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Report

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Between Here and There: How Attached Are Latino Immigrants To Their Native Country?

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Most Latino immigrants maintain some kind of connection to their native country by sending remittances, traveling back or telephoning relatives, but the extent to which they engage in these transnational activities varies considerably. Those who have been in the U.S. for decades and those who arrived as children appear less attached than those who arrived more recently or migrated as adults. There are also significant differences by country of origin, with Colombians and Dominicans maintaining more active connections than Mexicans, and with Cubans having the least contact.

Among all Latino immigrants, just one-in-ten (9%) can be considered highly attached to their country of origin; these immigrants engage in all three transnational activities (remittance sending; weekly phone calls; travel to the native country in the past two years) measured in a 2006 Pew Hispanic Center survey and newly analyzed for this report. A much larger minority (28%) of foreign-born Latinos is involved in none of these activities and can be considered to have low levels of engagement with their country of origin. By far the greatest number of Latino immigrants (63%) show moderate attachment to their native country, meaning they engage in one or two of the measured activities.

The extent to which Latino immigrants maintain active connections is an important marker of their attitudes toward the U.S., their native country and their own lives as migrants. Those with the highest levels of engagement are associated with more favorable views of a native country in comparisons with the U.S. Nonetheless, a clear majority of even these immigrants see their future in the U.S. rather than in the countries from which they come.

About this report: Based on data from the 2006 National Survey of Latinos conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center, this report provides new findings on the extent to which foreign-born Latinos engage in a variety of transnational activities such as remittance sending and travel back to their country of origin and on how such activities relate to their attitudes toward the United States.

About the Pew Hispanic Center: Founded in 2001, the Pew Hispanic Center is a nonpartisan research organization supported by The Pew Charitable Trusts. The Pew Hispanic Center's mission is to improve understanding of the diverse Hispanic population and to chronicle Latinos' growing impact on the nation. The Pew Hispanic Center is a project of the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" in Washington, D.C., that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world; it does not advocate for or take positions on policy issues.

Executive Summary

Most Latino immigrants maintain some kind of connection to their native country by sending remittances, traveling back or telephoning relatives, but the extent of their attachment varies considerably. Only one-in-ten (9%) do all three of these so-called transnational activities; these immigrants can be considered highly attached to their home country. A much larger minority (28%) of foreign-born Latinos is involved in none of these activities and can be considered to have a low level of engagement with the country of origin. Most Latino immigrants (63%) show moderate attachment to their home country; they engage in one or two of these activities.

Latino immigrants who have been in the U.S. for decades and those who arrived as children are less connected than those who arrived more recently or migrated as adults. There are also significant differences by country of origin, with Colombians and Dominicans maintaining more active connections than Mexicans, and with Cubans having the least contact.

Whether Latino immigrants maintain active, moderate or limited connections is an important marker of their attitudes toward the U.S., their native country and their own lives as migrants. Those with the highest levels of engagement have deeper attachments to their country of origin than immigrants whose connections are less robust. They also have more favorable views of their native country in comparisons with the U.S. Nonetheless, a clear majority of even these immigrants see their future in the U.S. rather than in the countries from which they come.

Most Latino immigrants reveal moderate levels of engagement with the home country—both in the extent of their transnational activities and in their attitudes. They maintain some connections to the country of their birth through such activities as sending money or phoning regularly. And their opinions blend optimism about life in the U.S. and positive evaluations of some aspects of American society (notably political traditions) with less favorable comparisons to their native land on other aspects (such as morals). Their attachments and identities are a mix of views that might be expected of people navigating an emotional terrain that encompasses two nations. That mix differs in several important respects, with people who have been in the U.S. longer being more ready than recent arrivals to declare this country their homeland and to describe themselves as Americans.

The Pew Hispanic Center's 2006 National Survey of Latinos collected data on a variety of transnational activities and a wide range of attitudes and beliefs. This report is based on a new analysis of that survey data, which for the first time examines the extent to which Latino immigrants with different characteristics

maintain connections to their native lands and assesses how different levels of transnational activities are associated with an immigrant's views on key subjects. The analysis thus explores the question of whether maintaining connections to a country of origin is associated with more positive or negative views of the U.S., a greater or lesser sense of attachment to this country and a stronger or weaker sense of identity as an American.

The 2006 National Survey of Latinos was conducted by telephone among a random sample of 2,000 Hispanic adults from June 5 to July 3. The respondents include 1,429 foreign-born Latinos whose activities and attitudes are explored in this report. Respondents could choose to be interviewed in English or Spanish. The survey has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.8% for the full sample and plus or minus 4.4% for the foreign-born sample. Fieldwork for the survey was conducted by International Communications Research, an independent research firm headquartered in Media, Pa. (See appendix for detailed methodology. The full dataset is available for download at www.pewhispanic.org.)

Major findings include:

- Although transnational activities are a central characteristic of the Latino immigrant experience, only a small share of the immigrant population regularly engages in all three of the activities measured in the survey. Only one-in-ten (9%) of all Latino immigrants send remittances, make phone calls at least once a week and have traveled back to their country of origin in the past two years. Meanwhile, nearly three-in-ten (28%) do not engage in any of these activities. Most Latino immigrants (63%) engage in one or two of these activities.

- Just over half of all Latino immigrants (51%) send remittances (money sent to relatives in their country of origin) and 41% talk by telephone with a relative or friend there at least once a week. However, these activities are much more common among recent arrivals than among those who have been in the U.S. for many years. Among those in this country for less than 10 years, 63% send remittances and 62% phone at least weekly. Among those here for 30 years or more, 36% send remittances and 19% call at least weekly.

- Travel back to countries of origin follows a different pattern. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of all Latino immigrants have made at least one trip to their native country since moving to the U.S., and 29% have traveled in the past two years. The share making trips in the recent past is higher among immigrants with long tenure than among the recent arrivals. Acquiring U.S. citizenship, which is more common among those with more years of residence, is associated with higher levels of recent travel.

- The extent of engagement with the home country varies by country of origin. Larger shares of immigrants from Colombia and the Dominican Republic travel back and make frequent phone calls than those from Mexico and El Salvador. Levels of remittance sending are similar for Mexicans, Dominicans and Colombians but higher for Salvadorans. Cubans, who face significant legal restrictions on contact with their native land, have the lowest level of engagement among the major Hispanic country of origin groups.

- Two-thirds of Latino immigrants (66%) say they plan to stay in the U.S. for good, but this intention varies significantly depending on how long an individual has been in this country. Among those here for fewer than 10 years, 51% say they plan to stay, a stance shared by 85% of those who have already been here more than 30 years.

- Half of Latino immigrants (49%) say that their country of birth is their "real homeland," while more than a third (38%) look upon the U.S. in that way. This measure of attachment also varies according to the amount of time someone has been here. More than twice as many immigrants who have been in the U.S. for fewer than 10 years (69%) cite their country of origin, compared with those here 30 years or more (32%). Among Latino immigrants who are not U.S. citizens, 59% say their country of origin is their real homeland, compared with 33% of those who have become U.S. citizens.

- Higher levels of engagement with the home country are associated with weaker attachment to the U.S. across several indicators. Immigrants engaging in more transnational activities are more likely to say that their country of origin is their real homeland, for example. Those with high engagement are also less likely to say that they plan to stay in the U.S. for good, but a clear majority of even these immigrants (67%) still see their future in the U.S. rather than in the countries from which they come.

About the Author

Roger Waldinger is a professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of California, Los Angeles, where his research and teaching focuses on international migration, race and ethnicity. His recent work includes an extensive reexamination of the concepts of assimilation ("Foreigners Transformed: International Migration and the Making of a Divided People," Diaspora, (2003): 12, 2: 247-72.) and transnationalism ("Transnationalism in Question," co-authored with David Fitzgerald, American Journal of Sociology, V 109, 5 (2004): 1177-95).

A Note on Terminology

The terms Hispanic and Latino are used interchangeably in this report.

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Introduction

Are they here or are they there or are they somewhere in between? Among the most persistent questions in the study of immigration are the extent to which immigrants engage in activities that maintain connections to their native lands and the pace at which their attachment shifts from country of origin to country of destination. These questions are important simply as a descriptive matter to understand the nature of migration, and they have broader implications in the debate over immigrants' allegiances and loyalties. The answers, however, are neither simple nor straightforward.

Maintaining connections with a country of origin is a central component of the Latino immigrant experience. Large proportions of Latinos who have immigrated to the U.S. have regular contact with the relatives and friends they left behind through travel, telephone calls or emails, or by sending material support, or remittances. These connections also have a clear and defined impact on how immigrants think of themselves. For most, the native country is an essential part of their personal identity. And while they are optimistic about their future in the U.S., they also continue to see much that is positive in the countries where they were born.

However, the extent to which foreign-born Latinos maintain these connections is not uniform. Levels of activity and attitudes vary among nationalities and according to the length of time an immigrant has lived in the U.S. Focusing on the largest national-origin groups and also contrasting settled immigrants with more recent arrivals, this report shows how and why engagement with such activities as remittance sending and travel back to native lands differs within this population. The report also explores the relationship between these activities and immigrants' attitudes towards both the U.S. and their country of origin

This report is based on an analysis of the 2006 National Survey of Latinos, conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center. Several batteries of questions in the survey were designed to reveal the extent of Latino immigrants' ties with their home country. The analysis examines findings on three transnational activities—travel, communications and remittances—and cross-references them with data on several key characteristics such as nationality and length of residence in the U.S. A further analysis explores responses to questions that probe immigrants' perceptions of their native country and the U.S. as well as matters of ethnic and national identity. Finally, the report examines the relationship between these activities and attitudes, especially among those who maintain the most extensive ties to their native country.

Table 1
The Activities and Attitudes of Latino Immigrants

	SHARE OF HISPANIC FOREIGN BORN *(percent)*
Transnational Activities with Native Country	
Has made at least one trip back	65
Has traveled back in the past two years	29
Sends remittances	51
Phones at least weekly	41
Never phones home	24
Sends email	15
Owns property	27
Belongs to immigrant civic organization	9
National Identity and Attachment – U.S. vs. Native Country	
Plans to stay in U.S.	66
More concerned about politics in U.S.	60
Native country is "real homeland"	49
Ever describes self as an American	33
Identifies self first as national of native country	62
U.S. Compared to Native Country	
Racial/ethnic relations better in U.S.	30
Morals better in U.S.	28
Political traditions better in U.S.	55
Expectations of Latino Children's Future	
Children will have better income and jobs in U.S.	80
Children will stay close to family in U.S.	68
Expects own children to stay in U.S.	56
How Much Transnationalism?	
Sends remittances, phones weekly and has traveled in past two years	9
Does not send remittances or phone weekly and has not traveled back in past two years	28

Source: Pew Hispanic Center, 2006 National Survey of Latinos

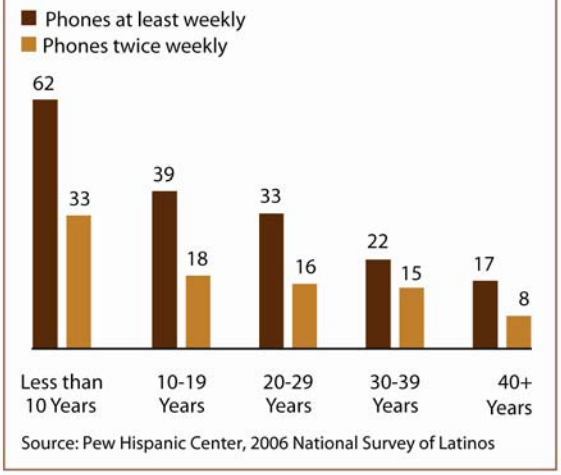
Communication

The most common form of cross-border exchange is communication. And among the different forms of communication, telephone calls are by far the most prevalent. Three-quarters of foreign-born Hispanics call someone in their native land at least occasionally, and two-thirds do so at least once a month. About 41% call at least once a week, with about 20% calling more than once a week.

Although telephone calls are relatively inexpensive and widely accessible, putting an increasing proportion of family and friends within reach, not every Latino immigrant makes even the occasional call. Almost one-in-four Hispanic immigrants say that they never call (5%), almost never call (14%) or that they have no family or friends in their country of origin to call (4%).

The extent of calling declines according to the amount of time an immigrant has spent in the U.S. Among the newest arrivals, almost two-thirds call at least once a week (Figure 1). But among those in the U.S. for at least a decade, the proportion falls to one-third and it drops further, to one-fifth, among those living in the country for 30 years or more. While the overall pattern is of declining activity, it is notable that a substantial minority of Latino immigrants who have lived in the U.S. for many years continues to make frequent calls to friends and relatives in their native land.

Figure 1
Communication and the Impact of Years in the U.S.
(percent foreign-born Latinos)



Source: Pew Hispanic Center, 2006 National Survey of Latinos

Differences by country of origin also vary widely, sometimes due more to politics than to personal relationships. Almost 60% of immigrants from the Dominican Republic make calls at least weekly. Meanwhile, with all forms of contact between people in the U.S. and those in another Caribbean island nation, Cuba, being restricted to some extent or another by the hostile relationship between the two nations' governments (see box on page 6), Cubans have the lowest levels of weekly telephone contact (9%).

Another pattern is evident among Mexicans. More than one-third are in frequent contact, calling Mexico at least once a week, yet more than a quarter say they call rarely, if ever. As shall be seen, among Mexicans that pattern extends to other cross-border activities. In each, a significant minority displays few or no ties to Mexico.

Email

Only 15% of Latino immigrants report using email to contact friends and family in their native lands. To a large extent, email communication is affected by access to computers. Only a third of Hispanic immigrants report using a computer on even an occasional basis, compared with three-quarters of U.S.-born Hispanics.

Among Latino immigrants who do not have access to a computer at home or at work, only 3% report having email contact with home country relatives or friends. By comparison, roughly a third of immigrants who have access at home or on the job say they have email contact. Dominicans again show strong ties to their home country, with 27% reporting that they send emails. Colombians, however, are the clear leaders, with almost half saying they use email to communicate with home country friends and relatives.

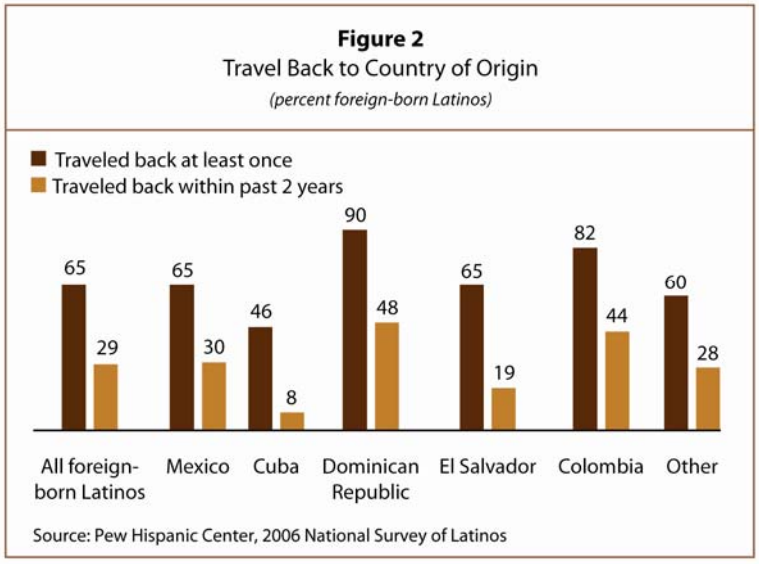
Travel

A trip back to the country of origin costs far more than a phone call or an email. Nevertheless, it is one of the two most common forms of maintaining a connection with the home country. In a sense, such travel best illustrates the ways in which U.S. and home country ties are mutually compatible and not mutually exclusive.

Since most Latino immigrants come from countries that are relatively close to the U.S., regular visits to their native lands would be expected. And that is indeed the case (Figure 2). Two-thirds (65%) report having made at least one trip back since they have been living in the U.S. Nearly half of those who have traveled back—29% of all Hispanic immigrants—have made a trip in the past two years.

But that still leaves a significant minority, about a third of immigrant Latinos, who do not report any travel to their native land (27% say they have never

traveled). Recent arrivals account for most of the immigrants who have never traveled back or have not done so recently. Of those who have been in the U.S. for 20 to 29 years and thus have had greater opportunity to make a trip, nearly all (90%) have returned to their native land at least once, compared with less than half (45%) of those in the country for 10 years or less. Among those with longer periods of residence, travel to the native land is also an increasingly common experience: Latino immigrants who have been in the U.S. for 20 to 29 years, for example, are more than twice as likely to have traveled to their home country in the past two years than those who have been living in the U.S. 10 years or less (48% versus 21%).



Travel is somewhat less common among the longest-established residents, but that may reflect the distinctive experience of Cubans, who are disproportionately represented among respondents who have lived in the U.S. for 30-plus years. Taking into account both travel and communication, relatively few have severed contact. Of all respondents, about 16% report neither calling family nor friends in their native country nor traveling within the prior five years.

Both in frequency and prevalence, travel can vary significantly across the major national origin groups (Figure 2). At the two ends of the spectrum are Dominicans and Cubans. Almost all Dominicans (90%) report having traveled to their native land at least once. By contrast, just under half of Cubans—who face legal restrictions on travel to Cuba—report having gone to Cuba at least once (see box). How recently the travel took place also distinguishes the two groups. About 48% of Dominicans report having returned to their country of origin within the prior two years, as opposed to 8% of Cubans who faced a period of tightened restrictions on family travel to Cuba. Reflecting the circumstances of their

Restrictions on Transnational Contacts with Cuba

In order to put economic pressure on the government of Fidel Castro, the United States first imposed an embargo on Cuba in 1962 (Cuban Assets Control Regulations – CACR) and since then has enacted a variety of laws and regulations restricting travel, commerce, financial transactions and other forms of interaction. The following policies currently limit transnational activities by Cubans in the United States:

- **Communication**

  While Cuban telecommunication and Internet infrastructure lags behind that of the Caribbean region and much of the world, there are no specific policies prohibiting phone calls or email from the U.S. to the island. However, the U.S. Postal Service does not accept letter post and parcel post packages of merchandise to Cuba.

- **Travel**

  The embargo regulations do not ban travel itself, but place restrictions on any financial transactions related to travel to Cuba, which effectively result in a travel ban. Under the Bush administration, the travel regulations have been tightened significantly, with additional restrictions on family visits, educational travel and travel for those involved in amateur and semi-professional international sports federation competitions. Family visits are now restricted to one trip every three years under a specific license to visit only immediate family (grandparents, grandchildren, parents, siblings, spouses and children) for a period not to exceed 14 days.

- **Remittances**

  Since June 2004, U.S. Treasury Department regulations have limited remittances to members of the sender's immediate family and to $300 per household in any consecutive three-month period, provided that no member of the household is a prohibited official of the government of Cuba or a prohibited member of the Cuban Communist Party.

Sources:

U.S. Department of Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control, *An Overview of the Cuban Assets Control Regulations Title 31 Part 515 of the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations*

Sullivan, Mark. *"Cuba: U.S. Restrictions on Travel and Remittances."* August 2006 CRS Report for Congress.

migration, 45% of Cubans say they have never traveled to their native land, by far the largest share for any national origin group.

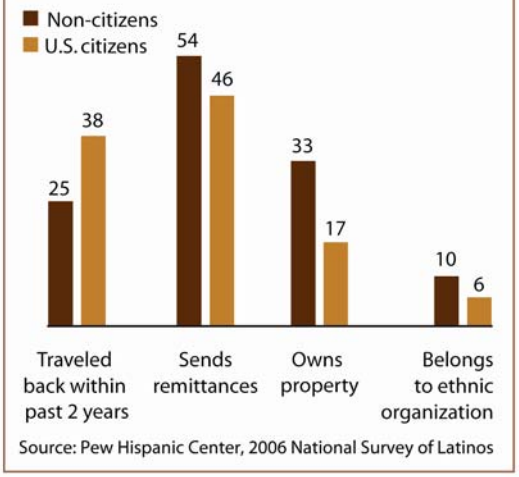
Despite their geographical proximity, Mexican immigrants do not travel to their country of origin more than other Latino immigrants, leaving aside Dominicans and Cubans with their distinctive profiles. For example, 65% of Mexicans say they traveled back at least once, including 30% in the past two years. Those rates are below the travel rates among Colombians (82% and 44% respectively) and similar to the rates among other Latino immigrants (60% and 28%). About half of all Mexican immigrants are here without authorization and thus face limits on their ability to leave and re-enter the country.

Citizens versus non-citizens

Generally speaking, immigrants who are legally authorized to reside in the U.S. can seek to become U.S. citizens after they have lived in the country for five years. In recent years, the share of eligible Hispanic immigrants seeking citizenship has been on the rise. (See Growing Share of Immigrants Choosing Naturalization, Pew Hispanic Center, March 28, 2007.) How does citizenship affect cross-border activities? The findings from this survey are mixed.

A larger share of non-citizens phones their native land at least once a week than do immigrants who have become U.S. citizens (46% versus 31%). Citizens are also less likely than non-naturalized respondents to send home money home, though a substantial minority (46%) does (Figure 3). Naturalized citizens were half as likely as their non-naturalized counterparts to own property in their

Figure 3
Citizenship and Transnational Activities
(percent foreign-born Latinos)



Source: Pew Hispanic Center, 2006 National Survey of Latinos

country of birth, while they were twice as likely to own the house in which they lived in the U.S.

However, when it comes to travel, about 81% of Latino immigrants who are U.S. citizens report having traveled to their country of origin at least once, compared with 57% of those who are not naturalized. Citizens are also more likely than their non-naturalized counterparts to have traveled to their home country within the past two years—even though the citizens on average have been living in the U.S. for a much longer period of time. This may reflect the fact that citizens can leave and reenter the country as they please. A substantial share of foreign-born Latinos who are not citizens are living in the U.S. without authorization. For them, reentering the U.S. can be a difficult and expensive proposition.

Remittances, Property Ownership and Civic Activity

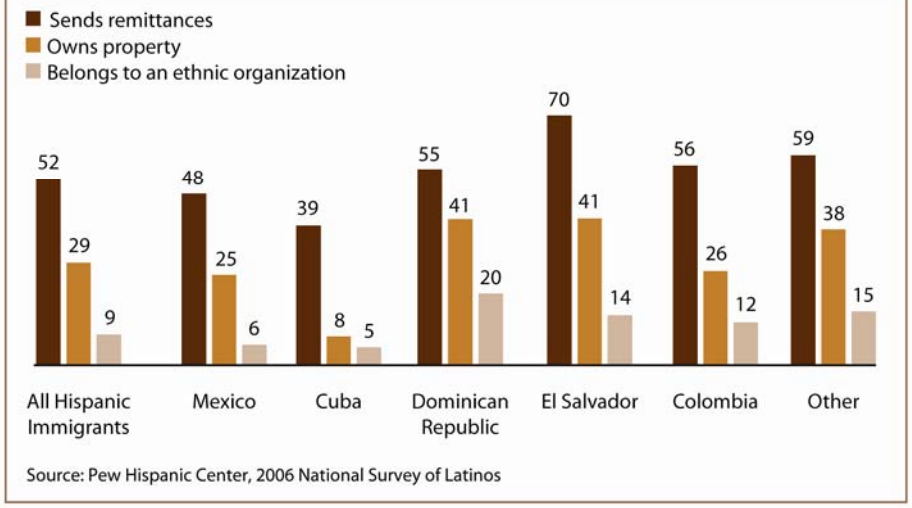
Remittances, or the money sent by immigrants to relatives in their country of origin, are a topic of great interest because of the size of the financial flow. According to the Bank of Mexico, in 2006 Mexicans alone received $23 billion in family remittances, almost all of it dispatched from the U.S.

Just over half of the Latino immigrant population sends remittances. This activity is most common among new arrivals and least so among those of long tenure here. However, a large minority of long-settled immigrants continue to send money to relatives in their native lands.

Among the most recent arrivals—those with 10 or fewer years in the U.S.—63% send remittances. That proportion declines to 48% among those with 20 to 29 years of residence. Among those who have lived in the U.S. for 30 years or more, 33% continue to send money to relatives in their country of origin.

While remittance activity is common among all nationalities, there is a good deal of variation (Figure 4). Cubans are a little more than half as likely as Salvadorans to send remittances (39% versus 70%), but again U.S. law restricts this form of transnational activity by Cubans.

Figure 4
Transnational Economic and Civic Engagement by Country of Origin
(percent foreign-born Latinos)



Source: Pew Hispanic Center, 2006 National Survey of Latinos

Property ownership

Ownership of property in the home country is common among Hispanic immigrants, with Cubans the expected exception. Property ownership also varies greatly by years of residence.

Among the most recent arrivals, 39% report owning property in their country of origin. By contrast, only 4% of long-established immigrants do so. Consistent with their high level of remittances, Salvadorans report a high level of property ownership (41%), with Dominicans at a similar level (Figure 4).

Civic activity

While most Latino immigrants actively maintain ties to family and friends, they are much less likely to be involved in any type of civic activity in the U.S. that is directly linked to their country of origin.

Overall, only 9% report belonging to a civic organization, social club or sports team of people from their native land. This kind of activity is sharply lower among those with many years of residence. About 12% of recent arrivals are involved, but that share decreases to 5% among those living in the U.S. for 20 to 29 years.

Activity levels also vary from one nationality to another. One-in-five Dominicans say they have some engagement with an immigrant civic or social organization, again displaying their high level of connectedness with their native land. By contrast, only 6% of Mexicans are similarly involved.

National Identity and Attachment

Even as Latino immigrants remain connected to relatives and friends in their country of origin, they develop attachments to the U.S. The results of this study clearly demonstrate that this is not an either/or proposition. Immigrants who maintain ties to their countries of origin also cultivate attitudes that show they are putting down psychological roots in the U.S. Immigrants who have been in this country for many years are more likely to express attachment to the U.S. than are recent arrivals.

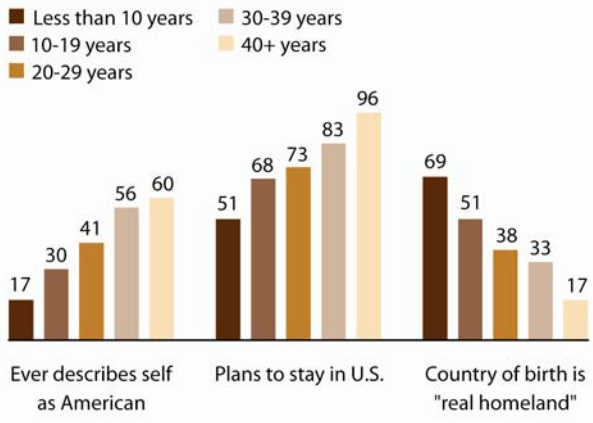
As demonstrated above, longer residence here is associated with lower levels of some cross-border activities—telephoning and remittance sending in particular. But the shift is not absolute. Just as significant shares of long-term immigrants engage in cross-border activities, many also maintain a sense of identification with their native land even after many years in the U.S. Moreover, this is not a uniform process, as different measures show differing results in the extent to which immigrants associate themselves with the U.S. Overall, the survey results reveal a dynamic process that often produces a mix of identities and attachments.

Perhaps the simplest measure of attachment to the U.S. involves how long an immigrant plans to stay in the country. Two-thirds of Latino immigrants say they plan to live here for good. While many newcomers often arrive uncertain about settlement prospects, just over half of immigrants who have been in the U.S. for fewer than 10 years say they plan to stay for good. Expectations for settlement rise consistently with years spent in the U.S. (Figure 5). Among the most established residents (in the U.S. for 30 years or more), the great majority intend to stay for good, even though many maintain home country connections through telephone calls, travel and remittances.

A comparison of U.S. citizens and non-citizens also highlights the generalized predilection for long-term residence in the U.S. While immigrants who gain citizenship are more likely than non-citizens to plan to stay, the difference is slight. Indeed, the great majority of non-citizens also plan to live in the U.S. for good (Figure 6).

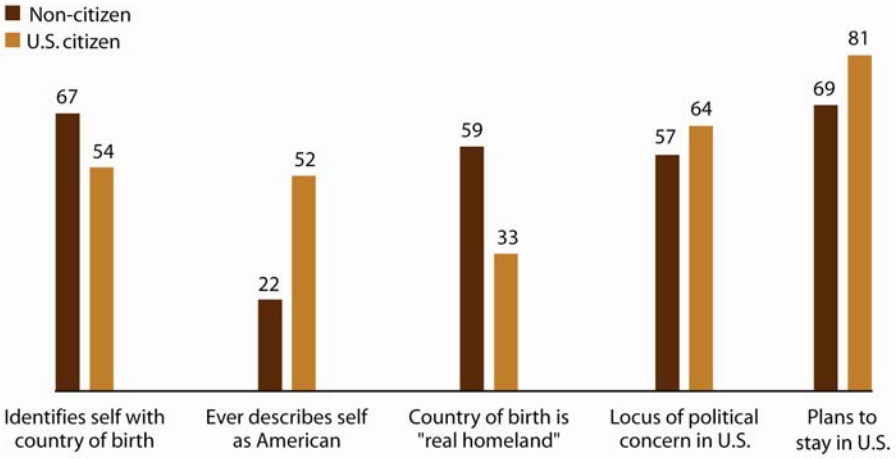
Another measure of attachment that shows a considerable shift involves the focus of immigrants' political concerns. Six-in-ten immigrants (60%) say they are more concerned about politics and government in the U.S. than in their country of origin. Recent arrivals and long-term residents differ little in this respect—in contrast to their responses to many other matters. Likewise, citizens are barely distinguishable from non-citizens in the extent to which their political preoccupations are focused on the U.S.

Figure 5
Identity and Time in Country
(percent foreign-born Latinos)



Source: Pew Hispanic Center, 2006 National Survey of Latinos

Figure 6
Identity and Citizenship Status
(percent foreign-born Latinos)



Source: Pew Hispanic Center, 2006 National Survey of Latinos

A slower shift is evident in immigrants' sense of homeland, and this measure of attachment responds to different influences. Overall, half (49%) say they consider the country where they were born to be their "real homeland," while 38% cite the U.S. As time spent in the U.S. increases, however, the proportion answering "the country in which I was born" steadily drops. While seven-in-ten (69%) of those with fewer than 10 years in the U.S. say their "real homeland" is their country of birth, that proportion falls to a third or less among those who have lived in this country for 30 years or more (Figure 5).

Latino immigrants who have become U.S. citizens respond very differently than non-citizens in how they identify their homeland. Among non-citizens, 59% say their "real homeland" is their country of birth, compared with 33% of citizens (Figure 6). A substantial commitment to the U.S. is inherent in the act of becoming a citizen, and so it is logical that a majority of immigrants who have naturalized have shifted their sense of "homeland." The fact that a third of naturalized citizens continue to look to the country of their birth is further evidence that maintaining connections to a native land is not necessarily the dominant factor in determining attitudes and behaviors among immigrants.

Personal identity

The survey explored personal identity by asking respondents about the terms they use to identify themselves, offering three options: country of origin (e.g., Mexican or Cuban); the pan-ethnic terms (Latino or Hispanic); or "Americans." Respondents were asked whether they ever used any of those terms to identify themselves and, of those terms, which one they generally used first. The results show that immigrants avail themselves of all three, to varying degrees and in varying ways, depending on length of residence in the U.S.

Just under a third of Latino immigrants say they ever describe themselves as Americans. Among recent arrivals, the rate is about one-in-six. As time spent in the U.S. increases, the proportion saying they ever self-identify as Americans increases (Figure 5). It is well over 50% among those living in the U.S. for 30 years or longer. On the other hand, a much smaller proportion, just 6% of all Latino immigrants, think of themselves as Americans first. Even among those living in the U.S. for decades, only one-in-five ever describe themselves as Americans first.

Rather, for most immigrants, the core identity is linked to the country of birth. Virtually all respondents (94%) describe themselves as nationals of their native land, and that proportion remains stable regardless of years in the U.S. When given a choice, most (62%) also describe themselves as home country nationals first. While that proportion declines with years spent in the U.S., home country identity predominates even among long-term immigrants.

Use of the terms “Hispanic” or “Latino” is more prevalent than the term “American,” but the pan-ethnic labels are less common than identification with country of origin. Almost three-in-ten (29%) say the first term they use to describe themselves is “Latino” or “Hispanic.” In contrast to the use of “American,” this form of self-identification changes little over time.

Immigrants who have become U.S. citizens are much more likely than non-citizens to ever describe themselves as Americans (52% versus 22%). However, only a small minority of citizens (14%) think of themselves as Americans first. The majority of citizens (54%) also think of themselves as “home country” nationals first, as do the majority of the non-citizens (67%).

In sum, responses to questions about nationality identity and attachments again underline the fact that home country and host country options coexist among many immigrants and may indeed be mutually compatible. On the one hand, most immigrants say that their lives and futures are to be found in the U.S. And, apparently realizing that conditions in the U.S. will determine their futures, most say their political preoccupations are mainly focused in their adopted country. On the other hand, most don’t feel fully American, naming their country of their birth as their homeland and identifying themselves in terms of that nationality. This core identity with a native land appears very resistant to change among people who were born in another country and in most cases lived there until they were young adults.

Is the U.S. better?

When it comes to children’s well-being, Hispanic immigrants are generally optimistic about life in the U.S., but when they compare the U.S. to their native lands, views are much more mixed. The ambivalence evident in these findings is once again indicative of the ways in which immigrants balance emotional ties to two nations.

An overwhelming majority of immigrants (80%) say they are confident that Hispanic children growing up in the U.S. will have better jobs and incomes than they themselves currently have. That optimism is somewhat tempered when it comes to family ties. Among immigrants, 68% predict that Hispanic children growing up in the U.S. will stay as close to their families as they have. Not surprisingly, then, 56% of immigrants with children expect that their children will stay in the U.S. rather than move to their families’ country of origin (Table 1).

There is a good deal of consensus on these matters. Among both citizens and non-citizens, large majorities are positive about future prospects for Latino children. Widespread optimism is found among newcomers and long-established residents alike.

While Latino immigrants generally agree that the U.S. is a good place to raise children, much greater ambivalence is evident in response to questions asking them to evaluate various aspects of American society compared with those aspects in their country of birth. Latino immigrants are divided over where the moral values of society are better, with roughly similar shares saying that they are better in the U.S. (28%), that they are better in their country of origin (31%) and that they are the same in both countries (34%). On the question of relations between racial and ethnic groups, many more say relations are better in the U.S. (30%) than say they are better in their country of birth (18%)—but the largest share (45%) say relations are the same in the two countries.

The U.S. is overwhelmingly favored, however, when it comes to political traditions. More than 10 times as many Latino immigrants say that the traditions are better in the U.S. than in their country of origin (55% versus 5%). Meanwhile, nearly a third (32%) judge the two countries as the same.

As with the measures of optimism regarding children's future, there is little difference between the views of immigrants who have become U.S. citizens and those who have not. Further, responses do not vary greatly according to the amount of time a respondent has been in the U.S.

These responses again point to the multidimensional relationship immigrants have with the U.S. and their home country and the extent to which they maintain attachments to both. When survey questions refer to personal well-being of Latino children growing up in the U.S., clear majorities of immigrants see an optimistic future. But when the questions compel them to compare the two societies, immigrants are much more reluctant to give their home countries an unfavorable rating except when it comes to political traditions. Instead, their evaluations of moral values and racial/ethnic relations are divided.

As with national identity, these responses suggest that immigrants are looking for a middle way, trying to find a solution that will reconcile their new U.S. lives and their continuing attachments to the places where they grew up and where so many of their relatives and friends still live.

Transnationalism

Cross-border ties among Latino immigrants are extensive and some home country attachments persist even after many years in the U.S. But should these continuing home country connections be thought of in terms of "transnationalism," a concept implying that the immigrants' "here-there" ties are a condition of being?

Experts such as Alejandro Portes and Peggy Levitt contend that the situation of Latino immigrants today is unique. According to this view, the ease of travel and communication creates "transnational communities" that extend between the U.S. and the countries from which the immigrants came. Those who engage in these regular, here-there contacts comprise the "transmigrants." Another interpretation is that cross-border connections are a natural byproduct of any migratory situation, as many migrants arrive with uncertain settlement plans that change only gradually. Consequently, the high volume of contemporary migration makes for extensive back-and-forth flows of many types that tend to decline with years of residence in the U.S.

One way of gaining insight into this debate is to first see whether there is a subgroup of immigrants who engage in an especially high level of cross-border activities and then determine whether that affects national identity and attachment. In this analysis, "transnationalism" is conceptualized as three regular and recurring activities that take place across borders: remittance sending, calling home at least once a week and recent travel (at least once within the two years prior to the survey). Immigrants who engaged in all three forms of cross-border activity are labeled "transmigrants." By this measure, only 9% of Latino immigrants can be classified as transmigrants.

At the other end of the spectrum are the immigrants who do not engage in any of these cross-border activities. Nearly three-in-ten foreign-born respondents (28%) say that they never sent remittances, had not traveled to their country of origin recently and did not make phone calls at least once a week. The share of immigrants in this category rose from 17% among those in the U.S. for 10 years or less to 43% of those in the country for 30 years or more.

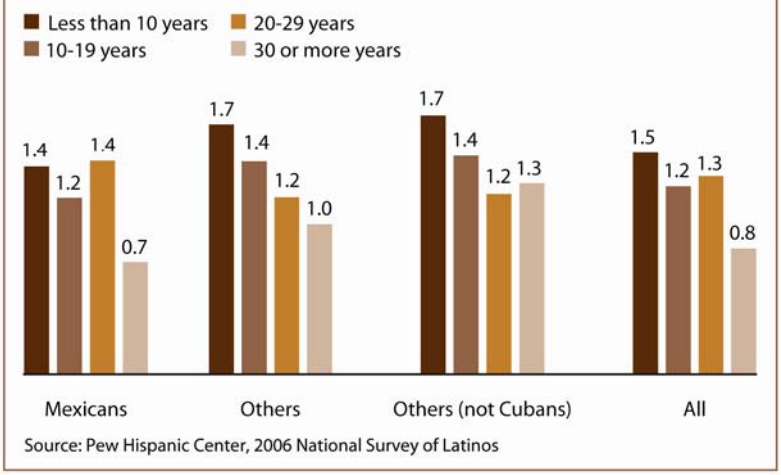
Most Latino immigrants fall between the two extremes of all three cross-border activities and none. On average, most respondents say they engage in a little more than one cross-border activity. Of those engaged in just one, half send remittances; the remainder is split between those who have traveled to their native country within the past two years and those who call home weekly. Of those engaged in two cross-border activities, 84% send remittances and 77% telephone weekly.

Another way of measuring the extent of these activities is to construct a scale from zero to three that shows the extent to which these different cross-border activities are combined. For individuals, a score of zero indicates no cross-border activities; a score of one or two indicates involvement in any or two of the three possible cross-border activities; a score of three indicates involvement in all three activities. We also averaged these scores by national origin and year of arrival: these scores show how groups compare (Figure 7). Patterns vary greatly by national origin: on average, Cubans predictably fall at the low end of the scale, barely registering above zero, in contrast to Colombians whose average of 1.5 puts them at the high end. On average, Mexicans score at 1.2.

Levels of cross-border activity decline with years spent in the U.S. Immigrants who have lived in the U.S. for 10 years or less have an average score of 1.5, while those in the country for at least 30 years average 0.8, meaning that recent arrivals are almost twice as likely as their most settled counterparts to engage in cross-border activities.

The most relevant comparison contrasts Mexicans with non-Mexicans. Mexicans are distinctive, reflecting generally lower levels of cross-border activities, regardless of years of residence. Mexicans who have lived in the U.S. for 30 years or longer also have a particularly sharp falloff in cross-border activities (Figure 7).

Figure 7
Levels of Transnational Activity by Country of Origin and Time in Country
(level ranges from 0 to 3, with 0 implying no cross-border activities and 3 implying involvement in all three activities)



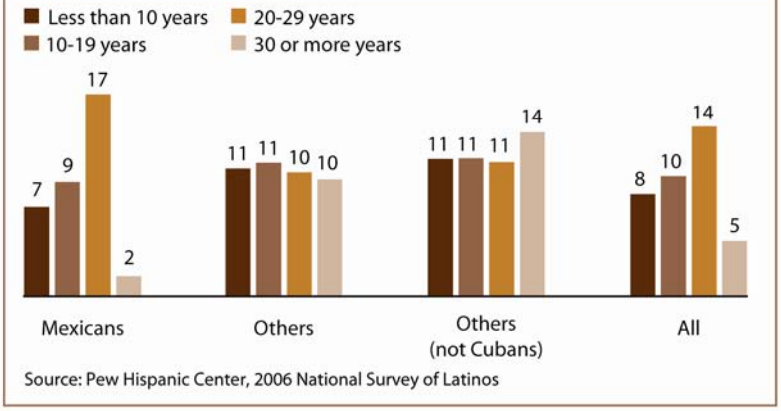
Source: Pew Hispanic Center, 2006 National Survey of Latinos

Although the typical Hispanic immigrant is engaged in at least one of these three cross-border activities, "transmigrants" (those engaging in all three) comprise a much smaller group, accounting for just 9%. Though Cubans again are underrepresented and Colombians overrepresented among the transmigrants, relative differences are much greater. For all practical purposes, there are no Cuban transmigrants. By contrast, one-in-five Colombians qualifies as a transmigrant. That might be explained by the fact that compared with Mexicans, for example, the Colombian immigrant population includes a smaller share of unauthorized migrants and higher shares of affluent individuals.

No less notable is the low proportion of transmigrants among Salvadorans (about five of every 100), suggesting that for this group "regular and recurrent" cross-border activities are constrained by low incomes and the fact that many are not authorized to be in the country. Transmigrants are somewhat more commonly found among Mexicans. Yet, notwithstanding Mexico's proximity to the U.S. and the longevity of the migration, just eight out of every 100 Mexican respondents engage in all three forms of cross-border activity.

The impact of years of residence in the U.S. also differs depending on place of origin. Among Mexicans, the proportion of transmigrants rises with each decade of settlement in the U.S. and then sharply falls among those who have lived in the country for 30 years or longer. By contrast, among all other non-Cuban residents, the proportion engaged in all three cross-border activities remains stable over time, increasing slightly among the most settled (Figure 8).

Figure 8
Share of Transmigrants by Country of Origin and Time in Country
(percent foreign-born Latinos who send remittances, traveled back in past 2 years and phone at least weekly)



Source: Pew Hispanic Center, 2006 National Survey of Latinos

No single factor determines which immigrants engage in all three cross-border activities. While years of residence in the U.S. is clearly influential, other characteristics—including language usage, citizenship status or whether immigrants have children in the home country—also matter. More importantly, these characteristics are correlated with one another, as longer-term residents are more likely to be U.S. citizens and are also more likely to be English-dominant speakers.

A regression analysis was done to help identify important impacts when taking into account certain other variables, including national origin, years of residence in the U.S., citizenship, language usage, education, employment and marital status.

The analysis reveals that once other related factors are taken into account, only a few characteristics make a difference (Table 2). After controlling for other factors, most national origin groups differ slightly, though with two notable exceptions. In other words, differences in characteristics such as citizenship, employment and education explain most of the differences among national origin groups.

Colombians and Cubans stand out in this analysis. Not surprisingly given legal restrictions on their contacts, Cubans were significantly less likely to be transmigrants compared with all other country of origin groups. Mexicans, on the other hand, were not statistically different from other immigrants from Latin America, though they were much less likely than Colombians to be transmigrants. Colombians are the most likely of all to be transmigrants. When other related factors are taken into account, this specific national origin effect is reduced, largely because Colombian immigrants have other traits that are associated with a high level of cross-border involvement. However, even after controls, Colombians still display a pattern that is distinctive from those of other national origin groups.

Years of residence in the U.S. as well as the age at which respondents migrated also make a difference. When compared with immigrants who have lived in the United States for 10 to 19 years—the largest group in the sample—the more recent arrivals seem much the same. Controlling for other background factors, however, they show a much lower propensity to be transmigrants; they are also much less likely to be transmigrants than immigrants who lived in the United States for 20 to 29 years. Similarly, the longest-settled cohort—those who have lived in the U.S. for 30-plus years—are significantly less likely to be transmigrants than the cohorts who have lived here for one or two decades.

Table 2
Factors Predicting Who Is A "Transmigrant"

		PERCENT TRANSMIGRANT	
	Impact	no controls	controls
Colombian	positive	23	8
Children in home country	**positive**	17	10
Naturalized citizen	positive	11	6
Married	positive	11	5
Mexican	no effect	8	4
10 years or less	negative	8	3
30 years or more	negative	5	2
English dominant	negative	3	1
Immigrated as a child	**negative**	1	0
Cuban	**negative**	0	0

Text Style Key:
Bold: p <= .01 Underline: p <=.1 Plain: p <= .15 Sample Average: 9 percent transmigrants

Source: Pew Hispanic Center, 2006 National Survey of Latinos

The strongest settlement factor, however, is related to the age at which immigrants moved to the U.S. No transmigrants appear among those who came to the U.S. under the age of 12. In addition, those with at least one child still living in the home country are almost twice as likely to be transmigrants as the average immigrant. Indeed, that factor has the most powerful effect of all, after controlling for others. Lastly, naturalized citizens were more likely than their non-naturalized counterparts to be transmigrants, largely reflecting the way in which possession of citizenship facilitates travel home.

Impact of cross-border activities

Do immigrants who engage in many cross-border activities have stronger or weaker attachments to the U.S. compared with other immigrants? And are their attitudes toward their countries of origin different?

In this section, a statistical analysis is used to look for associations between each measure of cross-border activity and the 11 indicators of national identity and attachment already discussed. Since cross-border activity is affected by the same factors that influence national identity and attachment (citizenship or years of residence, for example), the statistical analysis controls for these other factors and isolates the unique impacts of cross-border activity.

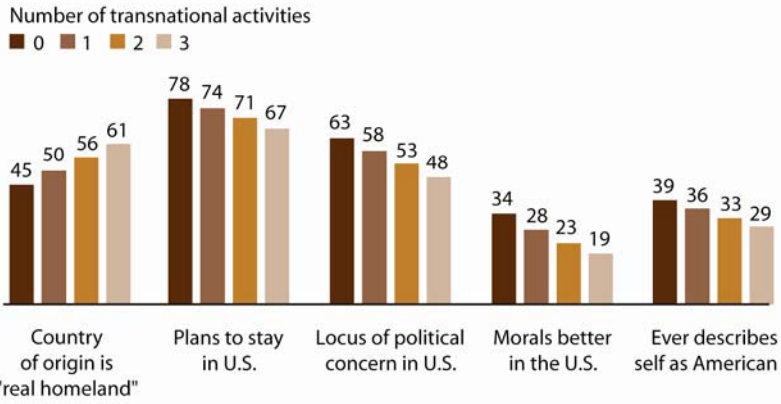
The analysis shows that differences in the number of cross-border activities have statistically significant impacts on a broad range of national identity and attachment indicators. Immigrants with more cross-border activities tend to say their "real home" is their country of birth, and they are less likely than others to plan on staying in the U.S. They are also less likely to view the U.S. as the locus of their political concerns and to think that morals and political traditions are

better in the U.S. than elsewhere (Figure 9). The analysis found that cross-border activities still exercise statistically significant effects even after controlling for other, possibly influential factors, such as years of residence or citizenship.

However, even immigrants with the highest level of cross-border activities appear to have shifted attachments from their native countries to the U.S. The statistical analysis shows that, among those with three cross-border activities, 67% still plan to stay in the U.S. The analysis also reveals that the U.S. is the locus of political concerns for half (48%) of those with three cross-border activities (Figure 9).

In sum, it seems clear that higher levels of cross-border activities have a distinct effect in weakening identification with, and attachment to, the U.S. However, the impact is strongest on symbolic matters, such as whether moral values are better here or there, as opposed to more practical aspects, such as plans to remain in the U.S. or return to the country of origin.

Figure 9
Transnational Activities and Identity
(percent foreign-born Latinos)



Source: Pew Hispanic Center, 2006 National Survey of Latinos

Conclusion

As this report shows, the country of origin connection is a central part of the Latino immigrant experience. Large proportions of Latino immigrants have regular engagements with the relatives and friends they left behind, through travel, phone call or email contact or the sending of remittances. These activities are related to the ways that immigrants think of themselves. Identity remains strongly defined in native country terms; though optimistic about the future to be found in the U.S., the immigrants continue to see much to admire in the countries where they were born.

The long-term trend, however, is toward a steadily deepening commitment to the U.S. Phone calls, travel, remittances—the three major transnational activities—start off high, but all fall off among those who have been in the U.S. for longer periods of time. By contrast, attachment to this country is strong among recent arrivals and then rises among the long-term immigrants. Even among immigrants living in the U.S. for less than 10 years, more than half are planning to stay for good and a similar proportion report that the U.S. is the locus of their political and social concerns. Levels of attachment are stronger still among more established residents.

Even though home country contacts are extensive, only a small minority—fewer than 10 percent—engages in the full range of cross-border activities that exemplify the concept of "transnationalism." The evidence examined in this report indicates that regular and recurrent transnational activities do not impede the development of bonds to the U.S. Those people who are labeled here as "transmigrants" differ little from other respondents in their level of attachment to the U.S. or in their self-identities. Moreover, even those immigrants with the highest levels of cross-border activity expect to live in the U.S. for good.

In the end, this report shows that immigrants are in a process of transition. A significant minority severs all ties to their home countries; at the other side of the spectrum, a significant minority continues to engage in frequent travel and communication, even after many years of residence in the United States. However, the best way to characterize the immigrants' "here-there" connection is to describe them as "in between." Most Latino immigrants stay in regular contact with friends or family living in their country of origin, either sending remittances, phoning weekly or traveling regularly. But the very same people who are keeping in touch and trying to remain true to the people and places they have left behind are simultaneously shifting loyalties and allegiances to the U.S., where they see a bright future for themselves and their children and where they plan to stay for good. The evidence from this survey suggests that Latino immigrants find

America deeply appealing and that, with time, they are finding their own way to go from “there” to “here.”