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Los Ángeles en procesos electorales mexicanos

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# Transnational Political Participation of Hometown Associations from Los Angeles in Mexican Electoral Processes

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## **Dedication**

**To my wife...**

**Who followed me in this adventure without  
hesitating; who has been a motivator and a  
confidant when I needed it the most; who has  
never stopped believing in me.**



## **Introduction**

This investigative work focuses on the study of hometown associations and how over the last 20 years they have gained influence within and outside of the Mexican territory, specifically during election periods. Hometown associations, particularly federations conformed by migrant clubs representing localities from a specific state or region, are becoming a political force in American and Mexican politics to a degree that they have attracted the attention of the Mexican government and, more particularly, the election management body to a point where the inclusion in the upcoming elections has become a priority.

The thesis focuses on studying the activities managed by Los Angeles based federations representing migrant associations from 11 states from across Mexico. The analysis is based on interviews with current members who are or at some point occupied the presidency of their respective group. The dissertation is supported by a foundation of specialized literature in the subject of transnational political participation of Mexican citizens living in the United States, emphasizing the relation weaved by the Mexican diaspora and its government. Although writings pertaining to democracy advancement are central to upkeep the dissertation, literature on electoral reform, governance and accountability also give it sustenance.

From an empirical point of view, the dissertation uses primary sources of information in the form interviews as well as secondary data based on academic articles, specialized reports, book

publications and statistical material from legitimate and verifiable sources. First-hand information collected through interviews conducted in Los Angeles, with migrant organizations is reinforced by the specialized data revised with anticipation.

Considering the quantitative aspect of the proposal, information from the Institute for Mexicans Abroad (IME) database of hometown associations (HTAs) as well as from the COFEM migrant federations' database was used to look for evidence of the existence of hometown clubs and similar associations, in particular, migrant federations representing particular Mexican states and regions.

Another source of quantitative information consulted was the National Electoral Institute's (INE) databases storing literature on the results of the presidential elections 2006 and 2012. The INE provides statistical data screening the amount of participation, voting results, which were submitted from beyond the national boundaries, particularly the United States, and more specifically from the Los Angeles County in California.

For this assignment, a mixed methodology approach that required the formulation of interview instruments helped gather data from the HTAs. This task required the use of first-hand information collected through interviews and questionnaires elaborated for the sole purpose of analyzing the electoral involvement of the hometown associations. The data gathered reinforces the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the research. A questionnaire consisting of 28 questions was the guide leading this dissertation. The inquiries are explored and explained in

chapter three, and the main findings on Mexican migrant political involvement in Mexican electoral processes are presented in chapter four. The initial idea was to inquire about federal elections, but because Mexico's electoral management body conducts and executes internal elections on a yearly basis, it is pertinent to consider what are the implications for the migrant associations, for the aspiring gubernatorial candidates and their respective parties.

The dissertation is divided into four chapters. The first illustrates the theoretical foundations. The main goal of the chapter is to set the epistemological groundwork to understand why the participation of Mexican migrants in electoral matters within the national territory is gaining importance in both sides of the US-Mexico border. Transnational political participation in other parts of the world is a common democratic practice that has only become an option of political involvement in Mexico over the last decade. The experience of voting in presidential elections has grown from being a cross-border activity available only to those with the capability of entering Mexico during electoral Sunday into a feat available to those residing well beyond the territorial limits of the border towns.

Chapter two is an overview of the formal relation between the migrant diaspora and the Mexican authorities, exploring how there have been shifts in the way each group has participated in the evolution of Mexican laws in order to include the Mexican migrant community in Mexican politics without having to be physically in the territory. The goal of this chapter is to portray the fieldwork that took place from both sides of the spectrum that signifies the approval of migrant-friendly laws and programs, as well as the approach of the political

parties and their representatives with migrant organizations going from a general perspective to a more specific look on the Los Angeles based HTA.

Chapter three provides a detailed description of the qualitative apparatuses used to obtain first-hand information from the federations' leaders aiming to understand the context of their involvement in Los Angeles based activism as well as cross-border activities of the political type. The attainment of information on the hometown associations went through three processes of data collection, face-to-face interviews, electronic based questionnaires, and also through long-distance interviews executed over the telephone. The majority of the associations considered for the study form part of a larger organism called the Council of Mexican Federations (COFEM) situated in Los Angeles, a coalition that has been working to unite the Mexican community from around the southern California area since the early 2000s. However, not being a member of the COFEM was not a limitation that prohibited the participation in the study.

Chapter four focuses on the analysis of the transnational political activity headed by the hometown associations in Los Angeles, specifically the leadership figures. In other words, this section centers on the results coming from the interviews, considering the HTAs' ability to respond and collaborate with the Mexican government and vice versa.



## **Chapter I. Understanding and Explaining State-Diaspora Relations from the Transnational Perspective**

This chapter has the objective of clarifying and discussing the most indispensable choices and decisions in the dissertation. The second part of the section gazes at the State of the Art in the study of transnationalism, how migrant hometown associations are linked and have politically influenced the development of democratic growth in Mexico through the electoral dimension.

The Mexican electoral reforms of 1996 opened the path for dual nationality to those who no longer resided within geographical limitations of the United States of Mexico. This meant openness for Mexicans living abroad who considered adopting a second nationality, mainly applying to those who lived in the United States.<sup>1</sup> However, it was until 2005, after debating a new set of electoral reforms that voting in presidential elections was extended to those living abroad. The political activism generated by a strong diaspora swayed the Federal government to consider the migrant population as more than a provider of remittances. With this victory came a new paradigm of the State and diaspora relations in which political parties, candidates and institutions could extend their zone of influence and adherence without violating the

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<sup>1</sup> One of the main reasons keeping many Mexicans living in the US from taking the step towards the American naturalization process was the fear of losing rights granted by the Mexican Constitution such as the right to own land within the national territory. Although it is not the predominating motive, the fear of failing to secure the *ejidatario* rights was persuasion enough for many in the 90s to stay loyal to Mexico and not the US.

federally established electoral legislation. The result was an alliance molded between the money providing migrants and the national government.

A great number of Mexicans in the US gather in organized units, through the establishment of clubs, federations and pan-organizations, carrying out tasks in conjunction with the Mexican government at an institutional level. Local and state administrations on the Mexican side of the border utilize this link with the associations to breed development projects in communities of origin lacking attention and funds from federal, state, or municipal authorities that cannot fully provide them. The installation of *mirror clubs*<sup>2</sup> looks to ensure that the transnational task is accounted for, on the one hand, while on the other it allows local politicians and their parties to negotiate the construction of future projects as long as a window of cooperation stays open.<sup>3</sup> There is very little contact between the political figures and the diaspora in non-electoral periods. The panorama changes in pre-electoral periods when Mexican candidates and party representatives seek business meetings and public reunions with the associations in order to strengthen their position and popularity.

Therefore, this thesis focuses on the role played by Mexican migrant associations during the pre-electoral epoch. The work is set to analyze the political engagement headed by the HTA.

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<sup>2</sup> These refer to a representation office in the place of origin. The main role of a mirror club is to insure the development of projects being advanced with money provided by the migrant association abroad. The majority of these are headed by family members that remain in Mexico (Marcos Mendez, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> The Mexican political system is one in which decision making is rooted to the needs of political parties and not those of the population. That is why negotiations between HTA and Mexican authorities suffer from credibility.

Through social media publications and journalistic notes, meetings between Mexican candidates and groups of Mexicans in Chicago and other US cities with high diaspora registration have been documented (Ayon, 2005). However, for this work, I concentrate on the facts that take place in the City of Los Angeles between HTA and election officials and party representatives. Much of the work focuses and has as a launch pad the approval of the vote for Mexicans living abroad. The migratory phenomenon and the abroad vote are considered important factors in the study of transnational migration, however, will not be analyzed in depth. What is important to point out is the fact that before considering as migrants the millions of Mexican nationals living abroad, they are Mexican citizens. This is an important fact that requires recognition, given that we are dealing with a question of citizen identification and representation and not attacking the migratory phenomenon.

Also, there are subnational electoral processes in Mexico in between presidential elections, resulting from a lack of synchronization between the federal and local and state elections in many parts of the country.<sup>4</sup> For that reason, the interest of this dissertation shall focus on the pre-campaign as well as the electoral preparation and participation that took place for the presidential elections of 2012 taking into considerations recounts of the 2006 presidential process of the same nature and pointing out the occurrences surrounding the different migrant organizations during the subnational campaigns and midterm elections.

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<sup>4</sup> In 2016, Mexico will have 12 gubernatorial elections, of which only three, Zacatecas, Aguascalientes and Oaxaca, allow out of state voters.

In the case of target groups, the investigative work focuses on hometown associations located in the Los Angeles County. These are federations that garner at least a total of eight hometown associations and that have had a foot in at least one of the previous two Mexican presidential elections. Much of the information gathered on the federations is discussed in the following chapters.

### **Theoretical Considerations of Transnationalism, Political Participation and the Mexican Diaspora**

Over the last thirty years, the establishment and nurturing of relations between national governments and their diasporas brought forward a new subject to the study of international relations, political systems and political participation. In the case of Mexico, as of 2006<sup>5</sup>, Mexican citizens are by law eligible to take part in the presidential elections as well as in local proceedings. In several countries, Colombia, Peru and the United States, to mention a few, absentee voting has been an ordinary democratic practice over the years. Nevertheless, in Mexico, the exercise of extraterritorial suffrage is a transnational process that is still being sorted

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<sup>5</sup> This was the result of work conducted by Mexican transnationals on both sides of the United States-Mexico border. Dating back to the 1990s, Mexican-Americans along with the Mexican government had been working on binational strategies looking to include the diaspora into the national arena. A reason for the insertion was to maintain the flow of remittances active. Nevertheless, the activities are now oriented in preserving not only the financial ties but also the cultural, social and political links between both sides alive. Therefore, the transnational practices of *Chicanos* and Mexican authorities are still evolving.

and its regulation is being adjusted it to fulfill the needs of the voters, institutions and the political parties.<sup>6</sup>

The Mexican constitutional reforms of 1996, establishing the concept of dual nationality, along with the approval of absentee voting in 2005, have opened Mexico to a new model of presidential elections. It became important for candidates to not only promote their image and plan of action within the national boundaries, but now had to find a way to reach those who live abroad. On the other hand, hometown associations and other migrant organizations took advantage of the openness of the Mexican government looking to lobby and negotiate migrant friendly policies. Considering the previous, the theoretical aspect of transnationalism rests on the identification of several key concepts, ideas and models, particularly exemplifying the perception, study and interpretation of the concept. From the identification of this notion, through the analysis of what has been written recently, this section focuses on examining transnationalism and its link to identity, networking and citizenship, dire to the political participation of Mexicans living in the U.S. Consequently, the following unit aims to present

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<sup>6</sup> The absentee vote has been applied in only two elections, 2006 and 2012, but the participation of Mexican nationals that live outside of the country's geographical limitations is a practice that extends back to the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Mexican government had a reserved political attitude towards its population north of the Rio Grande since before the annexation of that area in the mid-1800s. It was until the 1980s that the Mexican government began to modify its political approach towards the Diaspora. This meant opening new Consulates and Embassies, and expanding the consular services according to the needs. One of the reasons for this shift in mentality was the fact that in the eighties, there was a new group of leadership flourishing; technocrats were taking important posts in the federal government. These were highly educated, Ivy League graduates and professionals who foresaw that a way to enter the US was through the aid of its immigrants.

contemporary approaches that explore the study of transnational political participation and what it means to have political ties to more than one country. Therefore, the objective of this chapter is to exhibit the recent findings in the study of transnationalism, emphasizing on State-diaspora relation between Mexican migrant organizations and the institutions established by the Mexican regime looking to show how these intertwine and relate with one another.

The government of Mexico has seen an increase in activity with its nationals living abroad. Lately, the civil and migrant associations have served as a channel of communication between the migrant population and the institutions in charge of catering to their needs. Their participation can be questioned from an allegiance perspective; nevertheless, their desire to integrate into the American way of life is persistent while maintaining their adherence to the home country remains unbroken (Gonzalez Gutierrez, 2003; Tsianos, Hess, & Karakayali, 2009). Several questions will be discussed looking to explore the transnational relation of Mexico and its diaspora for instance, what are the main tendencies of transnationalism; where is the development of transnational citizenship heading; what are the focal findings in the field of transnational political participation; what does transnational political participation represent in the development of migrant networks and the democratic progress of a Nation-State; and what course is being pursued by the Mexican government in relation to their migrant community.

## **What is Transnationalism?**

Transnationalism is the area of study that has very recently generated substantive interest within the scientific community and a growing interest of transnational migration especially. Waldinger & Fitzgerald (2004) state “social scientists are looking for new ways to think about the connections between *here* and *there*” hence, its study within the social sciences has developed several branches of revision for this complicated subject. They go on to explicate that migration “produces a plethora of connections spanning home and host societies” (2004: 1177) considering a socio-economic-political manner. The interaction between Mexicans living in the United States and the national authorities has evolved to the point that official representation administrative centers have sprung up in the last couple of years making the possibility of being present simultaneously in several places a reality.

It results erroneous to believe that the Mexican government does not have an interest in keeping contact with its emigrants. A mode of keeping them connected with their native land is to give them an identity, a mean of ideological belonging. This was accomplished with the approval of political reforms in the 90s and 2000s that handed them back the right to elect the president of the United States of Mexico. Now they could be politically active in the host country as well as the in the sending. Anyone can take part politically, voting being the most common political practice. Political participation, and more precisely electoral affairs (Ekman & Amnå, 2012), are a customary practice in any democratic system, allowing the citizen to have their voice heard, approving or disapproving a candidate, propositions, postures or political party with the knowledge that their opinion will be accounted for and that he or she is doing so

free of coercion. It is a prerogative constituted and protected by law. However, when the elections are held outside of your hometown, or country, the situation becomes turbid. At the same time, political parties get their electoral machinery ready to begin mobilizing their sympathizers and dishing out their campaigns in order to attract the nonmembers as well as the non-affiliated. Without emphasizing colors, stance or candidates, the singularity of the campaign crew is to obtain the highest number of votes as possible.

### **Transnationalism and its Reaches**

Thomas Faist (2004), Manuel Orozco (2003, 2005), Peter Smith and Luis Guarnizo (1998), Nina Glick Schiller (2005, 2010, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 1997, 2005), Steven Vertovec (1999, 2003, 2004) are among the leading specialists who have paved the way for transnational studies. It is a road that dates back to the 90s, when globalization was the hot topic and every study was directed through the global economic spectrum, including migration studies (Sassen, 2003; Waldinger, 2013). Nevertheless, there were a few who went beyond the notion of unidirectional migration, not expecting to solve the issue at hand with studies questioning what lead people to leave their place of origin and venture off into the unknown in search of an improved way of life

unreachable back home.<sup>7</sup> This meant unleashing empirical investigations of the exporting country, migratory routes, of the networks used to help those following the footsteps of the ones who first ventured, the integration and assimilation processes, entering a new environment and initiating relations with those of similar and differentiated cultural backgrounds, on the one hand; and once settled in their recently acquired residence, what it meant to assimilate, to adapt and adopt a new culture, way of life, and customs without letting go of the autochthonous roots, on the other.

Before transnational studies, migration studies dealt with cross-border exchange, state memberships and the transformation of institutions focusing on migrant practices and agency (Faist, Pitkänen, Gerdes, & Reisenauer, 2010). Since the migration boom of the 1990s, transnational studies pointed out that due to new communication and travel opportunities, migrants maintain cross-border relations and ties to a higher extent than in the past (Faist, Pitk, Jurgen, & Reisenauer, 2010). In the last three decades, however, the research field of transnationalism has emphasized changes and dynamics in human mobility and the gap left between migrant social realities.

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<sup>7</sup> Even when social science began to examine transnational processes, the legacy of this bounded theory that approached culture as a discrete, stable, and historically specific local system of meanings continued to impede historical analysis. The founders of cultural studies, who worked within the Geertzian tradition of cultures as discrete webs of signification spoke as if transnational processes were novel and transgressive, occurring in response to dramatic changes in communication technology and global capitalism. they framed the outcome of transnational processes, which implicitly defined a previous stage of cultural production unblemished by diffusion.

Transnational studies deal with the unidirectional approach to migration (Bauböck, 2002; Vertovec, 2003; Wan Shun & Warriner, 2012). The condition of migration processes has shifted towards transnationalism from below emphasizing a perspective where the immigrated looks to acquire a role in the exporting nation-state. This new route is transforming the space in which migration studies are analyzed. The focus is no longer concentrated in the place of destination nor does it solely concentrate on the place of origin of the diasporas; nor does it center on a single migrant habit, custom or tradition. Faist (2004) theorizes that although most transnational studies have focused on migrant practices, there is still much work to be developed on the institutional role. This depends on a structural involvement of both sides and requires an expansion in consular activity from the Mexican government and a degree of reaching out for assistance by the diaspora.

What Faist sees is a growing panorama in which transnationalism has surpassed the nationalistic perspective of stubborn borders and ideologies towards a model that perceives past them and demands a realist perception in which immigration studies go beyond the study of networks, South-North or East-West displacements and financial-based relations. Transnationalism then looks to focus on transnational social spaces, transnational social fields and transnational social formations, networks and organizations across the borders, ranging from low to highly institutionalized forms (Bauböck & Faist, 2010; Faist, 2004). Michael Smith and Luis Guarnizo (1998) deliberate transnationalism from below and from above analyzing the necessity to include in the discussion the new role of the nation-state and citizenship which can be

complemented with the question of whether or not there exists the need to highlight the existence of political boundaries and legal limitations (Faist et al., 2010; Fouron & Glick Schiller, 2010; Vertovec, 1999).

In *Globalization and the Human Consequences* (1998), Zygmunt Bauman makes a theoretical, yet descriptive analysis of the progress of modernity through international economic relations and how these developments affect and transform societies. The main transformation takes place within the sovereign State. What we see is a shift in telecommunications, finances, human and product mobility, local and international politics and more important, a deterioration of the confines that are nation-states and the formation of transnational relations.<sup>8</sup> This breach in communication opportunities facilitates a cross-border relation and ties to a higher extent than in earlier times.

Keohane and Nye (1971) expose transnational relations as "...contacts, coalitions and interactions across state boundaries that are not controlled by the central organs of foreign policy of governments in which at least one actor is not an agent of a government." Put into the Mexican Diaspora context, this relationship refers to the actions, decisions and coalitions that take place within the sphere of influence, between the Federal and subnational governments and the federations of Mexican clubs scattered across the Los Angeles County with the objective of

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<sup>8</sup> See Canel, 2001; Gamlen, 2006; Jin, 2008; Newland, 2010; Norris, 2002; Orozco, Dialogue, & Lapointe, 2003.

prompting a change at an institutional level as well as providing altruistic assistance to the communities of origin, stepping in where the Mexican government has not been able to react.

Just as Keohane and Nye suggest, Smith and Guarnizo, in *Transnationalism from Below* (2004), delineate trans local relations as established inside geographically and historically precise plugs of origin and migration time-honored by trans migrants. Such relations are vigorous, changeable and dialectical, in that they produce a triadic linking associating trans migrants, the areas to which they transfer, and their locality of origin (M. P. Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). The region of immigration offers an explicit framework of prospects and restraints (e.g., labor market conditions, popular and official perceptions of the migrant group, the presence or absence of other co-nationals) into which migrants enter. Settling in becomes the top priority for the migrant.

Several groups search for the comfort that comes from neighboring those with similar backgrounds and history and once established the immigrant individually seeks for others with whom to relate, be it through sharing the place of origin, a particular affinity towards a sporting, social or cultural activity that keeps them attached to the country or community left behind. At first glance, this represents a step towards networking building process. Today, it is a common practice to have migration, mobility and the social groups they produce on the research agenda of social scientists around the globe. From the other end of the spectrum, the change being produced is in part the result of the gaps that are being bridged by continuous advances in communication and transportation technologies that are releasing people from the

geographical and temporal constraints, permeating the simplification of interaction across borders.

A few years back, it was unthinkable for a person reading an article on financial disturbances in Nepal to establish contact with the writer in real time, via email, telephone, online video call, text messaging or through the social media networks and attain more information on the subject without having to wait until the next publication. The same applies for a farmworker in Orange County who can be in contact with family and friends in Mexico without ever leaving the country. Nowadays, this same type of networking can be applied and given a cause; political involvement within Mexico but doing so from the United States.

This idea of transnationalism, derived from the connections built by migrants with the home country extends, as Orozco acknowledges it, to four common practices within every Diaspora; money transfers via remittances to the family, demand of services, charitable donations and capital investment (2005). The transnational flow of money has been a key factor to the reorganization of the world's political economy. It is safe to say that complex networks connect shoppers and buyers are also connecting the homeland with the new place of residence. A grocery store situated inside the popular marketplace "El Mercadito" located in East Los Angeles adopts the notion of home away from home and takes away the natural, and political, land barriers in order to bring the Mexican and Latino population in the community a sense of being back to where they left. Nevertheless, this transnational experience does not signify in any way that the first generation migrants, and their descendants, are disrespectful of the American way

of life, but rather it depicts the possibility of being able to find a little piece of Mexico inside American soil.

There are several transactions taking place in the previous scenario that are an example of the relationship between transnationalism and development given that it reflects a combination of economic, political and social initiatives and motivations of the interplay between micro and macro relations. Transnationalism can be defined not as a "level" of action or analysis, but as actors, actions, and interactions that *cross* over levels and/or boundaries, highlighting the transgressive nature of transnationalism (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). The activities being managed by hometown associations and regional federations engulf the idea of transnationalism as Adriana Ortega Ramirez (2015) suggests by involving an international effort of national multilevel players, federal, state and municipal governments, diplomatic workers and the heads of the associations. There is a recurring struggle by the actors to establish a link between those who left the country and the institutions who desire to maintain a relationship through the opening of representation offices, sister cities programs and mirror clubs to guarantee a transparent accountability between the actors, to name a few.

Following that line of thought, Peggy Levitt (2004) contends that only ten percent of the immigrants residing on American soil partake in economic and / or political activities on a regular basis. As a counter reply, Orozco (2005) asserts that at least 60 percent of migrants sent remittances on a regular basis, and also buys home country goods. The current anatomy of the global political economy is reorganizing the production between world regions and such an

event produces massive flows of migration within them. The complexity of transnational economic development requires a wide range of actors and institutions in order to devise strategies at the long term. Such task may involve the integration of new players and a shift in realities, governance, according to the requirements over time. As of 2014, according to information from the World Bank (WorldBank, 2015), Mexicans living abroad represent the fourth largest contributors of remittances worldwide, behind, India, China and the Philippines, beating out Nigeria, accounting for 25 billion dollars. A great part of the investment Mexican nationals living abroad is destined towards the construction sector. It is through programs promoted by the Secretariat of Social Development (known as SEDESOL, its acronym in Spanish), that migrant associations conjoin with Mexican authorities in an effort to horizontalize the power relation and work in joint development projects, mainly through the 3x1 and 1x1 Programs for Migrants.

Kahgram and Levitt (2007) state "the terms 'transnational' or 'transnationalism' or 'transnationality' are partly misnomers, in that the only thing we are interested in are dynamics across or beyond nations, states, or within the nation-state system." Khagram and Levitt propose an optic that begins with a world without borders. They empirically examine the boundaries and borders that emerge at particular historical moments, and explore their relationship to unbounded arenas and processes in a borderless world, that empirically examines borders and boundaries from a particular historical moment, and explores the existing link between them and unbounded processes and habitats. A key component of a transnational

approach, however, is to interrogate the territorial breadth and scope of any social phenomenon without prior assumptions.

This adaptation goes along the same path as the previous concepts of Levitt and Orozco. Transnationalism and transnational activities entail an interdependent relationship between migrants, their networks, and official governmental institutions that requires the penetration of national cultures by global and local forces. From an anthropological perspective, "...the trappings of globalization – world markets, mass media, rapid travel, modern communication [...] have had the effect of greatly increasing cultural diversity because of the ways in which they are interpreted and the ways they acquire new meanings in local reception" (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). This type of transnationalism or globalization from above portrays an interventionism by transnational capital, global media, and emergent supranational political institutions in which the main activities are handled by nation-states. Contrary to this perception of transnationalism, they go on to state transnationalism from below faces the decentering local resistance of the informal economy, ethnic nationalism and grassroots activism. The core of transnational studies from below takes a path onto the point of view of the other actors, referring to subnational and non-state players and their role within the transborder arena. Transnationalism from below seeks to conduct an analysis in which non-state actors acquire greater role in the development of the State apparatus. The involvement of migrant associations in activities such as political lobbying, electoral promotion and demands of citizens' rights are examples transnationalism from below actions (Fox, 2005; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998).

Radcliffe, Laurie and Andolina (2002) work the subject of transnational indigenous relations. Their paper *Indigenous people and political transnationalism: globalization from below meets globalization from above?* presents three elements that are adaptable to the transmigrant debate as well:

First, it involves diverse levels simultaneously - it's not just at the supranational level... {And must} consider the crossing of scales (body, local, national, regional, international) as constitutive of transnationalism...In other words transnationalism is as much about discontinuous space as relational space. Second, the state is not "hollowed out" in this process, with ethnic groups and neo-liberal agendas reducing the remit and significance of the state. The state provides a ground of meaning-creation, institutions and political cultures through which transnational relations are constituted. It contributes to the establishment/reproduction of transnational connections by facilitating flows of funds, ideas and the award of resources to indigenous actors ... Third, political transnationalism represents the entanglements of diverse ethnic, class and geographically dispersed institutionalized and politicized social actors, and the policy and political frameworks through which to address these needs (Radcliffe et al., 2002).

In other words, transnationalism generates conditions conducive to the creation of new hybrid practices and spaces that can be interpreted as opposition and resistance of the hegemonic logic. These practices are multi-faceted and trans local. Such methods are spotted as confrontational of the social equilibrium but should be seen as alternative methods of

assimilation by those who do not know comprehend the dual frame of reference. That is, the intricacies and the tensions between these different paths of integration become evident in Suarez Orozco and Suarez Orozco's (2001) comparison of recent Mexican immigrants with U.S.-born Mexican Americans (second generation) in Transformations. According to Suarez Orozco and Suarez Orozco, first-generation immigrants often possess a "dual frame of reference," an alignment of their previous life before migration to their current life. Such a frame of reference enables recent Mexican immigrants to feel that their life in the United States is markedly better than the life they left behind. Children of immigrants, not having access to a dual frame of reference, do not see their current status as one of being "better off"; rather, they see themselves as the marginalized group compared to the dominant culture.

### **Assimilation Dynamics and its Alternatives**

Being an immigrant, part of the influx of citizens from another nation-state, meant an accommodation struggle. Living abroad, far from friends and family lead to the establishment of new forms of relations and social activities that allowed a long distance connection that surpassed the geographical and political boundaries determined by governments. It also meant the initiation measure of identity modification, looking to be inserted into the social spectrum of the American way of life. In this exercise, Mexican trans migrants sustain social networks and other hometown organizations that facilitate the binational social processes. They are a seen as

a new breed of citizens, abiding by the American institutions of citizenship but also demanding that their Mexican rights be respected and applied as well (Bada, 2003, 2004; Escamilla Hamm, 2009; Portes, Escobar, & Walton, 2006). Many of the trans migrants have adapted to their new home, but refuse to leave behind their heritage and culture. This is not a denial of the role new role acquired once inserted in the new social space but rather look to remain active in more than one.

Smith and Guarnizo (2004) cite Shapiro in saying that,

The "self" is envisaged as "fragmented and in contention as it is dispersed over a variety of dominant and peripheral discursive practices rather than existing as a homogeneous, centered steering mechanism... In this way various "social spaces" like trans-local migrant networks, transnational working arrangements, and globalized neo-liberal ideology, can be viewed as affecting the formation of character, identity, and acting subjects at the same time that identity can be seen as fluctuating and contingent, as the contexts through which people move in time-space change and are appropriated and/or resisted by acting subjects.

Transmigrants attempt to activate a mechanism of inscription of group identities as an effort to evoke a vanished sense of belonging forged from below (Crang, Dwyer, & Jackson, 2003; Vertovec, 2003). This is an attempt to retake their political role once again but not in a methodological nationalistic manner (Camroux, 2008; Cohen, 1999; Wimmer & Glick Schiller,

2003). Domestic boundaries are being constantly traversed by progressions of communication and exchange that do not comprise actual biological movement, such as financial growth, Internet, and other telecommunications. Far from removing the local identifications and meaning schemes, transnationalism depends on them to endure transnational ties. The reproduction of transnational ties is sensitive to contextual circumstances<sup>9</sup> (Fouon & Glick Schiller, 2010; Glick Schiller, 2010b).

This reproduction of cross-border realities poses a challenge to the individual. It entails a questioning of how the individual sees him or herself and raises the query of citizenship as an identifier and as an institution. The first involves a nationalistic manner but this does not mean that it demands a pledge of allegiance from the being. The latter is where the path of transnational studies is heading; it is no longer acceptable to comprehend the term of citizenship only as a national matter but rather it must be questioned and studied. Transmigration and representation are two matters that were treated separately given that there was no relation in the past. However, the rise in political participation by trans migrants brings to the table the debate on what is a citizen and what citizenship represents.

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<sup>9</sup> This gives root to the exploration of how parents and children have to cope with the assimilation process when the roles change and the children are handed the responsibility of not just interpreting for their parents who lack the language skills to express themselves fully. This interaction also generates a dependence that leaves the parents in a vulnerable stage of inutility and gives the children the responsibility to express their opinions and demands without being in a position to reject the task (*Transformations: Immigration, Family Life, and Achievement Motivation among Latino Adolescents*, Carola Suárez-Orozco and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995).

Thomas Faist et al. (2010) explore the conceptualization of transnational transformations of citizenship. They affirm that migrant transnational practices, which in different ways, challenge and change the well-established institution of national citizenship. Cross-border realities pose fundamental challenges to traditional citizenship because it is based essentially on the assumption of a congruence of continuous residence in a given territory, a shared collective identity and participation in and subjection to a common jurisdiction.

These challenges have led to the establishment of citizenship beyond the nation-state. In fact, they call citizenship a *meta-institution* "based on a host of other institutions relating to the whole process of representative democracy, effective governance and definitions and enforcement of individual basic rights, such as political parties, congress, governments, courts and other administrative bodies" (Op. cit, 2010, p. 28).

### **Hometown Associations**

An unrecognized, not to say unofficial, institution that has caught the attention of the Mexican authorities in recent years has been the migrant association. For several years, civic associations have been recognized as an essential element of democracy (Putnam, 1993). Hometown Associations (HTAs) are groups representing the community of a particular town, township or state with welfare purposes for the community established within the United States. Zabin and

Escala Rabadan (2003) argue that the extent to which migrants establish civic organizations or decide to join existing ones are undertaken around specific themes or topics or host country. Migrant associations as an object of study remain an issue that is immersed in a cloud of fog due to the ambiguity caused by their classification within the migratory typology. A detailed examination of the subject leads to the analysis of how to classify these clusters. In their formative beginnings, they are informal groups formed by migrant civic purposes seeking to maintain ties with a specific community, and revive old attachments and arrange informal ties.

Hometown Associations, however, are not just a Mexican phenomenon. Most Latin American immigrants are organized in HTAs with the purpose to help their communities. Salvadoran HTAs, for example, have grown in numbers since the 1990s; in Washington, DC, Salvadorans from eastern El Salvador are organized in more than twenty groups to raise money for assistance in areas like San Miguel province (Somerville, Durana, & Terrazas, 2008). The *Comunidad Unida de Chinameca* created in 1991 is a typical Salvadoran HTA that began its activities in the city of Chinameca by constructing the school's water tower and 12 restrooms (Orozco, 2005). From there they went on to construct a laundry facility and recreational park for the town, and painted and attached a roof on the local church. The *Comunidad* raises approximately \$30,000 dollars annually, mainly through fundraising events. After the 2001 earthquake in El Salvador, the *Comunidad* received donations of construction material from the French Embassy to build a wall for the Red Cross, and the town participated by donating labor (Vertovec, 2004).

The issue of migrant organizations is performed as an alternative to empirical studies whose unit of analysis is the migrant; however, some authors state organizations and organizational networks as the center of the definitions of transnationalism. Jorba and Morales in Bauböck & Faist's *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods* (2010) state organizations are transnational actors that shape access to capital and bonding patterns that allow understanding the transnational practices of individuals with greater clarity. Through the formation of these groups, migrants can maintain a sense of community as they adjust to life in America. The authors induce the idea that HTAs are a subset of transnational migrant organizations, motivated to take advantage of rising remittances and financial need in their home countries as a means of preserving cultural ties and improve their communities the country of origin (Jorba & Morales, 2010).

In practical terms, Orozco and Rouse (2007) conducted a chart review of the activities of hometown associations, their relationship to exporting community, the type of investment through public donations and familiar works. It proposes the concept of diaspora and migrant defined as "socio-political formations, created as a result of forced or voluntary migration, whose members are of the same ethno-national origin and who permanently reside as minorities in one or more countries" (2007). According to the above, we have a first look at the migrant transnationalism.

Years before, Orozco and Lapointe (2003) analyzed the hometown association and its relation to rural development in Mexico. They assess the nature of the organization and capacity

building of migrant associations and investigate their inter-organizational linkages and collaboration capabilities, durability and impact on the development of long-term Mexico. The highlight of this study lies on the premise that migrants are no longer perceived as a backstage, unseen and unheard actors and stepped towards becoming economic, social, cultural and most importantly political transnational actors.

Orozco indicates that migrant clubs play an important role in the transformation of the diaspora's political culture as well as the local politics of the areas where they operate. The organizations have pressured governments to meet the highest standards of transparency and accountability by making specific demands as well as setting timelines on the projects they finance. The groups have urged governments to develop clear budgets and deadlines for the implementation of projects, and have continued with the insistent requests that money be accounted for fully. A way to monitor the expenditure and development of the ventures is through the creation of mirror clubs which are ran by ex-migrants and family members of those still living in the U.S. Their role goes beyond the barriers of civic activism and have transcended into the political arena.

These hometown associations are an example of the relationship that exists between transnationalism and development. The relationship, nevertheless, is complex as it reflects a combination of cultural, economic, political and social initiatives and motivations. A key element for the development of HTAs is to strengthen the connections between migrants and their home communities, which transforms the points of origin and points of reference of a collective

identity of people from the same region (Alarcon, 2002; Orozco & Garcia-Zanello, 2009; Orozco & Lapointe, 2004). Rivera, Bada and Escala-Rabadan (2006) argue that the "*paisano* connection" becomes essential in the social organization of migrants. These ties to the land of origin, rather than disappear or weaken, become stronger with distance and create a sense of "trans local" membership (Khagram & Levitt, 2007). In this context, working together in the United States as an organized group allows migrants to promote and consolidate a sense of shared cultural identity. Migrant associations are a formal expression of these networks linking.

These HTAs began as social networks that organized sporting events or celebration for a patron saint of a specific village (Lopez, Escala Rabadan, & Hinojosa-Ojeda, 2001). However, these associations, aside from sharing an identity and the desire to maintain links with the community of origin, are constantly involved in political decision-making of communities in Mexico, through different mechanisms, ranging from the participation of its community leaders in development projects to promoting political campaigns, both in their communities and at different levels of government, as well as acting as advocates of the vote among the members and supporters during election time (Escala Rabadan et al., 2006; Escamilla Hamm, 2009; Zabin & Escala Rabadan, 1998).

Through the HTAs, migrants have the option to transfer money and resources to their communities of origin through the mechanism of collective remittances (Bada & Mendoza, 2013). They also represent channels through which trans migrants can make a difference in their country of origin (Orozco & Garcia-Zanello, 2009). However, HTAs often encounter obstacles

given their structural limitations. To overcome these operational barriers, associations join forces with local groups in the communities of origin to implement their projects. The formation of these associations appears to facilitate the effectiveness and continuity, through a delegation of responsibilities. Institutionalization can identify and provide access to certain communities (Delano, 2006; Gonzalez Gutierrez, 2006a).

In general, the work of the HTAs is directed to the most vulnerable populations, including sometimes overlapping development (Orozco & Rouse, 2007). This is evidenced by the work of the Federation of Zacatecas in California in the late nineties. Having arranged the 3x1 Program, development projects promoted by local, state and the federal governments to encourage philanthropic investment of migrants, and after a close campaign by the government of Zacatecas, the natives of this state began to press by vote from abroad (Zabin & Escala Rabadan, 1998).

Since then, one of the most important achievements of these forms of association in Mexico is its role in creating public policy initiatives and this is an activity that does not give due credit to groups of migrants. In fact, according to some theories of citizenship and civic participation, explain Escala Rabadan, Bada and Rivera Salgado (2006), these associations tend to shy away from formal politics precisely because they are only looking to fill social gaps caused by inefficient governments and politicians.

Somerville, Durana and Terrazas (2008) affirm policy makers are unable to identify what are hometown associations and also suggest that lawmakers are more interested in taking advantage of the migrant economic benefits, translated into remittances and return of highly trained personnel. Moreover, host countries of these organizations see the formation of these gatherings as a sign of insularity in immigrant communities and are concerned that such structures act as an obstacle to full assimilation of its members. In addition, Somerville, Durana and Terrazas perform an extensive descriptive study to narrate the formation of these groups dating back to the eighties and land on how the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs (SRE), with the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME) and the SEDESOL, has tracked them.

HTAs facilitate projects that would otherwise be impossible for the receiving communities to implement. Therefore, politicians have acquired a taste for visiting migrant communities in the U.S. in order to foster funds for upcoming development projects. This is especially vital when electoral processes are at hand. The weight HTAs and their members gain during this period is greater than in non-electoral epochs. This has two repercussions within the migrant networks, first, they become more political and politically active, and second, candidates are more willing to recognize their need for the migrant vote and their economic support. The political participation from migrant associations expands beyond the economic showground and extends into the electoral field.

## Political Participation and its Extensions

Ekman and Amnå's "Political participation and civic engagement: Towards a new typology", published in *Human Affairs*, Volume 22, Issue 3, July 2012 taking on Brady's description of political participation propose that, as seen from the political science perspective, it delineates "citizens' engagement in politics as conventionally focused on electoral participation" suggesting that "voting was perceived as the primary way for a citizen to make his or her voice heard in the political system", making voter turnout the most commonly used measure of citizen participation (Ekman & Amnå, 2012).

Political participation should be seen as the activities aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and the actions they take. In other words, it focuses on participation in decision-making (Ekman & Amnå, 2012; Norris, 2002; Theiss-Morse & Hibbing, 2005; Verba, Nie, & Jae-On, 1978). This conceptualization of citizen participation excludes the protests, riots, murder and public violence and it focuses on particular acts thus excludes citizens acting in their professional, government officials, political parties and pressure groups professional roles. It also involves civic activities such as ceremonial and supportive actions in which citizens partake expressing support for the government, for instance marching in parades or participating in ceremonial events (Adamson, 2009; Delfino & Zubieta, 2010; Warren, 2009).

Political participation can be seen as a practical activity and reflexive of reproduction and transformation of the social movements that go beyond the electoral arena. These movements

constitute a key force of the social change as well as umbrella organizations for citizen participation in countries with different levels of development and political cultures (Jakobson & Kalev, 2011). Along with the reduction of the state's role and the failure of political parties as intermediaries for citizen demands, it has energized the civil society in the promotion of their rights and interests through new subjects such as social movements and organizations. We must see political participation and citizen participation as an objective and subjective human activity of transforming the social reality and strengthening of a collective subject. That is, political participation is a practice performed on a specific dimension of social life: the political field. It is a human activity where there is a dialectical unity between the subjective aspect or political awareness, and target practice or policy aspect, that is a necessary interplay between collective subject constitution and socio-political transformation (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003).

Unlike any concept of the social sciences, the interpretation of political participation is an indefinite thing. There are good reasons to adopt the concept from a perspective that covers the ratings, nominations and popular representation. Verba, Nie and Jae-On (Verba et al., 1978) speak of political participation by referring to the legal activities of citizens aimed at making decisions and carrying them out. Seeing political activity from this perspective excludes other activities that fall under the classification of political participation. In fact, the classic definition of Verba et al. is amid controversy because from a political and academic perspective, the concept of ethnicity, focusing on the needs of groups in general, has shattered the public, and consequently, political participation as defined above.

## **Final Considerations**

The notion of politics seems to have undergone a conceptual change; a concept focused around the ballot and the act of voting for something more complex to the exclusive definition omitting vital elements of today's political participation. The involvement of hometown associations in the localities is a reality that allows them to have a presence in their place of residence and their place of origin without having to make travel arrangements. What began as a mode of helping the community and those who have remained afoot, has transformed and acquired importance and influence that surpasses the political territorial limitations and ensures that the Mexican population living abroad are spoken for and represented.

This view has not always adequately explained the underlying political processes of these groups. The literature relevant to the subject is based on assumptions as a constant struggle between the State and civil society, just equating HTAs with the latter and not examining the ambiguous boundaries, transfiguration, and the entanglements between the two spheres. Furthermore, transnationalism studies pick up where migration studies have mistreated the key issue in collective action for migrants, mainly how or under what circumstances the agendas of these actors emerge.



## **Chapter II. The Path towards Political Participation of Mexican Hometown Associations in Mexican Electoral Matters**

The history of Mexico's relation with its diaspora is one based on economic intentions first and engagement policies second. Remittances have always been the top reason pushing the federal government's link to those who left their places of origin in search of higher wages and superior living conditions. The development of diaspora engagement policies is a political exercise that has only been gaining strength in the last 20 years. Constitutional changes from within, and political activism from the outside, have pushed for societies of cooperation between the institutions and those who wish to be included in the political game from abroad.

The relation between the government and the Mexican diaspora has had several setbacks. The seventies saw the rise of a nationalist period on both sides of the US and Mexico border. The eighties brought forth an engagement between the two sides that was based on how well the Mexican economy was doing. The nineties were a decade of actions, seeing the rise in the creation of migrant associations and government engagement policies. The new millennium meant was the pinnacle in migrant activism and lobbying, accompanied by the birth of institutions dedicated totally to the needs of Mexicans living abroad. This movement finally saw a breakthrough in its political participation when Congress officially accepted to include postal vote as an option for those reside outside of the national territory.

This chapter will analyze the evolution of the Mexican policy engagement towards its diaspora seen from two perspectives, the official historic standpoint and that of the migrant advocates. The first takes a look at the foreign policy and interior decisions made by the Mexican presidents of the last four decades that lead to the inclusion of Mexicans living abroad as an exercise of diaspora engagement. From the opposite angle, there is a historic struggle that depends on two factors, the Mexican government's commitment and the political steadfastness of the migrant organizations and advocates.

## **Migrant Recognition and Representation**

The notion of outsiders as a result of the sentiment and evidence demonstrating that until less than twenty years ago, the inference of the migrant population was almost unknown and uncounted for in Mexican politics. These outsiders have proven through several exercises not only in Los Angeles, but also in Chicago that the electoral and political actuality in Mexico is important to those who dwell abroad.

## **First Attempts at Diaspora-Government Relations**

The Mexican migrant phenomenon is one of the cycles. It slowly moves according to the people in power and the circumstances of its relationship with the United States. Official protection of Mexican diaspora has had several episodes dating back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Under the administration of President Luis Echeverria, the relation with the migrant population living in the U.S. was marked by stints of commitment in defending workers' rights and embraced their organization exertions. This manner of activity did not last as the Mexican government was worrisome about the reaction in the U.S. regarding these actions. For that motive, the Mexican government turned towards a "policy of no policy" (Cano & Delano, 2004; Shapira, 1978).

In the long run, this form of action represented an indifferent posture by the Mexican government in dealing with the migratory flow to the U.S. and support for the Chicano movement. Cano and Delano (2004) express the main issue in which Echeverria concentrated the government's efforts regarding the Mexican origin population in the United States was the support of the Chicano movement given its convenience to show Mexico's benevolent face across the globe. They go on to add that the regime could "display potent historic symbols that incidentally reflected the PRI's nationalist traditions and its political aims" (Cano & Delano, 2004).

During the presidency of Jose Lopez Portillo, the transnational scene did not promote any major activities. However, on the internal front, in 1977 an electoral political reform, designed by the Secretary of the Interior, Jesus Reyes Heróles, expressed in the Ley Federal de Organizaciones

Políticas y Procesos Electorales (Crespo, 2004). The main advances in this reform were the institutionalization of the existing political currents as political parties, the restructuring of the popular representation organs and the functioning of a multi-party political system. This law established the beginning of a political system in which the elections would see the official party compete with other political forces that at the time could not take part of the elections.

This law was released in the elections of 1979, when for the first time in history citizens of Mexico had nine political options for which to vote, they were the existing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), Partido Accion Nacional (PAN), Partido Popular Socialista (PPS), Partido Autentico de la Revolucion Mexicana (PARM), Partido Mexicano del Trabajo, the Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (PST), Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT), Partido Democrata de Mexico (PDM) as well as the Partido Comunista de Mexico (PCM) (Woldenberg, Becerra, & Gomez, 2004c). Based on this law and these elections, several opposition parties would for the first time have representatives in the Chamber of Deputies.

From the U.S. side, the Chicano movement looked for recognition of its rights as American citizens, taking cover under several social movements based on the principles of cultural nationalism, indigenism and the Mexican revolution, similarities shared with the PRI regime. It is no surprise that these social movements would give birth to approximately 22 of the main 40

non-governmental pro-Mexican migrant associations<sup>10</sup> in the neighboring country (Delano, 2006).

## **Economic Turmoil and Democratic Consolidation**

In the 1980s, President Miguel de la Madrid would hold meetings with the Chicano movement leaders because he sought a closer connection with the business people of Mexican heritage through the Proyecto de Acercamiento del Gobierno y el Pueblo de Mexico con la Comunidad Mexico-Norteamericana (Cano & Delano, 2004). This project would be set aside given the economic crisis that hit the country in 1982 and the presidential administration of Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988). The presidency of de la Madrid would be plagued by the financial problems of Mexico. Looking to ease the economic tension in the country, his team opted for an economic policy that consisted of reducing the public expenditure, generating tension with the economic sector of northern Mexico.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Among the most important and significant for the Chicano cause are Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), National Council of La Raza (NCLR) and the Centro de Accion Social Autonoma (CASA).

<sup>11</sup> Partido Accion Nacional took advantage of the situation and allied with the economic front looking to knock the PRI from local and state posts in the midterm elections of 1985, with their sight set on the 1988 presidential election.

In the U.S., the eighties represented a time of population growth for those of Mexican descent. In 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) legalized close to two million Mexicans. This reform, along with the high fertility rates and the growth of migratory networks between Mexico and the United States triggered an increase in the Chicano population of 13.4 million living in the host country (Cano & Delano, 2004; Seara Vazquez, 2004).

Back in Mexico, a new electoral reform, in 1986, gave birth to the Federal Electoral Code replacing the Federal Law of Political Organizations and Electoral Processes, approved in 1977. This new rulebook retook many aspects from the previous and was applied in the federal elections of 1988 (Woldenberg, Becerra, & Gomez, 2004a; Woldenberg et al., 2004c). This new law augmented the total number of federal deputies from 400 to 500 and the number of proportional representation from 100 to 200. It also established the Tribunal for Electoral Disputes created to resolve complaints in electoral matters.

Also, demands for democratization of the party begun to emerge within the PRI, demanding for an open and democratic designation of their presidential candidate as well as changes in the direction of government and the economic policy to defend the project of revolutionary nationalism, opposing the application of neoliberal measures. The party did not budge and out of this process the Democratic Current of the PRI, led by Cuauhtemoc Cardenas and Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, among others, was born (Woldenberg et al., 2004a). After failing to see their demands met, maintaining a nationalistic posture and avoiding the incursion of technocrats into

the political scene, this group broke with the party and openly expressed their interest in participating in the electoral contest of 1988.

For the first time since its foundation in the 1930s, the range of support the opposition was receiving abroad threatened the PRI. Raul Ross Pineda (2006) writes that the internal conflicts of the PRI allowed the opposition, mainly Cuauhtemoc Cardenas's group to advance in the polls. He adds that the "elections became more competitive and government control over them weakened, giving rise to an electoral system that progressively created more equitable conditions for all the parties" (Ross Pineda, 2006).

The presidential campaigns of 1988 acquired an international touch of interest. The mobilization of migrant associations was in favor of the Frente Democratico Nacional's election campaign and against the PRI candidate Carlos Salinas de Gortari. Delano and Cano (2004) utter "for the first time, Mexican parties, mainly the ruling PRI and the leftist PRD, competed for the loyalty of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the United States". It was the first time that migrants were being considered as assets of the electoral process, as citizens of Mexico. This renewed interest in the migrant community made the relationship with the Mexican government more dynamic. Throughout the seventies and eighties, their link was merely by means of consular activities. However, as a consequence of the electoral phenomena of '88, the ties with the Chicano community of first, second and upper generations, were strengthened through the informal organizational and business initiatives given that the government's transnational activism set the stage for the development of a more comprehensive response to migration issues in the 1990s.

Ross Pineda (2006) adds that with the approaching of the '88 elections, Mexicans living abroad began to press for the right to vote in Mexican elections. These activities were scattered across the U.S. and went unnoticed in Mexico, but the demand began to take on strength among the Mexican migrant population. The migrant organized clubs and especially the opposition candidates considering their economic importance at the time politicized state federations. Remittances had a significant importance for the national economy, fact that determined the attention destined towards their senders as a priority for engagement policies of the upcoming administration.

Kathryn Stoner and Michael McFaul (2013) write that the result was manipulated to favor the PRI candidate; yet, this statement is impossible to prove. It is the belief of the majority of the Mexican population on both sides of the border but in the end of the day. The votes were tallied and Carlos Salinas de Gortari came out on top. The end of this electoral proceeding portrayed the outgoing PRI government as the main manipulator of the system and the newly appointed Salinas de Gortari without an ounce of legitimacy (Crespo, 2004). Electoral irregularities and post-election protests, tinged with violence, were the keynote of the Miguel de la Madrid and Carlos Salinas de Gortari's governments.

## **Diaspora Engagement Policies at the Turn of the Century**

The government of Salinas de Gortari was characterized by applying a policy of "*concertaciones*" (Meyer, 1997; Woldenberg et al., 2004a) consisting of yielding to Accion Nacional municipalities and governorships where the PRI was recognized as triumphant by the electoral management body in Congress and then, to avoid post-electoral problems, those wins were turned over to the PAN candidate, despite the dissatisfaction of the PRI<sup>12</sup> (Crespo, 2004; Meyer, 1997). This was the result of an alliance between the Salinas government and the PAN in view of favoring or voting and approving all initiatives that the federal government sent to the Legislature. PRI did not hold the majority of the Lower House needed to approve its bills in an express matter and an alliance with the PAN was required in order to obtain 2/3 of the House votes. It also resulted in a partnership agreement between Salinas and PAN on the implementation of the neoliberal model in Mexico at the end of the eighties.

From 1988-1989 Mexico was a new country politically in many ways. While the country continued to be ruled by the PRI as the majority party, a more competitive opposition represented by both the PAN and by the newly formed Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD), came out. For the first time since PRI came to power, during the presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari they came to the governorship of certain states were not governed by PRI, as was the case in Baja California, taken by PAN under Ernesto Ruffo Appel, Francisco Barrio Terrazas in Chihuahua and Carlos Medina Plascencia as interim governor of Guanajuato. This

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<sup>12</sup> There were certain cases where the opposition appeared to have won but after the final vote tally, it was given to the PRI candidates (see Woldenberg's *México: Historia de la democracia*, 2004).

relation between the PRI and PAN was baptized as the “holy alliance” based on the only factor of agreement, facing off against the PRD (Crespo, 2004). Meanwhile Mexico City and the state of Michoacan were under the influence of the PRD.

During the Salinas administration, consular activity was at the top of the list of priorities. From the other side of the border, the main concern was getting the government to institutionalize the migrant movement. To this demand, came the creation of the Programa de las Comunidades Mexicanas en el Exterior (PCME), Programa Paisano, the Oficinas Estatales de Atencion a Migrantes (OFAMS) and the Grupos Beta de Proteccion a Migrantes. These programs were cared under the Ministries of Foreign Relations (SRE) and of the Interior (SEGOB) (Cano & Delano, 2004; Delano, 2006; Gonzalez Gutierrez, 2003). The idea came from the fact that the government wanted to promote business ties between Mexicans from both sides of the border. The OFAMS were the first instance of assistance and communication between the immigrants and the PRI government. Gonzalez Gutierrez adds that the PCME was,

The government’s response to the growing influence of the Mexican community abroad in the issues related to Mexico, the expansion of non-governmental actors in both sides of the border, the need to strengthen protection of Mexicans through ties with the organized community, and to the demand of Mexican American organizations, to have an office within the Mexican government that would be dedicated exclusively to the attention of the Mexican community and

provide official channels for communication between them (Gonzalez Gutierrez, 2006b).

The PCME's main objective was to engage all levels of government with the Mexican community abroad and promote development projects inside and out of Mexico, as well as the creation of hometown associations and similar migrant organizations (Figueroa-Aramoni, 1999). It was also meant to endorse seek financial and political support for the Mexican government without crossing into the violation of sovereignty of the United States. A diplomatic technique utilized by the Mexican government who did not wish to damage the US-Mexican relations was maintaining these programs vividly in the hands of immigrant associations and as informal as possible within the host country.

The Salinas administration looked towards the promotion of its image in the U.S. considering that it was in the midst of a State reform that was looking to transform the economic and political sectors. It consisted on two features, deepening the neoliberal policies through social liberalism that developed the economic strategy of modernization and privatization by selling state enterprises to private initiative, and a series of political reforms that would lead the country towards democratic modernization (Woldenberg, Becerra, & Gomez, 2004e). The relationship between Mexico and the United States changed much to make this a more dynamic and interdependent relationship. It meant maintaining a healthy, distant and passive cooperative connection while seeking solutions to the problems they had in common (Goldring, 2002; Vazquez, 2003; Velazquez Flores, 2014). Also, with the occurring changes, both countries

encouraged economic integration instead of rejecting or repressing action moving towards integration as was being done in past years.

To do this several constitutional reforms that legalized all the neoliberal economic, political and social changes that the ruling group needed to implement the project were conducted. These proposals, implemented by technocrats, involved a confrontation with some sectors of the political class that still conceived the active role of the State in the economy and defended the project of revolutionary nationalism. It should be noted that for legal approval of these reforms, the PRI and PAN legislators were in full approval while the parliamentary faction of the PRD rejected the application of the neoliberal project in Mexico.

The approval of the North American Free Trade Agreement represented a shift in the nationalist discourse that reigned supreme between the sixties and eighties, and pushed Mexico even closer to a relation with the U.S. government and Mexican population living there. Delano and Cano say "for the first time Mexico launched an open lobbying campaign in the U.S. including Mexican American organizations and politicians to promote its interests" (Vazquez, 2003; Woldenberg et al., 2004e) no longer fearing that Mexican intervention in politics north of the border might prompt United States intervention in Mexican affairs."

On the political participatory front, in order to eliminate the lack of credibility in political parties, reduce doubts about the transparency of electoral processes and seek citizen participation in elections, constitutional changes were made to modify the electoral laws, a new electoral

register was established and the electoral management bodies were “citizenized” (Woldenberg et al., 2004e). In 1990, electoral reforms led to the creation of the Federal Code for Electoral Institutions and Procedures (COFIPE) that included extending the rights of political parties; a new mechanism for party funding; and impartiality of electoral management bodies. It also stipulated the creation of the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), a new electoral roll and voter identification card with photograph. These latter two inclusions to the COFIPE were points against the enabling of citizen vote from abroad.

A new wave of reforms in 1993 and 1994 incorporated national and international electoral observers, which meant the adoption of international legal apparatus, were put in motion to legitimize the '94 presidential elections. There were modifications to the Article 82 of the Constitution (Woldenberg, Becerra, & Gomez, 2004d), establishing that as of 2000 any Mexican by birth could aspire to the Presidency regardless if one of the parents is of foreign origin but naturalized Mexican and resident of Mexico for at least 20 years prior nomination. Before the reform, the presidential candidate had to be the son of Mexican-born parents. With this reform the possibility that many Mexican father or mother opened foreign origin but naturalized Mexicans could enter the presidential office, as in the case of Vicente Fox Quesada in 2000.

The 1994 presidential elections became an international event with similar expectations just as had occurred with the elections of '88. Once again, the PRD candidate went across the border in search of gaining the immigrant support in focal cities such as Los Angeles and Chicago. Jesus

Martinez (1998) explains how the Mexican Diaspora held mock elections in August of the same year looking to replicate the same process as the one offered by the IFE in Mexico.

During the Ernesto Zedillo presidency, Mexico-US relations took a shift towards a more regional scenario. In 1994, the governor of California, Pete Wilson, of the Republican Party, promoted an anti-immigrant campaign plastered in the Proposition 187 which looked to deny education and basic rights to undocumented immigrants and their children (Zabin & Escala Rabadan, 1998). The California Congress did not approve the proposal, but it intensified the immigration debate as well as other related subjects that attracted public attention in both sides of the border. It also meant a stalemate to Mexico-California relations. This measure of anti-immigrant policy making in the U.S., and California particularly, resulted in the emergence of transnational political engagement. On one side, Mexico needed to react in the defense of its immigrant population through diplomatic means. On the other, the Latino political leaders in California began to urge those immigrants who had been favored by the IRCA in '86 to continue and conclude their naturalization or citizenship attainment process in order to make them eligible to vote in the upcoming governor elections.<sup>13</sup> They figured that there was a need to politicize the Mexican-American community in order to suppress the republican administration of Pete Wilson.

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<sup>13</sup> Interviews with former California Congresswoman Denise Ducheny Moreno opened the perspective to how the Latino Caucus had evolved in California and how their involvement in pro-immigrant activism helped to push forward the Mexican vote from abroad.

## **The Road towards Cross Border Political Involvement**

In an attempt to regain the trust of the Mexican population living abroad, the Zedillo administration presented the initiative for the “Programa Nacion Mexicana” which planted the need to develop pro-migrant policies. Accompanying this initiative, at the federal level came the reform packet of 1996 that made modifications to the Constitution in order to allow Mexican citizens the possibility of adopting another nationality without having to renounce to their Mexican rights. This was a major step towards the politization of the migrant community, especially those who by law were eligible to attain the American nationality but were reluctant to do so because of fear losing benefits in Mexico, such as the right to own land.

This reform package was also the first official step taken by the Mexican authorities towards the implementation of voting in presidential elections from abroad. Escala Rabadan (2005a, 2005b; Zabin & Escala Rabadan, 1998) points out that although the Mexican diaspora was present in these proceedings, they were still configuring the networkings of unitary organizations. Aside from the Zacatecas and Michoacan federations with a long history of migrant representation, the petitioning that ensured the inclusion of the Mexican diaspora politics was collaboration between the Mexican and American authorities (Delano, 2006; Escala-Rabadan, 2014; Gonzalez Gutierrez, 2014).

The Zedillo administration understood that it needed to reestablish a link with the Mexican diaspora living in California working with state congressional leaders to promote the adoption of the US citizenship. From the California perspective, the Latino leaders and especially those who were close to Gray Davis, who at the time was considering running for governor, and would later win the post, realized the negative impact this immigration reform package entailed. Ducheny Moreno explains that the both the Mexican and California authorities were open to working together and building relations to defend the immigrant population in general would rescue the lingering ties that were debilitated by the Wilson administration (Interview with Denise Ducheny Moreno, 2014).

Zedillo was able to restore relations with the government of California once Gray Davis was elected governor in 1998, and that bond formed over the course of the Zedillo administration eased the transition when Vicente Fox came to power in 2000. Once governor Davis took office, his first official visit was to Mexico. This trip, which was an invitation from the Mexican government, was representative of the bond that existed between the Mexican federal administration and the highest elected official to have visited Mexico at the time. Davis travelled to Mexico previously while he was Lieutenant Governor, Pete Wilson did not hold the same regards towards Mexico and its economic ties, so for the newly elected California administration going to Mexico meant maintaining that bridge of communication open. From the Mexican side, holding steady relations with states like Texas, Illinois and California also represented a step forward in fortifying relations with the Mexican diaspora. It was a sort of migrant

community outreach program. Cano and Delano suggest that, “this migration dialogue lay the foundations for President Vicente Fox’s activism on migration issues and the negotiation of a possible migration agreement with President George W. Bush in 2001” (2004).

With the arrival of Vicente Fox to the Mexican presidency, new hope of integrating the migrant community, as this was one of his campaign’s main pillars, accompanied the alternation of power from the PRI to the PAN. Fox proposed he would be the leader of 120 million Mexicans, 100 million living in Mexico and the rest abroad (Cano & Delano, 2004).

### **The Fox Administration’s Hits and Misses**

The Fox administration facilitated the implementation of programs and the creation of agencies that tended to the migrant population especially in the US (Reyes Romo, 2008). The PAN administration’s first success came when by official orders the Oficina Presidencial para los Mexicanos en el Exterior (OPME) began operating with the aim of promoting productive investments among the Mexican community in the US. This agency was not a new initiative given that since the Salinas administration, there had been a steady stream of maintaining direct contact with the Mexican population abroad through the Oficinas Estatales de Atencion a los Migrantes. What did rise during the Fox administration was the National Council of Migrant

Attention Offices or Conofams (Delano, 2006), which would coordinate the tasks of the states' offices of attention to migrants from a centralized position.

The installation of a central entity policing the local offices for attention to migrants also represented a step toward the registration and localization of the Mexican diaspora in the US. Gonzalez Gutierrez (2003), Cano and Delano (2004) and Escala Rabadan (2014) have studied the Fox administration in depth and suggest that these labors conducted by the Mexican authorities was an explicit recognition of the activism done by the migrant communities. Having installed representative offices to manage relations with the diaspora and answer to their needs was seen as a sign of trust that the Fox administration had towards the migrant community. The creation of the OPME in the first year of Fox's term, the expansion of productive and social project initiatives through the 2x1 and 3x1 Programs in 2002 and the creation of the Institute for Mexicans Abroad (IME) in 2003, to substitute the OPME and PCME, served as proof that the Mexican government was committed to work with the diaspora. As a result of the conjoined work across borders, Escala Rabadan (2014) mentions that there was an exponential growth in the formation of social and cultural local clubs and federations between 1998 and 2011, going from 441 officially recognized clubs to 1842 representing the top migrant exporting states. The investigator goes on to assert that there are currently hundreds of these associations across the United States, some of them with little contact with other groups, either in Mexico or abroad. The constant formation of new associations and the inclusion of these groups on to the IME and Secretary of Foreign Relations' databanks are a clear sign that show the interest these groups

have in being recognized by the Mexican government but also show that the migrant community through their networks in Los Angeles primarily expect to be accounted for and taken into consideration. In other words, many of the migrant federations in Los Angeles are relatively new when compared with other Mexican communities in the US, Chicago for example.

Along with these advances in the establishment of migrant attending agencies, Fox's administration also brought forth the initiative to reform the electoral law and allow the Mexican community living abroad to vote for the president of Mexico. This was an endeavor that began in 1996 and was examined by the electoral management body in 1998 but it was Vicente Fox with the support of Congress that approved the measure in 2005.

For the first time in history, Mexican citizens were allowed to vote for president of the United States of Mexico while living abroad. In an interview with personnel from the Council of Mexican Federations in Los Angeles (COFEM), specifically Paco Moreno, explains how although the PRI government ceded several spaces to the migrant diaspora, it did not grant or even acknowledge them full access to the political arena. It was until 2005 that the Mexican diaspora was incorporated to the Mexican political panorama, however it was as if the "they (the Mexican authorities) gave us the car, but not the keys" (2015).

Prior to the approval of the Mexican vote from abroad and the 2006 elections, members of the COFEM took advantage of the possibility of voting for the first time in Mexican elections but there were several setbacks that prohibited the diaspora from voting. In response to the

campaign managed by the IFE to register and have them emit their vote in 2006, the COFEM operated their own campaign to help those who were eligible to vote but did not have an official identification card and therefore drove several buses on the weekends to Tijuana to the IFE installations. This campaign was self-funded by those who were benefiting from it, without any help from the government. The only support received was from the IFE, which meant opening their offices on weekends and assisting those crossing the border to get their voters' ID. In all, about 5,000 people crossed the border and attained their voting card.

After the 2006 presidential elections, in which the victor was Felipe Calderon, the migrant community shifted their attention towards the immigration contention countrywide, which began in March of the same as a response to the Sensenbrenner Act. The Mexican diaspora in California was integrated into a coalition to defend the rights of immigrants along with other pro-migrant organizations mobilizing between 13,000 and 20,000 people (Ortiz, 2016). The presence of Mexican immigrants in public spaces had been linked until then to the festive culinary or reproduction festivals, or to link with their place of origin, but when uniting under a single cause such as immigration reform amalgamated the Mexican population, the associations and their networks to fight against the unjust cause.

## **Closing Considerations**

The short history of the transnational involvement of the Mexican diaspora in national political matters has been a constant battle with specific challenges in spans limited to electoral periods. In the 2005-2006 election season, there were several setbacks that blocked the participation of almost 10 million voters the IFE projected would partake because of a structural obstacle materialized in the lack of voters' IDs within the diaspora. Adjunct to the credential barrier, those who were eligible to register and received the electoral package were not completely sure of how the vote was to be cast and shipped back to the IFE. The lack of information as well as the absence of contact between the electoral management body and those living abroad left a sense of indifference with the situation.

The same can be said for the past presidential elections of 2012. Most of those who were eligible to vote did not believe the INE was targeting the Mexicans abroad. Several of the same obstacles that appeared in 2006 resurfaced in 2012, which meant that the game plan traced by the Mexican authorities once again had not approached the diaspora or other agencies who are charged with reaching out to the immigrant community.

At the subnational level, several localities began reaching out to their citizens in the US. States such as Zacatecas in 2003 and Michoacan in 2007 reformed their legislations in order to allow their migrant population to elect local officials. The Mexican diaspora, organized in hometown associations and regional federations, has acquired political influence as a result of their monetary contributions and joint remittances that help finance social and productive projects back home. As an example, according to data handled by the Federation of Nayaritas USA

(FENINE) in 2015 and confirmed with Banxico (Banxico, 2016), the Nayarit population living in the US contributed to the state finances more than 399 million dollars. In short, while the presidential exercises have fallen short to the expectations in electoral preparations and management, from a subnational point of perspective, there seems to be a roadmap already drawn out by 17 local elections management bodies that could serve as a how to instructions manual for the INE.



### **Chapter III. Dissecting the Analysis Processes Method of Transnational Political Participation<sup>14</sup>**

Depicting the civic and political activity of the Mexican population can no longer be thought of as a process constrained by national borders. It has become a common practice of democracy studies to go beyond the traditional definition of a citizen as an individual who sustains political rights and obligations within a politically and territorially defined space (Fitzgerald, 2006; Isin, 2007; Martinez, 1998a). The national political systems have shifted from a territorially or geographically locked space to one that eliminates the official borders established by governments in order to include citizens or nationals that live beyond them. The extension of democratic rights to a transnational arena brings about a new wave of political actors and activists looking to exercise those rights from beyond the national borders. This paradigm has been redesigned and spawned an alternative model of representative democracy where citizens change their residential space, temporary or permanently, without renouncing to those prerogatives and rights. In this case, American citizens of Mexican descent have the right to

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<sup>14</sup> This section emphasizes the importance of the social networks working on both sides of the US and Mexico border. It deliberates on the characteristics, functions and activities carried out by the HTAs as international support of the electoral management body and the party machinery implanted outside of the Mexican territory. The aim of this section is precisising the interaction that went on previous to the presidential contention and provide attention to the electoral reforms previous to 2012, that, in hand, lead to those of 2014, less lenient on campaigning and proselytism outside of Mexico.

capitalize on the Mexican and retain those rights if they choose to, including electoral involvement.

This study looks to show the evolution Mexican migrant associations have experimented over the last ten years with an emphasis on the general electoral periods of 2006 and 2012. Considering the previous, Mexican citizens who live abroad are eligible to vote and elect the President of the United States of Mexico every six years. As a result of reforms to the Mexican electoral legislation in 2005, 2010 and 2014, their immersion in the political arena has grown, and their transnational civic activities have led them to a path unexplored by the Mexican Election Management Body and the Mexican outsiders. Their political involvement as individuals who participate through ballots is a matter that deserves delicate attention. However, because it results in an almost impossible task for Mexican authorities to contact the universe of Mexican nationals living abroad, their main object is to consolidate a joint task force with federations and confederations of migrant clubs in order to reach as many willing potential voters as plausible before the presidential election of 2018. That having been said, however, it is of dire important to highlight the fact that the civic individuality of the Mexican living abroad was not explored in depth in this work for it is the interaction and relation between the Diaspora representation federations and the State apparatus as an entirety that is the focal point of this work.

## **Contextualizing the Research Method**

In order to analyze the behavior and actions of the migrant collectives, it was necessary to apply a mixed-method analysis emphasizing an empirical approach based on data obtained from qualitative interviews through three approaches, life history informal-conversational interviews, standardized open-ended interviews, and in-depth email interviews directed at migrant community leaders who have been involved in the development of transnational activism. The qualitative data used in this study consisted of primary material obtained from interviews and questionnaires that supplied information referenced and substantiated by a secondary material specialized in the area of study.

The resulting data collection guides aimed to get a perspective on the world of the migrant federations and how their transnational labors have shifted from managing social and economic development projects in Mexico to embrace a democratic and political conscious inclusive line of work. The goal of the initial interactions with Mexican migrant leaders was to test the field in civic engagement within the state of California. The information subtracted from the interviews was complemented by secondary data collection focusing on micro-political development of actors involved in transnational activities that detonated the cross-border electoral effort. Also, secondary data collection attesting the evolution of Mexico's political system opened the spectrum onto how the Mexican government was dealing with the Mexican diaspora's changing reality.

The initial fieldwork aimed at gaining a perspective on the evolution of citizen participation in electoral matters in California, during the 1990s and early 2000s when the Mexican population in

the state was coming out of its shell. Pro-migrant work to strengthen their position within US politics was on the rise, but it also pushed the Mexican-American towards demanding from the Mexican government the installment of their political rights, seeing how they had progressed from being considered remittance senders to drivers and promoters of development projects in their communities of origin.

That having been said, several questions arose on the matter, for example, how had the operational process of Mexican migrant associations evolved as an outcome of the electoral reforms of 2005 in Mexico; what mechanisms were being used by hometown organizations to participate politically in electoral matters and; how has the relationship between Mexican institutions such as the Federal Electoral Institute, Institute of Mexicans Abroad and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with migrant associations changed in the last two decades.

These questions surge from the idea that Mexican nationals who have opted for the adoption of the United States citizenship have changed the perspective the American community and Mexican authorities have towards them. This new brand of Mexican-Americanism takes center stage and no longer lurks in the shadows hiding, avoiding or fearing deportation or being noticed by the general population. They organize with others like them, be it through blood links or sharing a common hometown. The formation of hometown clubs can emerge from a

conversation, as was the case with the federation from Hidalgo or through an invitation as it occurred with the Yucatan associations.<sup>15</sup>

The majority of the interviews conducted were with migrant federations' representatives who have been involved with hometown clubs and statewide or regional federations for over twelve years, predating the approval of the right to vote in Mexican presidential elections in 2005. This is an important milestone, as it highlights the level of commitment and dedication the interviewees have devoted to helping their communities in Mexico as well as those who are in need of assistance and representation in the LA area.

Prior to the electoral reform of 2005, the Mexican government began promoting voting from abroad which represented an opportunity for the migrant associations to negotiate with their authorities to facilitate several administrative tasks, such as facilitating birth certificates, as well as an opportunity to take part of the political game in Mexico, as it occurred in the state of Zacatecas, when Andres Bermudez, former migrant, and activist, managed to secure a municipal candidacy in Jerez de Garcia Salinas in 2001 and eventually won the election in 2004,

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<sup>15</sup> One of the informants, native of Hidalgo, Mexico, mentioned that the formation of their federation surged after her and her husband saw a truck with a bumper sticker with the state of Hidalgo's flag. After catching up to the driver, a quick conversation emerged and soon after, they founded a hometown association that detonated the *Federacion de Hidalguenses en California*. The Yucatan federation was born after the current president was invited by a third person to a meeting with Mexican authorities who were explaining the benefits of the Secretariat of Social Development's program 3x1 to a crowd of Mexicans from the LA County. The realization of how hometown associations from other Mexican states were working with the Mexican government to help their place of origin, and the realization that no such organization existed within the Yucatan community of California inspired the creation of the *Federacion Alianza de Clubes Yucatecos USA*.

making him the first transnational candidate and president municipal. The eventual selection of Bermudez to office serves as a strong precedent of what the Mexican diaspora represents to the evolution of Mexican politics. With the vote from abroad in place and the precedent of Bermudez, it is a fair assumption to hypothesize that an increased participation and involvement of hometown organizations in the formulation of pro-migrant electoral politics has influenced and strengthened the interest and position of Mexican nationals living abroad in politico-electoral matters from their country of origin.

This movement represents a step forward, in Mexico, towards the fruition of a transnational electoral mechanism that will emphasize the participation of Mexicans living abroad. In order for this apparatus to detonate in the right path, there are two variables that require examination; the participation of the Mexican population channeled through the hometown associations and federations, and the second, the associations' ability to sway or influence their members and the public, in general, to act in Mexican electoral matters, whether through the ballot, direct or indirect proselytism.

Considering that information, the elaboration of questionnaires for interviews had to take into consideration those variables as well as the hypothesis, and the research questions. To do so, the first necessary task was to grasp the early process of political buildup that was being rendered by the Latino representatives in the California State government with higher possibilities of working with their Mexican counterparts as well as other politicians in the 1990s

and the first half of the 2000s. Second, the point of view of Mexican and Chicano<sup>16</sup> community leaders, leaders of migrant federations representing states or regions in Mexico, was also a pinpoint that needed exploring as this group conformed of first and second generation immigrants knew and understood what was at stake.

In order to contextualize the emerging transnational political scene, life history informal-conversational interviews gave perspective to the evolutionary process of Mexican politics that originated within the migrant community living in Southern California. Along with the interviews, there was an extensive revision of specialized documents in the subjects of transnational studies; immigration; political participation; democracy; Mexican immigration history, electoral law, and political system. These interviews gave a distinctive vision onto how the work performed autonomously by the Mexican authorities and the Mexican diaspora in Southern California helped shape the Mexican Constitutional reforms in 1994 and 1996.

The constructionist perspective, as expressed by Robert Atkinson (2002) considers life histories “in terms of how accounts of lives are used by a variety of others, in addition to the subjects whose lives are under consideration, for various descriptive purposes” can recount and contribute fresh information by relating a specific moment in an individual’s life story. The

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<sup>16</sup> The use of Latino and Chicano are conceptual notions that are not synonyms but for this case serves to identify a portion of those “outsiders” who are, or were, involved in the transnational movement of electoral politics. This distinction is important given that this work focuses on Mexican migrant leaders and apologists who are in favor of expanding the democratic game beyond the borders of Mexico. They can be of Mexican descent or have adopted the nationality through bloodlines or any other mean probable.

second modality, standardized open-ended interviews, required a structured script in terms of wording that allowed the respondents to contribute specific and very detailed information and the interviewer freedom to ask follow up queries in a face-to-face method. A third document was prepared in order to reach federations' leaders who could not be reached in person.

This guide is an online in-depth interview technique that, unlike the online survey, is semi-structured in nature and involves multiple email exchanges between the researcher and respondent (Meho, 2006). Lokman Meho (2006) suggests that this type of investigation can be administer to large groups geographically dispersed who can be reached individually, "*through listservs, message boards, or discussion groups rather than making long-distance telephone calls...or travelling to the location of participants.*"

The interviews targeted people who are in charge of leading migrant federations in Los Angeles as well as those migrant leaders who have served in office; such is the case of Denise Ducheny Moreno, former chair of the California State Assembly from 1994 to 2000 and former Senator in the State of California. Another key informant was Francisco "Paco" Moreno, a migrant community leader who emerged from a social club representing the town of Los Reyes, Michoacan; a former president and current Secretary General of one of the biggest Michoacan federations in Los Angeles, Federacion de Clubes y Asociaciones de Michoacan (FECADEMÍN), and now works for the Council of Mexican Federations (COFEM). He joined the COFEM in 2004

and was elected president for the 2006-07 term; in 2009 he was employed by COFEM as Director of Communities.<sup>17</sup>

The interviews with the presidents and representatives of the migrant federations focused on answering the research questions looking to explain what has been done by the Mexican authorities in the past, what is being carried out in the present and where is it heading in terms of State-diaspora cooperation. There was a total of ten interviews of this sort carried out with presidents of federations representing the states of Colima, Guanajuato, Hidalgo, Michoacan, Nayarit, Oaxaca, Puebla, Sinaloa, Tlaxcala, Yucatan and Zacatecas.

### **Identifying the Population and Sample Sources in the IME Directory of Organizations**

Concentrating on the analysis of hometown associations in Los Angeles meant contacting clubs initially using the database formulated by the Institute of Mexicans Abroad<sup>18</sup> (Instituto de Los Mexicanos en el Exterior, IME), a Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, SRE) decentralized figure, under the supervision of the North America Affairs Undersecretary. A

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<sup>17</sup> Paco Moreno was interviewed on an initial occasion through the informal-conversational method in order to visit a particular period of his life story as he was one of the activist in Los Angeles who was involved in the lobbying venture that sparked the political reform giving Mexicans living the chance to take part in Mexican presidential elections in 2006. He was cross-examined a second time utilizing the open-ended interview guide, only that this time as a representative of the FECADEMIN.

<sup>18</sup> For more information on the Institute, go to <http://www.ime.gob.mx/es/ique-es-el-ime/1>.

second index, provided by the Council of Mexican Federations was revised to compare the contact information between the affiliated federations and those from the IME organization directory. The IME document of organizations' registry is an official form of registration issued and managed by Mexican authorities, as mentioned above. The COFEM listing too has been recognized by the Mexican government and it serves two purposes; to inform the public which federations and other groups conform it and how to contact the federations, and as a statement of existence to other similar groups as well as the Mexican government.

The IME migrant associations' database composes a registrar of nearly 2,649 clubs, organizations, associations, federations and confederations of Mexican origin from around the world and 2,479 in the United States; 964 in California and 380 in the greater Los Angeles area.<sup>19</sup> Within the Los Angeles County and its surroundings, the location of the organizations considers every one of the 88 localities, from Agoura Hills to Westlake Village and Whittier. The IME index supplies a mailing and contact address for the associations affiliated, and this characteristic recognizes groups that have an interest in Mexican residents' living abroad, regardless of their location. That is, there are several clubs and associations who are found within the territorial boundaries of the Mexican Republic. In a sense, the IME organization directory considers the affiliation of any group that desires recognition from this institute and the Mexican government.

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<sup>19</sup> The last database revised was downloaded on July 7, 2015 available at <http://asociaciones.sre.gob.mx/>.

The associations are divided into 5 blocs that are broken into smaller categories; the five main groupings are general information, the character of collective representation in Mexico, areas of interest, origin or nature of identity, and contact information.<sup>20</sup> The first category gives the organizations place of origin, according to the country where they are based, the city of creation, the official name of the association and acronym. This section presents the geographical location of the body and presents them formally as an officially recognized group. This segment also distinguishes the if an organization is a social, sports or cultural club; an association of clubs, state and regional Unions, federations, confederations, student unions, workers' syndicates and women's groups, to name a few of the possible categories.

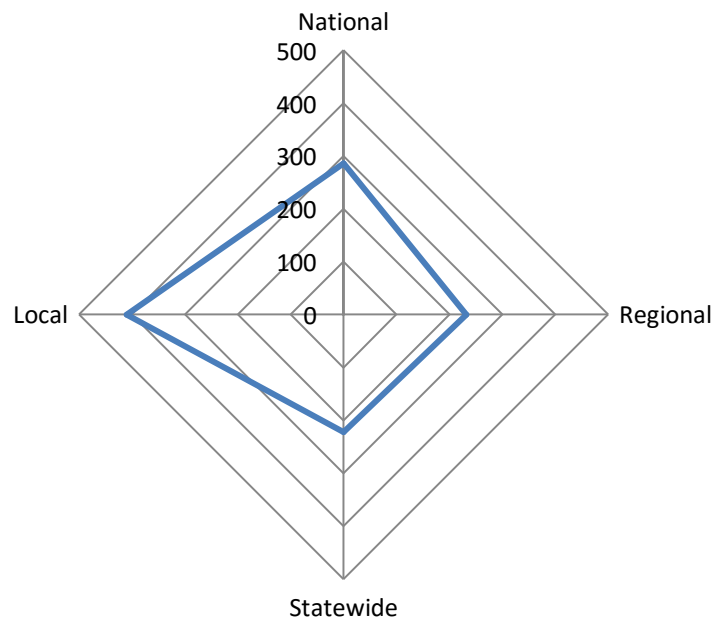
The second group allows the hometown associations to indicate their width and reach through the classification of representation in Mexico; the majority of the associations identify themselves as of national, regional, statewide or local representation; although there are cases in which an organization is classified through a combination of the four. In the US alone, an overwhelming majority of the organizations affiliated to the IME are of local representation. As seen in Figure 1, there is an abundance of hometown clubs registering under the Mexican Secretariat of Foreign Relations, when compared with those who identify as national, regional or statewide associations. The formation of clubs and their official recognition gives them the advantage to expand and evolve into federations or any other form of hub unifying several

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<sup>20</sup> The IME database is updated periodically to include new clubs and associations, however, once they are up on the IME cloud, their contact information is not revised leading to an outdated of output in several clubs and associations, mainly in the presidents' and contact information slots.

clubs from the same region. The second largest registration option is the national category, followed by statewide and regionally. The latter two includes supra-organizations such as federations, unions, alliances and syndicate associations with populations that surpass the 100 members mark from across the United States.

**Figure 1 Character of Representation in Mexico of Californian Hometown Associations, 2015**

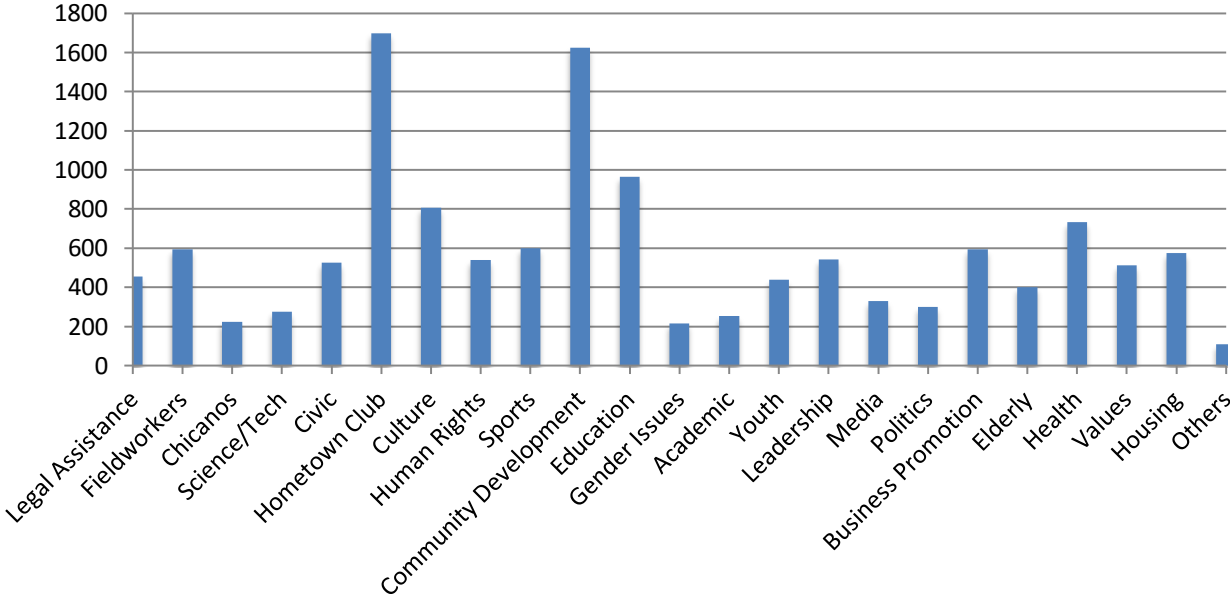


Source. Self-elaboration using the organization directory from the IME, 2015.

The third segment within the IME organization directory describes the areas of interests the HTAs can engage. This section has 23 subdivisions allowing the organizations to select all of those that are applicable. Figure 2 exhibits that a high volume of associations considers themselves as groups who support hometown activities, 1,697, and prioritize community development, 1,625. Several of the federations offer scholarships and educational funding to their member’s kin, 965. On a greater scale, according to the Migration Policy Index (MPI), the

majority of the federations are situated in the state of California, followed by Illinois and Texas (Misra, 2014). The Chicago branches have a long history of transnational activism given the history of migrants who arrived in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The evolution of the Chicano movement in the Windy City was influenced by the establishment of labor unions at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century among the lower classes and minorities inhabiting the Chicago area (Boruchoff et al., 2010).

**Figure 2 Main Areas of Interest of US Based Hometown Associations, 2015**

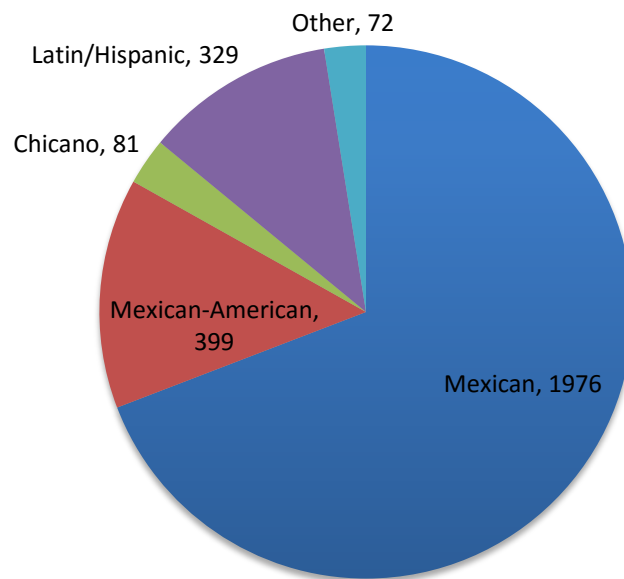


Source. Self-elaboration using the organization directory from the IME, 2012-2015.

The fourth section of the IME index emphasizes the need to classify the origin of the hometown associations according to how they identify themselves. Figure 3 shows that of the 2,479 organizations situated in the US, 69% express ascertain the origin as Mexican associations while

13% see themselves as Mexican-American origin. Once again, it is important to pinpoint that several of the groups selected more than one option of the bunch.

**Figure 3 Identity Origin of US Based Hometown Associations, 2015**

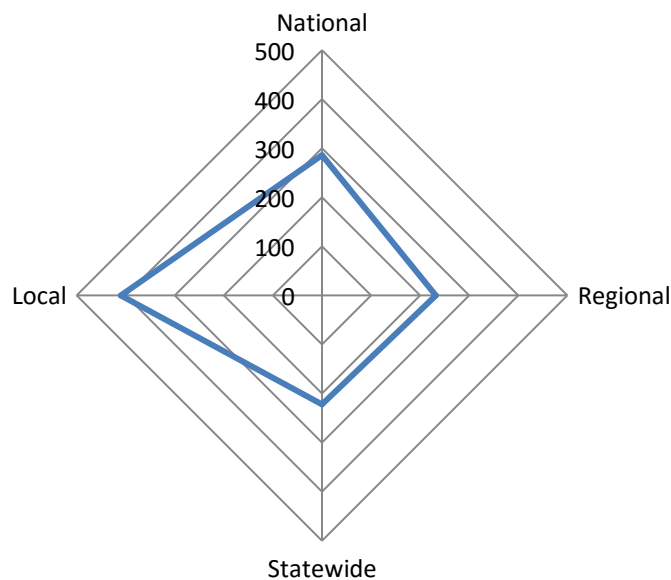


Source. Self-elaboration with tabulation of data from the IME pooled 2012-2015.

The fifth section highlights the contact information and a brief summary of the associations. This material conveys the availability and transparency of the organizations in portraying their membership numbers as well as their center and mean of operations. The shared data has its flaws given that several of the involved do not complete the form and leave several of the spaces blank, especially in this unit. Also, there are several alliances that are not established outside of Mexico but are still recognized by the SRE as unions with interests in immigrant matters.

As mentioned above, the state of California is home to 964 hometown associations as of July 2015. As is the case with the US index, Figure 4 shows that the clubs and associations in California identify themselves as representatives of municipal and local communities, 410 (43%), 286 (30%) are considered organizations with national representation, 232 (24%) regional and 222 (23%) statewide.

**Figure 4 Character of Representation in Mexico of Californian Hometown Associations, 2015**

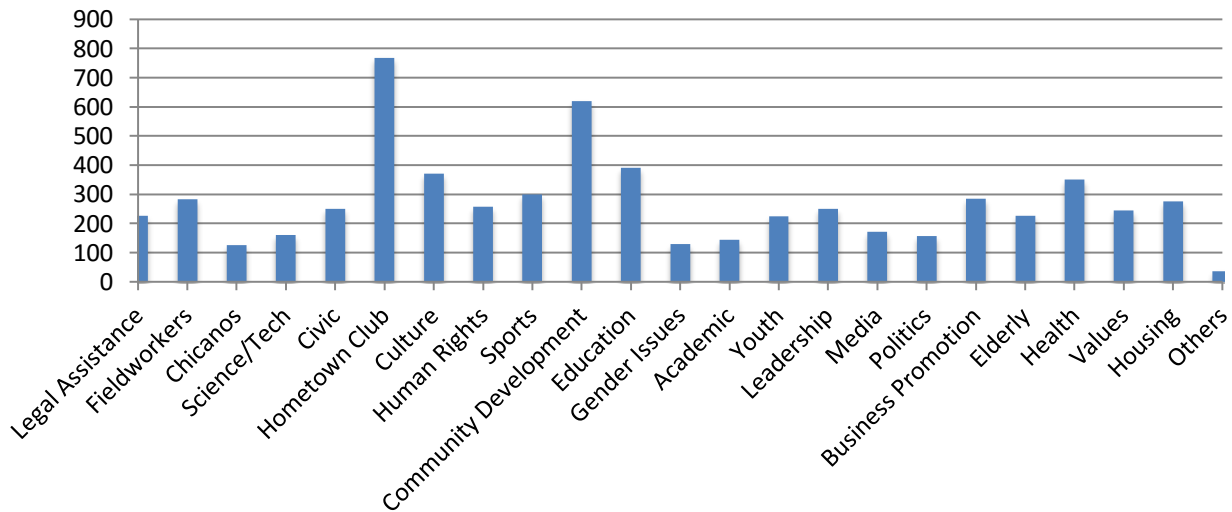


Source. Self-elaboration with tabulation of data from the IME pooled 2012-2015.

Figure 5 follows the same rubric as the national numbers suggesting that a great number of California associations are interested in developing hometown activities and community development projects. Education, Cultural activities and aiding in health matters, such as donations of medicine and ambulances are also at the top of priorities for the California branches. Politics is an area that is still unexplored or not within the consideration of statewide

organizations given that those who are registered under section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code of the United States<sup>21</sup> cannot get involved in political or religious matters. The political aspect is assimilated as a synonym for political backing or candidate sponsorship.

**Figure 5 Main Areas of Interest of Hometown Associations Established in California, 2015**



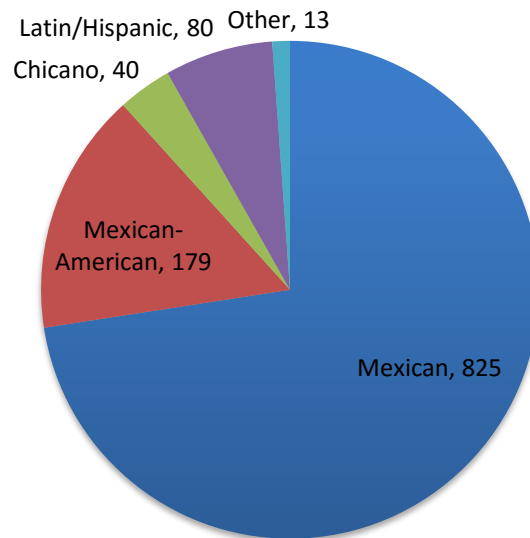
Source. Self-elaboration with tabulation of data from the IME pooled 2012-2015.

The California groups, compared to the national ratio, have a greater affiliation, 86%, to the Mexican cataloguing, followed by the Mexican-American brand, 19%, and Latin/Hispanic, 8%, is the third label most popularly attached to the hometown associations. In other words, although we speak of organizations recognized by the Secretariat of Foreign Relations through IME, as seen in Figure 6, student organizations such as Hermanos Unidos, labor unions, for example, United Teachers Los Angeles, also figure within the registrar. The same can be said of other

<sup>21</sup> Check [https://www.irs.gov/Charities-&-Non-Profits/Charitable-Organizations/Exemption-Requirements-Section-501\(c\)\(3\)-Organizations](https://www.irs.gov/Charities-&-Non-Profits/Charitable-Organizations/Exemption-Requirements-Section-501(c)(3)-Organizations) for more information on the foundation of non-profit organizations.

organizations such as Club Amigos de Caracol en San Diego, which identify as Mexican-American although according to their mailing address are situated in Ensenada, Baja California in Mexico.

**Figure 6 Identity Origin of Hometown Associations Established in California, 2015**



Source. Self-elaboration with tabulation of data from the IME pooled 2012-2015.

Conferring to a study conducted by Citylab and the Migration Policy Index (2012), California registered a total population of 2,895,000 sharing a Mexican origin. Nevertheless, 1.75 million of the Mexican population in the US is situated in the greater LA area. However, Table 1 also demonstrates that 4 regions in California are home to 51% of the US Census population of Mexican descent while Texas equates to 25% and the Northwest representing Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin as a region only register 12% of the Mexican population living in the US. This

data contradicts the fact that the majority of projects executed by the IME and SRE is directed towards the Chicago area.<sup>22</sup>

**Table 1 Top Concentrations by Metropolitan Area for the Foreign Born from Mexico, 2008-12**

Metropolitan Area	Immigrant Population from Mexico	% of Metro Area Population
<b>Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA</b>	1,751,000	60.48%
<b>Chicago-Joliet-Naperville, IL-IN-WI</b>	677,000	23.39%
<b>Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown, TX</b>	599,000	20.69%
<b>Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX</b>	587,000	20.28%
<b>Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA</b>	555,000	19.17%
<b>Phoenix-Mesa-Glendale, AZ</b>	353,000	12.19%

<sup>22</sup> A meeting with the FECADEMÍN at Casa Michoacan in March, 2016, expressed the fact that personnel from the government of Michoacan rather deal with federations and clubs from Chicago when organizing and executing particular events such as was the case with *Foros Binacionales de Consulta y Participacion Ciudadana*(Respuesta, 2016)(Respuesta, 2016)(Respuesta, 2016)(Respuesta, 2016) (Respuesta, 2016), held on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February (meeting held on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March, at Casa Michoacan, Plaza Mexico, Lynwood, California).

The federation was founded in 2000 under the name of *Federacion de Clubes Michoacanos de California Lazaro Cardenas del Rio* and changed their name in 2005 to *Federacion de Clubes y Asociaciones de Michoacan* (FECADEMÍN). The previous name suggested the organization had political ties with the Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD) in order to attain the non-profit status.

<b>San Diego-Carlsbad-San Marcos, CA</b>	332,000	11.47%
<b>New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-PA</b>	316,000	10.92%
<b>San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA</b>	257,000	8.88%
<b>McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX</b>	213,000	7.36%

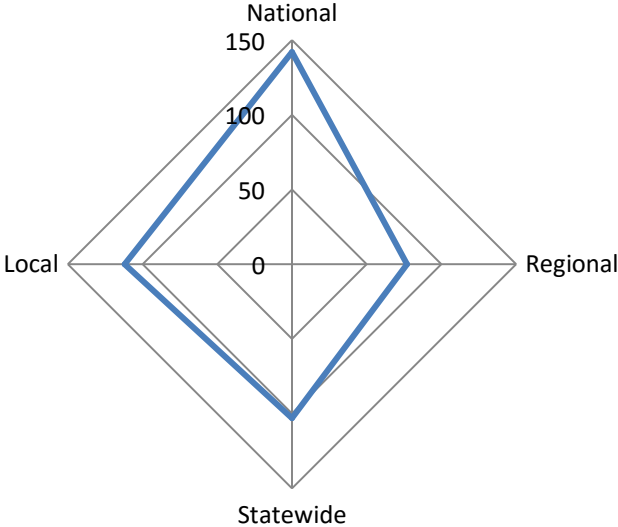
Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI), 2012.

The greater Los Angeles area, as shown above, represents a total of 60% of the population with Mexican roots surveyed by the US Census Bureau (Boruchoff et al., 2010; Rivera-Salgado, Bada, & Escala-Rabadan, 2005). The Mexican hometown associations founded in Los Angeles tally 14% of the organizations worldwide, 15% of the groups nationwide, and 39% of all the groups in the state.

As Figure 7 shows, the norm for the Los Angeles associations maintains the same line of community representation as in the subnational and national spectrum. Of the 379 groups registered in 2015, more than half take the character of national representation, followed by local, statewide and the regional level. The selection of character representation of the hometown associations asserts the fact that there is an inclusivity trait among the clusters, indicating that although the name of a federation may affirm exclusivity in representing a state or region in Mexico, groups such as is the case with the *Federacion de Clubes Zacatecanos de la*

*Costa Oeste* also look to embrace clubs from other locations in Mexico. Currently, this federation garners a total of 68 hometown and social clubs, with 20 of them representing the states of Yucatan and Estado de Mexico.

**Figure 7 Character of Representation in Mexico of LA Based Hometown Associations**



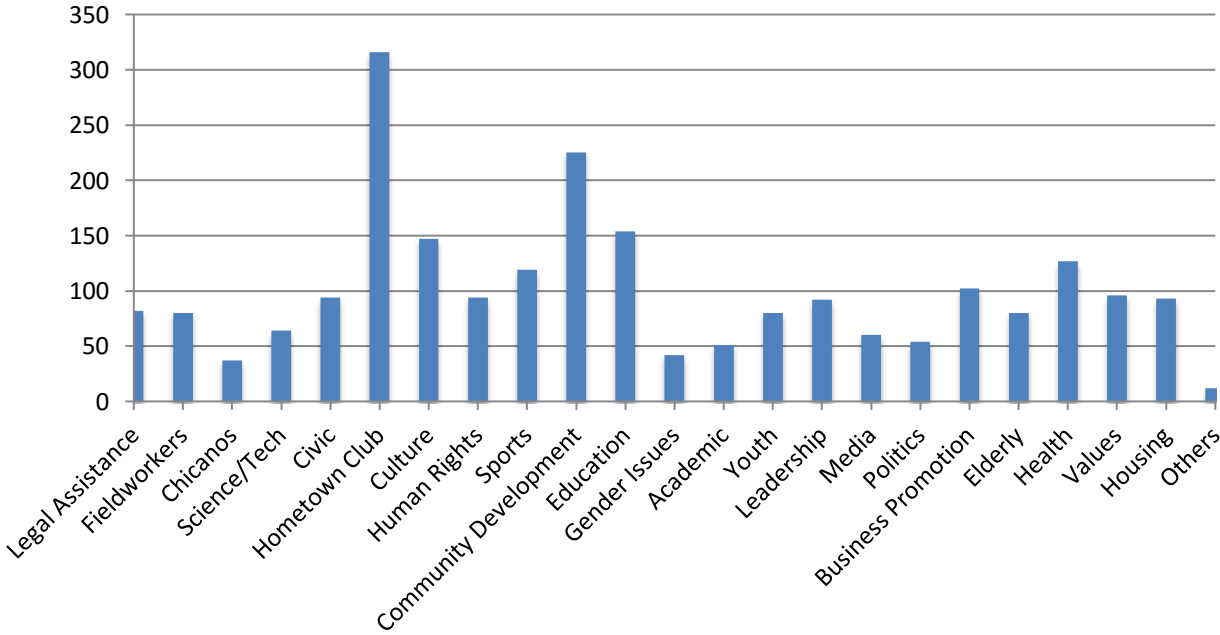
Source. Self-elaboration with tabulation of data from the IME pooled 2012-2015.

There is a permanent consensus among the clubs and associations at a national, state and local scale in terms of interests, goals, and objectives. That is, as Figure 8 shows, they select Hometown Club and Community Development as the two main interests because the execution of development projects through the 1x1 and 3x1 programs of the Secretariat of Social Development is a mean of contributing altruistically in their places of origin. The SEDESOL programs are pushed by the federal government, however, the federations also work in

cooperation with subnational governments in cultural and social proceedings, such as beauty pageants, sporting events, fundraisers, remembrance of local festivities.

Hometown Associations represent an audience for political figures who have aspirations of obtaining a civil servant position that requires the popular vote. Although the groups remain reluctant to supporting a specific political party, groups such as the FECADEMIN, *Organizacion Regional de Oaxaca (ORO)*, *Fraternidad Sinaloense de California (FSC)*, *Organizacion de Tlaxcaltecas USA*, and *Federacion Alianza de Clubes Yucatecos USA* have received political candidates and party representatives and organized meetings with the federation affiliates without recognizing an affinity towards the speakers. The federation’s members are invited to listen to the candidates, but are not pressured to vote for a specific person or political party.

**Figure 8 Main Areas of Interest of LA Based Hometown Associations**

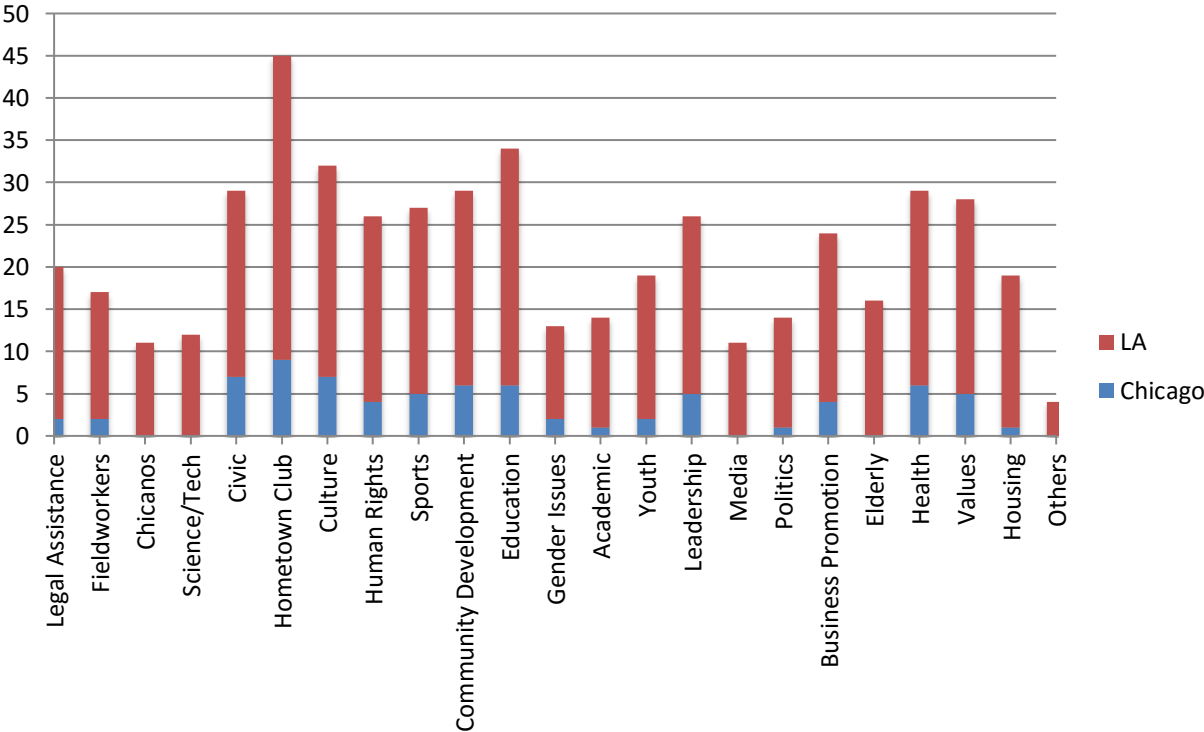


Source. Self-elaboration with tabulation of data from the IME pooled 2012-2015.



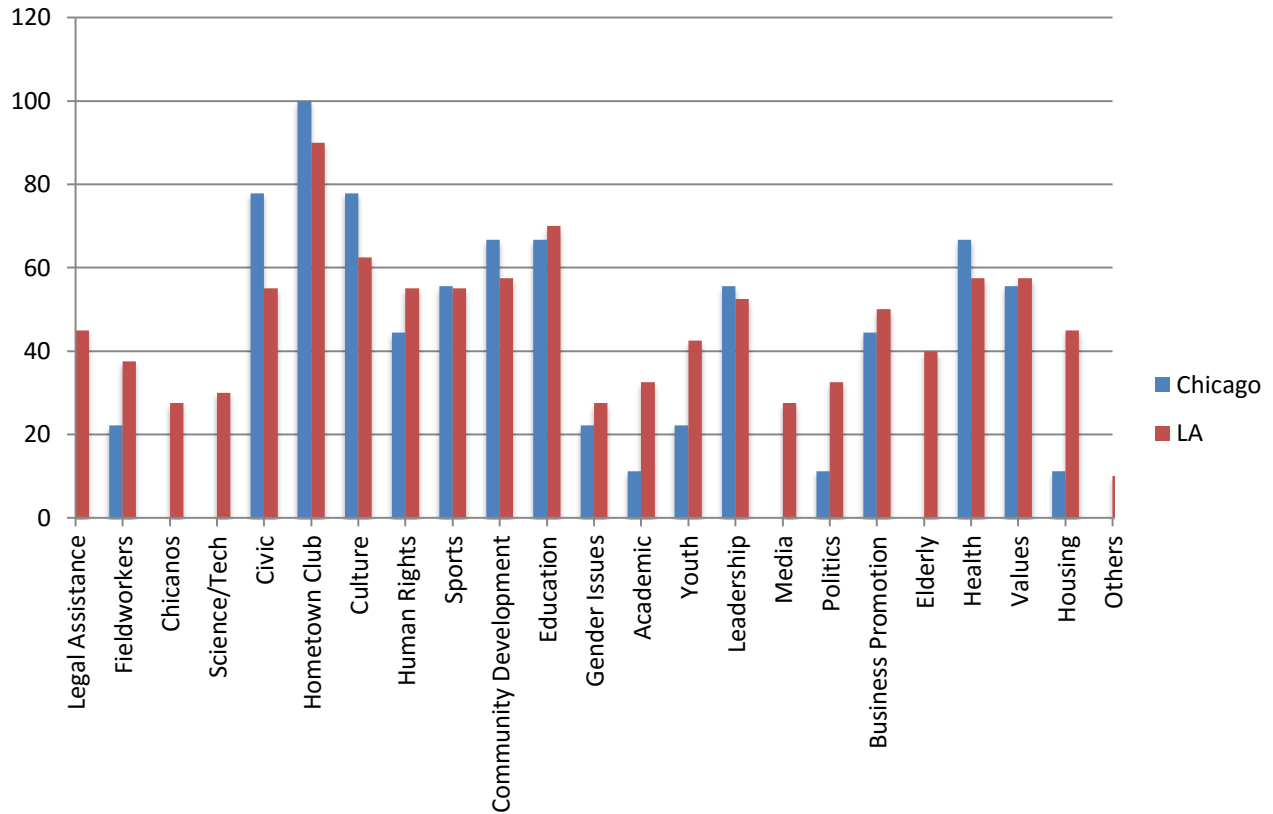
In a comparison between the federations in Los Angeles and Chicago, it is clear that there are more established and recognized groups in the first than in the latter. Figure 9 and 10 show that difference in numbers, but the similarities in the proportion of interests that drive the federation. Work derived from hometown clubs is the main concern for federations; followed by educational and cultural programs. When comparing not the population of federations, but rather where their concerns are, both groups of federations have high consideration for civic participation, through local community improvement projects, but it also becomes very visible that on the other end, politics is an interest that the groups do not admit to having.

**Figure 9 Areas of Interest for Federations from Chicago and Los Angeles in IME Index 2015**



Source. Self-elaboration with tabulation of data from the IME pooled 2012-2015.

**Figure 10 Areas of Interest for Federations from Chicago and Los Angeles in IME Index (Proportional) 2015**



Source. Self-elaboration with tabulation of data from the IME pooled 2012-2015.

## The COFEM Organization Directory

Alternatively, the COFEM organization directory is composed of 16 associations situated in the throughout California. There are 13 federations representing Colima, Durango, Guanajuato, Hidalgo, Jalisco, Michoacan, Nayarit, Oaxaca, Puebla, Sinaloa, Sonora, Tlaxcala and Yucatan. The Council also harbors the Anahuak Youth Sports Association, two women's organizations,

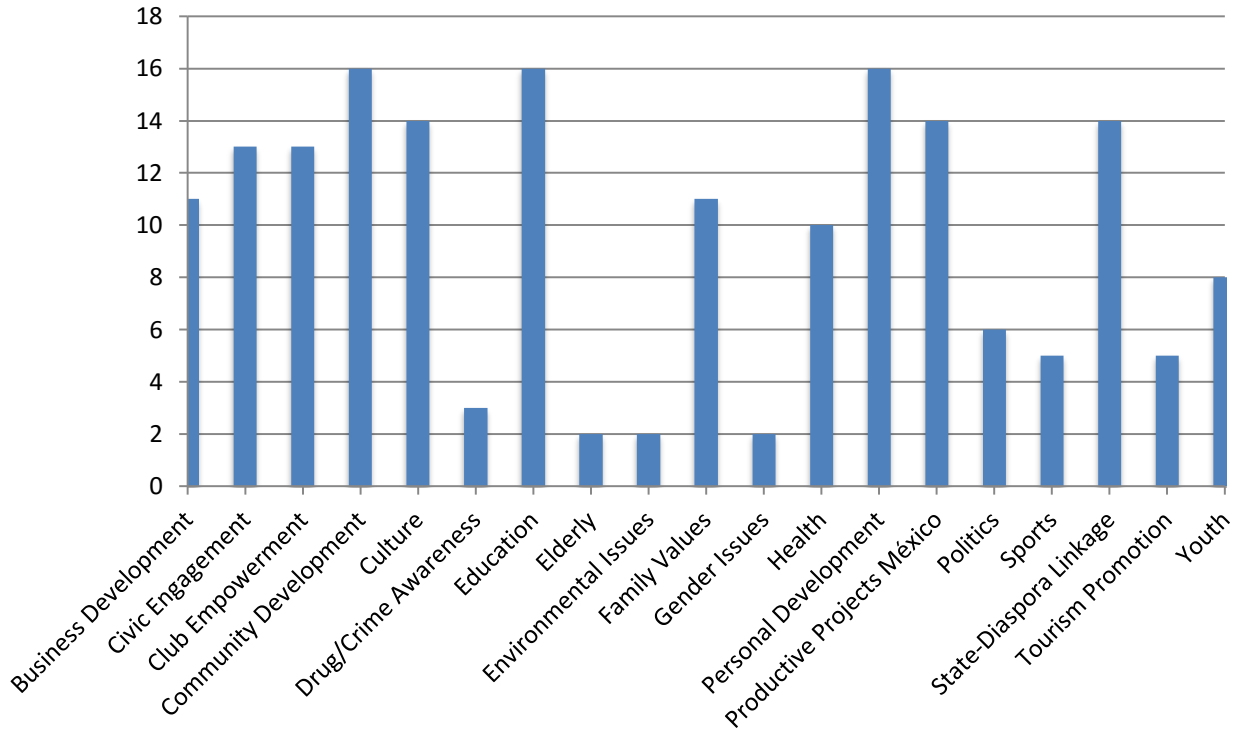
*Mujeres Unidas Sirviendo Activamente* (MUSA) and *Club Mujeres Exitosas*.<sup>23</sup> The organizations share common interests focusing on community development in Mexico and in California, mainly in the areas of health, education, civic participation, economic development and organizational development, as well as new member incorporation. The index offers contact information for every federation and organization, an updated board of directors' Organigram, brief summary of their activities, history, and achievements, as well as a link to the official websites when such exists.

Figure 11 displays the areas of opportunity the federations and associations from COFEM see as priorities. As a whole, COFEM looks to preserve the Mexican identity through social and cultural events that highlight the Mexican roots and heritage as well as through the involvement in Mexican electoral matters. On the contrary, COFEM advocates in favor of naturalization for those who are eligible and promotes the involvement in political activity that targets the migrant community in general. An example of such was the US Immigration Protest of 2006 in the city of Los Angeles, which lobbied for the approval of a migratory reform.

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<sup>23</sup> To get more information on the COFEM, go to <http://www.cofem.org/about-cofem>.

**Figure 11 Areas of Interests for COFEM Affiliates**



Source. Self-elaboration with data from COFEM, 2015.

The organizations associated with the Council of Mexican Federations concentrate on three areas, community development in the Los Angeles area; promoting educational programs and aid and; providing their members the opportunity to grow on a personal level, completing their basic schooling through special courses or initiating the naturalization and citizenship process for those who are eligible. Diffusion of cultural activities and events, development projects in Mexico in addition to commencing and maintaining cordial relations with national and subnational authorities are also top priorities for the federations belonging to COFEM.

The non-federation members of COFEM, *Anahuak*, *Mujeres Exitosas* and *Mujeres Unidas Srviviendo Activamente*, concentrate on strengthening family values. The Youth Sports Association involves the parents in the coaching and overseeing the practice sessions and matches. *Mujeres Exitosas* and MUSA include similar integration work by providing special courses for both women and men, giving them tools to overcome everyday challenges aiming to keep families united. The Duranguense USA Federation, Federation of Jalisco of Northern California and the Federation of Sonora concentrate on building club capacity in project development and tendering through the SEDESOL in Mexico, especially the 3x1 program.

According to information pooled from the COFEM website, the Durango association offer modules in business for young entrepreneurs and civics to promote the community integration of Mexican migrants, on top of adult education continuation with the help of the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) from Mexico<sup>24</sup>. The Sonorenses union offers personal development courses in English, computer usage and binational economic development, while the Jalisco collective, which is located in the agricultural area of northern California, favors participation in project development to provide support in the form of infrastructure and productive ventures in the state of Jalisco, along with cultural heritage preservation and dissemination in San Jose and its surroundings.

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<sup>24</sup> For more information on the organizations that conform COFEM, go to <http://www.cofem.org/clubs-and-organizations>.

There is a heavy interdependent linkage between the federations, all federations composing the COFEM, and the Mexican authorities in order to carry out the transnational endeavors. That negotiation process between the federations and federal, state and/or municipal institutions is the basic foundation that generates an increase or decrease in clubs' membership within the federations. There exists a political aspect that although the federations fail to acknowledge is a clear trait when considering the lobbying and negotiation willingness they carry out in Mexico.

In other words, the efforts federations have done in community development across borders have designated the elaboration and approval of productive agricultural and infrastructure projects in the towns the clubs within the federations represent as a priority. This labor requires collaboration with those institutions in accordance with the degree of the project and the participation necessary of all involved actors. Such undertakings entail a shift in the federations' mode of work, in their effort and attention from project elaborators and mediators with Mexican authorities, to transparency and efficiency facilitators and demanders. That is, the societies that originated outside of Mexico have become a link between the subnational governments and the population they are meant to represent living beyond their electoral domains. This does not mean that those social clubs of Mexican descent who are not associated with a federation cannot manage inscription with the SEDESOL to attain 3x1 funds for their projects, but it does help to have the support of larger units with established political ties already in play. The 3x1 program has meant that the Mexican diaspora living in Los Angeles has left behind their role of community activists and has been gaining political pull as a result of the altruistic work the 3x1

projects represent to the municipal and state governments in Mexico, which in turn has led to an increase in electoral activity within the local ambiances from those who live abroad.

This population involved in transnational civic activism directed through federations is the target public for political candidates, the Institute for Mexicans Abroad, the Mexican Consulate in Los Angeles and the National Electoral Institute. At a national level, the IME has recognized 68 federations. Of that total, only 6 are concentrated in Chicago, while Los Angeles shows a total of 40<sup>25</sup>; and of those recognized, thirteen form part of the COFEM.<sup>26</sup> Only six collectivities within the Council consider political participation as a primacy, those representing migrant social clubs from Michoacan, Oaxaca, Puebla, Sinaloa, Tlaxcala and Yucatan.

However, for the purposes of this study, and as seen in how political participation is being perceived, the inclusion of electoral interests in Mexican elections, at a federal or subnational degree can be considered as a trait of all federations. Angelina Klein stated that political participation is “more than just a set of specific government institutions; it rests upon a well understood group of values, attitudes, and practices – all of which may take different forms and expressions among different cultures and societies around the world” (Klein, 2011). Accountability, transparency, equality and respect of human rights are qualities present in the

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<sup>25</sup> Seven other cities in California also have at least one federation established within their geographical limits; San Diego, Santa Ana, San Bernardino, Oxnard, San Francisco, Sacramento and San Jose.

<sup>26</sup> Twelve federations are situated in Los Angeles and another in San Jose.

transnational political arena, as well as the electoral attributes, that are existent in the work and activities of the federations.

Taking into consideration the total number of federations in Los Angeles, 10 were selected to be interviewed from the COFEM directory and were complemented by another from the IME index. Of the 11 associations taken into consideration for interviews, Hidalgo, Oaxaca, Puebla, Sinaloa, Tlaxcala and Zacatecas will hold ordinary elections and elect a governor in 2016 and Colima will have extraordinary elections in January of 2017 after the 2015 primary were overturned. Michoacan held gubernatorial elections on July 2015, and Nayarit will elect a new head of state in 2017 ahead of the Guanajuato and Yucatan processes in 2018, coinciding with the presidential race.<sup>27</sup>

It is also noteworthy that seven states of the federations represented are opening their electoral systems to include those living abroad. These states are Colima, Guanajuato, Michoacan, Oaxaca, Puebla, Yucatan, and Zacatecas. Oaxaca and Zacatecas are allowing their voters living abroad to vote for governor in 2016; Guanajuato, Puebla, and Yucatan will give their voters abroad the same deal in the upcoming elections.

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<sup>27</sup> For more information on upcoming elections in Mexico and voting from abroad, go to <http://www.votoextranjero.mx/web/vmre/voto-desde-el-extranjero>.

## Selecting the Participants

As a point of initiation, I chose to work with these federations because of the recent and actual political eventfulness that represent local and gubernatorial election. The Federacion de Clubes de Colima (FEDECOL), Federacion de Clubes Guanajuatenses del Sur de California, Federaci3n de Hidalguenses en California, Federacion de Clubes y Asociaciones de Michoacan (FECADEMÍN), Federacion de Nayaritas USA, Organizacion Regional de Oaxaca (ORO), Union de Poblanos en el Exterior (UPEXT), Fraternidad Sinaloense de California (FSC), Organizacion de Tlaxcaltecas USA, Federacion Alianza de Clubes Yucatecos USA, and the Federacion de Clubes Zacatecanos de la Costa Oeste are the representative sample chosen from a list that contained all the members of the population in the County of Los Angeles. These are eleven of the 39 currently registered federations under the supervision of the IME.

The selection of these hometown associations was enacted in relation to the electoral periods in 2012, taking the last presidential elections as a follow up step towards transnational electoral involvement and political participation from those residing in the US led to the revision and realization of which were the Mexican states with the highest rates of diaspora voting from abroad. The outputs showed that there was a sequence of 10 states that registered a steady total of votes for the presidential run. As shown by Table 2, there was a higher voter turnout from people originators from central Mexico; Mexico City, Estado de Mexico, Michoacan, Guanajuato, and Puebla, while the southern part is represented by Veracruz and the north by

Baja California, Chihuahua and Nuevo Leon. Of those states, all except Mexico City, Estado de Mexico, and Nuevo Leon have a federation representing them in Los Angeles. However, not all were willing to collaborate; the reason why they were not considered in the study.

**Table 2 Mexican states with the highest voter turnout for presidential elections living abroad, 2006 and 2012**

2006	2012
<b>Mexico City... 6,281</b>	Mexico City... 9,644
<b>Jalisco... 5,047</b>	Estado de Mexico... 6,193
<b>Estado de Mexico... 4,149</b>	Jalisco... 5,779
<b>Michoacan... 3,368</b>	Guanajuato... 3,545
<b>Guanajuato... 2,793</b>	Michoacan... 3,489
<b>Nuevo Leon... 1,799</b>	Nuevo Leon... 2,992
<b>Puebla... 1,631</b>	Puebla... 2,959
<b>Baja California... 1,582</b>	Baja California... 2,143
<b>Chihuahua... 1,235</b>	Chihuahua... 2,024
<b>Veracruz... 1,191</b>	Veracruz... 2,015

Source. Informe Final del Voto de los Mexicanos Residentes en el Extranjero, 2013.

The initial contact with the federations from Colima, Guanajuato, Hidalgo, Michoacan, Oaxaca, Puebla, Sinaloa, Tlaxcala and Yucatan was mediated through the Council of Mexican Federations in cooperation. After establishing contact with the director of Community Outreach, emails and phone calls were sent out in search of an initial contact. There was no existent relation between the interviewer and the federations or COFEM previous to 2015 so initiating communication with the heads of the federations were the main goal of the field research phase.

### **Building an Effective Interview Guide**

The identification of the contacts and the elaboration of an inquiry form composed of over thirty questions was inspected to make sure it was aligned with the study's objectives, research questions and variables to make sure the analysis would not sway from the initial proposal. After a series of revisions, two versions of the questionnaire emerged, one of the feedback forms was devised and utilized with 27 questions intended to explore the actuality the federations face; the other, comprised of 18 questions, looked to explore the federations' business in a briefer route, and more interviewee friendly either through telephone interviews or by electronic media, video-conference or email, whenever engaging in face-to-face interviews was an impediment. The design of these guides was that of a standardized, in-depth interview parameter (Frary, 2002; Scheuren, 2004; Turner, 2010) where the questions were carefully worded in a manner

that would be understood by all interviewees in the same manner. This design of questioning allowed a pattern to be formed in order to give uniformity to the respondents' replies.

The guides were framed with the target population in mind and considering the possibility that not all possible targets would agree to participate, answer the recruitment telephone and online calls or emails, and that those who did agree, a percentage would be hesitant or unable to respond a formal, structured interview guide with follow-up questions that would branch out into other aspects of their private and civic activities. The guide required flexibility in its construction in order to be applicable via the telephone as well as in face-to-face exercises. For that reason, an alternative interview guide was formulated, aimed at those Mexican federation leaders who were unreachable in person and via telephone or virtual calls.

### **Format Construction for Face to Face Interview Guide**

The questionnaires were constructed following the same format composed of three sections; respondent specific personal questions (Ferreira, 2014; Kvale, 2006), open-ended questions on the federation (Reja, Manfreda, & Hlebec, 2003), and structured but non-threatening or biased questions (Vennesson, 2008; Willner & Willner, 2011) that allow branching off into other aspects of the federation's role in national and transnational political participation.

The first part was a double intension task to create a sense of trust and confidence with the interviewee and to find out more about the participants. Consequently, beginning the dialogue inquiring about their life outside the federation, name, occupation and how long ago did they immigrate to the US without questioning the legality aspect were the first steps taken towards the political participation section allowing them to fully express their viewpoints and experiences. Before beginning the questioning, the interviewees were given a brief introduction to the study, covering the recent historical events as expressed in the second chapter of this work, as well as theoretical insights of what has been researched on the matter at hand.

Part two of the questionnaire was arranged in a manner that led the respondents towards their political involvement in the US and Mexico considering the research variables, dependent and independent, as well as the general research question. Once again, this section opened with simple and direct questions on the federation such as the official name of the group; when did they join the federation; what activities are priorities within the federation; what was their motivation for getting involved with hometown associations' activities; how did they become aware of the group's existence and; what post do they occupy within the organization. Of the population interviewed, 82% were presidents of their respective federations and the remaining were Secretary Generals of their organizations. This segment was necessary for the investigation because it exposed a background into what might have motivated the integration on to civic activism and the transnational collective envelopment.

The third section of the interview guide is dedicated to seeking the tough answers regarding the transnational political activity the federations carry out on the subject of State-Diaspora relations between the three levels of the Mexican government and the associations. First, the interviewee was asked about the federation's relationship with the federal, state and municipal governments. This question is basic to the research given that a sane linkage with the national and subnational governments represents a strong negotiating capability within the federation. An example of such a connection is the reliance the National Electoral Institute has on the federations in order to get in touch with the Mexican population in Los Angeles.<sup>28</sup> The question is straightforward and opens the panorama to follow up questions in which the respondent can be probed about what other government institutions are the federations in collaboration with. The Secretaria de Desarrollo Social is the one managing social development projects and programs, as is the 3x1 and 1x1. Other possible options included the Secretariat of Culture, Economic Development, Economy, as well as with the INE.

The following questions branch out towards the electoral arena and to open this route of ideas, the examinees were questioned on whether they were registered in the Nominal Electoral List and had a voter identification card. The INE began work in 2015 to integrate Mexicans living abroad on the electoral registrar in order for them to apply for a valid Mexican identification card. This question probed to see if the INE's work was being effective and also to test if the

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<sup>28</sup> It would be unfair to discard the work portrayed by the COFEM in this labor for it does serve as an initial bridge of communication between the organizations it hubs and the Mexican Consulate through which the meetings are arranged.

Mexicans were interested in registering in order to vote in the 2018 presidential elections. Subsequent to this query came a series of questions directed to the voting affluence within the federation. Asking if any, association members, including the interviewee had voted in the Mexican presidential elections of 2006 or 2012 while residing in the US would emit data on the Mexican government's commitment to include the migrant society electoral processes. Correspondingly, this line of questioning was also searching for any evidence of rapprochement between the leading political parties in Mexico and the Mexican population in Los Angeles. This is pivotal question seeing that every year, more states are advocating for abroad voting in subnational and legislative elections. Furthermore, official and unofficial scheduled visits between Mexican politicians and the diaspora are becoming the norm for those who wish to hop from one public representation post to another.

Considering the fact that the federations are registered as non-profit organizations prohibits them from supporting any political party or institution or religious sect as an entity. This, however, does not impede the Mexican factions from seeking the support in an open manner of the federations bearing in mind what they represent within the Mexican community in Los Angeles.<sup>29</sup>

Following the same line of thought, the interviewees were asked about their connection with the Mexican Consulate in Los Angeles, how they evaluate voting via the postal service, and what

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<sup>29</sup> This point will be further explained in chapter 4.

modifications, if any, they saw fit in order to motivate a higher voter turnout. The Consulate has become the main ally and mediator between the federal government and the hometown associations in electoral matters. Its role has expanded from being the sole provider of administrative services, processing of passports, military and consular cards, on top of powers of attorney, to becoming the face and embodiment of the INE in the greater LA area. With that in mind, the INE has been working closely with the Consulate on the matter of registering the Mexican population in order to have as many voters as possible for the 2018 presidential elections. The request for information on the relation between institutions and hometown associations was a set up for a question that seeks to explore if there is an imminent interest from the federations to seek a role that puts them in the electoral fixture. In the first half of 2015, several potential candidates from more than a few states in Mexico made the trip across the border to establish a contact with the diaspora and within the retinues were migrant representatives who were managing the hopefuls' campaign machinery as individuals and not as members of a social club or federation.

The final batch of questions the interviewee's perspective on the American public's awareness of Mexicans voting in national and subnational elections. This subject has gained more attention in the last few months, especially considering that the US presidential elections are around the corner and the fact that immigration and US-Mexico relations are trending topics and debate material within the candidates from the democratic and republican parties alike. Political representation has been a cornerstone of the transnational movement with Latino and other

minority leaders from across California defending the immigrant community's rights, so asking about the importance of minority representation and representatives was an open ended question that sought to explore their stance on the subject and what it represented to have local leaders who understood their perspective.

### **Standard Model for In-Depth Email Interviews**

Recruiting for the email interview was done via individual solicitation with contact information retrieved by means of the COFEM and IME organization's directories. The number of qualitative studies through method is not enough to generate conclusive results and was integrated to a primary data collection registrar along with information extracted from the structured, open-ended interviews. The second interview questionnaire, and third interviewing technique, was constructed in a more concise manner to ensure sufficient participation and attention from those informants who were unreachable in person. The main reason why this guide was shortened was to keep the respondent from deserting it or returning an incomplete document. Other downsides to this type of interviews were that it is difficult to establish a bond, as is the case when the interview is conducted person to person. The trust issue could have been another stumbling block that would have impeded the realization of the interviews, however, having been in previous contact with personnel from COFEM resulted fruitful because the Council gave a heads up to its members and asked them to cooperate with the research effort.

This self-administered interview was sent out to 29 different email addresses. Less than 10% of the population targeted responded positively via email and another 34% of the possible participants were reached and interviewed personally. There were two specific cases that contact was with established and acceded to participate. The in-depth email consultations were sent out to COFEM affiliated federations from Guanajuato, Antonia Gutierrez, and Yucatan, Miguel Rodriguez, and a third was sent to Carlos Sifuentes Nava of the Federacion de Clubes Zacatecanos de la Costa Oeste. In order to get a foot in the door, several emails were sent and followed up by telephone calls confirming a few essential details on the research project. Connecting with the interviewees depended on the reliance of third parties, referring to COFEM personnel, and their ability to influence others to answer emails, phone calls and especially the questionnaire.

Conducting this type of interviews permits distancing between the interviewer and interviewee that is not possible in face to face interviews (Burgess, 2001). In this work, the interviews sent via email permitted the respondents to look back over the questions and reflect on their responses without the pressure of having the interviewer awaiting an answer instantaneously.

As was the case with the person to person dialogue, the questionnaire guide was planned out in three stages, exploring the following essentials; life in the US, organization's nominal data, and political participation on electoral matters by the Mexican diaspora via the federations (see Table 3). This last element is the dependent variable within the study as it is completely reliant on the work being done by the associations. An increase in transnational political participation

has influenced and strengthened the interest and implication in electoral matters of the Mexican community living in Los Angeles.

**Table 3 Considerations for Questionnaire Elaboration**

Elements	Question focus
<b>Personal life story</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does the interviewee do for a living?</li> <li>• How long have they lived in the US?</li> </ul>
<b>Information on the federation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The number of affiliated clubs</li> <li>• Year of enrollment in federation</li> <li>• Post within the organization</li> </ul>
<b>Political-electoral participation in Mexico by the federation and members</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State-diaspora relations</li> <li>• Migrant associations as electoral machinery</li> <li>• Political representation as pillar of transnational involvement</li> </ul>

Source. Self-elaboration.

This questionnaire was directed towards personnel deeply involved in the toils of the federations and are more likely to be in touch with personnel and high profile representatives from Mexican institutions. The existent relation between these groups allows the federations a certain level of trust and management consulting, placing them in the high political spheres within Mexican politics. Once the target population was identified and contacted, the questionnaire initiated in the same manner as the face-to-face interview guide.

There are minor modifications to the impersonal, self-administered feedback form, but the main issues and questions remained intact. Questions focusing on the tally of individuals affiliated to the clubs that conform the federations was removed; in contrast with the first guide. What are the principal areas of interest and activities followed the same fate? What motivated the respondent to join the organization and how did they find out about their existence were also removed. The reduction of questions corresponds to the fact that these are interrogations, which would branch out into multifaceted follow ups on the groups and the person answering, such as their connections with peers and non-peers alike.

There were a few cutbacks to the third section as well. It was pertinent to maintain a line of questioning on the existing bond between the federations and Mexican institutions, however, there was a twist in comparison to the longer question guide. The SEDESOL question was removed because this was information that could be subtracted from the COFEM website, in regards to the Guanajuato and Yucatan representations, and from social media sites in the case of Zacatecas.

Information on whether voting from abroad was allowed by the subnational electoral bodies, state electoral institutes, was removed because it was a question that was replied by the majority with a negative response, aside from the fact that this was information that could be withdrawn from the INE website. The type of participation the organization had in the past presidential elections in Mexico was also removed because their role was limited or nonexistent

in terms of inciting the popular vote in favor of the Mexican presidential candidates of 2006 and 2012.

The questions that remained could be identified as open-ended, single response and rated response- over the postal vote. The intention with this shorter guide was to keep the participant concentrated on answering within a ten-minute period the entirety. However, although the majority of questions asked for a 'yes' or 'no' reaction, the respondents would take the liberty of explaining and defending their replies.

### **Closing Remarks**

Relying on the respondents to answer one of the interview guides, over the telephone, through in-depth email interviews or in person-to-person interactions implicated formulating multiple interview guides with similar wording that resulted interesting enough to the projected public that it would stimulate their participation in the study.

The exploration of primary data collection consisted of instrumenting interview guides in order to observe the effects of the variables, the independent over the dependent, to validate the hypothesis and project nominal information on the micro-political context driving the associations within the macro context in which the Mexican authorities interact with the diaspora representative entities. From a constructionist setting, the interactions with the

interviewees were sampled and controlled in order to extract analytic observations in an organized, optimal and structured manner.

The interviews represent a non-written pact between the researcher and the interviewee, based on mutual trust that the information will not be used in any other manner or with a different purpose than that accorded. Each required a verbal contract between the implicated, which involved a description of the study that resulted as a necessity to the migrant leaders who were eager to express that this labor should be carried on by the Mexican authorities. Conducting the cross-examinations and collecting primary data on the federations in Los Angeles opened a spectrum in the world of politics fulfilled by the organizations on a local, statewide, national and transnational level. Also, the life histories of Paco Moreno and Denise Ducheny Moreno serves as proof that there is a growing concern by the Mexican and the California governments in Mexican immigration matters that help shape the political agenda on both ends.



## **Chapter IV. Analysis and Discussion of the Migrant Associations Activity**

In this fragment, a sequence of face-to-face and virtual interviews was held with personnel from eleven federations of Mexican representation situated in the greater Los Angeles area, most of them, presidents of their association. Each interviewee provided extensive and detailed information on the establishment of their grouping as well as their experiences in adapting to the American process of civic activities and political involvement that would later be translated to the Mexican political scene. In all, the fieldwork process resulted in a greater understanding of how the Mexican community who is involved with hometown clubs or regional federations, in Los Angeles and its surroundings are changing their attitudes towards the American way of life. They are no longer a group who is scared to be seen or of standing out, on the contrary, it is a group of individuals who are becoming community leaders and migrant defenders within and outside of Mexico and, most important, they are no longer willing to remain silent when facing social or political injustice. The Mexican diaspora movement in Los Angeles is a driving force that has them placed as an investment group in several states in Mexico. Such is their influence in local Mexican political scenes that, municipal presidents and governors take the time to travel to the US and meet with them.

From a local spectrum, the groups in Los Angeles do not yet sustain the same level of representation and influence, as do the migrant hometown associations from Chicago. These are groups that have been interlaced in State-Diaspora relations for over fifty years, while the LA

associations, mainly speaking of those affiliated to the COFEM, have been in operation for less than 20 years. This, however, is not an impediment to seek out a relationship with the different levels of government and representation in Mexico. For example, the states of Michoacan, Oaxaca, Guanajuato, Colima and Puebla, to name a few, have set up administrative offices with personnel coming from the state of representation to provide aid for their co-nationals. These "Casas" provide some of the services managed by the Consulates, such as providing them with birth certificates, but they also help coordinate cultural and social events to promote tourism and investment in the place of origin.

For those states that do not count with these representations, it results in a challenge establishing and maintaining a stable relation between its institutions and the people they are meant to represent. An example of the lack of representation is that of the *Organizacion de Tlaxcaltecas USA*, who have a distant, almost nonexistent, relation with the state government. Contrary to that lack of linkage with the state and federal governing bodies, at the municipal level, many of the presidents yearn to keep a close contact with the federations, especially those who are not aligned with the state or federal governing factions. The lack of communication channels and political commitment, and action, by Mexican authorities has driven the associations to search for new business partners in order to carry out their activities in Mexico and abroad.

In order to see what is the current status of the transnational political scene between the LA based, several interviews were conducted, as explained in detail in the previous chapter with

presiding members of 11 regional Mexican migrant federations with the intention of inquiring on the relation between the groups and their municipal and state authorities, their stance on the Mexican vote from abroad program and, what actions are being carried out by the Mexican officials, be it through Foreign Relations or the horizontalization of power dynamics expressed by way of paradiplomacy. The main interests that arose and motivated the elaboration of these interviews was to figure out, with the actors at hand, how the State-diaspora link has evolved; where is the Mexican electoral management body heading in the implementation of transnational elections and; how will the people of Mexican origin, with an interest in Mexican politics, modify their behavior, via hometown associations, during presidential campaigns.

### **Dissecting The Federations<sup>30</sup>**

The federations represented have several similarities in their operational procedures. The majority of them are registered as Nonprofit associations under the IRS regimen; they are open to including more migrant clubs from their place of origin, and a few of them even include clubs from other states and countries, and; most important, the federations believe that electoral

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<sup>30</sup> The subjects that contributed with the interviews did so willingly and under the notion that the information rescued from the recordings would be available for any person who would desire their access. It was also important for the interviewees that I would identify myself as a student and not as a representative or affiliate of any Mexican political party.

activity and migrant representation, and representatives are the best route towards immigrant inclusion in Mexican politics. With the previous in mind, this section is dedicated to the analysis of the composition of the hometown associations scrutinized including. It will also bestow a great segment into their positions when it comes to the person's own experience as well as a unitary structure as expressed by them as community and organizational leaders.

**Table 4 Federation per State**

Name of Federation	Representative	Occupation
<b>Federacion de Clubes de Colima (FEDECOL)</b>	Miguel Angel Perez (President)	Retired/plumber (Self-employed)
<b>Federacion de Clubes Guanajuatenses del Sur de California</b>	Antonia Gutierrez (Secretary)	Teacher
<b>Federacion de Hidalguenses en California</b>	Rogelio Vazquez (President) and Silvia Marin (Former president)	Civil Engineer (Self-employed)
<b>Federacion de Clubes y Asociaciones de Michoacan (FECADEMIN)</b>	Francisco Moreno (Secretary)	Director of Migrant Community Outreach at COFEM
<b>Federacion de Nayaritas USA</b>	Carlos Gonzalez (Former President of FENINE and current President of SD Chapter)	Commercial driver (Self-employed)
<b>Organizacion Regional de Oaxaca (ORO)</b>	Isai Pasos (President)	Graphic Designer (Self-employed)
<b>Union de Poblanos en el Exterior (UPEXT)</b>	Alfredo Gomez (President)	Landscaper (Self-employed)

<b>Fraternidad Sinaloense de California (FSC)</b>	Jose Angel Barajas (President)	Lawyer (Self-employed)
<b>Organizacion de Tlaxcaltecas USA</b>	Abel Garcia (President)	Business Owner
<b>Federacion Alianza de Clubes Yucatecos USA</b>	Miguel Rodriguez (President)	Commercial truck driver and business owner
<b>Federacion de Clubes Zacatecanos de la Costa Oeste</b>	Carlos Sifuentes (President)	Business Owner

Source. Self-elaborated, 2016.

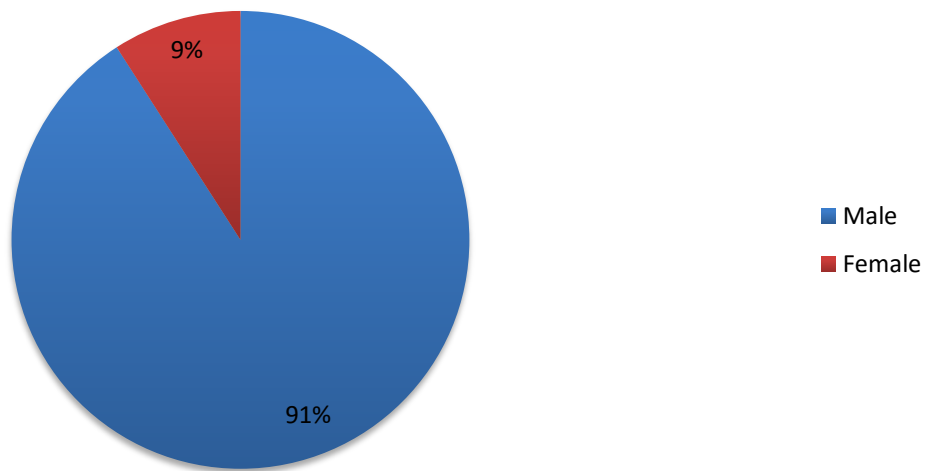
As shown in Table 4, the majority of those who were interviewed occupied the presidency of their respective organization, three served as Secretary Generals. Two of them, Francisco Moreno and Antonia Gutierrez had in turn served as presidents of the FECADEMIN and FGTO, but have stayed linked to the groups. In the case of Carlos Gonzalez, he also served as president of the Federacion de Nayaritas USA and is now in charge of the San Diego branch.

The majority of those who were interviewed have been active members of their respective organization for more than five years. They are not only federation and club leaders, but also look to help the migrant community and the families of their affiliates and supporters in Mexico. Although the organizations are identified as federations, their leaders see not all as federations;

the groups are self-labeled as federations, organizations and unions. An example of the latter is the Union of Poblanos Abroad (UPEXT) and the Oaxaca Regional Organization (ORO).

UPEXT founder and president, Alfredo Moreno, mentioned that although the group began as a federation, the collective soon realized that a lot of Poblanos interested in joining was not affiliated to a club or did not have enough of a following to form one, but desired to join the Poblano Federation. The solution was to change their mode of operation from a federation to a union with a membership of Puebla migrant clubs and individuals. ORO is another collective that does not identify as a federation. They are representative of Oaxaca migrants, but given the diversity of the state, and assortment of Oaxaca federations in the LA area, have opted to recognize clubs and cultural and folkloric dance groups as members, given their cultural nature, from across Oaxaca. The other federations have a more general outline in membership acceptance, dealing directly with hometown clubs in order to engage with local and state governments in the search of implementing productive projects through the SEDESOL Program of 3x1 for Migrants.

**Figure 12 Gender of Federation's President**



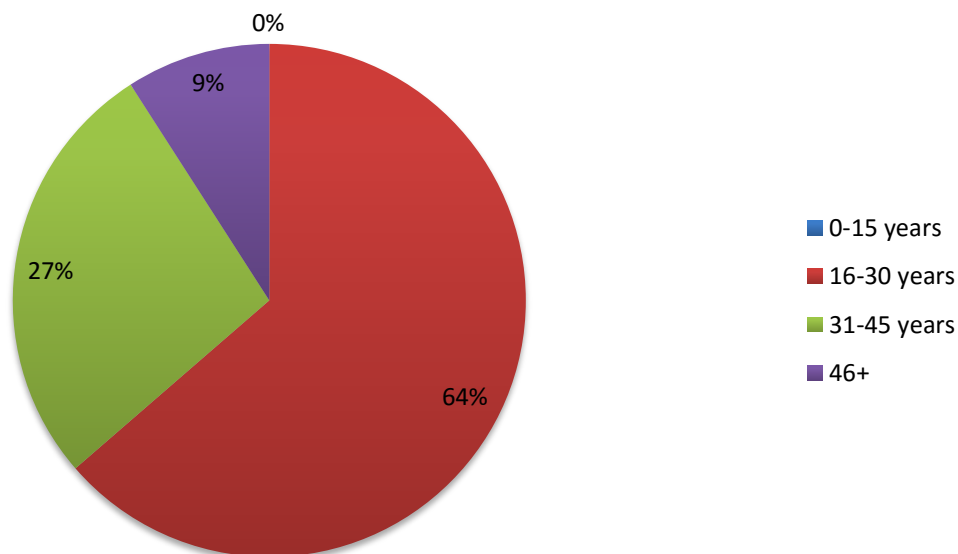
Source. Self-Elaborated, 2016.

A figure that stands out within the leadership of the federations is that only one is commanded by a female figure (Figure 12). This however does not suggest that female leadership is not present in this environment of micro politics. The Federacion de Nayaritas USA has a standing female president. In the case of the Hidalguense federation, Silvia Marin is the former president, but resigned to the position when she was appointed president of the Council of Mexican Federations. Antonia Gutierrez also served as president of the Federacion de Clubes Guanajuatenses del Sur de California, but stepped down in 2015 and currently serves as secretary of the FGTO's board of directors. The study does not go into depth on the subject of gender and migrant organization leadership, however, it does seem like a subject that deserves a deeper look into.

Gender does not seem to be a topic that stands out within the hometown association environment. Neither there were a few questions that surged in the moment related to the issue, but that were not really a concern nor could it be deducted through the information from the interviews. One was the matter of gender distribution within the federations and the other was if they could give an approximate number of members that conform the federation. The all-around answer was that each club is responsible for their membership accountability and are not bound to provide this information in particular to the federations' boards of directors.

This brings afloat the fact that the clubs and federations, although registered with the IME and the Mexican Consulate of LA, they are not concerned with having a registrar of the total organization population, but rather focus on administrative processes that have to do with getting the productive projects registered under the SEDESOL and providing aid to their communities of origin.

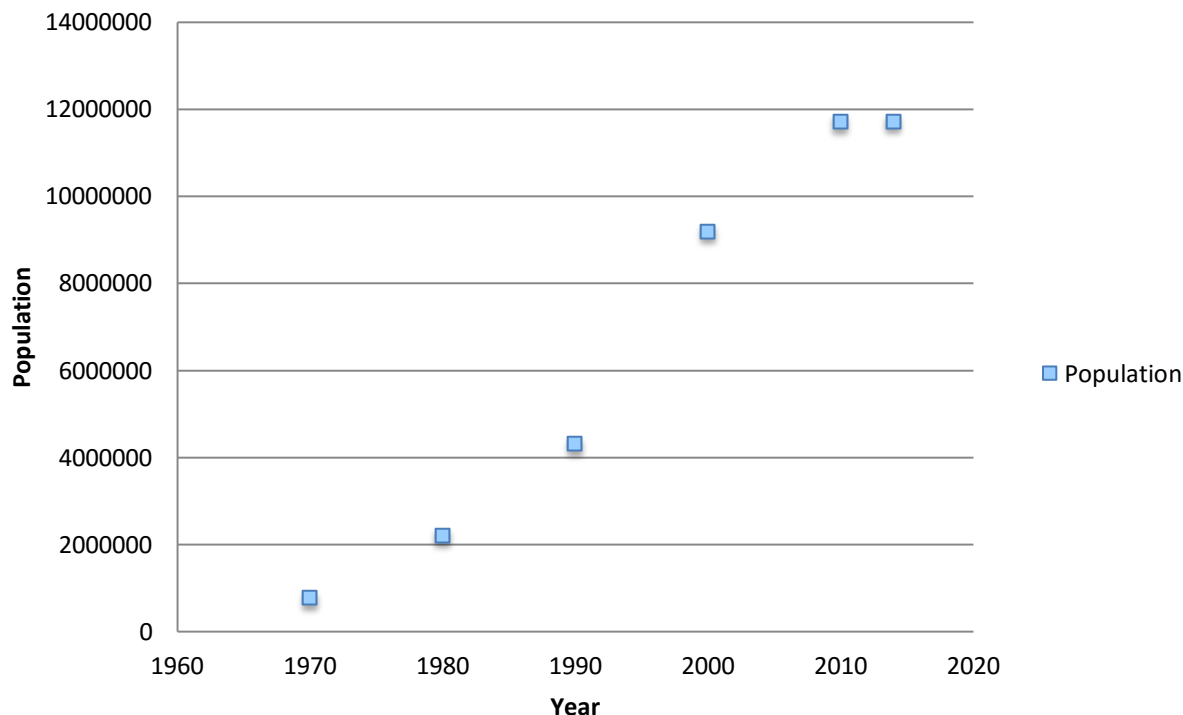
**Figure 13 Time of Residence in the US**



Source. Self-Elaborated, 2016.

There were, however questionings of the temporality of their residence in the US given that their date of arrival gives a glimpse of what they have witnessed, lived through and thrusted them to get involved with their hometown clubs and the federations in general. One of the main questions of the interviews glimpse into when the subjects migrated to the United States. Figure 13 represents the temporality of immigration to the US of the leaders surveyed, 64 percent of them migrated north between the late 1980s and early 1990s; 27 per cent migrated between the 1970s and early 1980s, while only nine per cent have been living in the US for over 46 years – this is the case with Jose Barajas of the Sinaloa Federation who has been there for over 48 years.

**Figure 14 Mexican Born Population Living in the US, 1970-2014**



Source. 2009. Pew Hispanic Center tabulations from “Mexican Immigrants in the United States, 2008.”

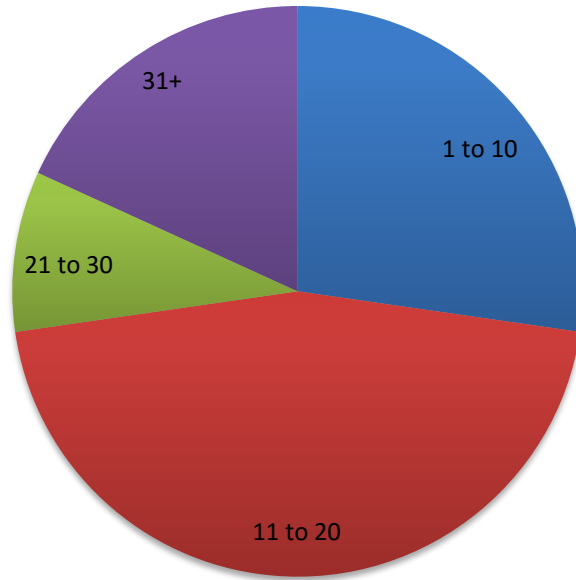
According to the Pew Hispanic Center and the Migration Policy Institute (Center, 2009; Zong & Batalova, 2016), the immigration of Mexican born population to the United States saw a steep increase beginning in the 1970s, and extending until the 1990s, that sparked a major influx of Mexican population when compared to the rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The availability of work in the fields, immigration reforms of the late 1980s along with the issuance of agricultural work visas to non-rural immigrants from central Mexico, as well as from the Bajio and Pacific regions were also factors that drove migration towards the northern neighbor. In this rubric, we can

include the interviewees from Colima, Guanajuato, Hidalgo, Michoacan, Nayarit, Oaxaca, Puebla, Tlaxcala, Yucatan and Zacatecas.

### **Rivaling the Immersion of Hometown Associations in Electoral Affairs**

As previously mentioned, although those who participated in the interviews were unable to give an approximate of the number of members that make up the federations, they were aware of the exact number of clubs associated with their organizations. As seen in Figure 15, out of 11, five federations are comprised of 11 to 20 clubs; three have less than 10 clubs; two of the organizations surpass the mark of 30 or more clubs and; only one federation has between 21 and 30 clubs.

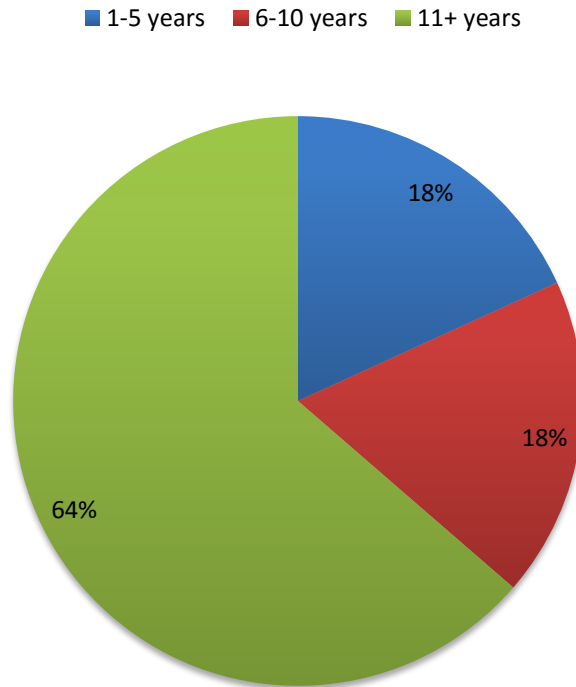
**Figure 15 Number of Clubs Conforming the Federation**



Source. Self-Elaborated, 2016.

The Hidalguenses Federation in California and Federation of Zacatecano Clubs are the two largest federations in club membership, each tallying 61 and 78 clubs respectively. These two numbers are followed by asterisks due to the fact that, and considering that the main subject of the organizations is the inclusion of all who desire so, that the Hidalgo federation also hosts more than 10 clubs established in other parts of the US. The Zacatecas group also looks to help and include clubs from other Mexican states and localities; currently it is composed of 58 Zacatecano clubs and a mix of 20 from Yucatan and from the Estado de Mexico.

**Figure 16 Years of Membership in HTA**



Source. Self-Elaborated, 2016.

Although it is important to consider the size of the associations, especially because the members represent potential voters for the 2018 presidential elections, as well as upcoming local, state and national electoral processes, it is also dire to consider how active and committed the leaders of the Mexican migrant federations have been within their organizations. As seen in Figure 16, seven of the people questioned have been affiliated to the association for over 11 years. This group includes the federation leaders from Colima, Guanajuato, Michoacan, Oaxaca, Sinaloa, Tlaxcala and Zacatecas. Those who are in charge of Hidalgo and Puebla federations got

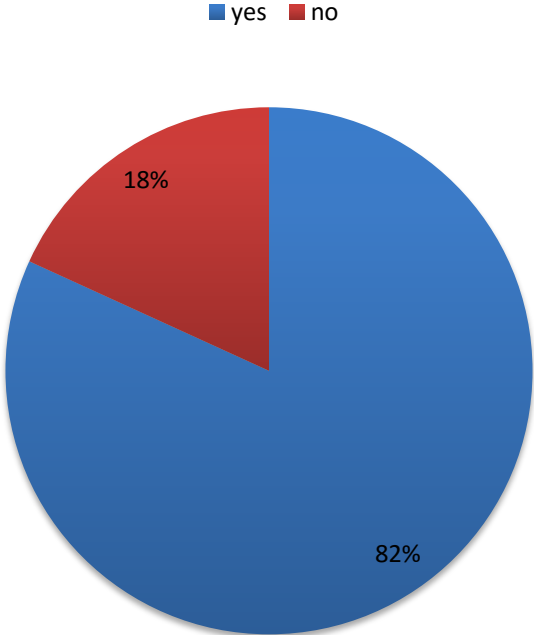
enveloped in 2008 and 2006 correspondingly, and the Yucatan and Nayarit representatives joined their groups in 2011 and 2012.

When asked about what drove them to join, a general response was to help develop productive projects back in the place of origin, however, if we look back at Table 4, we can see that nine of the eleven are self-employed and/or business owners. It is a significant fact because the interviewees enter a categorization in which they are identified as members of society that have acquired capital and retribute to the growth of their local communities as well as the one left behind. This is a distinction that was emphasized unintentionally by the examinees and gains relevance for the fact that after achieving “the American Dream” allows them to help others reach the same goal through the elaboration of those productive projects back home in collaboration with the SEDESOL Federal.

The elaboration and execution of these productive projects, 3x1 and 1x1 have been primordial to the prolongation and the survival of the associations. The affiliation of new clubs, and the permanence of those already associated, has depended on this activity. However, in order to perpetuate those ventures, the federations need to establish actual relations with the municipal, state and federal institutions. This is the focal point that makes or breaks the federations. Every one of the leaders interviewed emphasized this argument; nonetheless, not all were pleased with the labor of the local government with whom they collaborated.

The importance of the State- diaspora relation may present electoral repercussions that do not only affect the ruling party at a national level but also at a subnational degree. The federations and their affiliates can lend a helping hand or become a bump in the road for those candidates representing a political party. Therefore, those states who do not contribute in the approval of productive projects, will not receive the support of the migrant community. On the other side, the consent of these endeavors by the state government, and incentivized by the federations, comply with three purposes; serve as a catalyst of infrastructural development in the communities of origin in a mode of extra official assistance; cultivates an entrepreneurial nature within the migrants that in hand; generates new job opportunities and a newfangled source of taxes that benefit the federal and subnational administrative structures.

**Figure 17 Do You Have a Mexican Voting Card?**



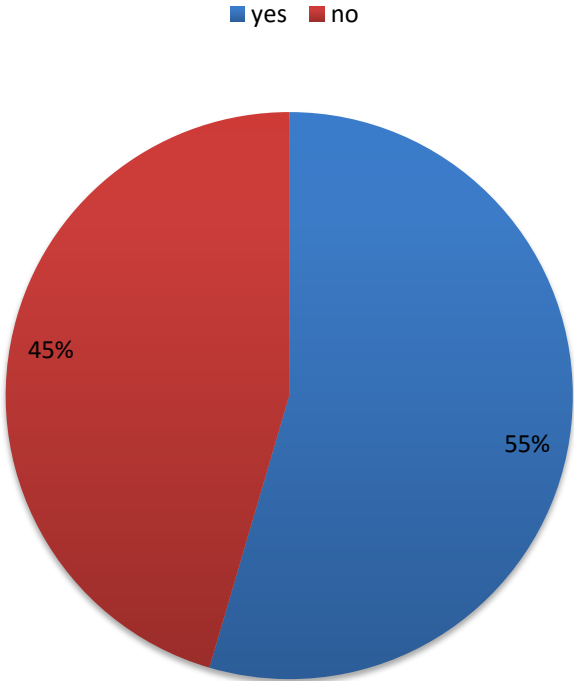
Source. Self-Elaborated, 2016.

This lack of commitment by subnational governments has already presented negative effects in the way migrants and the federations perceive the electoral processes and the parties' machineries. The 2016 midterm elections, united with the recent credentialization program promoted by the Mexican electoral management body provide a fertile testing ground to test whether or not Mexicans living outside of the national territory still have a desire to elect their leaders and representatives. Figure 17 presents one of the current problems the INE is facing with the voters living outside of Mexico. How many of the leaders interviewed possess a Mexican voting card. When asked if they have a valid INE identification card, nine of the respondents replied positively while only two of them did not have one, but were in the process of acquiring it, the representatives of the Colima and Hidalgo federations.

The lack of the identification card, or "IFE" as referred to colloquially, was not an impediment that kept the respondents from exercising their constitutionally given right of voting in Mexican elections (see Figure 18). In fact, 55 per cent of the participants admitted having voted in past Mexican elections. The options of doing varied from travelling to their place of origin, going across the border and voting in special booths in Tijuana and one of them experienced registering with the INE, voting and sending their ballot via the postal services in the 2012 presidential elections.

This question alluded to voting for the Commander in Chief of Mexico, however, given the open wording, it gave the interviewees elbowroom to elaborate their response. The representative of the Zacatecas group retorted, having voted for president in 2006 and 2012, as well as electing Senate members. The Yucatan frontrunner was another who voted for president in 2012. He submitted his ballot via the postal service, nevertheless, expressed concern about whether this was the best option for voting from a distance.

**Figure 18 Have You Voted in Mexican Presidential Elections While Living in the US?**

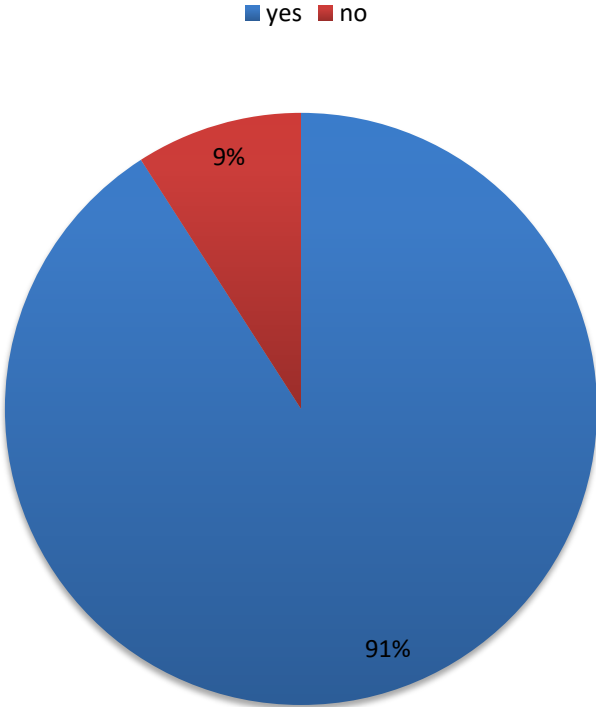


Source. Self-elaborated, 2016.

Another latent concern generally expressed are the lack of operational campaigns by the INE to promote the emission of voting cards and the registration of the overall migrant community in

the nominal electoral list for the 2018 presidential elections. Coincidentally the authorities of the Mexican Consulate in LA have picked up the slack on the issue with the purposefulness of informing the migrant leaders in order for them to filter the information down federation members. Although there is an unease present, the federations are interested in participating in Mexican elections at the national and subnational levels (see Figure 19).

**Figure 19 Is There an Interest in Participating in Mexican Elections within Federation?**



Source. Self-Elaborated, 2016.

The interest in participation is delicately linked to the amount of effort the INE and the Mexican authorities are willing to muster within the diaspora passed on through the hometown associations. The National Electoral Institute has been managing the abroad vote for over a

decade. Many events and studies have been held and published describing the advances in the field at hand. Also, the involvement of the associations is determined by the current events in the US political scenario. As it has occurred in past migratory cycles, the foreign born community and their kin, in general and across the country, is currently concentrating on increasing the naturalization rates in order to vote in the upcoming presidential contention. Once the US presidential elections have past, the attention, of the Mexican born immigrants will shift towards the Mexican presidential elections of 2018.<sup>31</sup>

The cases of Michoacan and Zacatecas stand out in this section given their long-standing tradition of being exporters of labor hand. However, with the approval of out of state voting by local legislations from 14 other states over the course of the last decade, like Colima, Guanajuato, Oaxaca, Puebla and Yucatan are becoming more active in the Mexican electoral scene. This is not to say that the leaders of these federations are more active transnationally than those representing the federations that still lack a transnational voting procedure.

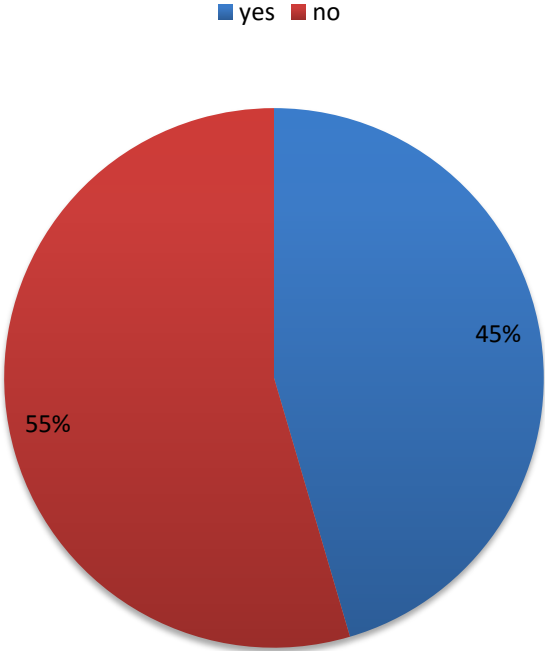
Participating politically involves developing public relations with the support of the nonprofit, migrant associations; carrying out cross-border agendas benefiting those living in Los Angeles as well as back in the locality of origin and; establishing and developing a series of migrant

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<sup>31</sup> The role of the hometown associations in this scenario is to summon and encourage their affiliates who are eligible for naturalization and citizenship processes go ahead and do so. Cofem has been one of the major promoters in the LA area campaigning heavily through television and radio interviews, as well as through social media the free workshops and courses directed at that sector of the population, indistinctly of their origin. For more information on the events and immigration workshops, visit [www.cofem.org](http://www.cofem.org) as well as the Cofem facebook profile.

networks with the ultimate goal of improving the living conditions in Mexico and the US. A resilient component necessary to ensure that collaboration between the State and diaspora is fructiferous for both flanks is the fabrication of continuous and unbreakable channels of communication between the federations and the subnational and national governments. It all goes back to the conception of productive projects and their perpetuity will determine whether the federations decide to express their right to vote or punish the political system through an act of abstentionism (see Figure 20).<sup>32</sup>

**Figure 20 Did HTA Members Vote in the 2012 Presidential Elections?**



Source. Self-Elaborated, 2016.

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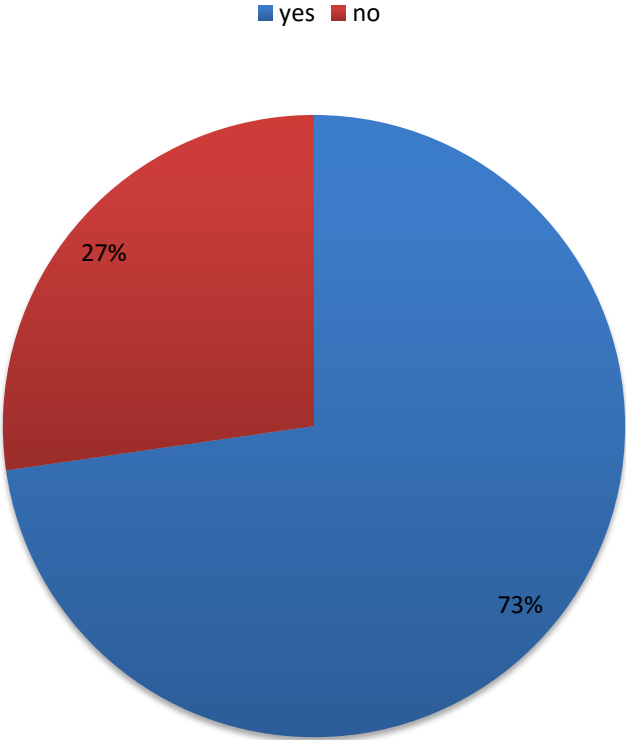
<sup>32</sup> As of 2015, all but one of those interviewed admitted that their organization has not had a single productive project approved and for this reason, there is no confidence that the state administration is interested in its diaspora and for that same reason, the diaspora is not interested in taking part of electoral matters within Mexico.

Despite the complications that result from the State-diaspora relation, lack of communication; an excess of bureaucratization of procedures and; the absence of action from state governments, the involvement of federation members in the electoral scene has not been hindered or discouraged. In March 2015, previous to the opening of the campaign season for ordinary elections in Mexico, members of the Michoacano Federation met with two of the governorship pre-candidates at a shopping center in the city of Lynwood. According to the Fifth Book, First Title, Second Chapter of the General Law of Electoral Institutions and Procedures (LEGIPE), this meeting did not corrupt the electoral code given that they did not present themselves as candidates and the meetings were not campaign acts, but rather meetings between concerned politicians' eager to listen to the issues concerning the diaspora. These assemblies were held in an informal environment and in an unofficial manner that did not violate the LEGIPE.

The gatherings with potential contenders do represent an implicit intent to encompass the would-be voters towards one or another party, but that intention is not promoted by the federations, but rather by concerned Mexican citizens who have an affinity towards the pre-candidates. All the same, since the meetings were held in a neutral location and not in the federation's official space, with concerned Mexican migrant who in no manner represented the federations at that particular periodicity, the federations were also acting in accordance with Section 501-C3 of the Internal Revenue Service statute, that prohibits the associations

recognized as nonprofit from convoluting in political actions and campaigns. As seen in Figure 21, 73% of the federations in the study have an agenda that focuses on promoting the Mexican vote from abroad. They are, nonetheless, open to appeal to latent voters towards voting without apologizing for a political party or nominee.

**Figure 21 Is the Federation Promoting Mexican Voting from Abroad?**

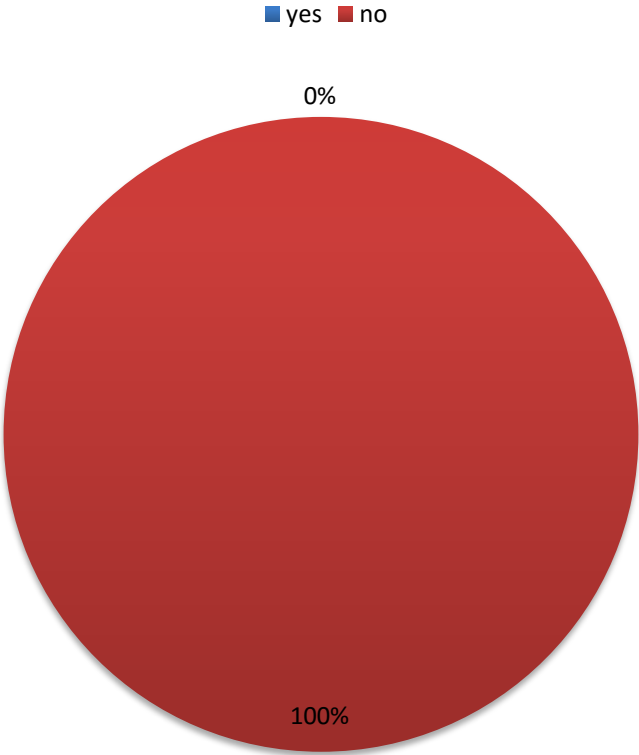


Source. Self-Elaborated, 2016.

The associations are not permitted by the IRS to endorse any candidates or parties as long as they maintain a nonprofit status. In Figure 22, it is shown that none of the groups support explicitly any of the political forces from Mexico. Nonetheless, this does not keep party

representatives from seeking the organizations. From a private standpoint, though, and depending on how pro-migrant the political factions have been, especially in helping with productive projects and providing funds for the celebration of regional festivals, the subjects have cooperated with the politicians but are adamant about taking sides during campaign season. The grander level of commitment by a politician to the migrant cause, greater will be the possibilities gaining access to the desired population by the parties.

**Figure 22 Does the Federation Openly Support a Political Party from Mexico?**



Source. Self-Elaborated, 2016.

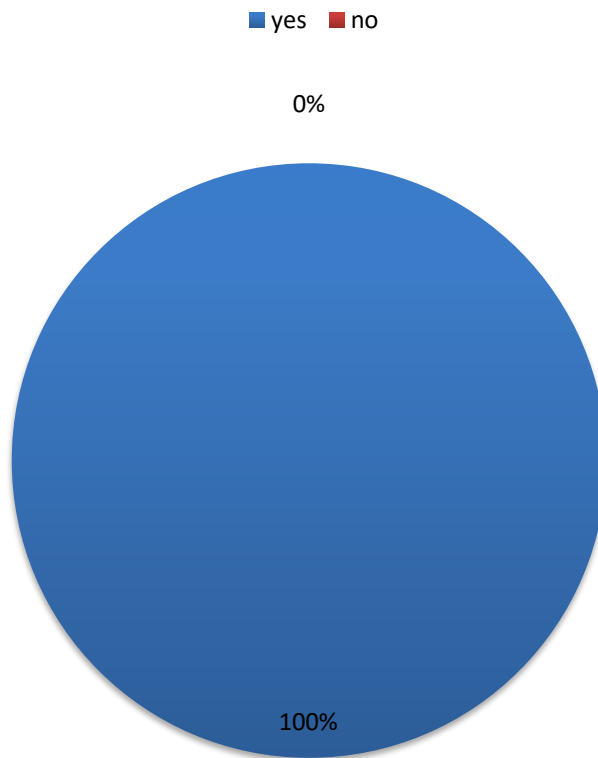
The electoral code from Mexico prohibits candidates and their machinery from promoting and receiving campaign funding from abroad. The electoral legislation prohibits parties and nominees from campaigning outside of the national territory, Article 353.1; nor can they purchase or receive television or radio airtime outside of the national territory, Art. 353.3 or; procure private resources to finance their campaign from foreigners, Article 380. The limitations established by the IRS and the Mexican legal system act as buffers to keep politics and the federations' activities separate. Distancing themselves from any political attachment allows the associations to work with municipal presidents, governors and federal employees without having the concern of what political party is in power.

As previously mentioned, governor nominees from Michoacan from Partido Accion Nacional and from Partido de la Revolucion Democratica met with potential voters and concerned citizens in Plaza Mexico; candidates from Colima, Oaxaca, Nayarit, Guanajuato, Hidalgo, Puebla, Sinaloa, Yucatan, Tlaxcala and Zacatecas have sought meetings with the migrant community. The success of their venture relies mainly on their actions and scarcely on their discourse (see Figure 23).

The state administrations depend heavily on the labor done by their agents and work to strengthen their relation with the diaspora. A way of fortifying that link is through the establishment of official state-run houses of representation such as *Casa Colima*, *Casa*

*Michoacan* and *Casa Guanajuato*, to name a few. Overall, there are 12 official houses of state representation in Los Angeles.<sup>33</sup>

**Figure 23 Have Any of Mexico's More Popular Political Parties Sought Support from the Federation?**



Source. Self-Elaborated, 2016.

Deeds taken on and accomplished by the houses, emitting birth certificates for example, work in favor of the local and national governing factions when it comes to electoral matters. This is why

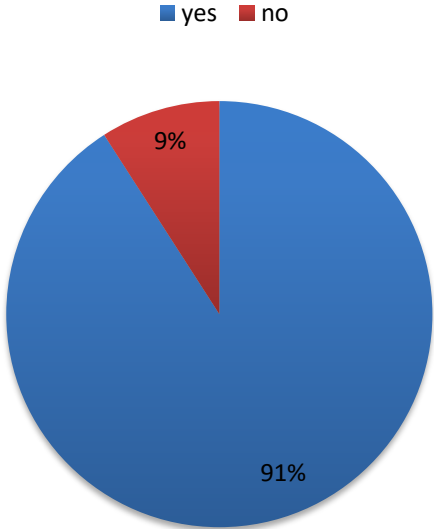
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<sup>33</sup> Casa Puebla, Casa Michoacan, Casa Jalisco, Casa Durango, Casa del Chilango, Casa Mexiquense, Casa Oaxaca, Casa Guanajuatense, Casa Colima, Casa Zacatecas, Casa Guerrerense and Casa Tepic (Nayarit) are those who have been carrying out administrative tasks that are generally managed by the Mexican Consulate.

the migrant leaders demand administrators who comprehend their needs and context, and who understand the problematic. As put by one of the interviewees, they do not want a person in charge who only works out of a desk and demand personnel able to understand their situation. If the Mexican authorities respond to the diaspora, the population will respond to the authorities.

Figure 24 tackles the question regarding if there is an interest in voting by the clubs and their members in presidential elections. There is a series of enquiries on the ground of the procedures for getting registered in the electoral list, ordering the ballot package, casting their vote and submitting to have it considered. Also, the associations demand a higher degree of attention from the Mexican institutions, especially the Secretary of Foreign Relations and the INE.

**Figure 24 Is There an Interest Within the Federation in Voting in Mexican Presidential Elections?**



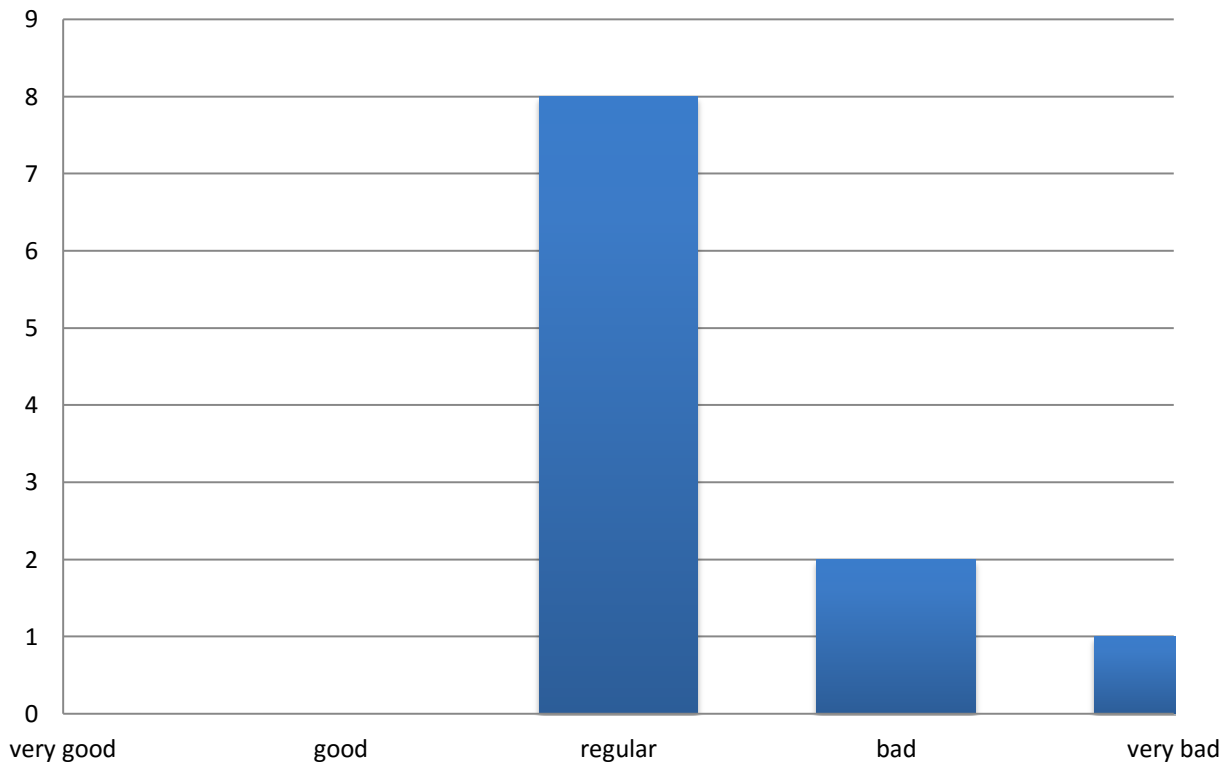
Source. Self-Elaborated, 2016.

According to the LEGIPE, Article 159, social communication of the political parties and candidates is responsibility of the INE and the local institutes. Political parties and their nominees, as well as independent candidacies, can access television and radio time as it is stipulated by the INE. They are, however, banned receiving privately funded promotional and pro-campaign media coverage. These are points of concern that have been overlooked by the electoral authorities in the previous electoral reforms, last one in 2014, which require close monitoring and policing. Private fundraising is a major problem of campaigning, because a significant portion goes unregistered. The most evident concern is the lack of text stating the management of private funds from Mexicans living abroad.

The procedural matter of the abroad vote is another center of interest for those who live outside of Mexico. From a federal level, the federal government has only held two elections in which those living outside of the country voted. From their experience, the method of voting via the postal service is rudimentary and obsolete. The Institute is looking forward and it is expecting the application of alternatives for managing the vote. The federations leaders have met on a monthly basis with personnel from the Mexican General Consulate in Los Angeles concerning the voting process and procedures for local elections. The Consulate has absorbed the electoral management tasks, in collaboration with the INE. According to the respondents, there have been several proposals for alternating the way Mexican residents living abroad can

cast their vote, special booths in consulates and embassies and electronic voting among the options.

**Figure 25 How Do You Rate the Current Mean of Distance Voting?**



Source. Self-Elaborated, 2016.

When asked how do they rate voting via the postal service, most did not praise it nor were they against the mean; two thought it needed to be simplified and one suggested it was not a viable mean of voting (see Figure 25). Considering these facts and comparing the number of interviewees who have voted, there is a lack of participation on the postal vote spectrum. Although there have been several who voted in past elections, local and federal, it is a very limited size who have done it via mail. The postal voters complain of the difficult process it

encompasses, with the ballots going to a reception center in Texas before being sent to the INE installations, and then there is the problem of trust in the INE's system of counting and determining whether a vote is eligible or not.

## **Closing Considerations**

The hometown associations in Los Angeles have faced several difficulties in the establishment of relations with the local governments. The majority did not express having a direct link, beyond the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME), because their main aim is to establish a direct line of communication with their local and state authorities. The aim of all the federations is to help their communities, which means getting in touch with the local agencies. In order to do so, the federations need to go through the official ladder of recognition as established by the Secretary of Foreign Relations. After doing so, associations search within the state and municipal bureaus hoping that there is one specializing in attention to migrant activities. Guanajuato, Hidalgo, Puebla, Michoacan, Colima, Zacatecas, Nayarit, Sinaloa and Oaxaca have such offices within the local governments. The federations who do not have support within the local administrations work with the departments of social development, economic development and / or culture. The other federations look to keep a close relation with these organisms as well.



## Conclusions

Transnationalism and transnational practices carried out by hometown associations present a paradigm in which altruistic activism is accompanied by an official response materialized as infrastructural and productive projects benefiting migrant exporting communities at first hand. Transnationalism disposes the hometown associations having a presence in different spaces at the same time that in turn creates cooperation opportunities between the Mexican population in and out of the national territory. However, before exploring the social and political structure of the HTA, there are certain principles of identity that come into play in the transnational scene. First-generation immigrants aimed to achieve the American dream, adopting new ideals and ideas of what reaching this means. Becoming an American citizen and being able to succeed in a country different from the one of origin represents a story of success, of wealth, of opportunities unreachable in Mexico for example. This does not represent a lack of allegiance to one country or another, but rather, it represents a binational commitment.

The Mexican-American community involved in hometown associations hold a sense of dual solidarity that is synonymous of the American way of life, pertaining to social involvement in community activities and employ it within the organizations of which they form part. From within the organisms, they seek to export those opportunities for community involvement to their places of origin. Identity, nationalism and allegiance blur in significance as the migrant

communities adopt the ways of their actual place of residence and merge those social constructions with those uprooted in their place of origin.

Transnationalism implicates unity within the migrant community. There were several similarities from the people who were interviewed, but the one that stood out the most was the fact that they have all reached their own version of the American dream, they are business owners in the US or Mexico, and in one particular case, in both the United States and Mexico, and now desire to help those who are striving to do the same. The idea of helping those "*paisanos*" who have not accomplished such goal is what unites the Mexican communities in small groupings at first, establishing a chain of command among those who are business and politically savvy and those who are learning and preparing to follow in their footsteps. These are the first steps towards formality of the hometown association. This is a must for the any club in order to be recognized by the other entities and most importantly by the Mexican and American authorities.

Recognition is an important stepping-stone in the formation of HTAs. Without the formal recognition from the Mexican authorities, it is improbable that the organization can carry out transnational activities successfully. This recognition also represents a lifeline for the association. In other words, if a club or federation is to survive, it requires leadership with networking capacities that enable it to concrete development projects in collaboration with the local authorities. This demands a strong level of commitment and follow-through from the Mexican authorities as well as a sturdy and steady presence by the federation and clubs in order to account for the endeavors. The stronger the link between the associations and the Mexican

authorities will translate into more probabilities of a positive feedback in productive assignments.

This formation of productive project networks takes the associations into a political arena that was not considered previously. In other words, the professionalization of the leaders has allowed the Mexican diaspora to be transported from an arena where they were seen as remittance senders, low-wage workers, onto a larger stage where the federations' representatives are able to work side by side with high-level political figures, such as municipal presidents, governors and federal officials. The federations have managed to secure an interdependent relationship with Mexican subnational governments and are now able to carry out their own type of paradiplomacy that was inaccessible in the recent past.

The Mexican migrant clubs and federations in the LA County have arranged a link that surpasses the geographical limitations set between Mexico and the US and are managing to bring development and progress in parts of the country that do not receive official aid. The federations involved in the study show that a major goal on their behalf is to increase the number of productive and urban development projects in their states and regions. With the establishment of the Institute of Mexicans Abroad, the Mexican government has sought to fortify the link with the Mexican diaspora, a projection that began formally under the Salinas administration.

The evolution of the electoral law has widened the suffrage scene to an ample audience, eliminating several misconceptions pertaining to migrants and voting. First is the fallacy that Mexicans living abroad are uninterested in the Mexican political panorama. Nowadays, access to the world wide web, allows easy access to media outlets, newspapers, radio and television, from any nook and cranny of Mexico. Communication with family and friends via telephone and video chatting applications also allow those living abroad to have a sense of what the local political scene is like back home. In other words, the evolution of means of communication enables the migrant population to stay in touch with the Mexican political scene at the national and subnational scale.

Second, there is a belief that Mexicans living abroad are not interested in maintaining links with Mexico, let alone help those who remain in their communities of origin. The Mexican diaspora, however, is interested in the social development of Mexico in general and the communities they represent. The first sign of interest in Mexican affairs can be seen in their interest of being recognized as Mexican entities, with internal concerns and plans benefiting their localities and especially the inhabitants. An example of such ventures is seen within the Yucatan federation whose leader has several businesses established in different localities with the idea of generating work opportunities. The federations of Nayarit, Puebla, Hidalgo and Colima, to mention a few, hold food, clothing and a variety of other donation drives with the aim of transporting the merchandise and proceeds raised in Mexico. Puebla's federation, e.g., donated

an ambulance in 2010 and the Organizacion Regional de Oaxaca gives annual scholarships to students on both sides of the border to continue with their education.

The third misconception is that the Mexican diaspora is not interested in Mexican politics, let alone voting in Mexican elections. The 1990s and first half of the 2000s is significant on this subject given that it opened the doors to the political reincorporation of Mexicans living abroad, first with the introduction of dual citizenship and then with the opening of voting from abroad. From a purely quantitative perspective, the amount of resources invested in abroad vote campaigns, to include Mexicans living abroad to national electoral processes, have not reverted the results to support its existence. However, from a qualitative point of view, voter turnout from abroad has seen a slight increase in the number of people who have chosen to participate casting their vote from abroad in presidential elections from 2006 to 2012. On the other hand, the federal government and subnational governments are committed to maintain active the vote from abroad to such a degree that as of 2015, a project to credentialize Mexicans living outside the country began, first in the US and has grown to include Mexicans living in parts of Europe and Latin America.

Hometown association leaders have worked with the Mexican General Consulate in Los Angeles in order to ensure that the organization's affiliates are updated on the proceedings and are able to communicate the information through their networks. According to those interviewed, personnel from the National Electoral Institute has maintained constant communication with the organizations with the objective of facilitating the electoral registration process.

Hometown associations have transformed into one of the main outlets of information for the INE as well as for other national and subnational agencies. Currently, it is unthinkable to consider running a successful political campaign without considering a meeting, or several meetings, with the Mexican diaspora, especially in cities like Chicago and Los Angeles. Chicago has a long tradition of transnational political participation, however; Los Angeles has a larger concentration of the Mexican population, and Mexican migrant associations, making an obligatory stopping point for any potential candidate. As seen in the previous chapter, every one of the federations' leaders admitted to having been contacted by representatives of the major political forces in Mexico, and some of the lesser ones as well.

The participation of the diaspora, represented by the federations, and clubs belonging to the federations, embody a niche that is yet to be taken an advantage of by the political parties and the election management body. Their presence may not characterize any influence at a national degree, but when considering that every year, there are more states implementing voting from abroad for local proceedings, serves as a petri dish of what future presidential elections will be. In 2015 alone, 16 held municipal and state elections, of which citizens from Colima and Michoacan, were eligible to vote from abroad; in 2016, migrants from Aguascalientes, Oaxaca and Zacatecas were also able to vote in local elections.

The inclusion of the Mexican diaspora living in Los Angeles, and in general, represents a step towards the modernization of the electoral apparatus. So far, the only viable mean for voting from abroad is the postal vote, nevertheless, the INE is exploring suffrage alternatives for voting

within the national territory as well as from beyond the borders. Although there is a high level of distrust in Mexican elections, as seen by the degree of abstention by the public in the past presidential elections, those living abroad are willing to gamble in favor of the electoral process. According to the voices of their representatives in Los Angeles, the goal of the migrant community is to become a political force strong enough to sway future electoral processes. This idea is not as implausible as it might sound, given that the projections managed by the INE is to have at least 500,000 new voters registered for the 2018 elections who will emit their suffrage while living outside the national territory.

The Mexican electoral law is still in its initial stage when it comes to voting from abroad. There are several areas that are not covered within the law, such as media coverage around the borders; stricter monitoring in the reception of political funding from abroad; and campaigning outside of the territory ahead of the start of the campaigning period. These are matters that require analysis in their own right, which is why they are only mentioned in this study and not seen in profundity.

## **Transnational Politics and Paradiplomacy**

In summary, transnational political involvement by hometown associations has led to a transformation of the political and electoral apparatus in Mexico in order to include its citizens

living abroad. Migrant networks based on the establishment of these organisms have transmuted the Mexican diaspora into a political force that slowly but surely is gaining strength and becoming an influence in local and statewide elections to a degree that aspiring candidates make time to meet with the migrant population spread throughout the United States and has led to the modification of local laws, and also at the national level, so that those living abroad to exercise their vote. Little by little, Mexican associations in Los Angeles are getting involved in Mexican politics and elections to the degree that they are promoting the credentialization and registration on to the electoral nominal list.

Also, the majority of the federation leaders who took part in this study admitted to not having voted via the postal service in the previous two exercises, however, given the facilities offered by the INE to integrate Mexicans living abroad to the electoral scene has attracted the attention of migrants who in the past were not interested in getting involved in the Mexican political game. A great deal of the interest is garnered thanks to the advances from the Mexican government to alleviate and make more approachable the productive and urban development project initiatives to allow those living abroad to have access to public funds through the 3x1 program.

The link between the migrant community and the authorities in charge of these programs and social development agencies has become a focal point of interest, especially at the subnational level and the success of these ventures can now be transformed into votes during electoral season. The Mexican associations in Los Angeles have not had much experience in voting from abroad, except for the diaspora from Michoacan and Zacatecas, specifically given that the

registration process and the emission procedure to secure their vote was considered too complicated and there was a shortage of information available to the Mexican population abroad. Finally, the success or failure of future involvement by the hometown associations relies heavily on the accountability of activities and project financing that ensures that their investments are being used efficiently. Electoral wise, the Mexican diaspora is betting for a shift in the way Mexican politics are to take place and if they do not see a favorable panorama, they are set to look forward to the next elections to punish those parties or party whose political actions are inappropriate by their standards and give their vote to the opposition, by emitting their votes and by carrying out proselytism within Mexico as well.



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