnational linked fate have a 62-percent likelihood of agreeing with a Mexico-U.S. union, compared to Mexicans with a high level of transnational linked fate; for the latter, the likelihood of agreement is 76 percent. In the case of those with weak versus strong Latino identities, those with strong Latino identity (71-percent likelihood of agreement) are 11 percent more likely to agree with political union than those with weak Latino identity (60-percent likelihood). These robust effects of transnational linked fate and ethnic identity are significant when controlling for the social and economic factors.

**Figure 3**  
MARGINAL EFFECTS OF LINKED FATE AND LATINO IDENTITY  
ON AGREEMENT WITH A MEXICO-U.S. POLITICAL UNION



**Figure 4**  
MARGINAL EFFECTS OF COVARIATES ON AGREEMENT  
WITH A MEXICO-U.S. POLITICAL UNION

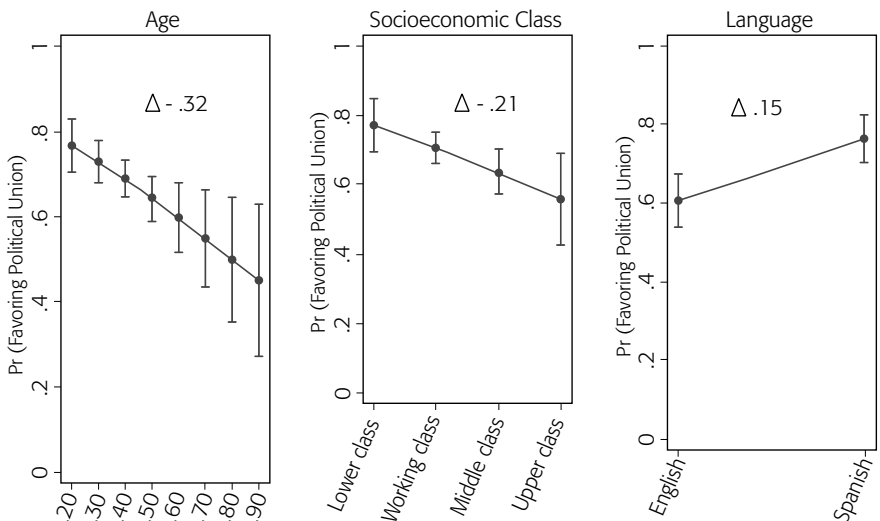


Figure 4 illustrates the marginal effects of the covariates age ( $p < .01$ ), socioeconomic status ( $p < .05$ ), and Spanish language ( $p < .01$ ). Increasing age and higher socioeconomic status are negatively associated with agreement with political union: older Mexicans are cooler about the idea of a union than young Mexicans; and upper-class Mexicans are less likely to agree with union than lower, working, and middle-class Mexicans. The effects of another important form of U.S. acculturation, theorized as Spanish-language vs. English-language dominance and measured by the language version of the survey, are such that Spanish-dominant Mexicans are 15 percent more likely to agree with a political union than English-dominant Mexicans.

Next, I explain the substantive significance of these statistical findings to our understanding of North American relations and transnational political behavior among the region's people of Mexican origin.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NORTH AMERICAN POLITICS

In seeking to identify what motivates the Mexican community in the United States to support an idea akin to the NAFTA-plus-style argument (Pastor, 2001; 2011) of a political union, I theorized that ethnic Latino identity and transnational linked fate play key explanatory roles in our understanding of support for a Mexico-U.S. political union. My approach to understanding the views of Mexicans in the U.S. toward political union involves how they view political union in terms of phenomena unique to their historical experiences. That is, given the psycho-historical and socioeconomic development of Mexican-origin people in the U.S. (Álvarez, 1973), for non-Mexican U.S. Americans and for Mexicans in Mexico, the concepts "transnational linked fate" and "Latino identity" mean very different things—if anything at all.

That stronger linked fate and group consciousness develop among co-ethnic Hispanics/Latinos living among each other within the U.S. is no novelty, since their shared context and experiences there bring them closer together. Likewise, the development of transnational ties among Mexicans in the two countries derives from a common set of lived experiences with migration, settlement, integration, and political integration. That is, pan-ethnic Latino identity and transnational ties are important components of Mexican-Americans' psycho-historical development.

The project of North American integration, a strictly economic one, has largely dutifully dismissed the importance of society and its complex identities in deference to neoliberal economics. More than an artifact of North American economic integration or of a set of convergent or parallel values, transnational linked fate tells an

important story about who Mexican-origin people throughout North America have always been: a community bonded by a traditional national character (Castañeda, 2011) that knows only of an artificial border.

Whereas linked fate had been previously effectively employed independently as a tool for understanding opinion and behavior among African-Americans (Dawson, 1995; Davis and Brown, 2002), Latinos (Sánchez and Masuoka, 2010; Kaufman, 2003), and immigrants in the U.S. (Sánchez and Masuoka, 2010), here I illustrate its utility to our understanding of support for a political union that reflects the complexity of Mexican-American identity in North America. Beyond a description of transactions such as remittances (Massey, Arango, and Hugo, 1998; Cohen, 2005; Cortina and De la Garza, 2004; Waldinger, Popkin, and Magaña, 2008), or a form of organizing material interests via hometown associations (Escala-Rabadán, Bada, and Rivera-Salgado, 2006; Waldinger, Popkin, and Magaña, 2008; Ramakrisnan and Viramontes, 2010), Mexican-U.S. transnationalism by way of a transnational linked fate is a reliable predictor of consciousness of a political identity. As I have illustrated here, the Mexican-American public's support for a political union is informed by this consciousness. Based on the relationship between transnational linked fate and Mexican-Americans' views of political union, this study's main findings contribute to the literature in support of the transnationalist view of migrant politics for Mexican immigrants *and* for U.S.-born Mexican-Americans.

The other main finding articulated in this study is that the pan-ethnic Hispanic/Latino identity forged in the U.S. is also an independent, significant predictor of support for a Mexico-U.S. political union. The regression analysis reveals that Mexican-Americans with a strong pan-ethnic Latino identity are more likely to support political union. In this regard, stronger support for a political union among stronger Latino identifiers illustrates pan-ethnic Latino consciousness generating out of intergroup social participation and interaction (Padilla, 1984). That is, pan-Latino consciousness and identity is a catalyst through which Mexicans in the U.S. can imagine a political union with their compatriots in Mexico. From the viewpoint of Mexican-Americans with a well-established and fomented pan-ethnic Latino identity forged in the U.S. context, political integration with Mexico is more imaginable.

Among the types of pan-ethnic ties that prevail in the U.S., the primordial versus the instrumental (Padilla, 1984; Calderón, 1992; Espíritu, 1992), the relationship identified here between Latino pan-ethnic identity and support for political union both potentially have the power to explain the meaning behind the relationship. As a construct employed instrumentally, strong pan-ethnic Latino identity potentially relates to opinion about political union as a manifestation of the economic and social integration that already exists among Mexicans in both countries. Taking a primordial

view of Latino ethnicity, the concept of a “community of culture” (Espíritu, 1992) applies to the millions of Mexican-Americans who, based on a shared Mexican culture, can envision being a part of a new North American state. That Mexican-born and U.S.-born Mexicans alike view political union similarly further advances this important point. To be sure, Latino/Hispanic identity is a construct with a much deeper meaning in the U.S. than in Mexico. What I find strong evidence of here is a truly supranational, regional identity, grounded, at least in part, in a pan-Latino consciousness and commonality among the Mexican-origin people in the U.S. and Mexico. In this arena of transnational politics, the primordial view of Latino/Hispanic identity reflects a longer tradition of pan-American identity and political philosophy emblematic of Simón Bolívar’s vision for Latin America.

Related to the strength of the association between Latino identity and support for political union, and as important to this study’s claims and empirical findings, is the non-finding of a relationship between American/U.S. identity and support for political union. That is, the strength of a community of Latino and Mexican culture is related to the concept of a Mexican-U.S. political union, not that such a union would reflect Anglo-American culture. To this end, the quality-of-life nature of the degree of agreement with a Mexico-U.S. union is critical. Support for political union is tied to the condition that such a union of states would enhance their quality of life. Mexican-Americans have decidedly linked the possibility of a better quality of life to their sense of linked fate with Mexicans in Mexico and to their ethnic identity. Still, though stronger ethnic Latino/Hispanic identity is a strong predictor of support for political union and the better quality of life that it entails, it is unclear, based on what is observable in this analysis, whether this phenomenon among Mexican-Americans is a function of primordial ties that Latino/Ethnic identity signals to co-ethnic Mexicans or to the instrumental value of pan-ethnic identity in the U.S. context. That many Mexican-Americans can envision, and even embrace, the idea of a Mexican-U.S. political union through the lenses of linked fate and ethnic identity supports the view that nearly a half-century after ideas of a “Chicano homeland” or a “Gran México” held the most currency, signals the strength and relevance of such ideas. The connection between those ideas and a better quality of life for Mexican-Americans also suggests that they have some instrumental value as well. In the final section below I offer some concluding remarks and suggestions for future research.

## CONCLUSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH IN NORTH AMERICAN IDENTITY AND PUBLIC OPINION

This study offers a fresh take on the important questions facing North America's political future and a first attempt at understanding transnational linked fate and pan-ethnic Latino/Hispanic identity as forces of support for political integration. I demonstrate that both Mexican migrants and U.S.-born Mexican-Americans open themselves up to the fluidity of identity and common values. More than simply transnational in their views, they are able to reconcile the forces of their primordial ties with the idea of a supranational, North American identity. In this regard, Mexican-Americans are decidedly inclined toward regionalism and deeper integration, and view it as a means to achieving a better quality of life. If it is left to Mexican-Americans to decide, then the answer is clear.

To be sure, as our previous understanding of Mexican-American opinion and North American politics has revealed, scholars and policymakers are much better acquainted with the costs, benefits, and unintended consequences of free trade and economic integration than with the factors related to a cultural, social, and political integration in North America. This study presents readers with a point of departure from which to further investigate the implications of a Mexico-U.S. political union. The very next steps toward expanding even further what the future holds for Mexicans in the U.S. and Mexico in terms of policy and identity are to develop meaningful ways to measure transnational linked fate and public opinion toward political union among Mexicans in Mexico, and to deepen our understanding of how Mexicans link their own identity development to the politics of North America. With more available, observable indicators of these phenomena, we will move closer than ever to understanding the political and social development of North America. We see in this study how the parts of Mexico and the U.S. that give them their Mexican-American transnational identity are most certainly compatible with deeper, political integration. What also remains to be seen is whether and when North American institutions will catch up.



## APPENDIX

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS, MEXICAN-ORIGIN RESPONDENTS N = 570				
Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Agreement with Mexico-United States Union	0.67	0.47	0	1
Transnational Linked Fate	1.35	1.04	0	3
Latino/Hispanic Identity	0.78	0.41	0	1
U.S. American Identity	0.58	0.49	0	1
Personal Economic Outlook	1.15	0.68	0	2
U.S. Citizen (1 = yes, 0 = no)	0.63	0.47	0	1
U.S. Born (1 = yes, 0 = no)	0.45	0.49	0	1
Age	40.30	14.19	18	90
Education (1 = no formal ed... 14 = Ph.D./Prof. degree)	7.95	2.99	1	14
Socioeconomic Status (1 = lower class... 4 = upper class)	2.26	0.68	1	4
Sex (1 = female, 0 = male)	0.51	0.50	0	1
Spanish Speaker (interview)	0.50	0.50	0	1

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