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# Made in the USA? Immigrants' imported ideology and political engagement

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ABSTRACT

This study explores both the extent to which immigrants' *pre*-migration ideological predispositions might serve as a heuristic, by which these individuals anchor and adjust their ideological predispositions in the new polity, and the extent to which *imported ideology* enhances the likelihood of immigrants' political engagement once in their new home. Empirical tests take advantage of two unique survey datasets of Mexican immigrants residing in the United States; one of which incorporates a survey embedded experiment. Results show that immigrants' ideological predispositions in the country of origin do anchor these individuals' ideological predispositions in the new host country in terms of intensity and directionality. Most importantly, *imported ideology* does heighten the prospects of immigrants' electoral participation in the United States.



## 1. Introduction

From 1965 to 2000, international migration flows more than doubled. Estimates show that during this period, roughly 100 million people migrated from their countries of origin to a new home. These migration flows were far from steady over this period of time. Fifty-five percent of those 100 million left their homelands between 1990 and 2000 (Ueda, 2007). Clearly, migration flows are on the rise. Also, at least one in four of those 100 million individuals chose the United States as their new host country. This influx of immigrants over the past forty years made the United States the leading destination for the second consecutive century in terms of total of immigrants received. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, by 2010, the foreign-born population in the United States had increased to 36.7 million, accounting for 12 percent of the total. In spite of this fact, there are noteworthy gaps in our knowledge about this important population. For instance, the literature on immigrants' political attitudes and behaviors primarily focuses on post-arrival patterns in America (e.g. Garcia and de la Garza, 1985; Cain et al., 1991; Wong, 2000). There is, however, much to be learned about whether and how political experiences *before* migration influence these individuals' decision to become political actors *after* they have crossed nations' borders.

In his foreword to *Barrio Ballots* (de la Garza et al., 1994), Sidney Verba points out that the recent waves of immigration to the United States are a "major natural experiment." Immigrants, after all, are individuals whose world views were learned from and nurtured by experiences in their countries of origin. By migrating to a different host country, these individuals' world views have been transplanted to a different soil. Immigrants provide a unique opportunity to revisit and further analyze key questions in the social sciences, including those concerning the origins of political attitudes and the foundations of political behavior. In recent years, interdisciplinary scholarly efforts have taken advantage of this social experiment to enhance our understanding about immigrants' political engagement

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in an increasingly globalized world where transnational politics play a fundamental role (Ramakrishnan and Espenshade, 2001; Ramakrishnan, 2005; Wals, 2006, 2009, 2011; Jones-Correa and Andalon, 2008; McCann et al., 2009; Portes et al., 2009; Hajnal and Lee, 2011; Fraga et al., 2012; Leal et al., 2012). This study joins this academic tradition by advancing our understanding on the origins of immigrants' ideological predispositions. Specifically, this study explores whether the imprint of pre-migration political experiences on ideological predispositions endures following migration.

Scores of scholars have devoted decades to understanding the antecedents and consequences of ideology (e.g. Lane, 1962; Converse, 1964; Zaller, 1992; Jost et al., 2009; Rudolph, 2009; also for an excellent review see Kuklinski and Peyton, 2007). Although the significance of this concept is well established, our understanding of its origins could be improved. The central goal here is to shed light on the extent to which immigrants' ideology is a byproduct of a re-socialization process after they arrived in the United States or an imported political asset that developed before these individuals emigrated from their country of origin.

Pioneering explanations of immigrants' political behavior have placed a great deal of emphasis on post-migration factors such as mobilization efforts (Garcia and de la Garza, 1985), political learning and resocialization in the new environment (Black et al., 1987; White et al., 2008), immigrants' minority status, levels of economic advancement and foreign policy concerns (Cain et al., 1991). More recently, under this tradition, other sources of influence have been studied: the role of English language skills, media exposure to politics (Wong, 2000), the naturalization process and the relevance of the political atmosphere (Pantoja et al., 2001; Michelson and Pallares, 2001), as well as the impact of dual nationality (Jones-Correa, 1998; Staton et al., 2007). It is undeniable that these post-migration factors play an important role in shaping patterns in immigrants' political behavior. An argument can be made, however, that these individuals' pre-migration political experiences are causally prior and thus shape the effects of these post-migration factors.

The impact of pre-migration factors such as ethnic or national backgrounds has not been ignored (e.g. Pachon and DeSipio, 1994; Lien, 1994; Ramakrishnan and Espenshade, 2001). Several among these noteworthy works, however, do not address immigrants to the United States (Wilson, 1973; Black, 1982, 1987; Gitelman, 1982; Finifter and Finifter, 1989; White et al., 2008). Thus, any lessons that can be derived from these studies may be of only indirect relevance to the American case, and especially to the question of whether Mexican immigrants' prior political experiences matter for political behavior after migration.

Also, among these seminal works in which pre-migration experiences are acknowledged as an important factor producing post-migration behaviors, the main analyses are conducted through comparisons *across* groups such as British vs. non-British (Black, 1982); British, South Europeans, East Europeans, and West Indians (Black, 1987); or immigrants coming from "repressive regimes" (Ramakrishnan and Espenshade, 2001) or "industrial democracies" vs. "other countries" (White et al., 2008). The idea behind these latter studies is to test whether certain countries of origin's political institutions better prepare individuals, and thus provide other host nations with prospective citizens who are better equipped to adapt politically to the new context. However, under any of these approaches that investigate differences *across* groups, one is still left to wonder the extent to which individual differences moderated the impact of these "shared" pre-migration experiences that occurred *within* the same country of origin (for exceptions see Jones-Correa and Andalon, 2008; Wals, 2011).

To illustrate this point, let us think of two individuals from Mexico who came of political age under the hegemonic-party dominance of the Institutionalized Revolutionary Party (PRI). These hypothetical individuals do not necessarily share the same ideological predispositions even if both of them opposed the regime. One of them might have held left-oriented positions and supported the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) whereas the other might have held right-oriented positions and supported the National Action Party (PAN). If these individuals decided to migrate to the United States, one should expect that these individuals will be packing and bringing along these ideological orientations, which in turn may help them to make sense of the new political milieu.

In order to advance this argument, the present study takes advantage of two unique data sets and addresses two specific empirical questions: 1) Are Mexican immigrants using pre-migration ideological predispositions as an anchoring and adjusting heuristic to make sense of American politics?, and if so 2) Are Mexican immigrants who were ideologues in their country of origin more likely to become politically engaged once in the United States than their non-ideologue counterparts? To answer these questions, the remainder of the study is divided into four sections. The first of these sections offers a brief recount of the theoretical rationale for why one should pay attention to pre-migration ideological predispositions in order to understand more fully immigrants' political engagement once in the United States. The second one offers empirical tests to determine the extent to which pre-migration ideological predispositions do indeed serve as a heuristic by which immigrants anchor and adjust their political views in the new host nation. The analyses differentiate between intensity (*ideologues vs. non-ideologues*) and directionality (*left vs. right*). The third of these sections explores the extent to which ideological predispositions among Mexican immigrants *after* migration to the United States predict patterns in political participation in American elections. Following these analyses, the final section of the study offers some brief conclusions regarding the impact of *imported ideology* on immigrants' prospects for incorporation into American political life.

## 2. Imported ideology: a cognitive psychology approach

From a psychological perspective, the immigration process involves the constant interaction of dual realities triggered by exposure to cultural practices from both the country of origin and from the new host country (Mahalingam, 2006), which in turn leads to loss and transformation of identity

(Akhtar, 1999). The constant interaction of the two worldviews is what defines how these immigrants come to understand the context of the new home and the way they adapt to it. Thinking about the political dimension of these worldviews, in Lippmann's (1922) terms, one can say that immigrants' political attitudes are nurtured by two pseudo-environments. One resulting from these individuals' *pre*-migration experiences and another one derived from their *post*-migration exposure to the political realm in the new host country.

Here at question is whether ideological predispositions developed in the country of origin exert effects that endure following migration. Approaching this central thesis with a cognitive psychology framework can provide powerful leverage. For one, early experiences inform the construction of cognitive frameworks. Subsequently, we process new information and make sense of new situations with guidance from the relevant considerations we can bring to mind. One particular mechanism is analogical reasoning. People cope with novel situations in part by drawing parallels to past experiences (e.g. Yanowitz, 2001; Hummel and Holyoak, 2005). In fact, reliance on information shortcuts or cognitive heuristics potentially enables average citizens to overcome the burden and constraints imposed by limited political knowledge (Sniderman et al., 1991). In the case of immigrants, it is not difficult to hypothesize that inferences about the new political context can be formed while using heuristic principles to establish connections between existing pre-migration political predispositions and beliefs and the new political pseudo-environment.

Anchoring and adjustment is a cognitive heuristic available to individuals in order to reduce the complexity of judgments of estimation. The mechanism is straightforward: individuals facing a question of estimation form an initial tentative response, which can be adjusted later after reviewing new available data. The construction of the initial estimate or "anchor" simplifies the judgment process by limiting the breadth of analysis, and thus the range of responses (Khaneman and Tversky, 1973; Mondak, 1994). When an immigrant is asked about one's self-placement on an ideological continuum, this individual is facing precisely a question of estimation: "on a scale that ranges from 1 to 10, where 1 is *left* and 10 is *right*, where would you place yourself?" In formulating an answer to this question pertaining to the new pseudo-environment, the immigrant might utilize an "anchoring and adjusting" heuristic, by which this individual draws on ideological predispositions formed in the nation of origin in both a general (*intensity*) and a specific (*directionality*) manner.

Concerning *intensity*, the immigrant who was an "ideologue" in the country of origin, regardless of the specific ideological self-placement on the political continuum, should hold the role of politics in a nation's life in relatively high regard when compared to a "non-ideologue" counterpart.[1] Therefore, an immigrant "ideologue" will have an advantage over a "non-ideologue" counterpart in adapting to the new political system and in developing political attitudes and affiliations. After all, "ideology" provides the individual with a heuristic or cognitive organizing device. This device allows the individual "to make sense of a wider range of (political) information" than one would find possible in the absence of such a device (Converse, 1964: 214). Therefore, in general terms, the person who is an ideologue in the country of origin is expected to be more likely to be an ideologue following migration, which in turn should facilitate this individual's interest and engagement in the political realm in the new host country. Conversely, the individual who refrained from developing ideological predispositions in the nation of origin should be relatively unlikely to become an ideologue following migration, and consequently unlikely to be politically interested and/or engaged.

Regarding *directionality*, by developing ideological predispositions in the country of origin, people place themselves on a political continuum. An ideological label both summarizes and organizes the individual's political views. Therefore, all else constant, the expectation is that the "ideologue" in one nation will gravitate toward a similar location on the ideological continuum following migration. However, the translation of political continua requires further discussion.

The ideological continuum in the American context might appear truncated to most observers when contrasted with other countries' continua. That is, in very general terms, the Democrats and the Republicans may be viewed as center-left and center-right to individuals from nations where much more divergent parties gain salience in mainstream politics. If indeed it is the case that more extreme options from both the "left" and the "right" are absent in the American setting, one should expect individuals who held more moderate views ("center") in their respective countries of origin to be more likely to become engaged in electoral politics in the United States than their more extreme ideologue counterparts.

This initial expectation, however, requires further refinement. In some nations, the ideological continuum might extend well to the left of that in the United States, but not to the right. The opposite pattern is possible in other nations. For instance, when comparing the ideological continua of Mexico and the United States, the latter continuum might appear truncated only on the left side given its lack of "social-democratic" options.

The Republicans on the right side of the spectrum can offer a compatible match to the National Action Party's (PAN) followers. The Democrats might appear like a "centrist" option to the Institutionalized Revolutionary Party's (PRI) followers depending upon the historical context under which these individuals were politicized. But Mexican immigrants with left-oriented positions along the ideological continuum, perhaps Democratic Revolution Party's (PRD) followers, will have a more difficult time using anchoring and adjustment to find their new ideological stances and their party of preference. Thus, it should be expected that Mexican center- and right-leaning ideologues will be more likely than their left-leaning counterparts to become politically engaged once in the United States.

[1] For the purposes of this study, an individual is considered an "ideologue" if capable of placing one's self along the left–right continuum. Individuals who fail to place themselves along the left–right continuum are considered "non-ideologues."

## 3. Imported ideology? An experimental design

The first empirical task of this study is to test the extent to which Mexican immigrants use pre-migration ideological predispositions as an anchoring and adjusting heuristic to make sense of the American political landscape. In order to do so, this study takes advantage of an experiment embedded in a telephone survey of Mexican immigrants currently living in the United States.[2] The survey took place in two different sampling sites. The first polling site is the north-central region of the state of Indiana. The second one is the San Antonio metropolitan area in the state of Texas. The idea to have these two main polling sites is straightforward. Texas is considered a "traditional" hosting area for Mexican immigrants whereas Indiana is considered a "new" or "emerging" destination. It was important to have the capacity to determine whether or not different dynamics of ideological importation were taking place depending upon the type of new host settings. In general, traditional host settings, such as the one offered by the San Antonio metropolitan area, have a sizably larger first- and later-generations Latino population, which in turn could potentially offer advantages to Mexican newcomers in terms of political incorporation. Among these advantages, traditional settings offer the possibility of more active mobilization efforts, availability of descriptive representation, and different majority–minority dynamics. Empirical tests, however, revealed no significant differences in ideological preferences between the two sub-samples. Therefore, all of the analyses reported in this section of the study pooled the data from both sampling sites.[3] A total of 1023 interviews were conducted. Roughly 500 interviews were conducted in each location (501 in Indiana and 522 in Texas). *Interviewing Services of America*, a firm based in Van Nuys, California, which specializes in polling within the Latino community, administered the surveys. Nearly all of the interviews took place during September of 2008.

The experiment consisted in asking every respondent two consecutive questions regarding their ideological self-placement on a country-specific basis where the order of the items was randomized. In other words, every respondent was asked about "ideology" when thinking both of Mexican politics and of American politics. The exact question wording of the two items are as follows: "In political matters **in Mexico/in the United States**, people talk of *the left* and of *the right*. On a scale that ranges from 1 to 10, where 1 is *left* and 10 is *right*, where would you place yourself?" Half of respondents were first asked to think of their ideological self-placement regarding Mexican politics, while the other half of respondents were first prompted to think of their ideological position in the United States. Also, a few additional demographic items were available to conduct the following analyses.

### 3.1. Anchoring and adjustment heuristic: the evidence

Recall here that in the following empirical analyses an individual is considered an "ideologue" if capable of self-placement along the left–right continuum, and a "non-ideologue" if unable to do so. The proportion of *ideologues* vs. *non-ideologues* among Mexican immigrants is substantively the same regardless of the political context they have in mind. At first glance, Mexican immigrants to the United States do not seem to differentiate between the two political pseudo-environments in ideological terms. When asked about the United States, 753 respondents (73.6 percent) place themselves on the ideological continuum whereas 270 respondents (26.4 percent) do not know where to place themselves. The proportions are strikingly similar when respondents are asked about Mexican politics: 740 respondents (72.3 percent) place themselves on the ideological continuum whereas 283 respondents (27.7 percent) do not know where to place themselves.

The striking similarities in proportion of *ideologues* vs. *non-ideologues* regardless of political context offer a good start in testing whether or not these individuals import their ideological predispositions at least in terms of *intensity*. Caution indicates, however, that we delve into this bivariate relationship even further. Toward that end, Table 1 shows the proportion of individuals who consider themselves *ideologues* in both contexts as well as the proportion of individuals who consider themselves *non-ideologues* regardless of the specifics of the political context in question. Of the 740 *ideologues* or individuals who place themselves regarding Mexican politics, 709 (95.8 percent) place themselves in the U.S. ideological continuum. Similarly, of the 283 *non-ideologues* or individuals who fail to place themselves regarding Mexican politics, 239 (84.5 percent) also fail to provide self-placement when asked about the U.S. political context.

A critical advantage of administering the specific-context ideological self-placement items in random order is that this step should grant leverage in assessing the extent to which Mexican immigrants allow their country of origin's ideological self-placement to inform their ideological

**Table 1**
Immigrants' ideological status in the U.S. by ideological status in Mexico.

| | Ideological status in the U.S. | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Non-ideologues | Ideologues | Total |
| Ideological status in Mexico | | | |
| Non-ideologues | 84.5% (239) | 15.5% (44) | 100.0 (283) |
| Ideologues | 4.2% (31) | 95.8% (709) | 100.0 (740) |
| Total | 26.4% | 73.6% | 100.0 |
| *N* | (270) | (753) | (1023) |

Source: 2008 Survey of Mexican Expatriates (SME 2008)

[2] Admittedly, the ideal test in this case would be provided with a different kind of data, namely panel data. With a three-wave panel, for example, it would be possible to monitor political attitudes and political engagement prior to migration, soon after migration, and then some years later once the person has become more fully entrenched as a U.S. resident. However, in an attempt to overcome the absence of panel data, the present section of this study offers empirical evidence by taking advantage of a survey embedded experiment.

[3] Of course, interesting specific questions regarding the interaction between imported ideology and different characteristics of the new host setting remain to be answered. These interactions are addressed in an interrelated study. Addressing them here would have taken away attention from the key role that *pre*-migration forces play in shaping *post*-migration political engagement, which is the main focus of the current study.

**Table 2**
Immigrants' ideological status in the United States by ideological status in Mexico and by experimental condition.

| | Ideological status in the U.S. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Treatment group (Mexican politics 1st) | | Control group (U.S. politics 1st) | |
| | Non-ideologues | Ideologues | Non-ideologues | Ideologues |
| Status in Mexico | | | | |
| Non-ideologues | 87.5% (133) | 12.5% (19) | 80.9% (106) | 19.1% (25) |
| Ideologues | 4.5% (16) | 95.5% (343) | 3.9% (15) | 96.1% (366) |
| Total | 26.4% | 73.6% | 23.6% | 76.4% |
| *N* | (149) | (362) | (121) | (391) |

Source: 2008 Survey of Mexican Expatriates (SME 2008)

self-placement in the new host nation even when not specifically prompted to think about the country of origin's political context. In other words, immigrants who first received the question of ideological self-placement regarding the Mexican context can be thought of as a *treatment group*, whereas those who first received the question of ideological self-placement regarding the American context can be thought of as a *control group*. If Mexican immigrants' ideological self placement regarding the U.S. context does not differ substantively regardless of whether or not they are primed to think first of their country of origin's political context, one can more confidently hold that imported ideology plays the role of a powerful anchor, which can be slightly adjusted in light of nuances of the new home's political context. Table 2 presents the bivariate relationship between ideological status in the United States and ideological status in Mexico for both the treatment and the control groups.

Note that the relationship across the two groups, as expected, looks strikingly similar. The proportion of *ideologues vs. non-ideologues* holds regardless of the experimental condition under which the individuals were assigned during the survey. Moreover, the proportion of individuals who consider themselves *ideologues* in both contexts (95.5 and 96.1 percent for the treatment and the control group, respectively) is also quite remarkable. The proportion of individuals who consider themselves *non-ideologues* in both the American and the Mexican contexts (87.5 and 80.9 percent for the treatment and control group, respectively) is also very close, roughly six percent points apart.

The bivariate relationship between ideological status in the United States and ideological status in Mexico is explored even further. Table 3 presents results from two logistic regression models. The dependent variable in both models is *ideologue in the United States*, constructed as an indicator variable, where an individual's response is recoded with a value of 1 if the individual provides a self-placement on the U.S. left–right ideological continuum (73.6 percent) and a value of 0 if otherwise (26.4 percent). The key independent variable in both models, *ideologue in Mexico*, is also constructed as an indicator variable.

The models include a number of control variables. First, the models account for immigrant's age upon arrival as it is important to determine whether or not individuals who came to the United States at later stages in their lives display the same levels of political engagement than their counterparts who migrated at earlier stages in their lives (Black et al., 1987). Accounting for age upon arrival is particularly relevant given that a sizable portion of the immigrants under study might have become of voting age in an emerging democracy (Niemi and Barkan, 1987), which in turn might affect their political engagement in the new host setting. In order to account for the effects of language skills (Wong, 2000), two indicator variables were operationalized, bilingual and English dominant at home, where the reference category is Spanish dominant at home. To control for the civic associational effects of church attendance on political engagement (Jones-Correa and Leal, 2001), the models include a measure of frequency of attendance to religious services, which provides an estimate number of days attended per year for every respondent.[4] The models also incorporate control variables for education and income levels (Verba et al., 1993; Chong and Kim, 2006). In the case of education, the variable values reflect the number of completed school years by every respondent. Upper cap values were assigned when any given level was indicated as complete.[5] Income is measured with a count of major electrodomestic items owned by respondents in their households.[6] Finally, to account for a gender gap (Niemi et al., 1984; Lien, 1998) in ideological preferences among Mexican immigrants, an indicator variable for males is included in the models. Table A in the Appendix A displays the corresponding descriptive statistics for all of the variables included in the models. The only difference between Models I and II in Table 3 is the inclusion of an interaction term between the key independent variable, *ideologue in Mexico* and *years in the U.S.*, a simple count of the number of years the respondent has resided in the United States. By including this interaction variable, as a proxy for longitudinal attenuation, the goal is to gauge the potential declining effects of imported ideology over time. These effects will be further explored shortly.

[4] If respondents indicated attending religious services once per month they were assigned a value of 12, whereas if respondents indicated attending once a week they were assigned a value of 52.

[5] If respondents indicated truncated studies at any given level, they were assigned with the mid-point value between the corresponding levels.

[6] A traditional measure of income was unavailable in this survey. The electrodomestic count measure is widely used in survey research focusing on Latin America and among immigrants from this region to avoid low response rates in this item and has shown to work as a reasonable proxy for income.

**Table 3**
The impact of imported ideology on post-migration ideological status (2008 Survey of Mexican Expatriates).

| | Model I. | Model II. |
|---|---|---|
| | Ideologue in the U.S. | Longitudinal attenuation |
| Ideologue in Mexico | 5.035*** (0.313) | 4.651*** (0.467) |
| Years in the U.S. | 0.031** (0.013) | 0.024* (0.012) |
| Ideologue × years in the U.S. | – | 0.026 (0.025) |
| Age upon arrival | 0.009 (0.012) | 0.009 (0.012) |
| Bilingual | 0.583• (0.312) | 0.560• (0.312) |
| English | 2.776* (1.239) | 2.824* (1.238) |
| Religious attendance | −0.004 (0.004) | −0.004 (0.004) |
| Education | −0.013 (0.039) | −0.008 (0.039) |
| Income | 0.142 (0.154) | 0.118 (0.155) |
| Male | 0.494• (0.284) | 0.503 (0.283) |
| Constant | −3.232*** (0.755) | −3.023*** (0.769) |
| *N* | 876 | 876 |
| LR $\chi^2(9)$ | 545.15 | 546.31 |
| Prob > $\chi^2$ | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| pseudo $R^2$ | 0.573 | 0.575 |

As the coefficient for *ideologue in Mexico* in both Models I and II in Table 3 suggest, being an ideologue in the country of origin (in this case Mexico) seems to play a fundamental role in explaining the existence of ideological orientations in the new host country (the United States). As expected, the coefficient is positively signed and attains statistical significance in both models. It is important to note that the effects of ideological status in Mexico on ideological status in the United States are present in spite of statistically significant effects for the constructs of two fundamental factors, which have been widely documented to account for successful immigrants' political incorporation: length of residence in the United States and acquisition of English language skills.[7] Interestingly, age upon arrival does not attain statistical significance. Finally, the coefficient for *Male* barely attains statistical significance (at the $p < 0.10$ level), thus suggesting that immigrant males are slightly more likely than their female counterparts to place themselves along the U.S. ideological continuum.

After this initial set of results, one can safely conclude that even after incorporating a theoretically relevant battery of control variables, *ideologue* immigrants in the country of origin are more likely to develop ideological attachments in the new host country because their anchor does seem to limit effectively the breadth of analyses these individuals need to undertake in order to place themselves in the new political continuum. There is, however, one more question to address. Do the effects of ideological status in Mexico on ideological status in the United States hold for immigrants regardless of how long these individuals have resided in the United States? Acknowledging that the data at hand is cross-sectional in nature and no definite conclusions can be made on the extent to which imported ideology effects fade over time, using length of residence as a proxy to estimate attenuation rates is still relevant. As the results below suggest, traditional models that do not explicitly account for pre-migration individual-level indicators of past political beliefs and attitudes may have overestimated the impact of length of residence in the United States on these individuals' levels of post-migration political engagement.

Fig. 1 displays the predicted probabilities of being an ideologue in the United States. Predicted probabilities were computed using the longitudinal attenuation model in Table 3. This figure clearly highlights that the probability of being an ideologue in the United States is remarkably higher among immigrants who also consider themselves ideologues in Mexico than those who fail to place themselves along the ideological continuum regarding Mexican politics. The relationship holds regardless of how many years these individuals have lived in their new home. Immigrants who consider themselves ideologues in Mexico have a 93, 95 and a 97 percent chance of being an ideologue in the United States after spending 1 year, 10 years, and 17 years, respectively.[8] This result is very relevant especially if one considers that most immigration policies currently in place operate under the assumption that efficient political incorporation will occur with the passage of time. Contrary to such an assumption, these findings suggest that time alone will have very meager effects, if any at all, to account for immigrants' prospects of developing ideological orientations in the new polity.

Regarding *directionality*, it should be noted that the distribution of the ideologues along the left–right continuum in both the American and the Mexican contexts are substantively the same (See Table C in the Appendix A for full details of these distributions). The distributions of the treatment (Mexican politics prompt first) and the control (United States politics prompt first) groups along the ideological continuum in the United States look strikingly similar (See Table D and Fig. A in the Appendix A). In short, regardless of whether or not immigrants have been prompted to think of their own ideological self-placement regarding the Mexican context before answering the same question regarding the American one, the outcome is seemingly the same.

If the individual's self-placement concerning Mexican politics is considered the *anchoring* point, the mean *adjusting* among ideologues is −0.09 on a scale that ranges from negative 9 (maximum adjusting to the left end of the continuum) to positive 9 (maximum adjusting to the right end of the continuum). Moreover, the difference in means between the *adjusting* expressed by the individuals first exposed to the Mexican politics prompt and those first receiving the United States politics prompt is not statistically significant. Among ideologues 458 of these individuals (64.6 percent) in fact, place themselves in the same spot along the

[7] These results hold when incorporating an indicator variable for the *treatment group*, which failed to attain statistical significance under different specifications. To keep the models as parsimonious as possible, the *treatment group* indicator variable is not incorporated into the tables shown in this study.

[8] One year is chosen to illustrate recent arrivals; ten years, to illustrate those individuals who have been here long enough to potentially having undergone the naturalization process; seventeen years, to illustrate the average length of residence of immigrants in this sample.

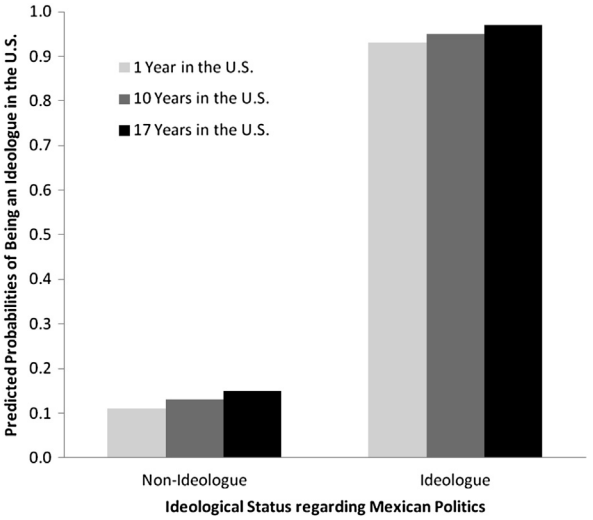


**Fig. 1.** Predicted probabilities of being an ideologue in the United States by ideological status in Mexico and years in the U.S. Note: Predicted probabilities were computed using the longitudinal attenuation model in Table 3. The following predictors were varied for this calculation: a) Ideologue in Mexico, with a value of 1 if the individual is classified as an ideologue and a value of 0 if otherwise; b) the number of years spent in the U.S., with values of 1 (New Arrivals), 10 years, or 17 (Average); and c) the corresponding interaction between these two terms. The rest of the predictors were held at their mean values, and to reflect the estimated probabilities for a Spanish-speaking male.

ideological continuum regarding the new host nation's context. Among those immigrants who actually express *adjusting* their position, 121 (48.2 percent) adjust their placement to the left whereas the other 130 individuals (51.8 percent) adjust their position to the right of their initial anchoring point. In addition, a majority (53.8 percent) of those ideological adjustments fall within a two point range (within one standard deviation). These results once again seem to suggest that ideology in the country of origin is imported and serves as an anchor for the ideological range from which the individual will choose to adjust (if at all) one's self-placement following migration. The pieces of evidence presented in this section all point in one direction: as immigrants cross our nation's borders, their ideological predispositions do as well.

## 4. The impact of imported ideology on immigrants' electoral participation

After showing that immigrants' ideology from their country of origin does in fact anchor these individuals' ideological preferences once in the United States, let us turn to the second question of this study. In this section, empirical tests assess whether or not Mexican immigrants who were ideologues in their country of origin are indeed more likely to become politically engaged once in the United States than their non-ideologue counterparts. By the same token, I test the extent to which the directionality of immigrants' ideological orientations enhance these individuals' prospects for political engagement once in the United States. Recall that the expectation is that Mexican center- and right-leaning ideologue immigrants will be more likely than their left-leaning counterparts to become politically engaged once in the United States.

The following analyses rely upon a different survey dataset, the *National Bank of Mexico's (Banamex) Division for Economic and Sociopolitical Studies 2003 Mexican Values Survey (MVS 2003)*. The original study contains a sample of 1213 U.S. residents. Among these U.S. residents, the dataset includes 399 U.S. residents[9] who were born in Mexico. This data set includes a couple of items asking respondents whether or not they would vote if "elections were held tomorrow" both in Mexico and the United States, thus allowing to test whether those immigrants' ideological predispositions in Mexico are politically consequential after these individuals have migrated to the United States.

### 4.1. Unpacking imported ideology in the American political arena

Specifically, this study posits that ideology in Mexico serves as a heuristic, which increases the likelihood that the person will become politically engaged once in the United States. The dependent variable used to test this hypothesis is a measure of expected electoral participation in the United States. Respondents were asked if "elections were held tomorrow," would they expect to vote for a Democratic candidate, a Republican candidate, a candidate other than a Democrat or a Republican, or would they opt not to participate. These responses are recoded, with a value of 1 used to indicate that the respondent would expect to vote (64.7 percent of respondents), and 0 used to indicate that the respondent would not expect to vote (35.3 percent).

The key independent variables are constructed using an ideological self-placement item, which ranges from 1 to 10, where 1 is "Left" and 10 is "Right." Given my interest in both *intensity* and *directionality* effects, this item was recoded in two different ways. For Table 4, concerning intensity, the first key independent variable is an indicator one, *non-ideologue in Mexico*, with a value of 1 used to indicate that the respondent did not offer a self-placement along the ideological continuum (10.5 percent of respondents), and 0 used to indicate that the respondent offered any self-placement along the ideological continuum regardless of its directionality (89.5 percent). Again, the expectation is that individuals who were ideologues in Mexico should be relatively more likely than those who were non-ideologues to become politically engaged once in the United States. Concerning directionality, the second key independent variable is *Imported ideology*, which is constructed using the full range of the ideological self-placement item, which ranges from 1 to 10, where 1 is "Left" and 10 is "Right." Recall that the expectation is that center- and right-leaning ideologues should be more likely than left-leaning ideologues to become politically engaged once in the United States. In addition to conducting tests of the core hypotheses, a second round of tests were run to

[9] There was no item available in this study regarding individuals' citizenship status in the U.S.

**Table 4**
The impact of imported ideology on post-migration political engagement (2003 Mexican Values Survey).

| | Model I. | Model II. |
|---|---|---|
| | Expected electoral participation | Longitudinal attenuation |
| Non-ideologue in Mexico | −1.548*** (0.431) | −2.785** (0.930) |
| Imported ideology | 0.207*** (0.061) | 0.411*** (0.124) |
| Years in the U.S. | 0.032* (0.015) | 0.095* (0.039) |
| Non-ideologue × years in the U.S. | – | 0.074 (0.047) |
| Imp. ideology × years in the U.S. | – | −0.012* (0.006) |
| Mexican partisan | 1.815*** (0.284) | 1.828*** (0.287) |
| Age upon arrival | 0.003 (0.013) | 0.003 (0.013) |
| Bilingual | 0.459 (0.619) | 0.545 (0.615) |
| English | 0.723• (0.390) | 0.742* (0.385) |
| Religious attendance | 0.006 (0.004) | 0.006• (0.003) |
| Education | −0.018 (0.037) | −0.027 (0.037) |
| Income | 0.014• (0.008) | 0.015* (0.008) |
| Male | 0.152 (0.252) | 0.155 (0.254) |
| Constant | −2.668*** (0.714) | −3.676*** (0.940) |
| *N* 394 | *N* 394 | |
| LR $\chi^2(11)$ 110.78 | LR $\chi^2(13)$ 116.94 | |
| Prob > $\chi^2$ 0.000 | Prob > $\chi^2$ 0.000 | |
| pseudo $R^2$ 0.221 | pseudo $R^2$ 0.233 | |

gauge whether the impact (if any) of imported ideology attenuates over time. To consider this possibility, Model II in Table 4 includes a count of years spent in the United States, along with an interaction term between this variable and the key predictors, *non-ideologue in Mexico* and *imported ideology*, respectively.

Given that partisan identification is an important predictor of political engagement of both Mexican citizens living in Mexico (e.g. Moreno, 2003, 2009; also see Greene, 2011) and Mexican immigrants living in the United States (Wals, 2011), the models in Table 4 incorporate a control variable labeled *Mexican Partisan*. This is an indicator variable for whether each respondent had an attachment with any of the three main Mexican political parties, coded 1 (57.4 percent) for yes and 0 if otherwise. The logic behind the incorporation of this control variable is that respondents who were politicized in Mexico to a sufficient extent that they held partisan attachments will be relatively more likely to become politically engaged once in the United States. Therefore, the inclusion of this control variable ensures that these analyses do not overestimate the effects of imported ideology on immigrants' political engagement once in the new host setting. In order to keep comparability between the earlier and the current models, additional control variables included in these models are age upon arrival, two indicator variables to account for language skills, frequency of attendance to religious services, education, income, and gender.[10] Table B in the Appendix A displays the corresponding descriptive statistics for all of the variables included in the models.

In both logistic regression models, the coefficient for *non-ideologue* is negatively signed and attains statistical significance. In other words, even after incorporating a battery of control variables, there is empirical evidence corroborating that non-ideologue immigrants are indeed less likely to become politically engaged once in the United States than their ideologue counterparts. Moreover, the interaction term between *non-ideologue* and *years in the U.S.* does not attain statistical significance, thus suggesting that the effects of being a non-ideologue in Mexico on becoming politically engaged once in the United States might not fade easily over time. In order to better understand the insights offered by this interaction term, Fig. 2 offers some predicted probabilities computed using the longitudinal attenuation model in Table 4.

As should be clear, ideologues are more likely than non-ideologues to become politically engaged regardless of how many years they have spent in the United States. Fig. 2 illustrates the last point even further. Noteworthy, ideologues' predicted probabilities of participating in American elections are roughly 80 percent, regardless of how long these individuals have lived in their new home. Among immigrants who have spent one year or less in their new home, the gap in the predicted probabilities of indicating interest in voting in American elections is simply astounding. The gap closes among immigrants who have spent ten years in the United States but the effects of imported ideology are still quite remarkable: ideologues are roughly eight times more likely to participate than their non-ideologue counterparts.[11] Recall here that, on average, Mexican immigrants included in the study have spent 17 years living in the United States. Looking at the gap between an average ideologue immigrant and an average non-ideologue one, both of whom have spent already 17 years in the United States, ideologues are still three times more likely to express that they would participate in American elections than their non-ideologue counterparts.

Let us turn our attention to the other key independent variable, *imported ideology*. In both models, the coefficient for *imported ideology* is positively signed and attains statistical significance. In this case, the empirical evidence supports the expectation that the more to the right immigrants stand on the ideological continuum in Mexico, the more likely they would be to become politically engaged once in the United States. Note that, in this case, the interaction term between *imported ideology* and *years in the U.S.* does attain statistical significance but it is negatively signed. Fig. 3 offers visual insight regarding this interesting interaction. Predicted probabilities, again, are computed using the longitudinal attenuation model in Table 4.

[10] All of these control variables, except for income, were coded using the same procedures described in the earlier empirical analyses. Here, income reflects estimates of respondents' household income in thousands of dollars per year. The midpoint of the range of every category was the value assigned for every respondent.

[11] It is important to note that the slight decrease in the gap between ideologues and non-ideologues is observed only among Mexican partisans. In other words, these predicted probabilities are computed considering the case of an immigrant who identifies with one of the three main political parties in Mexico. By contrast, the predicted probabilities of expressing interest in voting in American elections for a non-partisan, non-ideologue Mexican immigrant are 0.00, 0.02, and 0.05 after 1, 10, and 17 years of residence in the United States, respectively.

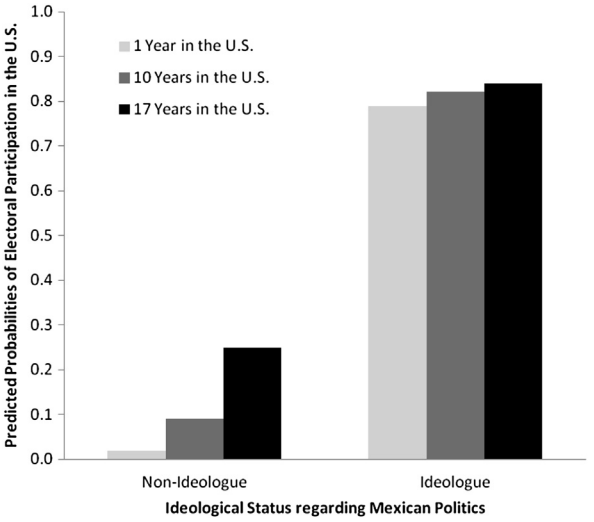


**Fig. 2.** Predicted probabilities of electoral participation in the United States by ideological status in Mexico and years in the U.S. Note: Predicted probabilities were computed using the longitudinal attenuation model in Table 4. The following predictors were varied for this calculation: a) Non-Ideologue, with a value of 1 if the individual is classified as a non-ideologue and a value of 0 if otherwise; b) the number of years spent in the U.S., with values of 1 (New Arrivals), 10 years, or 17 (Average); and c) the corresponding interaction between these two terms. The rest of the predictors were held at their mean values including the mean score for imported ideology (held at 6), and to reflect the estimated probabilities for a Spanish-speaking male who identifies with one of the three main political parties in Mexico.

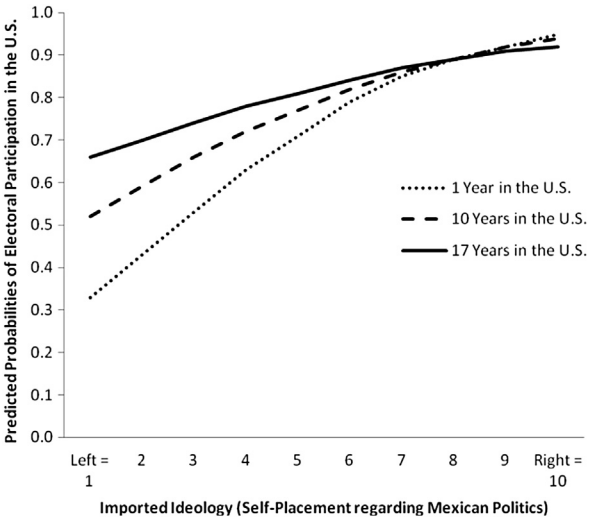


**Fig. 3.** Predicted probabilities of electoral participation in the United States by imported ideology and years in the U.S. Note: Predicted probabilities were computed using the longitudinal attenuation model in Table 4. The following predictors were varied for this calculation: a) Imported ideology, which ranges from 1 (Left) to 10 (Right); b) the number of years spent in the U.S., with values of 1 (New Arrivals), 10 years, or 17 (Average); and c) the corresponding interaction between these two terms. The rest of the predictors were held at their mean values and to reflect the estimated probabilities for a Spanish-speaking male who identifies with one of the three main political parties in Mexico.

Fig. 3 shows that immigrants who stand at the center and the right end of the ideological continuum are indeed more likely than their left-leaning counterparts to express interest in participating in American elections regardless of how many years they have spent in the United States. In fact, immigrants who stand on the right end of the continuum have more than 90 percent chance of engaging in American elections, regardless of how long they have lived in their new host country. For immigrants who place themselves in the center of the continuum and who have spent 1, 10 or 17 years in the United States, the predicted probabilities of political engagement are 71, 77, and 81 percent, respectively. For their counterparts on the left end of the continuum the story is certainly not the same. Among immigrants who have spent one year or less in their new home, the probability of expressing intention to participate in American elections is roughly 33 percent. This figure increases to 52 and 66 percent for immigrants who have spent 10 and 17 years, respectively, in the United States. In other words, the prospects of political engagement for left-leaning ideologues double with the passage of time.

Ideological moderates, as expected, hold better prospects than ideologues on the left and slightly less favorable probabilities than those ideologues on the right, thus suggesting that when contrasting the two ideological continuums, Mexican immigrants find the American one truncated to the left end of the continuum but not toward the right. The fact that the predicted probabilities of political engagement by those ideologues who stand on the right end of the spectrum are substantively the same regardless of how many years these individuals have lived in the United States supports the proposition that the American political spectrum might be more appealing and welcoming to right-leaning immigrants than to left-leaning ones. This is confirmed when looking at the predicted probabilities of political engagement by those ideologues who stand on the left end of the continuum. For these individuals, political adaptation takes longer. The passage of time matters. This provides additional evidence that Mexican immigrants holding left-leaning views who have spent very little time in the United States appear to have a hard time finding their place in the American political arena.

## 5. Conclusions

The final paragraphs of Isabel Allende's *De Amor y de Sombra*[12] describe the struggles faced by the main characters of the story as they are leaving their country of origin. *Francisco Leal* and *Irene Beltrán* are forced to flee their home country given their involvement in a chain of events that revealed the authoritarian regime's efforts to suppress political opposition using all means imaginable. As they prepare to leave everything behind to seek refuge in a new host nation, the young journalists stand in the midst of a valley in between two nations. The image could not be any more appropriate to illustrate the core thesis of this study. Their last words before leaving their homeland suggest

[12] The Spanish title "De Amor y de Sombra" translates into the English phrase "Of Love and Shadow."

they have hope to return one day, but the dialog also conveys their sense of fear, uncertainty and nostalgia. Those feelings, of course, do not vanish once *Francisco* and *Irene* cross the border. The byproducts of their political experiences in their home country—ideological predispositions included—stay with these expatriates.

Immigrants represent an increasing group of recruits, of prospective citizens for the American polity (DeSipio, 1996). The United States has led the world in the total number of immigrants received for the past two centuries (Ueda, 2007). In recent years, there have been important efforts to assess and understand whether or not these individuals use their prior political experiences to navigate and adapt to the new political context in the United States (e.g. Ramakrishnan and Espenshade, 2001; Ramakrishnan, 2005; Wals, 2006, 2009, 2011; Jones-Correa and Andalon, 2008; Hajnal and Lee, 2011). For instance, it has been documented that political engagement in the home-country is correlated (and not at odds) with political engagement in the United States (e.g. Portes et al., 2009; Fraga et al., 2012). There is still, however, much to be learned about the specific processes and conditions under which immigrants' prior political experiences become salient and relevant in the new host setting.

This study contributes to this growing academic movement and addresses this important topic by examining the extent to which immigrants to the United States import their ideological predispositions, which in turn can enhance immigrants' prospects of becoming politically engaged in their new home. Just as individuals are not blank slates when they come into this world (e.g. Alford and Hibbing, 2004; Alford et al., 2005; Hibbing and Smith, 2007; Fowler and Dawes, 2008; Mondak, 2010), the evidence presented in this study strongly supports that immigrants are far from being political blank slates when they enter the United States. As this study specifically shows, immigrants' ideology as constituted in a person's country of origin strongly anchors ideology in the United States following migration. Perhaps most critically in political terms, *imported ideology* does shape the prospects of these individuals regarding political engagement once residing in American soil.

The findings suggest that the foreign-born segment of the population is more up-for-grabs than generally depicted in electoral terms. There is no single rationale inherent in the results of this study that the current advantage held by the Democratic Party over the Republican Party, in terms of electoral support among U.S. citizens of Mexican origin, could not be altered if the Republicans were to succeed in implementing different strategies and more effective means to reach out and engage this segment of the population. This latter possibility becomes even more apparent if one considers that among ideologues, immigrants on the center, center right and right of the spectrum are significantly more likely to express interest in participating in elections once in the United States. This speculation based upon the findings of this study could be a reason for hope among the Republican Party and a wake-up call for the Democratic camp as the two parties continue to evaluate the relevance of the Latino vote in the most recent 2012 U.S. presidential election and as they develop new outreach strategies for future campaign cycles.

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## Appendix A

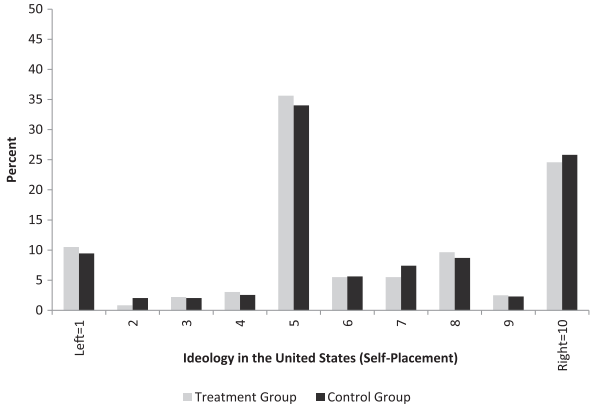


**Fig. A.** Distribution of ideologues along the left–right continuum among Mexican immigrants regarding the American context by experimental condition.

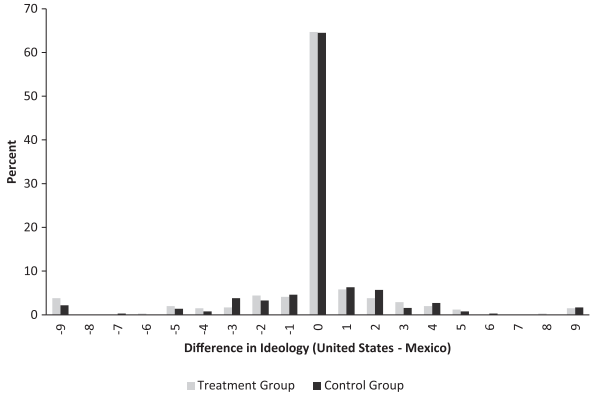


**Fig. B.** Distribution of adjustments in ideological self-placement among Mexican immigrants by experimental condition.

**Table A**
Descriptive statistics for the 2008 Survey of Mexican Expatriates – SME 2008.

| Variable | *N* | Mean | S.D. | Min. | Max. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Dependent* | | | | | |
| Ideologue in the U.S. | 1023 | 0.736 | 0.441 | 0 | 1 |
| *Independent* | | | | | |
| Ideologue in Mexico | 1023 | 0.723 | 0.448 | 0 | 1 |
| Years in the U.S. | 993 | 17.482 | 14.603 | 0 | 84 |
| Ideologue × years in the U.S. | 1005 | 11.658 | 13.780 | 0 | 76 |
| Age upon arrival | 938 | 25.278 | 12.652 | 0 | 78 |
| Bilingual | 1023 | 0.399 | 0.490 | 0 | 1 |
| English | 1023 | 0.018 | 0.132 | 0 | 1 |
| Religious attendance (days per year) | 1005 | 39.568 | 35.427 | 0 | 104 |
| Education (in number of years) | 975 | 8.578 | 4.075 | 0 | 17 |
| Income (count of major household items) | 969 | 3.041 | 0.962 | 0 | 4 |
| Male | 1023 | 0.445 | 0.497 | 0 | 1 |
| Valid *N* | 876 | | | | |

Source: 2008 Survey of Mexican Expatriates (SME 2008)

**Table B**
Descriptive statistics for the 2003 Mexican Values Survey – MVS 2003.

| Variable | *N* | Mean | S.D. | Min. | Max. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Dependent* | | | | | |
| Expected electoral participation | 399 | 0.657 | 0.475 | 0 | 1 |
| *Independent* | | | | | |
| Mexican partisan | 399 | 0.574 | 0.495 | 0 | 1 |
| Non-ideologue in Mexico | 399 | 0.105 | 0.307 | 0 | 1 |
| Imported ideology | 399 | 6.261 | 2.199 | 1 | 10 |
| Years in the U.S. | 399 | 17.180 | 10.471 | 1 | 55 |
| Non-ideologue × years in the U.S. | 399 | 1.581 | 5.794 | 0 | 55 |
| Imp. ideology × years in the U.S. | 399 | 105.953 | 72.371 | 1 | 378 |
| Age upon arrival | 399 | 15.238 | 12.558 | 0 | 57 |
| Bilingual | 399 | 0.055 | 0.229 | 0 | 1 |
| English | 399 | 0.208 | 0.406 | 0 | 1 |
| Religious attendance (days per year) | 399 | 34.774 | 35.360 | 0 | 104 |
| Education (in number of years) | 395 | 9.447 | 3.589 | 0 | 17 |
| Income (in thousands of dollars per year) | 398 | 34.271 | 18.023 | 7.5 | 125 |
| Male | 399 | 0.516 | 0.500 | 0 | 1 |
| Valid *N* | 394 | | | | |

Source: 2003 Mexican Values Survey (MVS 2003)

**Table C**
Immigrants' ideological self-placement regarding American and Mexican politics.

| | MVS 2003 | SME 2008 | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | General | American politics | Mexican politics |
| Ideological self-placement | | | |
| 1 = Left | 3.64 (13) | 9.96 (75) | 9.32 (69) |
| 2 | 2.24 (8) | 1.46 (11) | 1.62 (12) |
| 3 | 3.64 (13) | 2.12 (16) | 1.62 (12) |
| 4 | 5.60 (20) | 2.79 (21) | 3.11 (23) |
| 5 | 29.13 (104) | 34.79(262) | 34.59 (256) |
| 6 | 16.25 (58) | 5.58 (42) | 5.95 (44) |
| 7 | 9.80 (35) | 6.51 (49) | 5.81 (43) |
| 8 | 9.24 (33) | 9.16 (69) | 9.32 (69) |
| 9 | 5.60 (20) | 2.40 (18) | 2.16 (16) |
| 10 = Right | 14.85 (53) | 25.23 (190) | 26.50 (196) |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| *N* | (357) | (753) | (740) |

Note: Cell entries are on percentual scale. Number of cases is in parentheses.Source: 2003 Mexican Values Survey (MVS 2003) and 2008 Survey of Mexican Expatriates (SME 2008)

**Table D**
Immigrants' ideological self-placement in the U.S. by experimental condition.

| | American politics | |
|---|---|---|
| | Treatment group | Control group |
| Ideological self-placement | | |
| 1 = Left | 10.50 (38) | 9.46 (37) |
| 2 | 0.83 (3) | 2.05 (8) |
| 3 | 2.21 (8) | 2.05 (8) |
| 4 | 3.04 (11) | 2.56 (10) |
| 5 | 35.64 (129) | 34.01 (133) |
| 6 | 5.52 (20) | 5.63 (22) |
| 7 | 5.52 (20) | 7.42 (29) |
| 8 | 9.66 (35) | 8.70 (34) |
| 9 | 2.49 (9) | 2.30 (9) |
| 10 = Right | 24.59 (89) | 25.82 (101) |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| *N* | (362) | (391) |

Note: Cell entries are on percentual scale. Number of cases is in parentheses.Source: 2008 Survey of Mexican Expatriates (SME 2008)

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