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Nationalising Foreigners: The Making of American National Identity

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Abstract:

Whereas the literature asks whether immigrants and their descendants come to resemble the “mainstream”, this paper places the acquisition of a new national identity at the center of attention, contending that the views of ethnic outsiders provide strategic leverage in identifying any underlying consensus regarding the bounds of the nation and the means by which those bounds should be implemented. We contend that becoming “American” entails adopting American attitudes towards persons beyond the territorial divide, a population that includes nationals of one’s country of origin or ancestry. The paper develops a conceptual framework to understand how attachment to the people of the state of *emigration* gets transformed into attachment to the people of the state of *immigration*. The paper provides a demonstration of that process, focusing on Mexican immigrants and their descendants and using a variety of data sources to highlight and unpack different dimensions of Americanization.

Keywords: Nationhood / National Identity, Immigration/Migration, Americanization, citizenship

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For students of American immigration, *Letters from an American Farmer*, a book written in the late 1780s is a recurrent point of reference, as the author asked a question that still resounds. While Crèvecoeur's query, "What is the American...?" struck a deep chord, scholars citing that quote rarely provide an answer. That lacuna is no surprise since prevailing conceptualizations of the process of immigrant integration provide little basis for understanding how Americanization might be studied or explained. The problem is largely one of perspective: standing with their backs to the territorial border, social scientists only see processes of boundary making, blurring, and crossing at work *within* the country of immigration. However, looking across borders brings the otherwise invisible into full relief, starting with the external boundary that separates and distinguishes the Americans from the other peoples of the world, which when crossed creates the immigration phenomenon itself. Population movements traversing borders do not simply produce an encounter of natives with strangers -- people for whom home ground is utterly familiar and those for whom the environment is anything but. Since natives are also nationals and strangers are also foreigners, migration leads to a meeting of persons who understand themselves as members of separate communities that should normally not overlap. As the immigrants, like the natives, are also citizens, albeit of an alien state, both agree that the other is "not us".

With the appearance of the second generation, that agreement disappears as do other corresponding dualities. Immigrant offspring are *de facto* and, in the case of countries with birthright citizenship, *de jure* members of the people whose country their parents had earlier entered as aliens. Growing up on home turf, the second generation is as native as longer established elements of the country; by contrast, the parents' home environment, only occasionally or even never physically experienced, appears strange (Waldinger 2015). Membership does not necessarily entail acceptance, which is why immigrant offspring are often categorized as a sociological minority, aspiring to, but often not attaining, equality with the majority. Yet, as members of a minority, immigrants' offspring and their descendants do not understand themselves as a fundamentally different *national* community, with distinctive characteristics meriting a territorial organization of its own. While perceiving greater similarity among people on their side of the ethnic divide and greater difference from persons on that boundary's other side, second and later generations contrast with the first in perceiving the majority as at once "not us" and "us". Moreover, it is precisely as self-conscious members of the national "we", that immigrants' descendants -- like so many other minorities -- claim full acceptance.

For immigrants' descendants, belonging stands at the heart of their quest for equality in the national community. Yet is their search for equality motivated by a particularistic or cosmopolitan ideal? In a world where well-being is determined not so much by what one does as where one lives (Milanovic 2016), global inequality is driving population movements across state borders. As worldwide polls of migration intentions show, millions are eager to put the American creed of hard work and individual effort into practice in the United States (Esipova et al. 2018). Do immigrants and their descendants think that entry should be granted? Or do they resemble the ethnic majority, who, like the peoples of every other state, accept the cardinal nationalist principle that state, society, and people should be one and the same and therefore endorse territorial closure?

Highlighting the views of ethnic outsiders, we contend, provides strategic leverage for identifying any underlying consensus regarding the bounds of the nation and the means by which those bounds should be maintained. Often possessing phenotypical features at variance with the majority's somatic norms as well as names and accents or intonations that denote a more proximate

foreign origin, immigrants' descendants advance claims to belonging with only partial success (Barreto and Lozano 2017). Yet, precisely because they are “not safely positioned within the boundary from the outset,” suffering from insecure and uncertain acceptance, second and later generations “are likely to be much more aware of the character and contour of the boundary” (Simonsen 2018: 120). Since any community has boundaries, understanding the views of the ethnic outsiders and pinpointing where they locate the bounds of acceptable exclusion provides an opportunity for detecting a tacit agreement that internal conflicts often hide.

That quest is all the more valuable as nationalism in settled times is so difficult to detect (Bonikowski 2016). Under these conditions, crises such as 9/11 or the covid-19 pandemic serve as the equivalent of ethnomethodological breaching experiments, unearthing taken for granted understandings otherwise obscured. Though international migration is a regular feature of the contemporary world, in violating the root assumption regarding the isomorphism of state, society, and people it possesses some features of a breaching experiment (Fox 2017). As migration policy is intrinsically discriminatory, a focus on attitudes towards immigration can demonstrate how even nationals who themselves may experience discrimination at the hands of other citizens nonetheless perceive exclusion at the territorial frontier as legitimate. Moreover, since migration control can be seen as a system of global apartheid (Pritchett 2006), the support that it elicits highlights the tension, inherent to liberal nationalism, between the commitment to treating people of the same nation-state identically, while treating people from other nation-states differently.

In looking across borders, this paper builds on previous work (Waldinger 2015; Luthra et al. 2018) to show that the conventional approach – emphasizing contrasts between an ethnic majority of long-standing presence and an ethnic minority of more recent origin – conceals an underlying process of nationalization. While affirming the presence of the majority/minority divide, we show that this cleavage is overlain by the superordinate boundary of national membership, separating immigrants and especially their later generation descendants from the national peoples from which the foreign-born stem. In so doing, we argue that longstanding and now fully globalized practices of migration control have “naturalized” nativism (Zolberg 1999), generating an underlying national consensus hidden by disputes concerning the particulars over how migration control should be implemented.

We begin with a conceptual framework for understanding the process of nationalization, building on the literature on boundary making to explain how population movements across territorial boundaries sever attachments to the people of the state of *emigration*, subsequently transferring loyalties to the people of the state of *immigration*. We then demonstrate that process, using a variety of data sources – the Latino National Survey (LNS); the General Social Survey (GSS); the International Social Survey Program (ISSP); and the National Politics Survey (NPS) - - to unpack the different dimensions of Americanization. We first focus on American identity, examining the degree to which immigrants and their descendants explicitly identify as Americans and express pride in their American identity. Then, we analyze views towards immigration policy and examine links between patriotism, identification and attitudes towards immigrant rights and immigration.

Boundaries: External and Internal

Conceptualizing ethnicity and national identity in terms of boundaries rather than groups yields an explicitly relational frame. The concept entails two dimensions: categorical, establishing distinctions between one population and the next (“we” and “they”); and behavioral, pointing to interactive implications (Wimmer 2008a). Zolberg and Woon, who brought the boundary concept into the analysis of immigrant incorporation, conceptualized it as “negotiations in which hosts and

immigrants engage” around boundaries “between ‘us’ and ‘not us’ (1999: 8).” Substituting assimilation for incorporation, Alba and Nee introduced further refinements, defining assimilation as “the decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences (2003:14).” Recentring the phenomenon around the boundary between the mainstream and the outsiders and the way in which that boundary evolves, they contended that assimilation involves inclusion into the American “mainstream”. Applying the cognate concept of integration in a book that works with a broader geographic scope, Alba and Foner repurposed the same point of view, albeit with different terms. For them, “integration occurs in relationship to a ‘mainstream’ society,” defined as spaces where the native majority “feels ‘at home’ and where “its presence is taken for granted and seen as unproblematic (Alba and Foner, 2015: 5).” Regardless of the lens the mainstream is viewed as an entity in process, transformed by the infusion of earlier groups of outsiders. As newcomers and their descendants loosen and lose their ethnic attachments, they simultaneously transform the mainstream itself.

Though insightful, these formulations neglect an essential element of the we/they relationships defining ethnic boundaries: that they are multilevel, comprised of nested segments of differentiation. As illustrated by Wimmer:

A Southern Californian may identify as Blue Hmong as opposed to White Hmong, as Hmong in opposition to other persons of Vietnamese origin, as Vietnamese in contrast to other Asian nationalities, as Asian-American in opposition to African-Americans or Euro-Americans, or as American from a global perspective. (2008a: 977)

Thus, conventional contrasts – whether framed as separating majorities from minorities, insiders from outsiders, hosts from immigrants, strangers from natives – overlook the external, international dimension in which these domestic divisions are embedded: that linking territory and nation and separating any one national people from all others. Like the people whom they study, the scholars implicitly accept the fundamental logic of nationalism, which assumes that “the world is (and should be) divided into identifiable nations” (Skey, 2011:5), while positing a corresponding spatial schema, in which , “we”, the nationals are found “here” and “they,” the foreigners reside “there,” beyond the boundaries of “our” state (Painter and Philo, 1995). People and territory are overwhelmingly aligned as the schema predicts: the great bulk of humanity is born, lives and dies in the same state; only a small minority makes long-term cross-border moves. However, globalization renders that schema less accurate: migration leads ever more foreign people starting out in foreign places “there” to subsequently move “here,” changing countries of arrival from societies of the nationals to societies that nationals share with foreigners – persons socialized for membership in their native country, whose citizenship they retain even as passage across territorial frontiers places them in alien status. Thus, in breaching state borders, immigrants also breach the mental borders of nationalist logic, which is why international migration inevitably pushes issues of belonging on to the political agenda.

Nationalization: In entering a new state, migrants confront a social boundary not previously encountered. Before emigration, the logic of nationalism marks the lives of would-be migrants: as nationality is typically shared and unnoticed, other axes – class, region, politics – separate “we” from “they”. In departing native grounds and entering foreign turf, migrants move into a context where origins – between natives and foreigners, among foreign-born persons from parts of the globe never previously encountered, between the domestic ethnic majority and minority – become relevant. Identities are further shaped by the attribution errors of outsiders, imposing labels inconsistent with the old ways of thinking, and yet so pervasively held as to organize experiences. If back home, sensitivities to regional or linguistic differences rank high, they diminish in the new

context, thanks to the lumping efforts of the unknowing members of the various populations with whom the immigrants interact. Just as Americans may shift from a passive to an active identification with their home country in the face of outsiders' construction of "Americanness" abroad (Dolby 2004), international migrants similarly discover commonalities among persons with whom they would have never associated, had they stayed home.

However, in changing physical location, migrants do not necessarily alter the geography of their national loyalties. A selective process, migration extends kinship boundaries across state boundaries: those most likely to gain go first; others follow slowly; the elderly often stay behind. Since not everyone who could follow wants to depart and many of those who would leave cannot – due to restrictive immigration policies – cross-border ties are pervasive, reinforced by interdependence. Consequently, the relevant "we" is likely to be "there", in the state of emigration. That configuration is not necessarily stable: the strange world becomes familiar; the familial center of gravity crosses the border; sometimes, a new citizenship – representing formal entry into a new national people – is obtained. However, national loyalties acquired in childhood are difficult to extirpate; feelings of home often remain tied to place of birth; naturalized citizens sometimes find themselves treated as if they were foreigners. As the external dimension corresponding to nationality remains a salient principle of classification, territorial presence and peoplehood diverge: while individual immigrants and families may be "here", this place remains "theirs", as "we" still belong to the people who live "there," back home (Waldinger 2015).

That external dimension fades into the background with the emergence of the second and later generations: lines of division mainly rooted in the domestic, internal context come to define the relevant we/they differences. Nonetheless, those differences remain nested in the higher level category of nationality, the boundaries of which are enlarged to include the immigrants' descendants. As compared to the parents, only a minority of whom succeed in becoming both *de facto* and *de jure* members of the people among whom they live, the immigrants' children and grandchildren are inexorably transformed into nationals.

Nationalization as boundary enlargement entails a variety of different strategies. To some extent, expansion results from the assimilationist strategies common in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. While explicitly assimilationist approaches have lost favor, the ordinary institutional framework of nation-states yields the same ends, which is why the fundamental impulse towards nationalization comes from parents' move from one political jurisdiction to another, detaching them from the state of emigration. Consequently, immigrants' descendants are exposed to a variety of tools -- flags, anthems, ceremonies, armies which happily enlist immigrants and their offspring, as well as ritualized forms of evoking the national community and linking its past with its present – that states of immigration use to nurture and reinforce national identity among the entire population (Billig 1995). Immigrants' descendants are also socialized by state-controlled schools, which are organized to produce citizens who understand themselves as members of a larger, abstract national collectivity, even if they maintain special attachments to others with whom they share certain experiences or backgrounds (Koh 2010).

The logic of settlement reinforces the logic of everyday nationalism. Language shift is pervasive. Though many immigrant children retain mother tongue fluency, even bilinguals prefer the dominant tongue; immigrant offspring of all origins employ the common language of the country in which they were raised. Unlike immigrants arriving as adults with attachments and allegiances oriented towards "there", the place of origins exercises greatly attenuated influence. As language is so powerful a boundary marker, the shift to the dominant tongue weakens homeland engagement among the children of immigrants (Rumbaut 2002) as well as accompanying attitudes

towards potential immigrants still abroad (Branton 2007). Hence, immigrant offspring and even more so, their own children, become increasingly similar to the people around them and increasingly different from those they left behind. While a minority may maintain ongoing homeland contact, most find that they no longer fit into the country from which the migrants originated. As so many immigrant offspring lack both the tools and the incentives for continued cross-border engagements (Luthra et al. 2018), the gaps separating them from their contemporaries among the stay stay-behinds often prove “much greater than the small differences upon which ...scholars of assimilation focus their microscopes” (FitzGerald 2014: 136).

Therefore, nationalization entails, not of a fading of particularistic attachments, as suggested by conventional assimilation approaches, but rather the substitution of one national, and hence, particularistic, attachment for another. We anticipate a shift in the subjective understanding of membership, with home-country identification diminishing and host country identification increasing as foreign residents gain citizenship and as generational succession proceeds (H1).

Internal boundary formation: Thus, for immigrants’ descendants, territorial location and national identity converge: “we” are “here,” in a place that is “ours” – the national people to which “we” belong. However, boundary enlargement at the international level accompanies boundary changes within the national context, one level down: immigrants and their descendants become classified as members of a minority, with standing and power unequal to that of the majority. From the top-down, the ethnic majority engages in boundary contraction: believing that state, society, and people should all converge, it reacts negatively to immigration, perceived as a deviant event. The arrival of foreign people is more visible than the movement of foreign things; as people, immigrants and their descendants also have the capacity, not possessed by things, to act on and transform a society, leading majorities to perceive them as a threat. Initially, labor migrants might be tolerated because they accept jobs that natives will no longer take (Piore 1979), but the demographic dynamism of today’s societies of immigration ensures that newcomers, and especially their descendants, are not confined to walled-in enclaves but rather filter out into walks of life involving contacts with the majority. Hence, while boundary enlargement transforms strangers into natives, the growing similarity between immigrant-origin persons and the ethnic majority does not guarantee acceptance. Instead, the very process in which “not us” mutates into “us” generates inherent tensions, possibly leading “to a crystallization of boundaries, the imposition of conditions that render crossing more difficult and blurring impossible, and perhaps even a ...shift of the boundary in a more exclusive direction (Zolberg and Woon 1999: 9).”

From the bottom-up, the line separating the minority from the majority emerges from processes of boundary expansion. Existing contacts to friends and kin lubricate the movement to a new society: upon arrival, migrants connect with friends, relatives, hometowners, and others seemingly like them. But the diversity of social circles in the new world is always greater: as even the largest immigrant groups comprise quantitative minorities, the range of possible connections extends beyond the universe imaginable back home, expanding the circle of the “we.” Thanks to lumping efforts of the many outsiders blind to categorical distinctions relevant in the home country, systems of categorizations and related scripts get remade, which is why the foreign-born may retain attachments to smaller-scale places like their hometown or region, but not their US-born or -raised children, who may understand themselves as Mexican, Chinese, or Italian, but rarely think of themselves in terms of the narrower, specific identities meaningful to mom and dad (Alarcon et al. 2016).

Simultaneously, immigrants' descendants search for progress, which entails greater exposure to the majority. The latter's resistance to accepting the newcomers activates ethnic allegiances that immigrant offspring might otherwise lose on their own. Having been turned into nationals, immigrant offspring see themselves as members of the people deserving of the same treatment as everyone else. Hence, in order to repair the harm associated with rejection and build the solidarity needed to fight it, they come to valorize the very qualities that the ethnic majority rejects.

Consequently, contested incorporation into the new national people proceeds in parallel with the development of minority consciousness, which the ethnic outsiders understand as a fully legitimate identity existing in complementarity with attachment to and membership in the nation. As greater exposure to the ethnic majority increases awareness and intolerance of unequal treatment, ethnic minority identity gains salience as generational change proceeds (H2)

Equalization: At home in the country of arrival, immigrants' descendants claim membership in both the broader national people *and* the minority of which they are a part. Like the white Americans who are the focus of Theiss-Morse's (2009) book on belonging, the children of immigrants carve spaces of belonging through the strength of their commitment to an American identity, pushing against internal boundaries drawn against marginal members, while at the same time endorsing external boundaries against outsiders from beyond the state's frontiers. In so doing they engage in a boundary changing strategy of "equalization": altering the normative principles of ethnic stratification in ways that emphasize the moral and political equality of the majority and minority on the basis of membership in a common people (Wimmer 2008b: 1037). The experience of prior nationalization provides a resource towards that end, especially in the United States where the civil rights struggles pursued by status citizens suffering from second-class citizenship have articulated and legitimated an understanding of peoplehood that brings all Americans into the fold. In this view, ethnic outsiders, whether of long-established or recent vintage, can be full Americans, without ever having to worry about being harassed for driving when not white, or being pressed to sever all attachments to other peoples or places. Put somewhat differently, it is the perspective of the World War II ethnics in the foxholes, of a Colin Powell writing that "My blackness has been a source of pride, strength and inspiration, and so has my being an American" or for that matter, a W.E.B. DuBois describing the "two unreconciled strivings" associated with being "a Negro, an American (Powell 1995: 534-35; DuBois 1897: 17)."

Therefore, we expect that immigrants, raised in a different national context and for whom the new context remains a foreign environment, are more likely to see themselves as standing outside the American people, understanding membership in the American people as exclusionary. By contrast, immigrants' descendants will adopt a more pluralistic understanding of membership in the nation, one that includes them and that places an ethnic or home country identity on an equal basis with an American identity. (H3).

Migration Control: Such a multicultural reinterpretation of peoplehood extends the cultural boundaries of the "we" to include all the citizens of the state, but for that very reason, ends at the water's edge, where the open-ness encouraged by multiculturalism stops. Rather than embracing universalism, multicultural peoplehood entails liberal nationalism (Tamir 1995), hewing to an unspoken particularism that allows the meaning of national identity to change but keeps membership in the people circumscribed by territorial borders, thus deviating from broader cosmopolitan ideals. Immigration policy is inherently discriminatory – favoring citizens over foreigners, advantaging those categories of foreigners that citizens prefer over those to whom they are averse, and limiting the freedom of persons with the bad luck to have been born on the wrong

side of the territorial boundary. Consequently, the degree to which the principle of immigration restriction gains the support of successive immigrant generations testifies to their self-understanding as members of a national community that may be committed to internal inclusion, but simultaneously maintains external exclusion at the territorial edge.

Thus, we anticipate that more exclusionary attitudes towards territorial outsiders will emerge as foreign residents gain citizenship and as generational succession proceeds (H4).

Data and Analysis

Our analyses draw on four different surveys: the Latino National Survey (LNS); the National Politics Study (NPS); the General Social Survey (GSS); and the International Social Survey Program (ISSP). Though rich in its own right, each source is also imperfect, with none encompassing the full range of national origin diversity found today.

The analysis begins with the 2006 LNS, a state-stratified survey of over 8500 self-identified Latino / Hispanic residents in the United States, representative of approximately 88% of the country's Hispanic population (Fraga et al, 2006). Containing questions well-suited to our purposes with a large sample enabling within-group disaggregation, this survey does not allow for thorough inter-group comparisons. Latino migrations are dominated by immigrants from Mexico; all other origin groups are relatively new; consequently, only Mexican-origin respondents furnish an adequate subsample of second and later generation persons. Thus, we restrict our analysis of the LNS to Mexican origin respondents, distinguishing non-citizens and naturalized citizens among the foreign-born and separating US-born into 2nd to 4^{th+} generations. After dropping those with incomplete information our sample is just under 5000 respondents.

For a view encompassing multiple national origins, we turn to the 2004 NPS, a quota survey of African American, Caribbean, Hispanic, Asian and White households (Jackson et al, 2009). Using multiple existing survey sampling frames and drawing data from across the United States, with geographic coverage varying by the target groups, the dataset allows comparisons of political attitudes of multiple ethnic groups, including both foreign-born and US minorities. Using the full sample, omitting non-Hispanic white respondents and excluding the 4th and higher generations, we generate a sample of 1,484 respondents, of whom 1004 are foreign-born and the remainder 2nd and 3rd generation.

Last, we look across borders, combining responses from the nationally representative Mexican component of the 2013 ISSP with those from pooled waves (2008-2018) of the nationally representative US GSS. The 2013 ISSP included information on national and subnational identity alongside attitudes towards minorities and migration, which could be matched to identical questions in the GSS. GSS contains little migration-relevant information, but as it asks about respondents' and parents' place of birth, as well as respondents' place of residence at age 16 and citizenship, it allows for comparisons across generations and citizenship status. We combine these two surveys to compare attitudes towards preferred migration flows.

Following the conceptual framework developed above, generation serves as the central independent variable in all of the analyses to follow. In addition to standard socio-demographic controls, we seek to assess for the effects of other theoretically relevant independent variables, though their availability varies from one dataset to another. Cross-border activity, whether entailing the sending of remittances or visits, as well as persistent mother tongue use, denote persistent home country ties, hence weakening the shift from home to host country attachments and self-understandings and corresponding preference for closure at the territorial border. Political participation – in these surveys measured by having registered to vote or actual voting – serves as an indicator of active U.S. citizenship, which we anticipate will be positively associated with

greater attachment to an American identity and greater support for territorial closure. By contrast, we anticipate that differences in phenotype will be associated with disparities in experiences of discrimination. As greater divergence from the majority's somatic norm is likely to be associated with greater exposure to discrimination, we expect ethnic minority identity will be most, and national identity least, salient among persons with darker phenotypes, who will also express weaker preferences for territorial closure.

We present all findings graphically, displaying results from logistic, multinomial logistic, or ordered logistic regressions as predicted probabilities. The underlying regressions along with descriptive statistics of the underlying data are found in an online appendix. The discussion of each data set provides additional details on variables used in the corresponding multivariate analysis.

We acknowledge that the surveys' uneven ethnic coverage lends a degree of tentativeness to the analysis that follows. However, we searched widely for appropriate sources of data and discovered few alternatives. The combined effects of demography and data limitations mean that our conclusions lean heavily – though not exclusively -- on results based on responses from Mexican-origin persons. Some aspect of Mexican migration or the Mexican-American experience may have generated a bias unlikely to have been found had we been able to access a broader range of groups. However, coming from a country where national pride is high and identity is defined, at least partly, in opposition to the neighbor to the north, Mexican immigrants are no more likely than others to have arrived predisposed to shed prior national affiliations. As dominant group hostility often strengthens ethnic group attachment, theory also suggests that the simultaneous growth of Mexican immigration along with the rising salience of the “Latino threat” frame should have weakened, rather than strengthened, tendencies towards greater identification with the United States or the American people. Given the well documented discrimination and long history of legal and societal exclusion of Mexican Americans in the United States (Telles and Ortiz 2008), should our reliance on Mexican origin respondents yield a bias, it likely works against the argument we advance.

Self-categorization in the Latino National Survey (LNS)

We begin with self-categorization: whether one identifies as a member of a particular ethnic and national group and, if so, the importance of that membership for one's sense of self. LNS gave respondents three pre-determined categories - American, national origin, and Hispanic or Latino – asking them to rate each category's fit (How strongly or not do you think of yourself as...?) with a four-point likert scale from not at all to very strongly as the response options. Approximately five percent answered “not at all” or “not very strongly” to all three options. The great majority picked strongly affirmative answers to all three labels, indicating that alternative ethnic identities can be mutually compatible.

We model each of the three identification items using an ordered logistic regression model. Theoretically relevant independent variables include language of the interview (English only, switched language, Spanish only); the number of visits and frequency of money remitted to Mexico; whether the respondent was currently registered to vote; self-rated skin color, an indicator of the salience of the internal ethnic boundary. We also control for age, sex, marital status, education, and arrival in the United States prior to the age of 12.

Figure 1 presents the predicted probabilities for respondents responding “very strongly” for each option offered. Confirming H1, self-categorization is a function of generation, with the intergenerational comparison pointing towards category shift and nesting (Figure 1a). Non-citizens displayed a propensity to strongly think of themselves as Mexicans (predicted probability = 70%), a sentiment shared by naturalized citizen and second-generation respondents. The strength of

Mexican national identity paled among subsequent generations: the predicted probability of answering very strong fell to 36% among the fourth generation. Few non-citizens (20%) described an American identity as “very strong” in contrast to almost half of the second, and more than three quarters (78%) of the fourth generations. Contrary to H2, pan-ethnic identity Latino is already strong among the foreign born and proves stable intergenerationally, though the second generation is more likely than non-citizen immigrants to rate it as “very strong” (71% v 63%) and the fourth generation least so (56%).

These patterns remain substantively the same when including control variables for basic demographics (age, marital status, education). Examining the coefficients for the broader set of variables (Figure 1b) yields further insights: whereas several control variables significantly influence identification as American or Mexican, only cross-border connections had a modest association with the strength of Latino identification, which was otherwise unaffected.

As expected, Mexican identity was anchored through persisting home country ties as shown in stronger identification among those who traveled frequently vs those who never travel (68% vs 59%) a gap virtually identical to the disparity separating frequent remitters from those who never sent money. Persistent home country ties had a weaker and opposing effect on American identity, as only yearly visitors to Mexico were less likely to feel very strongly American than those who had never visited and no statistically significant association emerged between remitting and the strength of American identity. As anticipated, language shift buttressed the strength of American identity: English language interviewees were almost one and a half times more likely to think strongly of themselves as Americans. However, this variable had little influence on Latino identity.

Phenotype affected both American and Mexican identity, though only in the contrast between the lightest and darkest: the difference in self-categorizing as “very strongly” Mexican was 60% among the former and 68% among the latter; correspondingly, as compared to respondents with the darkest skin color, the lightest were 5 percentage points more likely to “very strongly” self-categorize as American.

Figures 1 and 2

Thus, regardless of generation, the great majority of Mexican-origin respondents understood themselves as members of at least two groups, with the foreign-born more likely to self-categorize as Mexican nationals and as pan-ethnics, whereas the U.S.-born opted for made-in-America categories, strongly thinking of themselves both as Latinos or Hispanics and as Americans. But one can embrace multiple identities and yet think that one provides a closer fit with the self than another. To identify that closer fit LNS asked respondents, “Of the previous three terms...which best describes you?” Implementing a multinomial logistic regression using the same covariates applied in the previous analysis, we examine the predictors of the best fitting identity.

Intergenerational trends in the best fitting self-description closely track those for the multiple identity choices (Figure 2): though the level is low, naturalized citizens are significantly more likely, and the U.S.-born much more likely, to prefer an American identity than non-citizen respondents. The pattern for self-description as a Mexican takes almost the exactly opposite form; the comparison of best fitting identity shows an especially sharp intergenerational decline. The tendency to prefer a Latino or Hispanic identity remains fairly stable inter-generationally, with a statistically significant upswing at the 3rd generation subsequently leveling out. Correlates of generational change (cross-border ties, language shift, voter registration) follow the same pattern as in the analysis above. As expected, respondents shift away from a preference for a Mexican

national identity with increasing time in the United States (H1), decreasing home country ties, and greater English language use.

Thus, self-categorization and generational succession are strongly associated, though not necessarily in ways consistent with a standard assimilation approach forecasting assimilation into a non-ethnic “mainstream.” Non-citizens strongly perceive themselves as Mexicans yet easily adopt pan-ethnic, made-in-the-USA categories. Among the children of two immigrant parents just short of a majority add on an American identity, a fraction rising with subsequent generations. A parallel pattern sees home-country denationalization even as ethnic salience remains: Mexican *national* identification declines strongly over generations, with notable erosion in respondents’ predilection to view it as the best fitting identity, though a cross-border lens also illuminates how continued financial, physical and linguistic sending-country ties can decelerate its attenuation. Yet on the whole, in line with a liberal national perception of American as noted in H2, an ethnically modified identity appears more comfortable for Mexican origin respondents and their descendants while an unqualified American identity is less common.

Belonging to the American nation: Patriotism and the boundaries of national identity

Having demonstrated immigrants’ descendants increasingly think of themselves *as* (ethnic) Americans, we turn to a different question: do the descendants of immigrants also feel an attachment that leads them to identify *with* that very same national people? In other words, as one generation succeeds another, do the children of immigrants come to adopt a more expansive definition of American, one that allows the feeling that the country of residence and citizenship is *my* country (Brubaker, 2004) to grow more intense? To explore this question, we use NPS. Although lacking the abundance of migration-specific detail found in the LNS, questions about respondents’ and parents’ country of birth and respondents’ citizenship status can illuminate the relationship between generation and patriotic sentiment, controlling for gender, educational attainment, and employment status. We also index political incorporation with a variable indicating whether or not the respondent either voted (for post-election interviewees) or intended to vote (for pre-election interviews). We estimate an ordered logistic regression predicting agreement with three 4-point items: feeling proud about being American; whether there are things about America that make them feel ashamed (both strongly disagree to strongly agree); and feelings about the flag (not very good to extremely good).

Figure 3, reporting predicted probabilities for the strongest outcome, demonstrates a tight relationship between formal membership status and national pride: 34% of the respondents not planning to naturalize strongly affirm their pride to be American; pride levels then rise at statistically significant levels with each step closer to citizenship, reaching 77 percent among the naturalized – a rate only surpassed among 2.5 and 3rd generation respondents. Positive emotions towards the US flag do not quite rise to such heights, perhaps because the flag has come to symbolize the uncritically patriotic side of American identity. Nonetheless substantial differences across citizenship status and generation emerge: 27 percent of naturalized immigrants, 26 percent of second-generation, and 45 percent of 2.5 generation respondents indicate feeling extremely good when seeing the Stars and Stripes. The share dips to 23 percent among the third and higher generation respondents.

Beyond pride, meaningful identification with a national community may entail “owning” its shortcomings and dark periods in history; as the philosopher Richard Rorty noted, “you can feel shame over your country's behavior only to the extent to which you feel it is your country (Rorty and Mendieta, 2006).” In that light, agreement with the statement “there are some things about the US that make me feel ashamed of America” would imply identification with the country of

residence and citizenship. The trend across categories of membership and generations is not as striking; yet predicted probabilities show that overall, U.S.-born generations are more likely to report higher levels of shame than those foreign-born respondents who were either applying for citizenship or had already naturalized. Thus, identification *with* the American people rises with generations, confirming H1. In contrast voting was not associated with any of the measures of pride at levels that reach statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

Figure 3

Since national communities are inherently understood as bounded, identifying both *as* and *with* the category of American necessarily goes beyond self-categorization, involving an understanding of how to define the borders of the American nation. As opposed to formal, legally defined, distinctions separating one state from one another, on the one hand, and citizens from territorially present foreigners of different legal statuses, on the other, understandings of the boundaries of the nation are fundamentally subjective. Status citizens of foreign origins may be perceived as standing outside the nation, whereas resident foreigners can insist that their hearts are Americans, even if the U.S. does not show up on the passports. Unlike the boundaries of the territory or citizenship, the boundaries of the American nation are matters of political conflict and struggle, reflected in the multiple definitions of those boundaries, with one variant --the American creed (Myrdal 2017), whereby endorsement of individualism, freedom, equality, or hard work makes one an American -- long contending with alternatives that emphasize the importance of ancestry, origins, and race (Smith 1993).

Migrant and generational status may affect responses in several ways. The least likely to identify both *as* Americans and *with* the American people, the foreign-born may perceive the matter of national identity from the outside looking in, situating themselves on the external edge of the “we/they” cleavage. Hence, asking about the boundaries of the American nation may pose the question of “what do *I* think, that *they* think is important to be one of *them?*,” in which case foreign birth *and* foreign citizenship will be associated with a more exclusionary perception of the boundaries of American national membership. As expected in H3, U.S.-born immigrant descendants, self-categorizing as Americans, may think of U.S. national identity from the inside, having undergone the nationalization process through US schools and exposure to other US institutions. For these respondents, as we have already seen, identification with the American nation is stronger and hence the question more likely to be read as reflecting on what is important to “us.” If so, these later generation persons, will emphasize more fluid, permeable aspects of American identity allowing national and ethnic identities to co-exist.

Following previous research seeking to unravel the dimensions of American identity and their sources (e.g. Schildkraut 2011), NPS asked respondents their opinion of “What it takes to be truly American,” providing six answer items falling into three categories: ethno-cultural -- whether a person speaks English or is Christian; migration and settlement -- birth and longevity in the US; the importance of participation and service to the community (military service and voting). Figure 4 summarizes the predicted percentage of respondents indicating the strongest agreement with each item by generation and citizenship status. For three -- service in the military, being Christian, and voting -- non-citizens show more exclusionary attitudes than the naturalized and the US-born, a pattern likely reflecting an outsider’s perception of a boundary. As compared to non-citizens, the naturalized, and US-born are between 12 and 15 percentage points less likely to rate being Christian, speaking English, or voting as necessary for being “truly American”, with an even larger gap (20% points) regarding military service. Only for the question of being Christian, do we see

evidence of re-nationalization in the 3rd generation; still these respondents are no more likely to rank religion as very important to being American than any of the non-citizens.

Possibly reflecting their own experience of becoming *de jure* Americans, naturalized citizens are least likely to think of birth and lifelong residence in the United States as important conditions of being American: while a predicted 36% of those without plans to naturalize, and 44% of the 3rd generation ranked birth in the US as very important, only 22% of the naturalized did. Though somewhat weaker and statistically significant only at the 0.1 level, the rating of length of residence shows the same pattern.¹ Thus, confirming H3, adoption of a pluralistic understanding of national belong proceeds in hand with generational change.

Figure 4

Attitudes towards immigration: comparing those “here” and “there”

Nationals everywhere prefer migration control, wanting states that remain of the people, for the people, and by the people, with at best modest opportunities for settlement by foreigners from abroad.² Had they stayed home, the people who ended up opting for life in another country would likely have agreed. But once having crossed state borders to re-emerge as immigrants, that same preference for border control would present a barrier to the family reunification that many of the foreign-born desire. Moreover, migration control has both external and internal components: the former involve measures constraining the crossing of territorial borders; the latter affect non-citizen residents who previously crossed those same borders. As internal control policies can either impede or facilitate the search for a better life in the new land, immigrants have further reason to support expansion.

However, preferences are not fixed in stone: as the familial center of gravity shifts from emigration country to immigration country and as immigrants traverse the internal barrier of citizenship, the vested interest in expanded immigration and more liberalized settlement policies diminishes. Nationalization reinforces that shift, since adoption of the new national identity prompts preference convergence with longer-established nationals, who think that the new national community should be bounded. However, opposition to immigration also represents opposition to immigrants as well as the long-term social and political consequences associated with the demographic shifts that immigration produces. Consequently, since Americanization is compatible with a strong ethnic identity, settlement is unlikely to convert the mass of immigrant offspring into ardent restrictionists. Rather, as in H3, we expect that the liberal nationalism towards which immigrant descendants are inclined makes them more supportive than the general population of “immigrant friendly” policies, even if, as expected in H4, they will be significantly less so than immigrants themselves. This greater “immigrant friendliness” should take particularly marked form in views towards the conditions under which immigrants and would-be citizens traverse from one legal status to another, and the rights available within each civic stratum.

We begin with a discussion of attitudes towards outward-oriented policies for potential immigrants *there* and then move to attitudes towards inward-oriented policies for immigrants *here*, assuming that the conflict between liberal nationalism and immigration control grows as the people targeted by the policies are increasingly similar or connected to American citizens.

¹ Those respondents who showed most political incorporation and voted (or intended to do so) accorded significantly more importance to military service and voting.

² Questions probing support for more than trivial expansion of migration, something approaching open borders, are rarely asked in multi-country surveys. The much more modest proposition of “increasing immigration flows” receives support from only 21% of respondents across a range of countries (Esipova 2015).

As regulating the flow of immigrants comprises a central component of migration control, surveys around the world have recurrently asked a question regarding preferred flow levels. We take advantage of the inclusion of Mexico (along with the United States and 31 other countries) in the 2013 ISSP, focusing on migration policy and which included the following question: “Do you think the number of immigrants to [Country] nowadays should be increased a lot, increased a little, remain the same as it is, reduced a little, reduced a lot, can’t choose?” As this question appears in every round of the GSS, pooling responses from five GSS waves conducted between 2008 and 2018 with the Mexican component of the ISSP produces a bi-national Mexican origin sample of 1,550 respondents for whom we have key variables, in addition to 6,223 respondents, born in the U.S. to U.S.-born parents and with no Mexican background. Since the internationalization of families produced by migration links places of destination and places of origin, we separate respondents living in Mexico’s traditional sending regions from those living elsewhere in Mexico.

Figure 5, displaying predicted probabilities generated by an ordered logistic regression including variables for age, sex, marital status, and education, shows that Mexicans in Mexico lean strongly towards restricting immigration to *Mexico*, with emigration yielding an echo in the less restrictionist preferences of respondents living in the traditional sending areas. By contrast, Mexican immigrants in the US prefer expanded immigration (to the US), though a strong tendency also entails a preference for the status quo. Compared to compatriots in Mexico, the foreign-born with and without US citizenship report substantially more positive attitudes towards immigration; however the naturalized do not differ statistically from second generation Americans of Mexican descent. Relative to the U.S. average, second and third generation Mexican-Americans, tilt towards more open doors, though the latter significantly less than the former. Moreover, third and later generation Mexican-Americans no longer differ statistically from third generation Black Americans. By contrast, the majority of native white Americans with no immigrant background strongly favor reduced flows; white Americans with no immigrant background are significantly more restrictionist than native Black Americans, and all Mexican origin respondents in the United States. Nonetheless, among no group does the proportion favoring restriction rise to the level found among those Mexican respondents living outside traditional sending areas.

Figure 5

Thus, the cross-border comparison shows that Mexicans in Mexico and multi-generation white and black Americans all want migration control, albeit with those Mexicans in Mexico living outside the traditional sending areas evincing a preference for reduced immigration that is stronger, at statistically significant levels, than all third generation-plus groups. Mexicans in Mexico with high levels of exposure to migration and its benefits (though also some of its costs) take a less restrictionist view, with support for liberalized migration still greater among those who crossed the border. As expected in H4, immigrant offspring, though less restrictionist than native white Americans, want less migration than the immigrants, evidence that with settlement has come a shift in national loyalties and attitudes more aligned with other US minority groups, namely African Americans.

This pooled GSS/ISSP sample uniquely allows for comparisons between nationals in the country of origin and immigrants and their descendants in the country of reception. Both surveys, however, contain less information on factors central to experiences of migration and settlement, lacking questions about years of U.S. residence or homeland ties. GSS does ask about whether the respondent voted in the last presidential election: for survey year 2008 this refers to the 2004 election, for 2010-2016 the 2008 election, and finally for 2018 the 2016 election. We examine whether active participation in US politics, as evidenced by voting, is associated with less

favorable attitudes to migration. We also include a further measure of (lack of) assimilation: conducting the GSS interview in Spanish, to assess the link between investment in the US and more restrictive attitudes. For these analyses, we focus on respondents living in the United States (for Spanish language) and on US citizens (for voting in most recent election). Regression coefficients (see online appendix) indicate a strong association between conducting the GSS interview in Spanish and attitudes towards migration: those interviewed in Spanish were significantly more favorable towards migration than those interviewed in English but we find no direct relationship between political participation and attitudes to migration among U.S. citizens.

Attitudes towards immigrant rights: correlations with identity

To further examine the association between self-categorization (or identification *as*) and generational status, on the one hand, and attitudes towards immigration policy, on the other, we return to LNS. Whereas GSS and ISSP focused outwards, LNS focused inwards on policies regarding rights of non-citizens residing within the US: the right of Mexico to provide consular assistance to Mexican nationals living in the US; proposals to legalize or stabilize the status of unauthorized migrants; and public college tuition policies for undocumented state residents. Given the explicit focus on protection offered by the Mexican government to Mexican citizens in the United States, as well as the focus on undocumented immigrants, at the time of LNS were still mainly of Mexican origin, this analysis provides a more focused examination of the attitudes of Mexican-origin residents of the United States towards immigrants stemming from their own specific country of origin.

The multivariate analysis, controlling for the same co-variables as in the analysis of self-categorization, but including responses to those same identity questions among the independent variables, underscores inter-generational differences (Figure 6). Net of controls, more than half of non-citizens offer strong support of all three items. Later generation respondents are consistently less enthusiastic, confirming H4: support for immediate legalization and for provision of the *matricula consular* drops significantly starting with the second generation, with especially low levels among the 4th generation; across all generations support for the Dream Act is high, though with a ten percentage point fall off after the 2nd generation.

Net of controls for generation, identity preferences do not show statistically significant coefficients linking either an American, Latino or Mexican national identity to views towards the *matricula*. Only a Latino identity is associated with support for immediate legalization with strong identifiers 11 points more supportive of immediate legalization than those who do not accept this label. A closer association connects to support for the Dream Act, with about 20 percentage point higher support among those stating strong Mexican national or Latino identities as opposed to weak identifiers. The relationship to American identity goes the other way, with strong identifiers about 10 percentage points less likely to voice support for the Dream Act.

Of covariates related to the salience of the ethnic boundary, only language proved influential. Persons interviewed in Spanish were more likely to support rights expansion, with immediate legalization generating the largest disparity (54% among Spanish vs 35% among English) and smaller, but statistically significant differences emerging in response to questions about the *matricula consular* (9 percentage points) and the Dream Act (5 points). Thus, time in the US, a US centered identity, and language shift all point towards increasing closure towards Mexican origin peers still residing in Mexico.

Figure 6

Conclusion

In conclusion, we reflect on the question posed at the beginning of this chapter: what does becoming American mean? Extant research focuses on distinctions within US borders, asking about the social boundaries separating different segments of a national people and contending that immigrant newcomers and their descendant undergo assimilation, a process involving absorption into a “mainstream.” Yet if we detach the “mainstream” from its inherent opposition to what can only be thought of as a “sidestream”, it collapses along the class, regional, religious, and ideological cleavages that keep members of the “mainstream” regularly at odds with one another. Moreover, mainstreamers and sidestreamers share a common identity in the same national people, membership in which is an essential tool in the sidestreamers’ quest for full acceptance.

Looking across borders, rather than simply within, yields a better approach, demonstrating that as immigrants’ descendants are transformed from outsiders into insiders, they also get turned into nationals, in this case, Americans. To be sure, that transformation is not always easy to glimpse, as the everyday, banal nationalism of long-established nation-states lies quietly in the background. While the internal boundaries separating insiders and outsiders of varying type typically take center stage, they are nested within the larger category of the national boundary that distinguishes each of the peoples of the world. We note that our analysis – which focusses on the views of the newcomers and their descendants – does not address the question to what extent the members of the putative mainstream come to see the respondents as part of the national ‘we’; indeed, we assume that at least for some fraction of the “mainstream”, immigrant offspring and their descendants, lie outside the national ‘we’.

It is precisely because the external boundary is so hard to see, that a focus on ethnic outsiders and their views of migration provides strategic leverage. International migration serves as a sort of breaching experiment, disrupting the taken for granted view that state, society, and people are one and the same (Fox 2017). In crossing territorial boundaries, the immigrants move from one political jurisdiction to the next; however, they arrived having been fully socialized for membership in the country of departure, a place to which they typically remained tied by virtue of social connection, emotional attachment, and citizenship. The second and later generations may grow up in households that are integrated into international family networks, with cross-border obligations and attachments. Nonetheless, the bulk of experiences take place “here,” in the society of reception, *not* “there,” in the place where the immigrants began. Living “here”, the pressures to conform to the lingua franca are overwhelming, cutting off the US born, who tend towards ever greater levels of monolingualism from co-nationals at home. Schools provide a social mixing ground and educate for citizenship, seeking to produce good citizens who are primed for the roles and behaviors that prevail in the society of destination and who have the tools that good citizenship requires. In turn, for those who enact “good citizenship” by actively participating in the political process through engagement with voting, the generational shift towards US national identity is accelerated as is the “rebordering” process through which the descendants of immigrants become increasingly restrictionist towards would-be migrants.

Thus, while *state* boundaries are traversed by the first generation, crossing the boundary of the *nation* is mainly delayed until the advent of the second, at which time self-understandings and attachments linked to the home country decline, replaced by self-categorization as member of, and identification with, the people of the country destination. Boundary enlargement hardly precludes boundary formation at the domestic level: confronting an internal social boundary, immigrants’ offspring and their descendants come to see themselves as members of an ethnic minority, defined, however, in made-in-America terms. Rather than standing in tension with one another, these

twinned understandings prove compatible, entailing a pluralistic vision of membership in the American people.

That multicultural redefinition of the people proves appealing as it accepts differences *among* citizens *within* the boundaries of the state. However, it stands apart from more cosmopolitan creeds which appeal to concepts of shared humanity or universal human rights. As we have shown, it is mainly immigrants – representing that tiny proportion of the world’s citizens who choose to cross international boundaries to live in adopted homes where they often lack full rights – who support relaxed border restrictions and a more open approach to gaining rights in the receiving country. By contrast, as generational succession proceeds, support for closure at the territorial border grows while endorsement of immigrants’ rights diminishes, changes magnified by diminished home country contacts and language shifts.

Unlike status citizenship, determined by law, membership in the nation is a matter of interpretation, as the boundaries of belonging are inherently contested. But a national community allows for many ways of imagining who should belong and how; with the shift from more monistic to more pluralistic understandings of the nation, membership in the American people and continued attachment to the place and people of origin can be simultaneously claimed with ever greater ease. As there is no community without boundaries, in finding appeal in the idea of national community, first and especially later generations come to think that access is not for all who wish to join. Hence, the new Americans as well as their descendants join the national consensus in support of migration control.

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