
Original Article

Should I stay or should I go? Explaining why most Mexican immigrants are choosing to remain permanently in the United States

Q3

Brian Wampler^{a,*}, Maria Chávez^b and Francisco I. Pedraza^c

^aDepartment of Political Science, Boise State University, Boise, Idaho 83725, USA.

Q1

E-mail: bwampler@boisestate.edu

Q2

^bPacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, Washington, USA

^cUniversity of Washington, Washington, USA

*Corresponding author.

Abstract This paper analyzes why some Mexican immigrants, especially undocumented residents, plan to remain permanently in the United States, whereas others plan to return to Mexico. If Mexican migrants, especially those who are living in the United States with proper legal documentation to do so, plan to remain in the United States permanently, there will be far greater consequences on US society and public policies than if the migrants are only planning to reside and work in the United States for a short period. We use logistic regression analysis to analyze a data set of 492 Mexican and seasonal farmworkers (MSFWs). Two-thirds of the survey respondents lacked documents to live in the United States, and the remaining one-third indicated that they were US 'legal permanent residents.' Specifically, those who planned to remain permanently in the United States appeared to be strongly influenced by 'cutting ties' to their sending communities, as well as by 'planting roots' in their host, and potentially adopted, community. Importantly, we also find that their documented status had very little effect on their intent to remain permanently in the United States. *Latino Studies* (2009) 0, 000–000. doi:10.1057/lst.2008.63

Q4

Keywords: ; ;



Introduction

The United States has long been an immigrant-receiving country, and immigrants have often been at the center of political conflict in the United States, from the Alien and Sedition Acts of the 1790s, the devastating riots in New York City in the 1860s and the immigrant-led industrial strikes in the Midwest in the 1910s and 1920s, to the union organizing led by Cesar Chavez in California in the 1960s. More recently, the political protests by Arizona's Minutemen and the large demonstrations of Latinos, especially Mexicans, in Los Angeles and Chicago in the spring of 2006 represent two poles in an increasingly hostile political environment. Today, nearly 12 per cent of the resident population of the United States are immigrants, including millions who *lack* documents to live or work in the United States.¹ Many of the undocumented residents are from Mexico, and migrated north due to limited economic and social opportunities in their own communities, as well as the perceived economic and social opportunities available in the United States (Durand *et al* 2001; Marcelli and Cornelius 2001; Massey *et al* 2002).

1 http://www.uscis.gov/graphics/shared/statistics/publications/ILL_PE_2005.pdf.

Are these immigrants, especially the undocumented, planning to stay in the United States permanently? Or are they short-time residents who are here to take advantage of immediate economic opportunities? If Mexican migrants, especially those living undocumented in the United States, plan to remain in the United States permanently, there will be far greater consequences on US society and public policies than if they are only planning to reside and work in the United States for a short period. This paper draws from a survey carried out in the spring of 2003, of 492 Mexican migrant and seasonal farmworkers (MSFWs). Two-thirds of the survey respondents lacked proper documentation to live in the United States; the remaining one-third stated that they were US 'legal permanent residents.' This paper seeks to explain why some immigrants, especially undocumented residents, plan to remain permanently, whereas others plan to return to Mexico. Our sample consists of Mexican-born individuals, two thirds of whom lack legal documentation to live or work in the United States.

Based on evidence collected from our survey, we found that the majority of MSFWs (62 per cent) plan to remain permanently in the United States. Asked 'Do you intend to remain in the US permanently?' respondents with 'legal permanent resident' status answered affirmatively at 77 per cent, whereas undocumented individuals responded affirmatively at 52 per cent. In this paper, we develop a model that we test with logistic regression to explain the social characteristics and behaviors most associated with individuals' intent to remain permanently. The model includes 11 independent variables that tap into individuals' participation in social networks, their migratory behavior, their degree of trust and basic social characteristics such as gender and income. This model contributes to better illuminating the factors associated with immigrants' decisions to remain in the United States permanently.



In the current political and social environment, the most venomous attacks against immigrants have been aimed at low-skilled, undocumented Mexican immigrants. The survey was undertaken in the spring of 2003, during a period of increasing suspicion and hostility toward undocumented migrants, especially poor Mexican migrants. Although the most intense political and government backlash against this community was still several years off, the period following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the eastern part of the United States clearly had repercussions for millions of legally documented and undocumented Mexicans and other Latin American nationals living in the United States. Mexicans now comprise the largest segment of the undocumented population, at over six million people, and our data allow us to examine the extent to which the 'myth of return' applies to MSFWs, a group often characterized by circular migratory patterns.²

What happens to individuals and the broader political system when a significant share of a population lacks legal documentation to live and work in the country where they currently reside? Immigrants, especially from large groups (for example Mexicans or Cubans in the United States) who plan to settle permanently in the United States, may significantly impact the democratic values, institutions and processes that form the foundations of American democracy and civil society (Huntington 2004; Fraga and Segura 2006). Huntington argues that the impact is negative, and will contribute to the general erosion of values that he believes have given support to democratic processes in the United States. Fraga and Segura provide a devastating critique of Huntington, in which they show that his broad claims do not correspond to what social scientists know about second- and third-generation Latino immigrants.

Widespread political participation and strong civic engagement contribute to healthy and vibrant democratic processes and institutions (Putnam 1993, 2000; Verba *et al* 1995). When there are millions of disenfranchised individuals in a polity, it becomes more likely that the broader society will suffer from low levels of social capital, poor civic health and a constricted democracy. Immigrants, especially those who lack documentation, find themselves trapped in 'authoritarian enclaves' in which they lack basic civil, political and social rights (O'Donnell 1994). Individuals living in a polity but having limited legal or political rights (such as lacking the right to vote) are more likely to become isolated from and disenchanted with the broader polity (Michelson 2003; Garcia-Bedolla 2005). We can also imagine undocumented residents going to greater lengths to shield themselves from state authority, which has consequences in diverse policy areas such as public health (for example, lack of childhood immunizations or regular check-ups), education (for example, lower levels of parent involvement), or worker safety (for example, lower willingness to report safety violation).

To determine the survey respondents' legal status, we asked, 'Are you a US citizen, permanent resident, or other?'³ Two-thirds indicated a documented

2 http://www.uscis.gov/graphics/shared/statistics/publications/ILL_PE_2005.pdf; US Census Bureau. 'The Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2003.' (P20-551) Issued August 2004. Available at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/foreign.html>.



3 We recognize that it is possible that some of the respondents could hold H2a Visas, but it was our research teams' experience that holding H2a Visas was often viewed as being synonymous with having permanent resident status.

status of 'other,' which we interpreted to mean that they lacked appropriate documentation to live or work in the United States. Our interpretation of the 'other' response is based on informal interviews with survey respondents who acknowledged that they were in the United States without legal permission at the end of the formal survey, as well as interviews with community organizers, employers, housing managers and community members.

This unique data set offers the opportunity to contribute to ongoing empirical, policy and theoretical debates focusing on immigrants' attitudes and behaviors. It allows us to compare the attitudes and behaviors of Mexican immigrants who are US permanent residents and those who lack documents to live or work in the United States. Most sociological approaches, exemplified by the work of Douglas S. Massey, focus on explaining the migration and settlement patterns of undocumented Mexican immigrants, but they devote much less attention to their attitudes and long-term plans. Most of the work in political science on Latino immigrants focuses on issues related to assimilation, acculturation, isolation or political representation of documented immigrants, generally overlooking the attitudes of the US's large undocumented population (de la Garza *et al* 1992; Pachon and DeSipio 1994).

In this paper, we first briefly describe the history of migration of Mexicans to the United States. We then review the prevailing scholarship on the likelihood that Latino immigrants want to remain permanently in the United States. In this section, we substitute Latino for Mexican, because the most prominent work on the subject treats the larger group of Latinos, rather than the subset Mexican population. The third section of the paper presents four hypotheses that account for the likelihood that Mexican immigrants will want to remain permanently in the United States. We introduce 11 different independent variables that are included in our model, which we test with logistic regression to assess the validity of our hypothesis. The final section of the paper analyzes the findings of the statistical tests.

History of Mexican Immigration to the United States

According to Massey *et al*, current immigration from Mexico developed out of over 100 years of Mexican and US government policies that openly encouraged the migration of Mexicans to the United States (2002). Migration has long been dominated by working-age (age 18–35) males from western states in Mexico, particularly from the states of Guanajuato, Jalisco and Michoacan (Durand *et al* 2001, 113). 'Our analysis firmly established that Mexico–US migration is a working – class movement made up of agricultural, unskilled, and skilled manual laborers' (Durand *et al* 2001, 123). The survey respondents included in our study largely mirror this description. Sixty-five per cent are male, 54 per cent live in households that earn less than US \$15 000 per year and 52 per cent



are from the states of Guanajuato, Jalisco and Michoacán. Table 1 compares our survey population, Idaho's Hispanic population and data from the Mexican Migration Project.

Recent immigration and trade policies, specifically the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), are strongly associated with an increase in undocumented, full-time residency of Mexicans in the United States. These policies have 'pushed migrants decisively away from seasonal, circular migration toward permanent settlement and transformed Mexican immigration from a regional phenomenon affecting a handful of US states into a broad social movement touching every region of the country' (Massey *et al* 2002, 3). Mexican migrants used to spend part of the year in the United States, but today the high costs and risks

Table 1: Demographic distribution of Idaho's population^a

	<i>Idaho's Hispanic population</i>	<i>MSFW survey respondents</i>	<i>Mexican Migration Project</i>
Total population	7.9%	—	—
<i>Gender</i>			
Female	46.3	35.0	51.0
Male	53.6	65.0	49.0
<i>Income</i>			
Less than \$10 000	10.5	32.1	NA
\$10 000–\$14 999	8.8	21.3	NA
\$15 000–\$24 999	22.5	34.2	NA
\$25 000–\$34 999	19.8	9.3	NA
\$35 000–or more	38.6	3.2	NA
<i>Education</i>			
None	NA	10.4	15.6
Less than 9th grade	38.0	79.2	53.1
9th to High school graduate	38.5	9.3	23.4
Some college, no degree	17.3	NA	2.3
Bachelor's degree and higher	6.6	1.1	4.4
<i>Citizenship status</i>			
Native	62.7	6.2	1.8
Foreign born	37.3	93.8	98.2
(Not a citizen)	28.9	97.2	NA

^aThe data for this table were obtained from the US Census 2000 Summary Files (www.census.gov) as well as our survey of MSFW. For post-secondary education, the census data only consider individuals 25 years and older, whereas the 2003 Idaho MSFW survey included all individuals, including those between 18 and 25 years of age.

Abbreviation: MSFW, migrant and seasonal farmworkers.

Source: US Census 2000 Summary Files (www.census.gov); Mexican Migration Project (<http://mmp.opr.princeton.edu/>).



associated with returning to Mexico encourages Mexican migrants to stay in the United States. Simply put, legislation designed to legalize undocumented Mexicans and discourage future undocumented immigration from Mexico has had the unintended consequence of inducing those undocumented immigrants who were already in the United States to remain, due to the risks associated with undocumented transnational travel. Seventy-eight per cent of our surveyed population lives in the United States 12 months a year, 42 per cent of the survey respondents never returned to Mexico after arriving in the United States and an additional 38 per cent had not returned in more than a year. Overall, 80 per cent of the undocumented Mexicans included in the survey are now full-time residents in the United States. The behaviors of our surveyed population correspond to the argument of Massey *et al* (2002).

Marcelli and Cornelius (2001) report that settlement patterns of Mexican migrants are changing. Based on a survey conducted in California and Mexico completed in 1996, they contend that there has been 'a gradual feminization of the Mexican migrant flow,' and in some places women even outnumber male migrants (p. 111). They further argue that increases in female migration results raise the likelihood that immigrants will stay, in large part because females marry and have children in the United States (p. 112). Moreover, Marcelli and Cornelius' profile of Mexican immigrants suggests a younger, better educated, female and more urban population than in the past. Similarly, Kandel and Massey argue that Mexican women are more likely to want to *live* in the United States due to increased social opportunities, whereas Mexican men are more likely to want to *work* in the United States (Kandel and Massey, 2002, p. 985). According to both arguments, a significant gender gap has developed, which suggests that Mexican women perceive that their sending communities will provide fewer social, political and economic opportunities than their receiving communities.

Q14

Remaining Permanently in the United States

The intent to remain permanently in the United States has been the focus of other political scientists. In *Latino Voices*, the authors report that 73 per cent of documented Latino immigrants plan to remain in the United States (de la Garza *et al* 1992, 44). In *New Americans*, it is reported that 84 per cent plan to remain permanently in the United States (Pachon and DeSipio 1994, 62). However, the research projects upon which these books are based include only *documented* immigrants, hence limiting our understanding of the attitudes and behaviors of the most recent migrants. Aguilera analyzes the question of where recently legalized Mexican migrants plan to retire, in order to address their long-term plans. Similar to our findings, he finds that the majority plans to remain in the United States. However, the data that Aguilera uses also does not allow him to



show whether undocumented Mexicans share similar plans (2004, p. 348). The evidence presented below strongly suggests that any research project that does not include undocumented immigrants will paint a partial picture of how immigrants affect and are affected by their host country.

In order to assess the likelihood that immigrants will remain in the United States permanently, Massey and Akresh surveyed 683 documented immigrants from the New Immigrant Survey Pilot. They find that immigrants who have a high degree of satisfaction with the United States are those who are most likely to stay in the United States (2006), whereas migrants with higher income and education levels experience less satisfaction in the United States. 'Those with high earnings and US property ownership are actually *less likely* to intend ever naturalizing; and those with high levels of education are least likely to express satisfaction with the United States, and for this reason both are groups of people less likely to plan becoming US citizens or settling permanently' (Massey and Akresh 2006, 16). High-income immigrants are likely to have many more options available to them – they do not necessarily need to remain in the United States in order to enjoy heightened economic and social opportunities – whereas low-income and poorly educated residents come to the United States because it offers them the best opportunity to improve their lives. Massey and Akresh show that the group of immigrants *most* interested in making the United States their permanent home is comprised of low-skilled workers who possess low levels of formal education, characteristics that describe the surveyed group.

Our Hypotheses: Cutting Ties, Planting Roots, Trust and Opportunities

We develop four basic hypotheses that explain why immigrants are likely to remain permanently in the United States. These hypotheses tap into the key explanations regarding why documented and undocumented immigrants would want to stay.

Hypothesis 1: 'Cutting Ties': Individuals with weaker ties to their sending communities are more likely to want to remain permanently in the United States.

Hypothesis 2: 'Planting Roots': Individuals with locally rooted social networks are more likely to want to remain permanently in the United States.

Hypothesis 3: 'Trusting Others': Individuals with higher levels of trusts towards Mexican Americans are more likely to want to remain permanently in the United States.

**Hypothesis 4:** ‘Increased Opportunities’:

- (a) Women are more likely to want to remain permanently in the United States.
- (b) Individuals with greater income in our sample are more likely to want to remain permanently in the United States than those with lower income levels.

The first hypothesis, ‘cutting ties,’ asserts that individuals with weaker linkages to family, friends, social networks and job opportunities in their sending communities will be more likely to want to remain permanently in the United States. For these individuals, there is a decreasing interest in returning to Mexico because there are fewer familial connections, weaker friendship networks and decreased job opportunities in Mexico. One implication of this hypothesis is that US policies, such as increasing border security and IRCA, may actually have promoted Mexican immigrants to want to remain permanently in the United States, because the legal incentives under the 1986 legislation made it more difficult for them to maintain their ties to their sending community.

The second hypothesis, ‘planting roots,’ asserts that when immigrants become more comfortable and better situated in their host community, they will be more likely to want to remain permanently in the United States. The local community begins to provide the social support that makes their decision to remain permanently in the United States seem like a good option. For example, participating in cultural events or attending church services in Spanish may help bind immigrants to their new community.

The third hypothesis, ‘trusting others,’ is based on the assumption that Mexican immigrants’ main contact with non-immigrants is likely to be among Mexican Americans, who are often the landlords, labor bosses or employers of the most recently arrived. Although recent research has shown that trust of Mexican immigrants towards Mexican Americans is low, we would expect those with higher levels of trust to be more likely to want to remain permanently in the United States (Chávez *et al* 2006). If immigrants do not trust Mexican Americans, they may prefer to return to Mexico. However, if immigrants trust Mexican Americans to a small degree, they will be more likely to want to remain. This is due, in part, to the fact that levels of trust in Mexico are historically quite low (Cleary and Stokes 2006).

The final hypothesis, ‘increased opportunities,’ is drawn from existing research and is separated into two distinct relationships. We expect that women and higher-income immigrants will want to remain permanently in the United States. However, as mentioned above, Kandel and Massey show that Mexican female immigrants want to live in the United States more than their male counterparts. Immigrants living in households earning less than \$10 000 per year experience very precarious living situations, often lack decent support networks and have limited to no legal rights. ‘Higher income’ Mexican MSFWs



are more likely to want to stay because they receive greater benefits, even in a context in which their rights are limited. It is important to qualify the category of 'higher-income' Mexican MSFWs because it refers to individuals living in households earning at least \$15 000 per year, which is obviously very low.

Data and methods

We tested these hypotheses with a survey administered in Spanish, from March through June of 2003 on 492 MSFWs in three counties in Idaho, featuring large concentrations of MSFWs. Our survey documented demographic information, explored health issues and asked about work background, social/acclimation patterns and migratory behavior. We also sought to assess respondents' perceptions regarding trust, as well as their long-term plans.

The survey interviews were not fully random or entirely representative of Idaho's larger Hispanic population. A random sample would require that we first establish a potential pool of survey respondents (that is, creating a list using phone numbers or home addresses) and randomly select from within that pool. Many of Idaho's MSFWs do not have regular access to a phone and/or lack a permanent address. We found it necessary to locate members of this community by using methods and techniques that might more easily identify potential members of the targeted community. We sought settings where this community is most likely to be concentrated such as: labor camps (housing projects), neighborhoods with known high concentrations of Mexicans and/or Mexican Americans, trailer parks, weekend soccer games, Mexican American-owned businesses and Spanish-language church services. Our method of locating survey respondents in this manner is consistent with non-random sampling techniques in communities that are hard to locate. These techniques effectively capture important characteristics of the targeted community, which in turn helps us to explain more fully the targeted community's behavioral patterns (Babbie 2004, 184).

The demographic information we collected indicates that our sample is comparable to existing data on the demographic profile of migrants from Mexico collected in other studies, giving us a high level of confidence that the respondents to our survey are similar to other Mexican immigrants located elsewhere in the country (Durand *et al* 2001, 114). Before implementing the survey, we assumed that most of our respondents would be primarily Spanish-speaking, and that they would be either Mexican in nationality or Mexican Americans. Survey respondents had the choice to respond to the survey in either English or Spanish, but all chose to respond in Spanish. In this respect, it is important to note that our ability to gather sensitive information, such as legal status, from undocumented MSFWs was principally due to the skills and background of our three undergraduate research assistants who applied the



4 The research assistants, then all seniors at Boise State University, were either Mexican or Mexican American. They reviewed the draft of the survey instruments and helped us to modify the survey to reflect contemporary and common usages of phrases. Our 85 per cent response rate was due, in large part, to the fact that all three researchers identified strongly with the MSFW population – all three had family members who were then or had been MSFWs. One research assistant was born in Idaho but spent much of his youth in the central Mexican state of Michoacan. Another research assistant was Mexican. He came to the United States as a teenager and had worked as a MSFW. The third research was born and raised in Idaho and her family worked in Idaho's dairy industry. All surveys, which included 30

survey, all three of whom were bilingual and bicultural, and had spent considerable time living in communities with large numbers of Mexican MSFWs.⁴

We removed from the analysis those respondents who reported being born in the United States and those that did not respond to the question 'Are you a US citizen, permanent resident, or other?' which left us with 492 cases. This question is obviously very sensitive because of legal concerns; thus, if respondents chose *not* to respond, we did not press them for an answer.

In order to explain the variation in outcomes, we develop a model, discussed below, that includes individual-level characteristics (*Age*, *Gender* and *Household income*), migratory behaviors (*Age of entry*, *Months living in US* and most recent *Return home*), social networks (*Attend church*, *Attend cultural events*, *Send remittances* and work with someone from *Hometown*) and attitudes on trust (*Trust Mexican Americans*).

Explanatory Variables

Migratory behavior

Three indicators of migratory behavior are included in the model: *Age of Entry* into the United States, *Months* living in the United States each year and the timing of their most recent *Return Home*.⁵ We expect that MSFWs entering the United States at a younger age are more likely to want to remain permanently, compared to those who first entered at an older age. Statistically, *Age of Entry* is expected to be negatively associated with the intention to remain permanently. We expect respondents who spend more *Months* per year living in the United States to be more likely to express an interest in remaining in the United States permanently. As the time individuals spend in the United States increases, we surmise that there are more opportunities to solidify ties to the United States, and thus the amount of time that has passed since a respondent's last *Return Home* will be positively related with intentions of permanency in the United States. Therefore, when migration is not circular and international, migrant workers are likely to want to remain permanently in the United States. This set of variables allows us to test hypothesis number 1, *Cutting ties*.

Social networks

To tap into how individuals' social networks affect their attitudes and behavior, we include four variables: *Attend church*, *Attend cultural events*, *Send remittances* back home and work with someone from their *Hometown*. As a measure of the community ties that might develop while in the United States, we argue that attending church or a cultural event, such as *Cinco de Mayo*



Q5

(a Mexican-American holiday celebrating Mexican ancestry), *el Dieciséis de Septiembre* (Mexico's Independence Day) or a *quinceañera* party, will be positively associated with individuals' interest in remaining in the United States. Building new, localized networks rather than maintaining transnational communities will also encourage individuals to remain permanently. When an immigrant does not work with members of his or her sending community, he or she will be more likely to want to remain permanently in the United States, because he or she is in the process of building new social networks. Working with an individual from the sending community is an indication of the maintenance of transnational social networks, rather than new, localized networks. Additionally, we expect that respondents who *send remittances* to support family who remain in Mexico are less likely to express a desire to remain permanently than those who do not send remittances, because the former are simultaneously engaged in sending and receiving communities. Although these individuals may feel the need to remain in the United States to earn money to support family members in Mexico, they are, we hypothesize, more likely to return to their sending community in the future, in order to live with their families. This set of variables allows us to test hypothesis number 2, *planting roots*.

Trust

We also expect *Trust in Mexican Americans* to be positively associated with intentions to remain permanently. We hypothesize that greater levels of *Trust in Mexican Americans* foster positive social ties in the United States, and, hence, lead MSFWs to express intentions to remain permanently. As many MSFWs live in Mexican and Mexican American communities, those with greater levels of trust will want to remain permanently, because they may have more positive associations with their neighbors than they had in Mexico. Cleary and Stokes document the low levels of trust among Mexicans in Mexico, not only towards their fellow citizens, but also towards government institutions (2006). For Mexican immigrants who have low levels of trust, there may be few advantages to remaining in the United States. However, as trust increases, Mexican immigrants may come to believe that the United States offers a more stable social environment than their sending communities. This variable allows us to test hypothesis number 3, *Trust*.

Socioeconomic status

Finally, it is possible that factors such as *Age*, *Gender* and *Household Income* may have a significant impact on individuals' decisions to remain permanently.⁶ *Gender* should significantly affect immigrants' attitudes because women are

questions, were conducted in person.

- 5 Previous studies have measured the time spent in the United States as years. On the matter of precision, Shively (1998) writes that 'The Cardinal Rule of Precision might read: *Use measurements that are as precise as possible, given the subject you are studying; do not waste information by imprecise measurement*' (p. 54, emphasis in original). King *et al* (1994) advise researchers 'to use the measure that is most appropriate to our theoretical purposes' (p. 153). In studying MSFWs, whose behavior we seek to analyze is conducted within the span of one calendar year, we found it possible and more appropriate to use the more precise measure of months.

Q9

Q10

⁶ Standard attitudinal and



behavioral models usually include education as a measure of control. The survey participants from this study varied little in terms of education. Over 90 per cent had a high school education or less, most of whom completed elementary and middle school, very few of whom had post high-school education. We concluded that there was insufficient variation in our measure of education to justify its inclusion into any of the models.

more likely to want to remain permanently in the United States. Research on Mexican immigrant attitudes suggests that the principal factor expressed by women on this matter was their concern for family and children (Kandel and Massey 2002; Monsivais 2004). We expect that older respondents are more likely to express an interest in staying permanently, because they are more likely to have spent their most productive years in the United States and to have developed social ties that outweigh those in Mexico. We would also expect that as income increases, there is a corresponding increase in the intent to remain permanently. Thirty-two per cent of our surveyed population had a yearly household income of less than \$10 000. Although these wages may be high relative to wages in rural Mexico, the high cost of living in the United States may lead the lowest-income individuals to want to return to Mexico. This set of variables allows us to test hypothesis number 4, *opportunities*.

Q6

Findings

Our model tests three different groups' responses to the same question using logistic regression. The question, 'Do you intend to remain permanently in the US?' had a dichotomous answer of 'yes' or 'no.' We first test the model with only those respondents who are undocumented (Column 1). The second group includes all permanent residents and Mexican-born individuals who have become US citizens (Column 2). The third group combines both undocumented and documented residents to capture the attitudes of Mexican immigrants (Column 3). The results show that there are statistically significant factors from each of the likely types of explanations (migratory behaviors, social networks, trust and socio-economic status).

Undocumented Mexican MSFWS

The first group, with results reported in the first column of Table 2, is comprised of undocumented Mexican immigrants. Two of the three 'migratory behavior' variables are statistically significant: *Months living in the US* and *Entry age*. Individuals who live and work in the United States full-time are more likely than individuals who live and work in the United States part-time to want to remain in the United States permanently. Why? Individuals who move back and forth between Mexico and the United States on a yearly basis have a weaker stake in the United States and a stronger stake in Mexico, which leads them to be less likely to want to remain in the United States permanently. This suggests that public policies that encourage individuals to flow back and forth across the border will decrease the likelihood that MSFWs will want to remain in the United States permanently (Massey *et al* 2002, 128–141). Conversely, public policies that make it more difficult for undocumented immigrants to easily



Table 2: Remain permanently in the US?

	<i>Undocumented Mexican immigrants</i>	<i>US permanent residents</i>	<i>All immigrants</i>
<i>Migratory behavior</i>			
Age of entry	-1.09** (0.034)	-0.085 (0.048)	-0.090*** (0.026)
Months living in US	0.586** (0.225)	1.13* (0.494)	0.669** (0.192)
Return to hometown	0.060 (0.130)	0.025 (0.253)	0.027 (0.103)
Send remittances	0.038 (0.214)	-1.13# (0.588)	0.434 (0.354)
<i>Social networks</i>			
Attend church	0.486** (0.182)	-0.295 (0.287)	-0.418 (0.287)
Attend cultural events	0.202 (0.178)	0.028 (0.281)	-0.314 (0.280)
Hometown co-worker	-0.668* (0.339)	-0.413 (0.589)	0.476# (0.277)
<i>Trust</i>			
Trust Mexican Americans	0.427* (0.212)	1.05** (0.409)	0.574** (0.178)
<i>SES</i>			
Age	0.065** (0.023)	0.059* (0.029)	0.059** (0.017)
Gender	-0.726*** (0.201)	-0.603# (0.362)	1.479*** (0.333)
Income	0.179 (0.181)	0.113 (0.293)	0.139 (0.138)
Documented status control	—	—	-0.320 (0.333)
Constant	-2.18# (1.29)	-4.50* (2.28)	-3.56*** (1.089)
Log likelihood	-250.09	-95.96	-367.51
N	250	131	381

#P ≤ 0.1; *P ≤ 0.05; **P ≤ 0.01; ***P ≤ 0.001.

Figures in parentheses are standard errors

In OLS estimates of the logistic regression models, the tolerances for each predictor are greater than 0.10, indicating that multicollinearity is not a problem.

Abbreviation: SES, Socioeconomic status.

move back and forth across the border will encourage undocumented immigrants *not* to return to their country of origin. Stricter border enforcement has an unintended consequence of encouraging undocumented Mexican immigrants to remain in the United States because it decreases Mexicans ties to their sending communities.

Age of entry to the United States is also statistically significant. The younger the age of first entry to the United States, the more likely it is that an immigrant will want to remain in the United States permanently. Why? Individuals who migrate at an earlier age are likely to have an easier time adopting to the host country, thereby helping them to feel more at home in the United States. It is also possible that the earlier age of migration is associated with their moving to the United States as a minor, which means that it is likely that their family brought them to the United States. If an individual's nuclear family is in the United States, then it is quite plausible that he or she would have no intention



of returning to Mexico. Immigrants who enter at a younger age are more likely to assimilate because they have spent their formative years in the United States. In addition, these individuals may also have weaker ties to their sending community due to the early migration. In sum, this allows us to confirm Hypothesis 1. As Mexican immigrants *cut* their ties to Mexico, they are more likely to want to remain in the United States.

Social networks

There are two variables that are statistically significant in the ‘social network’ category: *Church attendance* and working with someone from *Hometown*. Individuals who attended church services in the 30 days before participating in the survey were more likely to want to remain in the United States. Seventy-one per cent of individuals who attended church services want to remain, versus 48 per cent of those who do not attend church. Additional evidence that support this argument is that 70 per cent of individuals who attended a local *Cinco de Mayo* community event want to remain, versus 48 per cent of those who did not attend the local celebration. Finally, 77 per cent of individuals who attended a local Farmworker Appreciation Day event want to remain, versus 50 per cent of those who did not attend the event. What does this tell us?

This finding suggests that individuals who are becoming involved in local social networks are more likely than the unorganized and uninvolved to want to remain (Marcelli and Cornelius 2001, 122). From the perspective of social capital, this is a promising finding because those who want to remain are already more active in contributing to their local communities than the individuals who do not intend to remain permanently (Putnam 2000; Chávez *et al* 2006). Religious, culture and labor networks are therefore strong predictors of why Mexicans will want to remain in the United States. Mexican immigrants who want to remain permanently are building the very type of networks that Putnam argues are so vital to enhancing the quality of our democracy and civic life.

Hometown is the second statistically significant variable, and it is negatively signed. Thus, *not* working with an individual from the respondent’s hometown is statistically associated with the intent to remain permanently. One possible explanation is that individuals who *do not* work with anyone from their hometown are more likely to be ‘cutting ties’ with their sending community, thereby encouraging the growth of new social networks. Additional supporting evidence for this ‘cutting ties’ hypothesis is that 68 per cent of individuals who reported that they do *not* send remittances plan to remain in the United States permanently.

These findings suggest that MSFWs who intend to remain permanently in the United States are living in constructed and localized communities, rather than transplanted communities. By constructed communities, we refer to a process in



which immigrants develop new relations in the United States with native-born citizens, with naturalized US citizens, with US permanent residents (not just from Mexico but from other countries) and with undocumented individuals. By transplanted communities, we mean social networks and associations that largely mirror their sending communities. It is our view that the combination of factors that are associated with individuals' intentions to remain permanently (younger age of entry, church attendance, 'cutting ties' to hometown) suggest that the US's most recent immigrants are seeking ways to develop ties that will allow them to deepen their ties to their host communities. Overall, these findings confirm Hypothesis 2, 'planting roots.'

Trust

Finally, as *trust for Mexican Americans* increases, so too does the likelihood that individuals will want to remain. It has been argued elsewhere that MSFWs have exceedingly low levels of trust, far below other already low groups in the United States (for example, African-Americans and Latinos) (Chávez *et al* 2006). Our finding suggests that the desire to remain permanently is positively associated with increasing trust for Mexican Americans. This means that Mexican MSFWs who have more positive associations with the members of the community to which they are most similar, Mexican Americans, are more likely to want to remain permanently. Building on the social network findings discussed above, we would argue that undocumented MSFWs who want to remain in the United States develop the necessary networks that will allow them to prosper as individuals, as well as help them to contribute to building new communities. A clear policy implication for pro-immigrant advocacy groups is that they should support the formation of 'bridging' social capital, which would better link Mexicans and Mexican Americans.

Q7

Socioeconomic status

With regard to socioeconomic status, two variables, *gender* and *age*, are statistically significant. *Income* was not statistically significant. *Gender* was statistically significant, as women were more likely than men to indicate that they wanted to remain permanently in the United States. This confirms the finding of Kandel and Massey, who argue that Mexican women express a stronger interest in living in the United States than do Mexican men (Kandel and Massey 2002). Mexican men, according to Kandel and Massey, want to work in the United States, but do not necessary want to live in the United States. Among women respondents, 77 per cent indicated that they plan to remain in the United States permanently, versus 45 per cent of men. What might explain this tremendous gender gap?

Q8



Significantly, 30 per cent of men declared that they have no children, compared to just 10 per cent of women. It is therefore plausible that women are more likely to want to remain permanently in the United States because they have children. Our survey did not, unfortunately, include a question on whether the respondents' children live in the United States. However, we strongly suspect that women are living with their children in the United States because 95 per cent of the female respondents live in the United States full-time (versus 64 per cent of men) and 85 per cent of the female respondents had either never returned to Mexico or had not returned in more than 3 years. It seems quite likely that women are expressing an interest in staying in the United States because their children already live here.

Age is the second socioeconomic variable that is statistically significant. Older individuals are more likely to want to remain permanently in the United States. This is likely due to the presence of their families in the United States, a greater amount of time living in the United States, and the lack of economic opportunities in Mexico. The former two factors suggest that as individuals spend more time in the United States, they develop stronger and stronger roots, which leads them to want to remain in the United States.

We have no evidence based on our models that *income* is associated with wanting to stay. As noted above regarding gender, we expected that individuals with fewer opportunities (that is, females and those with less money) in their sending country are more likely to remain in the United States. We suspect that the limited range of income among individuals in our sample, 80 per cent of whom live in households earning less than \$25 000, simply did not provide sufficient variation for the comparisons demanded by a regression model. Our bivariate analysis shows that 70 per cent of survey respondents who live in households that earned more than \$10 000 plan to remain in the United States permanently, versus just 50 per cent of survey respondents who earn less than \$10 000, but once we control for other factors this relationship is no longer statistically meaningful.

The results among the first group analyzed, undocumented Mexican migrants, show that a combination of factors including gender, migratory behavior and social networks are associated with their interest in settling permanently in the United States. Undocumented Mexican immigrants living in the United States plan to remain permanently despite not having the proper legal documentation to do so. The implication of this finding is that policymakers in the United States must be attentive to the fact that the lack of legal documentation does not appear to be a deterrent to Mexican MSFWs as they are making plans to stay in the United States for the long haul. Building a more secure southern border to prevent the illegal passage of Mexicans and others into the United States will keep out a new generation of migrants, but it will induce Mexicans already living without legal documentation in the United States to develop strategies that will help them deepen their connections to the United States.



Mexican-born permanent residents and naturalized US citizens

We expect that the second group, individuals born in Mexico who have documents that afford them the right to live and work in the United States ('legal permanent residents' and naturalized US citizens), would hold attitudes substantially different from the positions held by individuals who are undocumented. After all, documented status provides a series of protections and access to rights that individuals can exercise in order to protect themselves and pursue their interests. Individuals lacking these rights are more likely to feel insecure about their short- and long-term futures. At the very least, we would expect that documented individuals in the United States should be much more likely to wish to remain in the United States permanently.

Surprisingly, there are only slightly different factors that help to explain respondents' attitudes in this second group in comparison to the first group. But what is most surprising is that the basic factors that best account for the attitudes of undocumented MSFWs also account for the attitudes of documented MSFWs. This suggests that societal factors outside of individuals' documented status have a far greater weight than their documented status. Theoretically, this suggests that social scientists need to de-emphasize institutional inducements to account for immigrants' attitudes, and focus on social, economic, cultural and political factors that might better explain why so many undocumented Mexicans are willing to remain in a country where they are increasingly treated as pariahs. *Age*, *Months living in the US*, *Entry age*, *Remittances* (negatively signed) and *Trust in Mexican Americans* are all statistically significant. The explanation for why these are statistically significant mirrors the arguments presented above. *Gender*, *Church Attendance*, *Hometown* and *Trust in Mexican Americans* are not statistically significant.

Remittances is the only factor that is statistically significant in this group that was not statistically significant in the undocumented group. Individuals who report that they do not send money back to their sending community were more likely to express an interest in remaining permanently in the United States. This suggests that documented Mexican migrants may be cutting their ties to Mexico, which leads them to see the United States as their long-term home. This finding provides additional support to the 'cutting ties' thesis, evidence that Mexican immigrants are making the necessary steps to position themselves as *New Americans* (Pachon and DeSipio 1994). The five variables that are statistically significant give the greatest support to the first hypothesis, 'cutting ties.'

In sum, the evidence shows that Mexicans who are legal permanent residents are cutting ties to their sending communities and planting roots in their newly adopted communities. Only 27 per cent of the legal permanent residents included in the survey have initiated the complex naturalization process, which means that they are planning to remain in a society in which they



currently have access to fewer political and social rights afforded to United States citizens.

All Mexican immigrants (documented and undocumented)

The third column shows the results from testing the model with the inclusion of all Mexican migrants included in the survey. In this third and final test of the model, we include a control variable, documented status, when we analyze all immigrants because roughly two-thirds of the survey respondents lack documentation to be in the United States. Although 492 individuals were Mexican migrants, just 381 cases are included in the results because of missing data. Survey administrators were trained to not press survey respondents to answer any questions that they did not wish to answer, which means that data were missing. What is most surprising is that the results from this group closely mirror the results from the first group, the undocumented MSFWs. Again, from an institutional perspective, these results are quite surprising. The implication is that documented or undocumented status has a limited statistical effect on whether individuals plan to remain permanently in the United States. Individuals' gender, age, migratory behavior and inclusion in social networks are far better explanations of long-term interests. This finding should serve as a wake-up call not only to academics, but also to policymakers, as they seek to devise public policies that will directly affect how immigrants are treated by the broader US polity. Mexican immigrants, regardless of their documented status, express an interest in remaining in the United States. This suggests that they are both disenchanted by the lack of social, political and economic opportunities in Mexico, and encouraged by their ability to secure better futures for themselves in the United States. Mexicans, short of a massive deportation coordinated by the US government, are in the United States to stay, which means that politicians, policymakers and bureaucrats should devise strategies that will incorporate, rather than exclude, immigrants from our society. The US government can shut down the flow of undocumented Mexican immigrants to the United States, but an even more complex and troublesome problem remains: The majority of undocumented Mexican immigrants plan on remaining even though they lack legal documentations to do so, which has long-term negative consequences for state and society because it weakens the capacity of the state to enforce its law, and relegates undocumented Mexican immigrants to third-class status.

Concluding Remarks

Mexican immigrants who plan to remain permanently in the United States are 'cutting ties' to their hometown as well as 'planting roots' in their host



communities. Institutional rules (for example IRCA) and economic opportunities have induced Mexicans to remain full-time in the United States, thereby contributing to undocumented Mexican immigrants' interest in remaining permanently. The most remarkable finding in our analysis of Mexican immigrants' attitudes and behavior is that their legal status does not explain their intent to remain permanently in the United States. Before our analysis of the survey results, we expected that immigrants with proper legal documentation to work and live in the United States would have expressed an interest in remaining in this country at much higher rates than undocumented immigrants. After all, it is far easier to navigate the complex work, housing and educational environments in the United States with proper legal documentation. We must also bear in mind that the most venomous attacks against immigrants have been aimed at low-skilled, undocumented Mexican immigrants, not exactly the kind of reception that one expects to be associated with a desire to remain permanently. And yet, our regression analysis shows that when we control for other factors, legal status association does not retain statistical importance. Why then do we not observe the expected findings? Why is it that three quarters of legal residents are planning to remain permanently and over half of undocumented Mexican migrants are planning to stay?

First, Mexican migrants are 'planting roots' in their newly adopted community. Their behavioral choices, such as attending community events, including 'Farmworker Appreciation Day' or church services, are leading them to see the United States as a place to remain permanently because it offers greater social and economic opportunities than they might otherwise have in Mexico. Second, Mexican migrants, both documented and undocumented, are 'cutting roots' to their sending communities in Mexico because tighter border enforcement induces them to remain in the United States. Thus, having a closed border has the effect of inducing undocumented Mexicans to remain in the United States for the short term, which then alters how they plan for the future.

Remaining in the United States permanently and developing US ties are key strategies used by Mexican migrants as they plan for their long-term futures. It is important to remember that migrating, and the attendant decision-making process, is a *familial* experience for many, not necessarily an individual experience. Thus, collective memory among migrants, documented and undocumented alike, likely recalls the positive effect of IRCA for many Mexicans who gained legal permanent residency. The hope that another type of amnesty will be provided for undocumented residents helps to explain why so many Mexicans are willing to stay in a political context in which they are subject to increasingly hostile attacks.

Mexicans living in the United States without formal documentation are unable to initiate the complicated naturalization process. They face long-term legal and social exclusions because their labor services are needed but there is an unwillingness to grant them basic legal protections. Among permanent



residents, the news is somewhat better, as 27 per cent declared that they had initiated the naturalization process. Permanent residents already have a greater range of legal rights than do undocumented immigrants, but they continue to have fewer legal rights than US citizens. Mexican MSFWs, both permanent residents and the undocumented, are developing new social networks in their receiving communities, suggesting that the long-term prospects of being able to overcome authoritarian enclaves are possible. By developing deeper ties, Mexican MSFWs have the potential to build new alliances within and across communities.

There is an important methodological implication of our findings: Research projects on immigrants and immigration that do not incorporate undocumented immigrants are incomplete and potentially misleading. Although it is difficult to conduct research on undocumented individuals living in the United States, it is vital that researchers expand their research agendas to incorporate this significant part of the US population. Given that there are nearly 12 million individuals living and working in the United States without legal documentation to do so, it is vital that researchers seek out individuals from these groups, especially when attempting to analyze the long-term consequences of migratory patterns. Our research suggests that many Mexicans living in the United States are no longer planning on returning to Mexico, which means that policymakers, community activists and citizens need to better comprehend how documented and undocumented low-income Mexicans will relate to social, political and economic environments in the United States.

There will be long-term negative consequences for immigrants and the broader society if millions of individuals remain in the United States in a perpetual state of legal and political limbo. The United States is constructing a political system in which legal permanent residents will be afforded with second-class citizenship status, whereas undocumented immigrants residing in the United States will have even fewer rights and should be considered third-class citizens. Although there are *de jure* restrictions on the presence and employment of Mexican migrants, there is an established *de facto* presence of Mexicans that will persist for the foreseeable future given demands for their labor as well as Mexican immigrants' clear interest in staying in the United States. In our surveyed population, over half of these 'third-class' citizens plan on remaining permanently, which means that there will be a long-term presence of individuals in authoritarian enclaves in which their interaction with state officials is minimal. The survey was carried out just as there was a renewed effort in the United States to control and police the undocumented population. Our findings suggest that the current policies that actively seek to forcibly return undocumented Latino Americans to their country of origin will have a limited large-scale effect because the vast majority of undocumented residents are planning on staying. Rather than inducing Mexican migrants to return to Mexico, the increased policing of this community will push individuals farther



away from public officials. These limited connections can have negative effects on public security, education and healthcare, as migrants shield themselves from public officials rather than being able to gain access to government policies that are designed to help and protect low-income individuals. The answer to this paper's title is clear: Mexican migrants plan to stay in the United States. The crucial issue is how the larger public and government officials will respond to the long-term presence of millions of undocumented residents who are not planning to return to their county of origin.

References

- Q12 Aguilera, M.B. 2004. Deciding where to Retire: Intended Retirement Location Choices of Formerly Undocumented Mexican Migrants. *Social Science Quarterly* 85(2): 340.
- Babbie, E. 2004. *The Practice of Social Research*, 5th edn. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Chávez, M., B. Wampler and R.E. Burkhart. 2006. Left Out: Trust and Social Capital among Migrant Seasonal Farmworkers. *Social Science Quarterly* 87(5): 1012–1029.
- Cleary, M. and S.C. Stokes. 2006. *Democracy and the Culture of Skepticism: Political Trust in Argentina and Mexico*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- De la Garza, R., L. DeSipio, F.C. Garcia, J.A. Garcia and A. Falcon. 1992. *Latino Voices: Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban Perspectives on American Politics*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Durand, J., D.S. Massey and R.M. Zenteno. 2001. Mexican Immigration to the United States: Continuities and Changes. *Latin American Research Review* 36: 107–127.
- Fraga, L.R. and G.M. Segura. 2006. Culture Clash? Contesting Notions of American Identity and the Effect of Latin American Immigration. *Perspective on Politics, Symposium: Immigration and National Identity* 4(2): 279–287.
- Garcia-Bedolla, L. 2005. *Fluid Borders*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Huntington, S.P. 2004. *Who Are We? The Challenge to America's National Identity*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Kandel, W. and Douglas Massey. 2002. The Culture of Mexican Migration: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis. *Social Forces* 80(3): 981–1004.
- King, G., R.O. Keohane and S. Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Marcelli, E.A. and W.A. Cornelius. 2001. The Changing Profile of Mexican Migrants to the United States: New Evidence from California and Mexico. *Latin American Research Review* 36(3): 105.
- Q13 Massey, D.S. and I.R. Akresh. 2006. Immigrant Intentions and Mobility in a Global Economy: The Attitudes and Behavior of Recently Arrived U.S. Immigrants. *Social Science Quarterly* 87(5).
- Massey, D.S., J. Durand and N.J. Malone. 2002. *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Michelson, M.R. 2003. The Corrosive Effect of Acculturation: How Mexican Americans Lose Political Trust. *Social Science Quarterly* 84(4): 918–933.



- Monsivais, G.I. 2004. *Hispanic Immigrant Identity: Political Allegiance vs. Cultural Preference*. New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing.
- O'Donnell, G. 1994. The State, Democratization and Some Conceptual Problems: A Latin American View with Glances at Some Post-Communist Countries. In *Democracy, Markets, and Structural Reform in Latin America*, eds. William C. Smith, Carlos H. Acuna and Eduardo A Gamarra. New Brunswick, CT.: Transaction Publishers.
- Pachon, H. and L. DeSipio. 1994. *New Americans by Choice: Political Perspectives of Latino Immigrants*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Putnam, R. 1993. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Putnam, R. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Shively, P. 1998. *The Craft of Political Research*, 4th edn. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Verba, Sydney, Kay Lehman Schlozman and Henry E. Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Volunteerism in American Politics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

UNCORRECTED PROOF