Latinos and U.S. Foreign Policy:

Representing the "Homeland"?

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Latinos and U.S.–Latin American Relations:

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Jorge I. Domínguez

This volume reaches two principal conclusions: first, U.S. Latinos are more concerned with domestic issues than with international problems; second, there exists extraordinary variety within the category "U.S. Latino." There is also considerable variation in the relationships between particular national communities and the U.S. government and the governments of their respective countries of origin as well as in the actions of the U.S. and respective Latin American governments concerning the U.S. Latino communities (see also Farkas and de la Garza et al. 1998).

In this chapter, I ponder possible explanations of the three kinds of variation discussed in this book and practical implications of those explanations. I argue that a structuralist explanation accounts for the relative importance of U.S. Latino communities in the public consciousness of their countries of origin. In other

words, the greater the economic and demographic significance of the diaspora, the greater is the diaspora's impact on the public consciousness of the country of origin. Only Guatemala and Guatemalans seem not to have acted in a manner consistent with this generalization. I also argue that there is no general explanation for the variation in the pattern of relationships between diasporas and Latin American governments, but there is a voluntarist explanation for the change in any one Latin American government's experience and practices over time in relation to its diaspora. Presidents can change these policies, but not much happens in the absence of presidential decision. Finally, I argue that both structural and symbolic factors explain why Cuban Americans are more effective than other U.S. Latinos in affecting U.S. policy toward their country of origin. Cuban Americans have considerable social class and organizational resources and a clear symbolic cause that can be addressed only through collective action. I conclude by assessing the opportunities and disadvantages that U.S. Latino communities present for the relations between the U.S. and various Latin American governments. I argue that such communities matter in various ways for several Latin American countries, especially Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador, among those in this study. These U.S. Latino communities play a very modest role in U.S. foreign policy but, consistent with the main findings in this study, they are likely to advance the goals of the U.S. government if and when they become involved in U.S. foreign policy.

Variation in Perceptual Significance

There is very considerable variation in public perceptions in the countries of origin about the importance and impact of specific U.S. Latino communities on these countries. At one end of the spectrum, the communities of Dominicans and Salvadorans in the United States are perceived in their countries of origin to matter greatly for the Dominican Republic and El Salvador, respectively. In these two countries, positive views of their diasporas tend to prevail; the Dominican and Salvadoran governments seek constructive relationships with their respective communities in the United States. At the other end of the spectrum, the communities of Colombians and Guatemalans seem to have a relatively low impact on public consciousness in their countries of origin. At the time of the study, governmental and nongovernmental institutions in these countries had no systematic procedures and policies to engage their diasporas in the United States. Mexico was in between. U.S. Mexican-origin peoples appear frequently in news coverage in Mexico, and the Mexican government has elaborate policies to reach out to its diaspora. On the other hand, there is low public consciousness in Mexico about the diaspora's significance and few public policies focused on the impact of the diaspora on Mexico itself.

There is a good structural explanation for this variation in perceptions: the greater the economic and demographic significance of the diaspora, the greater is the diaspora's impact on the public consciousness of the country of origin. Salvadorans and Dominicans in the United States remit very large sums of money to their countries of origin; these sums are economically significant. In the mid-1990s, Salvadoran and Dominican remittances were worth more than the value of all merchandise exports from El Salvador and the Dominican Republic. In contrast, Mexican and Colombian remittances were worth less than 5 percent of the value of merchandise exports from Mexico and Colombia. The worth of Guatemalan remittances in the mid-1990s had reached about 15 percent of the value of Guatemalan merchandise exports. The trends for remittances were noteworthy. Remittances from Dominicans and Guatemalans in the United States to their respective countries of origin had risen very rapidly from the late 1980s through the first half of the 1990s; the economic significance of these remittances for the economies of the Dominican Republic and Guatemala also increased substantially. Salvadoran remittances and their importance to El Salvador's economy were at a high plateau. Remittances from Mexicans were at a plateau, but the relative economic importance of these remittances had declined for Mexico, thanks to the rapid growth of Mexican exports. (Nonetheless, Mexican remittances in the 1990s were worth nearly $4 billion per year.) The value of remittances from Colombians, and their economic impact to Colombia, had fallen in the early 1990s compared to the late 1980s (de la Garza, Orozco, and Baraona 1997, 3, 6; Meyers 1998).

A related explanation focuses on the size of the diaspora in the United States relative to the population in the country of origin. As table 3.6 in the study makes clear, the Salvadoran diaspora was by far the largest according to this measure, followed by the Mexican and Dominican diasporas in that order, then Guatemala, and, last, Colombia. The relative demographic impact of the Salvadoran and Dominican communities for their countries of origin was also rising the fastest.

These two measures help explain the variation found in the study with regard to perceptions of the diasporas in the home countries. The Salvadoran and Dominican diasporas are demographically and economically significant for El Salvador and the Dominican Republic and are accurately perceived to be so in their home countries. Similarly, the Colombian diaspora was not so important, either demographically or economically. The Mexican case ranks at an intermediate point precisely because the indicators yield mixed results. The sums involved were large, but their economic significance for the Mexican economy declined in the 1990s. As Gustavo Mohar suggests in his chapter in this volume, social and demographic aspects may have mattered more. The Mexican government, and

many Mexicans, cared about its diaspora in the United States because it was so large and because it extended the social ties and meanings of the Mexican nation.

The Guatemalan case is a bit puzzling, however. The economic and demographic significance for Guatemala of its diaspora in the United States is lower than it is for El Salvador and the Dominican Republic. But it is appreciably higher than it is for Colombia. And the objective importance of the Guatemalan diaspora is growing faster than any other diaspora except the Dominican Republic's. Consider the contrast with Colombia, which the Guatemalan case most resembles at the perceptual level (though the Guatemalan diaspora is objectively more important to Guatemala than the Colombian diaspora is for Colombia). As Fernando Cepeda Ulloa notes in this volume, there are other good reasons in addition to those under analysis for the observations in this study regarding the Colombian case. And yet, Cepeda Ulloa documents a number of steps that the Colombian government has taken to reach out to its diaspora, including dual nationality and the right to vote in some national elections. The Colombian government has also created a Program for the Promotion of Colombian Communities Abroad. Similarly, the Guatemalan diaspora is more economically significant for Guatemala than the Mexican diaspora came to be for Mexico in the 1990s, yet there is simply no Guatemalan equivalent to the extensive Mexican government programs toward its diaspora to which Mohar alludes in his chapter. The Guatemalan government and the wider Guatemalan political system have done remarkably little to reach out to the Guatemalan diaspora.

In short, other factors must be at play to sever the connection between Guatemala and its diaspora. No doubt the duration and severity of the civil war, which ended only in 1996, is one such explanation. Perhaps Guatemalans across national boundaries will construct in the first decade of the twenty-first century the friendlier and more constructive relations that Salvadorans in El Salvador and the diaspora built after the conclusion of that country's civil war in 1992. As a practical matter, however, this is of importance for Guatemalans no matter where they may be, and for those who care about Guatemala's prospects.

Variation in Latin American Government Policies

There is also much variation in the policies pursued by various Latin American governments toward their respective diasporas. This variation was evident across countries and diasporas as well as across time. In table 10.1, I present an approximation of the attitudes that Latin American governments held toward their diasporas in the United States, and vice versa, around 1990. The governments of El Salvador and Guatemala were engaged in brutal and prolonged civil wars. These wars were the origin of the massive northward emigration from these countries. Many Salvadorans and Guatemalans sought refugee status or political asylum in the United States, and a great many considered themselves refugees, even if the U.S. government had not accorded them that legal status. Consequently, the Guatemalan and Salvadoran governments viewed the emigrants with suspicion or hostility. Thus both cases are categorized as negative/negative.

In contrast, the relationship between the Dominican Republic and the Dominican diaspora was already positive, although the Dominican government of President Joaquín Balaguer had not developed an active network of contacts. The Colombian case can be situated in the same cell. As the study shows, the very few actions of the Colombian government toward the diaspora were positive; the actions of groups in the Colombian diaspora were favorable to the Colombian government even if they were uncoordinated.

The Mexican case is in a category by itself. By 1990, the government of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari was already reaching out to the Mexican diaspora and, as this study notes, designing an elaborate new program to provide contacts with, and services to, the diaspora. The government of President Ernesto Zedillo continued and deepened these policies. Yet, as both the study and Mohar's comments indicate, the Mexican community in the United States remained suspicious of the Mexican government, though perhaps one long-term consequence of the new, proactive Mexican government policies may be to change how it is perceived within the diaspora.

Table 10.1 does not portray accurately the relationship between the government of El Salvador and its diaspora by the late 1990s. El Salvador had moved to the positive/positive cell. The Dominican government of President Leonel

Table 10.1: Governments and Diasporas: Attitudes toward Each Other circa 1990

	U.S. Latino group view of Latin American government	
Latin American government's view of its diaspora	Positive	Negative
Positive	Dominican Republic, Colombia	
Negative	Mexico	El Salvador, Guatemala

Table 10.2: Governments and Diasporas: Attitudes toward Each Other circa 2000

		U.S. Latino group view of Latin American government	
Latin American government's view of its diaspora		Positive	Negative
Positive	Interactive	Dominican Republic, El Salvador,	
	Weak Ties	Colombia	
Negative		Mexico	Guatemala

Fernández reached out quite consciously toward the diaspora, at least in part because Fernández himself lived for many years in New York City. table 10.2 classifies these relationships as the twenty-first century begins.

There are no persuasive general explanations for the cross-country variation. As already noted, civil war was one reason for the emigration of Salvadorans and Guatemalans, and one explanation for the strongly and mutually held negative attitudes between these diasporas and the governments of their countries of origin through the end of the 1980s. But Colombia had also suffered from extensive political violence for decades, and there had been two Communist insurgent movements active since the 1960s. Some Colombians emigrated to escape the violence. Yet, as Fernando Cepeda Ulloa notes in his chapter, most of these Colombians did not think of themselves as refugees escaping their government, even if many may have had a low opinion of various Colombian governments. As both the study and Cepeda Ulloa make clear, the positive and mutally held feelings among Colombia, its government, and its diaspora, despite a very low level of interaction, are puzzling. They even include positive feelings toward Colombians convicted of crimes and held in U.S. jails. The fact of a brutal civil war cannot explain, therefore, why Colombians express relatively positive feelings while Salvadorans and Guatemalans did not. Similarly, the end of the civil war explains why reconciliation has occurred among Salvadorans. But the Colombian civil war has not ended, yet positive feelings remain. And Salvadorans moved toward reconciliation and intense interactions much more quickly and effectively than did Guatemalans after the end of the civil war in Guatemala, suggesting again that factors beyond civil war tear at Guatemala's social fabric.

Around 1990, there were also no clear explanations for the difference in government policies toward the diasporas. The Mexican government had turned toward positive attitudes and policies as a result of a presidential decision. In the Dominican and Colombian cases, however, there was no comparably strong and decisive presidential leadership; although relations with the diaspora were positive, the governments of both of these countries had done relatively little to nurture them. Ten years later, presidential leadership had become an important explanation for the pattern of government actions. Presidents Salinas and Zedillo in Mexico and President Fernández in the Dominican Republic clearly turned their governments toward a policy of amity and cooperation. The lack of change in Guatemala, and the continuing low-intensity ties in Colombia, may be explained in part as the lack of clear presidential direction.

In El Salvador, more dramatically, President Alfredo Cristiani's policies of peacemaking in the civil war helped establish greater rapport with the diaspora. As the chapter on Salvadoran government policies indicates, his successor, President Armando Calderón Sol, made it his policy to support Salvadorans who resided in the United States, even if their entry had been illegal. In May 1997, Salvadoran President Calderón Sol personally spoke to President Clinton about the adverse effects of the 1996 immigration law on Salvadorans living in the United States. President Calderón Sol created a multiparty presidential commission to visit the United States to lobby on behalf of these Salvadorans, and he visited the United States to the same end. Moreover, the Calderón Sol government's economic strategies consulted with Salvadoran diaspora business executives during the planning process in an extraordinary level of professional engagement.

In short, there is a voluntarist explanation for intertemporal change: presidents act to turn around policies toward the diaspora. The results wherever this has occurred have been positive for both the countries of origin and the diasporas. Such relations contribute to family reunification, the extension of the bonds of meaning and solidarity of a national community, reconciliation in once deeply divided societies, the provision of some protection and social services, and the transference of remittances. In the absence of presidential initiative, little happened even if attitudes could still be positive. It would be eminently pragmatic for many governments to undertake similar policies, therefore, to reach a similar win-win outcome.

One final observation with regard to the actions of Latin American governments is in order. As this study shows, all the governments, even Guatemala's, have improved outreach to their diasporas from their consulates in major U.S. cities. El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, and Mexico have done the most. Yet the pattern of effectiveness of these consulates varies greatly (see table 3.11). The principal explanation for that variation seems to be the personality

of the consul, underlining yet again the hypothesis that individuals in government may matter greatly in efforts to change the policies of Latin American governments toward their diasporas.

Variation in Shaping U.S. Foreign Policy

As the chapter by Hakim and Rosales makes clear, only one U.S. Latino community has had a significant impact on U.S. foreign policy, namely, the Cuban American community. This community is led, to a significant degree, by professionals, business executives, and other elites with the organizational and financial resources necessary to mount and conduct impressive political activity to shape U.S. policy toward Cuba. There is, however, one additional factor that facilitates collective action among Cuban Americans. There is a cause, a common goal, inherent in the realm of foreign policy: the overthrow of President Fidel Castro's government.

In contrast, the only comparably common issue within the foreign policy realm among other U.S. Latinos is immigration. Immigration is the one issue with important foreign policy content that is addressed by the Hispanic Caucus in the U.S. Congress, as Hakim and Rosales indicate. Yet, most immigration issues of direct pertinence to U.S. Latinos are highly individualized: How will this policy affect my friends, my family, or me? The immigration issue thus lacks the bonding or cohesive features of a joint struggle for *liberation* or the defense of the homeland, the kind of struggle that welds together in the United States the immigrant communities from Israel, Ireland, Armenia, Poland, or Lithuania. Moreover, as this study indicates, Latinos are interested in immigration perhaps because it is a foreign policy issue with high *domestic* content, and U.S. Latinos are, above all, interested in such issues.

Thus the difference between the Cubans and the other U.S. Latino groups can be explained in terms of both structural and symbolic factors. The first is the set of social class and organizational resources that make it possible for Cuban Americans to be politically active and effective in the United States; the second is the existence of a clear enemy that can be combated only through collective action. In practical terms, there are already many Mexican American professionals and business executives, but they lack a unifying foreign policy cause and are unlikely to find it. The future trajectory of other U.S. Latino groups is more likely to resemble that of Mexican Americans than of Cuban Americans.

Lobbying the U.S. government is only one possible relationship between U.S. Latinos and the U.S. government, however. There are other ways to think about the relationship between U.S. Latinos and U.S. foreign policy: What are the opportunities and disadvantages that U.S. Latino communities present for the relations between the U.S. and various Latin American governments?

Opportunities and Disadvantages: U.S. Latinos, Latin American Governments, and U.S. Foreign Policy

U.S. Latino communities give some Latin American countries a significant stake in their relations with the United States, namely, remittances. This is of great importance to the Dominican Republic and El Salvador, of rising though unacknowledged importance to Guatemala, and of importance for its absolute size though not for its relative economic weight to Mexico. Large U.S. Latino communities also create important symbolic, societal, and affective ties between some Latin American countries and a growing segment of society in the United States. This is especially the case for Mexico, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic.

A large stake in a diaspora, moreover, could help construct bridges across the ideological and partisan divides in the countries of origin in order to *defend our people* in the United States and to continue to benefit from the bonds that exist. Mention was made of multipartisan collaboration in El Salvador to protect Salvadoran migrants from U.S. immigration law. Mexicans and Dominicans, too, reach across partisan lines to express concern for their diasporas. Even the Colombian Congress and the 1991 Constituent Assembly reached out to the Colombian diaspora. Political parties will compete for support within the diaspora, as the principal parties in all of these countries except Guatemala already do, but the defense of the diaspora and its individual members can and has become an opportunity for within-country collaboration. In El Salvador, the defense of its diaspora may have served as one of the bridges that span the great schism at the core of that country's bloody civil war.

There are hurdles, however, on the path of a Latin American government that, emulating Israel, seeks to make greater use of its diaspora in the United States. Such a country would need strong governmental and nongovernmental institutions to construct, nurture, and use new relationships, and it would need a large number of high-quality professionals to staff this work. The Dominican Republic, as Ambassador Bernardo Vega laments in his chapter, still lacks enough of both. But, as he also points out, it would be a legitimate practical goal for the Dominican Republic to seek this objective. Pending such a change, the U.S. government will not *fear* the policy of a Dominican government toward its diaspora because it will expect failure.

Suppose, however, that there are stronger institutions and greater professionalism. Ambassador Vega suggests that the Dominican Republic might emulate Mexico. Despite many problems, Mexico has stronger institutions staffed by able professionals. The stakes for Mexico are very high. There are millions of Mexican-origin people in the United States. There is a contentious relationship

with the United States over migration. There is a long physical boundary crossed lawfully hundreds of millions of times every year. There is a logical extension of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to include not just the movement of goods and services but also the movement of peoples, as is the case in the European Union, with its one common passport. And the Mexican government already has in place a proactive and far-reaching policy toward its diaspora. The sum of these policies can advance Mexican objectives. It could also create intense friction with the United States. For example, Mexican policies to recognize the *dual nationality* of certain individuals could exacerbate political conflicts with, and within, the United States. Dual nationality is not a novelty; many European countries have had such policies for a long time. But Mexico is a physical neighbor of the United States, there are many Mexican-origin people already in the United States, and they tend to concentrate in the southwestern United States near Mexico.

None of these issues would necessarily cause conflict with the foreign policy of the United States. The United States should welcome the construction of means for strengthening democratic bonds, which these Latin American policies may foster in some Latin American countries. U.S. immigration law is based in part on family reunification, and this is one of the aims of Latin American policies. The United States has a long tradition of international business investment and international charitable activities, and this is one aspect of the transnational economic relations of these migrants. Dual nationality has not detracted from the loyalty through the ages of millions of European Americans to the United States, nor has it caused unmanageable or unusual societal, economic, or political problems.

On the other hand, these transnational ties that connect recent immigrants to their countries of origin may foster a greater volume of migrants than U.S. policy is likely to countenance, and it is likely to foster the practice of illegal migration. There is, consequently, appropriate U.S. concern over some Latin American policies and U.S. Latino practices, but the line between U.S. gains and losses is difficult to trace. Thus there is some uncertainty concerning whether the actions of Latin American governments toward their diasporas would be to the advantage of the U.S. government as well.

There should be no doubt, however, that greater involvement by U.S. Latinos with U.S. foreign policy would serve the interests of the United States well. (This is also the key point in the chapter in this volume by Acting Assistant Secretary of State Peter Romero.) In those few instances when U.S. Latinos have acted in the foreign policy realm, they have characteristically advanced U.S. foreign policy goals. Moreover, the views of U.S. Latinos in foreign policy also correspond closely to U.S. foreign policy priorities.

"We are largely populated by immigrants who turned their backs on the societies from which they came," a German-accented former U.S. secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, has said (Kissinger 1999). This study documents that U.S. Latinos are "like most Americans." At some point, they typically turned their backs on their countries of origin. Mexicans, Cubans, and most Central American migrants to the United States certainly have, and these account overwhelmingly for the Latin American–origin immigrant population in the United States.

The reconciliation between Salvadorans within El Salvador and between the Salvadoran diaspora and the Salvadoran government was a good thing. It was also a public policy objective of the United States in the 1990s: Salvadorans did both what they wanted to do and what the U.S. government wanted them to do. There is likely to be a similar convergence at some point in the future of Cuba.

At times, U.S. Latinos have advanced goals that coincide with those of the government of their country of origin. This is most notable in the case of some Mexican American groups who supported NAFTA's ratification. And yet, while the Mexican government did mobilize Mexican Americans, so too did the U.S. government. Support for NAFTA's ratification among Mexican American nongovernmental organizations was clearly and closely consistent with the policy preferences of the White House. Even Cuban American lobbying against the Castro government resembles the main features of U.S. policy toward Cuba.

The most noteworthy fact about U.S. Latino lobbying of the U.S. government concerning U.S. policy toward their countries of origin is its rarity, however. In 1997, Samuel Huntington wrote about his concern regarding the erosion of a notion of "American national interests" to guide the foreign policy of the United States. One reason for such possible erosion, he noted, was the capture of chunks of U.S. foreign policy by nationally defined ethnic communities that seek to shape and control U.S. policy toward their countries of origin. In the numerous examples Huntington cites, only the Cubans among the U.S. Latinos appear to behave in this way (Huntington 1997). Whether the problem to which Huntington points should be a cause for concern remains to be determined, but if it is, U.S. Latinos are not at the root of the problem.

The principal foreign policy goals espoused by U.S. Latinos are to strengthen democracy in Latin American countries and promote international trade and investment. These are also the goals of the U.S. government toward Latin America as the millennium begins. Were U.S. Latinos to act to implement these goals, as this study notes, they would be lobbying the U.S. "like other Americans" in pursuit of legitimate goals within the United States and in advocating that the government of the United States act on its principles and in pursuit of its objectives.

Notes

1. Data from de la Garza, Orozco, and Baraona (1997), 3, 6; Meyers (1998).

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