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Cita:

Paolo Boccagni y Jacques Ramírez (2013). *Building Democracy or Reproducing 'Ecuadorianness'? A Transnational Exploration of Ecuadorian Migrants' External Voting*. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 45 (4), 751-750.

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Building Democracy or Reproducing ‘Ecuadoreanness’? A Transnational Exploration of Ecuadorean Migrants’ External Voting

PAOLO BOCCAGNI and JACQUES RAMÍREZ*

Abstract. Ecuador has emerged as a good case study of the interactions between diasporas and their countries of origin. The recent enactment of external voting rights has mirrored a novel political discourse which emphasises the positive contribution of ‘emigrant brothers’ and their unbroken allegiance to their homeland. Expatriate reactions to these new political developments are at the core of our article, which heuristically reconstructs the social roots and meanings of expatriate participation in the constitutional referendum held in 2008. Questionnaires were simultaneously administered to Ecuadorean voters in nine cities in seven countries. Based on this innovative convenience sample, the expectations and motivations underlying people’s electoral involvement and civic participation are explored against the background of transnational connections and attachments. An understanding of voters’ involvement on a terrain of symbolic patriotism, identity reassertion and ‘home re-evocation’ – rather than in strictly electoral terms – is advanced. External voting – whatever its impact on domestic politics – should be appreciated as an institutional opportunity for migrants’ national identification and belonging to be represented.

Keywords: external voting, migrant transnationalism, civic participation, Ecuador, Ecuadoreanness

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* We are highly indebted to several colleagues who contributed to the administration of questionnaires in Italy (Francesca Lagomarsino, Vincenza Pellegrino, Lidia Manzo, Federica Besana, Maria Grazia Mei, Martina Terenzoni), Spain (Luca Giliberti, Alice Cavaglià, Paula Castello, Elisa Brey, Diana Plaza, D. Pérez, P. Pinta, J. Avalos), the United Kingdom (Diana Codesal, Olivia Sheringham, Cristen Davalos), the United States (Cristina Escobar, Victoria Stone, Orlando Trujillo), Mexico (Veronica Silva), Chile (Gabriela Quezada) and Argentina (Silvia Starkof). As important was the support of Giovanni Semi and Andrea Torre in Italy, and of Tanja Bastia in the United Kingdom. Earlier drafts of the paper were discussed at the annual IMISCOE conference in Stockholm and at the Spanish Congress of Sociology of Migration in Coruña (2009). Valuable comments were provided, at different stages, by Rainer Bauböck, Anastasia Bermudez, Leticia Calderón, Angeles Escrivá, Ralph Grillo and Eva Østergaard-Nielsen. Last, special thanks go to Roger Waldinger and to the four anonymous reviewers of the *JLAS*.

Interviewees didn't talk much about politics – nor did we interrogate them indiscreetly... they talked much more of their families, of their affections ... It would be difficult to guess the electoral returns. Only a few people told us about their political vision – two opposite cases are worth mentioning. A woman told us she sees Correa, and what he's doing in Ecuador, as a danger: 'They're going towards communism, and of course – I came to work here to get a better future, I don't want to share it with the rest, just equalising everything...'. In contrast, a boy ... replied to us: '[The situation in Ecuador] did improve. You see, my father lives in the countryside; no government had ever paid attention to him, whereas now they do.' Most people seemed to attach importance to the vote, but several of them told us they were definitely voting only ... so as not to pay a fine when they are back in Ecuador.

Interviewers' field notes, Barcelona, 28 September 2008

Introduction

'Auguri in your research', Alejandro wrote to one of us from New York, after being asked to join our research project on the transnational attitudes and practices of Ecuadorean emigrant voters in September 2008. But, he insisted, there was no space or sense of politics among Ecuadorean migrants. Rather, 'the only way you can follow their transnationalism is when the National Soccer Team plays a match. Ecuadoreans do not care about politics. I can tell it for sure. Otherwise, I and thousands of Ecuadoreans would not be in the USA, Spain or Italy.' Despite feeling 'frustrated with the politicians of the country', however, Alejandro himself intended to vote (in contrast to his father and grandfather, who had lived in New York for longer). As a young Ecuadorean social researcher, well settled in the city, he seemed to regard this as a civic duty.

A few months later some unusual posters could be seen in the Madrid metro. Alongside government posters reading 'Helping you plan for voluntary return', addressed to unemployed migrants (with Ecuadoreans a major target), were posters of Rafael Correa, who, standing for presidential re-election in Ecuador, was appealing to emigrants to support his 'citizen revolution' from afar. Next to huge images of Correa, the posters bore a photograph of the presidential party's leading congressional candidate, Dora Aguirre: a residential care-giver who, soon after winning a congressional seat, claimed she was returning to Ecuador in order to 'act as a link between migrants and the government'. A political activist even before leaving her country, she was also the leader of a well-known immigrant association within which her nomination had fuelled a vibrant debate, suggesting widespread suspicion of top-down co-optation by *la política*.¹

¹ Information from Spanish press coverage of the event (www.elpais.com), as well as from the authors' personal contacts.

The quotes above exemplify migrants' perceptions and expectations towards a relatively new and understudied phenomenon: the range of discourses and policies whereby their countries of origin 'court' them and appeal to their loyalty as national citizens, even while abroad.² Their exercise of external voting rights is, as we will argue, one of the most significant and visible indicators of these emerging diaspora-building processes.³

Whether or not Alejandro's contention of Ecuadorean migrants' detachment from politics holds true, and what support Aguirre may give (and receive from) her 'migrant brothers', are among the issues to be explored in this article through an original analysis of the Ecuadorean migrant vote in 2008. Specifically, our research questions aim to shed light on the following concerns: what does external voting say of the sentiments and attitudes that voters cultivate toward their homeland, as a state and as a nation? What does their electoral involvement suggest about their patterns of civic and political participation (overseas, and prior to emigration)? And what insights can be drawn from this ephemeral, if symbolically unique transnational practice, as to the broader map of voters' home ties, attachments and relationships?

In order to provide exploratory answers to these questions, we build on the results of a survey implemented on the referendum day for the approval of the new Ecuadorean Constitution in September 2008. The survey took place simultaneously in nine cities in Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, the United States, Mexico, Argentina and Chile. In this article, after arguing for the need to understand expatriate voting in the broader framework of external citizenship policies, we take stock of the relevant political developments in Ecuador. We then proceed to analyse the evidence provided by the 572 questionnaires. After describing the demographics of those interviewed, we analyse their forms of social and political participation, their transnational practices and their self-identifications and attitudes towards their homeland. As a conclusion, we critically discuss the prospects for Ecuadorean voters to cultivate cross-border interconnections and for their home country to expand, in turn, its domestic (and democratic) institutional sphere. Overall, our analysis aims to highlight the social and cultural bases, along with the strictly political ones, of the interdependence between emigration states and their expatriates. Our results, however, need to be framed in a heuristic perspective as they build on a specific and statistically non-representative case study.

² See Peggy Levitt and Rafael de la Dehesa, 'Transnational Migration and the Redefinition of the State', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 26: 4 (2003), pp. 587–611; and Eva Østergaard-Nielsen (ed.), *International Migration and Sending Countries* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

³ Alan Gamlen, 'The Emigration State and the Modern Geopolitical Imagination', *Political Geography*, 27: 8 (2008), pp. 840–56.

External voting and the state-led construction of a 'Fifth Region' in Ecuador

The right of expatriates to be active members of their homeland's polity by participating in national elections from abroad has been increasingly recognised on an almost worldwide scale.⁴ As far as academic studies are concerned, external voting has gained salience at a theoretical and normative level. This is unsurprising in light of the challenges it raises for the traditional understandings of equality, loyalty and belonging in the political sphere.⁵ Empirically speaking, however, it is still peripheral in the agenda of migration studies.⁶

The available evidence suggests that the symbolic relevance of expatriate voting is often higher than its real political import.⁷ While this holds for the Ecuadorean case also, there is no reason to reduce the significance of external voting to the impact of overseas ballots in strictly electoral terms. As we will argue in this article, emigrants' transnational electoral participation is an extraordinary kaleidoscope on their attitudes, emotions and practices towards their homeland. Ecuador provides a good case study for appreciating the role of external voting in both respects: with regard to state-led 'reaching out' strategies, and to emigrants' homeward allegiances and attachments.

The emergence of emigrants as relevant political actors in Ecuador has been a novelty introduced by the Correa government, against the predominantly neutral or indifferent attitude of past administrations. Along with a range of

new dedicated policy provisions, the reframing of expatriates as a 'Fifth Region' – a collective meta-geographical entity, supposedly on an equal footing with the four territorial regions of the country – has been a key marker of the public discourse of President Rafael Correa, in office since 2007.⁸ This stance has ushered in a new understanding of the unprecedented wave of emigration from the country in the late 1990s: less as an active, if uncoordinated strategy aimed at achieving better conditions overseas, than as a sort of 'massive expulsion' for which past (mis)governments should be blamed.⁹ Against this background, the Ecuadorean state itself would have an obligation to enable migrants to exercise their citizenship rights from afar, the tacit assumption being that their belonging and loyalty to the Ecuadorean nation is still intact in the meantime. While several strategic interests – related principally to incentivising remittances – underlie this discursive agenda across a range of countries of emigration, issues such as national pride and the reappraisal of past government (mis)deeds are also important in the Ecuadorean case.¹⁰ In fact, the Fifth Region discourse builds on a far older symbolic repertoire underlying the relations between Latin American countries and their 'diasporas'.¹¹ Nevertheless, external voting has provided in Ecuador and elsewhere a privileged venue in which to display this relationship – and, as we will show, a promising site for exploring emigrants' reactions to the homeland discourses towards them, as well as to the attendant opportunities for their political participation.

External voting and emigrant policy-building in Ecuador: potential and limitations

Although our research involved only the 2008 constitutional referendum, a broader review of Ecuadoreans' electoral participation from abroad is helpful for understanding their potential connectedness to domestic political life. Over a period of less than three years, Ecuadorean emigrants participated in absentee ballots six times: the 2006 presidential elections (first ballot and run-off); the 2007 elections for representatives in the new Constitutional Assembly; the referendum in 2008; the 2009 presidential and congressional

⁴ See IDEA, *Voting from Abroad* (Mexico City: IDEA-IFE Joint Report, 2007); and Michael Collyer and Zana Vathi, 'Patterns of Extra-Territorial Voting', Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty, Working Paper T22, 2007. On Latin America, see Leticia Calderón, *Votar en la distancia* (Mexico City: Instituto Mora, 2003); Cristina Escobar, 'Extraterritorial Political Rights and Dual Citizenship in Latin America', *Latin American Research Review*, 42: 3 (2007), pp. 43–75; and Lorena Araujo, 'Estado y voto migrante: una radiografía de la Región Andina', *AndinaMigrante*, 7 (2010), pp. 2–10.

⁵ Claudio López-Guerra, 'Should Expatriates Vote?', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 13: 2 (2005), pp. 216–34; Kim Barry, 'Home and Away: The Construction of Citizenship in an Emigration Context', *New York University Law Review*, 81: 11 (2006), pp. 11–59; Ruth Rubio-Marín, 'Transnational Politics and the Democratic Nation-State', *New York University Law Review*, 81: 1 (2006), pp. 117–47; Rainer Bauböck, 'Stakeholder Citizenship and Transnational Political Participation', *Fordham Law Review*, 75 (2007), pp. 2393–447.

⁶ Exceptions to this dearth of empirical analyses include case studies on emigration from Mexico: see Robert C. Smith, 'Contradictions of Diasporic Institutionalization in Mexican Politics', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 31: 4 (2008), pp. 708–41; from the Dominican Republic: see José Itzigsohn and Daniela Villacrés, 'Migrant Political Transnationalism and the Practice of Democracy', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 31: 4 (2008), pp. 664–86; from Peru: see Angeles Escrivá, Ursula Santa Cruz and Anastasia Bermúdez, 'Migration, Gender and Politics: The 2006 Peruvian Elections Abroad', *Latin American Perspectives*, 37: 5 (2010), pp. 106–30; and from Ecuador: see Paolo Boccagni, 'Reminiscences, Patriotism, Participation: Approaching External Voting in Ecuadorian Immigration to Italy', *International Migration*, 49: 3 (2011), pp. 76–98.

⁷ Østergaard-Nielsen, *International Migration and Sending Countries*; Michael Tager, 'Expatriates and Elections', *Diaspora*, 15: 1 (2006), pp. 35–60.

⁸ Paolo Boccagni and Francesca Lagomarsino, 'Migration and the Global Crisis: New Prospects for Return?', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 30: 3 (2011), pp. 282–97.

⁹ Franklin Ramírez and Jacques Ramírez, *La estampida migratoria Ecuatoriana* (Quito: Abya Yala, 2005).

¹⁰ Boccagni, 'Reminiscences, Patriotism, Participation'; Rainer Bauböck, 'Toward a Political Theory of Migrant Transnationalism', *International Migration Review*, 37: 3 (2003), pp. 700–23; Nancy Green and François Weil (eds.), *Citizenship and Those Who Leave* (Chicago, IL: Illinois University Press, 2007).

¹¹ Ulla Berg and Carla Tamagno, 'El Quinto Suyu' from Above and from Below', *Latino Studies*, 4 (2006), pp. 258–81.

elections; and then polls to appoint Ecuadorean members of the Andean Parliament (Parlamento Andino). This growing scope for emigrant involvement is a manifestation of the accelerated political change that has marked Ecuador in the last few years, under a 'permanent campaign' climate.¹² The expatriates' franchise, formally acknowledged by the 1998 Constitution (also the result of pressures from emigrant organisations in the United States), was first exercised eight years later. Its remit was then expanded under the new 2008 Constitution.

In quantitative terms, membership of the electoral register of Ecuadorean expatriates has gradually increased from about 143,000 registered voters in 2006 to some 185,000 in 2008. The total number of potential electors abroad could be estimated, however, at a minimum of 1.5 million.¹³ The increase in registered voters has arguably been due less to a strengthened emigrant concern with current affairs at home than to state-led 'outreach' initiatives. Indeed, reaching out to the emigrant vote has required significant changes in the state's institutional structure. Most consulates have attempted to promote electoral registration, including in cities with no permanent consular presence. Overall, procedures for voter enrolment (*empadronamiento*) have taken place worldwide in nearly 80 cities. Appreciable efforts have also been made by the ministry dedicated to migrant affairs, the Secretaría Nacional del Migrante (National Secretariat for Migrants, SENAMI), and by the main migrant associations overseas.¹⁴

Nonetheless, the increase in consular registration has not been matched with a consistently upward trend in turnout.¹⁵ Consequently, while about 15 per cent of all people born in Ecuador live outside the country, sending home remittances that comprise 5.4 per cent of Ecuadorean GDP, emigrant votes have never amounted to more than 1.5 per cent of all the votes cast.¹⁶ Put differently, despite the efforts of the Ecuadorean state to enlarge the scope

for expatriate participation, actual voters have been a small share of those registered in the consular lists, and a tiny fraction of the potential constituency overseas.¹⁷ One could argue that, if emigrant access to the electoral register were really facilitated (and if more pervasive campaigning were developed), the number of registered and voting expatriates would likely increase. Nevertheless, we find it important to note that the process has been driven by the homeland state's political agenda, much more than by migrants' claims and active involvement. The latter have grown, so far, at an understandably slower and uneven pace.¹⁸

We will not enter here into the details of emigrant voters' distribution by country of residence.¹⁹ We should note, however, that the distribution of Ecuadoreans overseas is far from homogeneous.²⁰ Spain, the United States and Italy account for approximately 85 per cent of emigrants and for an even higher share (88.5 per cent) of those registered as voters overseas. Significantly, voter turnout in the countries of the 'new' Ecuadorean migration that originated in the late 1990s, such as Spain and Italy, has been much higher than in the United States, where Ecuadorean immigration had started some 30 years earlier.²¹ The exercise of voter rights has induced political competition, although in practice nearly all the seats have been won by the political party of Rafael Correa. Although the party (which self-defines as a movement) celebrated primary elections in Ecuador, this was not the case abroad, where candidates were selected in a top-down process. Transnational policy-building has thus emerged, but it is one for which the command levers are firmly held in Ecuador. The selection of emigrant political candidates – which has been a source of ambivalence and tensions for migrant associations – still seems inadequate in terms of representation, agenda-setting, communication and accountability to emigrant voters.²²

¹² Catherine Conaghan and Carlos de la Torre, 'The Permanent Campaign of Rafael Correa', *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 13: 3 (2008), pp. 267–84.

¹³ FLACSO, *Ecuador: las cifras de las migraciones internacionales* (Quito: UNFPA–FLACSO, 2008).

¹⁴ State investment in external voting is considerable. The Consejo Nacional Electoral (National Electoral Council, CNE) estimated the cost of overseas voting for the 2009 presidential elections at over US \$2.9 million, or about half the annual budget of SENAMI.

¹⁵ In the first ballot of the 2006 elections there were about 86,000 Ecuadorean emigrant voters. Many of them were apparently driven by a supposed voting obligation which in fact applies only to citizens residing in Ecuador. In subsequent years, however, emigrants' turnout halved before it increased again, to about 79,000, for the 2009 elections, which benefited from better organisational arrangements. Altogether, registered emigrants' abstention rates were double those of their non-migrant co-nationals.

¹⁶ Mark Weisbrot and Luis Sandoval, *Update on the Ecuadorian Economy*, policy brief (Washington, DC: Center for Economic and Policy Research, 2009).

¹⁷ CNE, *Informe Proceso Electoral 2009* (Dirección del Voto en el Exterior, official report, 2009).

¹⁸ There has been some debate as to whether electoral registers should be kept permanently open, but even this option would make little difference to turnout unless means were found – for example, postal and e-votes – to facilitate emigrant participation or at least make it less expensive.

¹⁹ Seats allocated to 'foreign provinces' are not weighted by population size. In the 2009 elections for the national Congress and in 2007 for the Constitutional Assembly, six seats (out of 130 overall) were allocated to representatives of the 'foreign provinces' – two for each of Europe, the United States/Canada, and Latin America.

²⁰ FLACSO, *Ecuador*.

²¹ Ramírez and Ramírez, *La estampida migratoria Ecuatoriana*; Emilio Gómez, Andrés Tornos and Colectivo IOÉ, *Ecuatorianos en España*, no. 15 (Madrid: Observatorio Permanente de la Inmigración, 2008).

²² Jacques Ramírez and Paolo Boccagni, 'Construyendo la Quinta Región: voto a la distancia y participación política de los ecuatorianos en el exterior', in Jacques Ramírez (ed.), *Con o sin pasaporte: análisis socio-antropológico sobre la migración ecuatoriana* (Quito: IAEN, 2010), pp. 227–53.

Studying External Voting and its Social Milieus: The Research in Action

On 28 September 2008, Ecuadorean expatriates in 42 countries were called to participate in a constitutional referendum on an equal footing with the rest of their co-nationals – provided they had earlier registered in consular lists, travelling then to the cities which hosted the ballots (that is, those with larger Ecuadorean overseas ‘colonies’). The new Constitution bill had just been passed by a Constitutional Assembly convened in Montecristi (coastal Ecuador) and including, for the first time, a number of emigrant-elected representatives.²³ Ecuadorean external voting resulted in broad support for the new Constitution: the mean percentage of emigrants approving the bill was 60.6 per cent, or slightly less than the level of support in their homeland (63.9 per cent).²⁴

On the day, as some 46,100 Ecuadoreans cast their votes all over the world, 24 researchers attempted to administer an exploratory questionnaire to them, just as they were leaving the polling stations, in Europe (Italy, Spain and Britain) and America (the United States, Mexico, Chile and Argentina).²⁵ Significant differences existed, of course, between the national contexts of immigrant settlement and the average profile of the Ecuadorean population in each location.²⁶ Nonetheless, their simultaneous participation in overseas ballots provided common ground for us to explore their emigration patterns along with their transnational ties and, to an extent, their incorporation into society overseas. In total, 572 individual questionnaires were conducted and then analysed through SPSS, with the support of the interviewers’ fieldwork accounts.²⁷ We also built, methodologically speaking, on our past research on the topic.²⁸

Any quantitative analysis is prone to the risk of decontextualising the knowledge it generates from the social relationships, and the physical and social setting, underlying (and obviously shaping) the collection of the data. In our

²³ Jacques Ramírez and Gabriela Quezada, ‘Política migratoria y avances en movilidad humana en la nueva Constitución del Ecuador’, in Ramírez, *Con o sin pasaporte*, pp. 209–26.

²⁴ All the voting-related figures have been provided by the CNE; see its website at www.cne.gob.ec, along with CNE, *Informe Proceso Electoral 2009*, for developments in the electoral participation of the Ecuadorean ‘Fifth Region’, particularly with regard to the 2009 presidential elections.

²⁵ More specifically, questionnaires were collected at polling stations in Milan, Genoa, Madrid, Barcelona, London, New York City, Mexico City, Buenos Aires and Santiago.

²⁶ FLACSO, *Ecuador*.

²⁷ The distribution of the 572 voters we interviewed by country of settlement did not, regrettably, reflect the Ecuadoreans’ distribution worldwide. The distribution of questionnaires by country was as follows: Italy, 38.1 per cent; Spain, 35 per cent; United Kingdom, 6.5 per cent; United States, 5.9 per cent; Chile, Mexico and Argentina combined, 14.5 per cent. The sample corresponds to 1.25 per cent of the total number of emigrant voters at the referendum. ²⁸ Boccagni, ‘Reminiscences, Patriotism, Participation’.

case this risk encompassed two obvious dimensions. First, the fieldwork resulted in a myriad of random micro-encounters with a very diverse group of Ecuadoreans, all of whom shared the conditions of living and voting abroad. Hence, our brief interviews could never do justice to the complexity of their life experiences. Second, the electoral venues involved much more than an occasion to vote – they were also a peculiar setting for migrants to negotiate and expand their social capital, as well as for claiming public recognition.²⁹ Put differently, the elections resulted in an opportunity for migrants to gather in a public space, to make (or recover) acquaintances, and to tap an improvised but rich ‘ethnic market’, including vendors of food, representatives of remittance, travel or housing agencies and the like. The social and cultural milieu surrounding Ecuadorean voters, within a generally festive atmosphere, provided a striking commonality across countries of settlement such as Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States. To that extent, as we will argue, the enactment of overseas elections can be understood as a temporary reproduction of an Ecuadorean ‘transnational village’, in which different ways of understanding one’s Ecuadoreanness are displayed and negotiated.³⁰ Judging from a range of micro-indicators – for example, voters’ ways of dressing and talking, their patterns of consumption and their homeland-related attitudes – at stake were different conceptions and representations of what it means to be Ecuadoreans far from Ecuador.

In technical terms, the sample from our fieldwork is a convenient, exploratory one. It cannot be assumed to be fully representative of all emigrant voters – what is more, the latter are far from representative of all Ecuadoreans abroad. Rather, the survey closely resembles an exit poll, with all of the attendant challenges and limitations.³¹ Every interviewer attempted to select potential respondents on a random basis (in spite of the absence of any control list), by excluding more than one member of the same household and by contacting interviewees at regular intervals. The rejection rates were relatively low (between 20 and 25 per cent), especially in light of the highly fluid and unstructured context, as well as the chaotic environments surrounding the electoral stations. Judging from the fieldwork reports of the research teams,

²⁹ Paolo Boccagni and Francesca Lagomarsino, ‘Celebrare da cittadini, vivere da immigrati: una giornata elettorale in un cortile di Milano, “come se fosse in Ecuador”’, *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa*, 2: 3 (2009), pp. 441–64.

³⁰ Peggy Levitt, *The Transnational Villagers* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2001). See also Amalia Pallares, ‘Ecuadorian Immigrants and Symbolic Nationalism in Chicago’, *Latino Studies*, 3 (2005), pp. 347–71.

³¹ For an overview, see Mark Levy, ‘The Methodology and Performance of Election Day Polls’, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 47 (1982), pp. 54–67. See also, with specific respect to immigrant minorities, Karen Bird, Thomas Saalfeld and Andreas Wust, ‘Voter Turnout among Immigrants and Visible Minorities in Comparative Perspective’, in Bird, Saalfeld and Wust (eds.), *The Political Representation of Immigrants and Minorities* (London: Routledge, 2011).

rejections were not significantly biased in any direction. Defensiveness, lack of concern or simple haste were the more frequent reactions of non-respondents.³² As a result of these constraints, our survey has ultimately selected a range of respondents that, while *non*-representative of all co-nationals abroad, can be assumed to have a stronger transnational orientation than all Ecuadoreans generally.

In addition to the study of electoral participation, the questionnaire allowed us to revisit some core theoretical claims of the transnational perspective. The questionnaire was based on three complementary levels of analysis: a *descriptive* one, involving respondents' demographics, as well as their reported patterns of structural integration and transnational participation; a *normative* one, related to the values and ideals informing emigrant self-representations and, more specifically, the grounds for their electoral participation; and a *cognitive* one, concerning people's perceptions and expectations towards their kin, the receiving societies and, above all, their homeland.³³

Voters' Demographics and their Reasons for Electoral Participation

It is useful to provide a brief profile of respondents to our survey. First, there is a gender balance for all countries in which the questionnaire was applied, with the significant exception of the United States. Second, emigrant voters from Ecuador are, on average, younger than the native populations. Their mean age is about 40 everywhere, apart from the United States, where the average age is closer to 50. This generational difference may reflect the earlier settlement of

³² Some common observations were that (1) women being together with their partners tended to be relatively more reluctant to accept one-to-one interviews; (2) younger male interviewees sometimes showed less favourable attitudes to interviewers than the rest of their co-nationals; (3) against our expectations, the need to present our effort as 'scientific' and politically neutral proved unnecessary – most respondents showed no suspicions (or interest) in that respect, once interviewers demonstrated an empathic and respectful attitude towards them; and more remarkably, (4) while every interview was expected to be individual, some of them resulted in a collective effort as respondents would spontaneously exchange opinions with the relatives or friends standing beside them.

³³ The areas of concern covered by our questionnaire were: social and demographic characteristics; electoral involvement; ways of civic participation; family relationships; economic investments; help and friendship networks; personal identifications; and constructions and representations of Ecuador. The questionnaire included 37 close-ended questions. It was administered in the same version (in Spanish) across all the research sites, using one communal interview protocol. Interviews lasted, on average, 12 to 15 minutes. Most questionnaires were filled by the interviewers together with each respondent, rather than by the latter alone. In principle this face-to-face option may be less advisable than a self-administered 'secret ballot' (see George Bishop and Bonnie Fisher, 'Secret Ballots and Self-Reports in an Exit-Poll Experiment', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 59 (1995), pp. 568–88). However, since the bulk of the questionnaire did *not* involve the electoral event per se, we have reason to believe this approach did not significantly affect interviewees' responses.

Ecuadoreans in the United States compared with Europe.³⁴ Ecuadorean voters in other Latin American countries have a much shorter length of stay. This is no surprise, since this smaller emigration flow has increased only recently after the visa introduction (2003) that reduced EU-directed migration from Ecuador. Importantly, the average length of stay of the voters we interviewed – at about eight years – is relatively low.

Third, our sample reveals an above-average level of education when compared with estimated education attainment of migrants and the Ecuadorean population overall.³⁵ One in four respondents held a university degree, which suggests a strong (if well-known) correlation between emigrants' education and their concern with homeland politics.³⁶ To the extent that education may approximate human capital, the gap between the voters' human capital and their patterns of employment overseas is striking. Analysis of voters' employment confirms the centrality of the construction sector – which suffered an especially severe impact during the 2008–9 recession – and of personal services, whether in relation to in-house or institutional care settings.³⁷ Significant differences emerge in the weight of these occupational sectors between the United States and Europe, as well as between men and women.

Personal Understandings of the External Vote

Data on voter patterns of electoral participation, along with the meanings and expectations underlying it, are provided by Table 2. It is worth highlighting that about 70 per cent of respondents reported having voted from abroad at least once in the past. Although external voting was introduced just two years before our survey, only a relatively small fraction of respondents perceived it as a new and unprecedented practice. To this extent, Ecuadorean migrants' electoral participation can be regarded as an established phenomenon.

As to the reported motivations of voting choices, two main considerations emerge from the data. First is a conviction about the relevance of the vote, expressed by 38.8 per cent respondents, as a part of a perception of the

³⁴ Ramírez and Ramírez, *La estampida migratoria Ecuatoriana*. An 8–10 per cent undocumented rate can be found across the sample (with a significant over-representation in the United States), and the number of those who have never returned home – understandably high for newcomers – is above 10 per cent, even for those living overseas for more than a decade.

³⁵ FLACSO, *Ecuador*.

³⁶ See, among others, Luis Guarnizo, Alejandro Portes and William Haller, 'Assimilation and Transnationalism: Determinants of Transnational Political Action among Contemporary Migrants', *American Journal of Sociology*, 108: 6 (2003), pp. 1211–48.

³⁷ For construction, see Miguel Pajares, *Inmigración y mercado del trabajo: informe 2010*, Documentos del Observatorio Permanente de la Inmigración, no. 25 (Madrid, 2010). For the service sector, see Brian Gratton, 'Ecuadorians in the United States and Spain', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 33: 4 (2007), pp. 581–99.

Table 1. Key Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (Valid Cases: from 516 to 572)

Gender	Male: 50.3%	Female: 49.7%	US: women at 26.5%
Age*	18-30: 21.2%	31-50: 64.4%	Over 50: 14.4%
Years abroad**	0-4: 15.6%	5-10: 70.6%	Over 10: 13.8%
Education	Not completed primary school: 2.6%	Completed primary school: 15.4%	Completed secondary school: 57.9%
Employment	Construction: 23.4%	Trade, transport of goods: 14.4%	Health and social care: 16.0%
Legal status	Undocumented: 8.4%	Does not work: 8.1%	Completed university degree: 24.1%
Homecomings (number of times)	Never returned home: 28.1%	Returned once: 23.1%	Returned twice or more: 48.8%
			US: undocumented at 34.4%
			0-4 years abroad: never returned at 60.2%
			Over 10 years abroad: never returned at 12.8%

Notes: Last column displays significant differences in relevant variables. Only one response allowed.

* Mean: 39.4 years old.

** Mean: 8.1 years abroad.

Table 2. Key Attributes of Respondents' Electoral Involvement (Valid Cases: 501 to 572)

Took part in previous elections abroad	Yes, in all previous elections: 56.1%	No, first time voting from overseas: 29.2%
Primary motivation for voting today	Feeling closer to homeland: 13.1%	Being obligated to vote: 12.2%
How respondent got relevant information on vote (mainly through...)	Relatives in Ecuador: 18.1%	Migrants' representatives in the Constitutional Assembly: 3.2%
Perceived situation of Ecuador under current regime (since 2007)	Improved: 37.4%	The same as always: 21.5%
Preference to external voting in national vs local elections	National elections (president): 79.2%	Local elections (mayor): 20.8%
Thinks that an expatriate can actively contribute to Ecuadorian political life	Yes, more and more: 63.5%	Yes, but only at a symbolic level: 16.0%
		No, does not care about Ecuadorian politics: 9.1%

Notes: Last column displays significant differences in relevant variables. Only one response allowed.

external vote as a fundamental citizen right, whatever the electoral stake (33.9 per cent).³⁸ Second, less emphasis is put in explicit terms on migrant voting as an obligation (as voting is compulsory in Ecuador – hence migrants' fear of being forced to pay a fine once back home) or as the ultimate sign of patriotism and national belonging (although the salience of symbols of 'home' was conspicuous to every interviewer). Overall, broadly patriotic, civic or nostalgic motivations seem to matter more as underlying reasons for voting than a specific interest in the constitutional referendum or a strong identification with the new presidential agenda.

Whatever their motivations, how did voters acquire information about the elections? The picture that emerges from the data is highly differentiated and fragmented. Interestingly, interviewees rely both on their personal contacts and on more public or institutionalised sources; on interlocutors both in Ecuador itself and, to a greater extent, in the country of settlement; and on information both received through personal interaction and mediated by virtual (or cross-border) communication. Four different communication channels turn out to be relevant: consulates overseas (but *not* emigrants' representatives in the Constitutional Assembly); relatives or acquaintances in the context of immigration; family members left behind; and traditional media channels (TV and radio). The incidence of TV and radio use is higher than host population averages in the United States and Spain, where a massive presence of Ecuadorean (and broadly Latino) migrants has allowed for an ethnic economy to develop in the field of communication. Less prominent is the use, apparently a gendered one, of the internet.³⁹

A mixed picture emerges of voters' perceptions of political changes in Ecuador. As Table 2 shows, respondents are roughly divided as to positive ('improved') and negative opinions ('same' or 'worse') about political developments at 'home'. Remarkably, one interviewee out of four shared a more problematic view that undermines the rationale of the question itself: living far away from home makes it difficult to grasp Ecuadorean domestic politics, let alone assess them. The presence of this minority, even within a self-selected population of 'homeward-oriented' subjects, calls for a more nuanced reading of migrants' interconnectedness with their homeland and its political institutions than a superficial understanding of transnationalism would have it. To be sure, this intriguing combination of participation and detachment, both in cognitive and emotional terms, has to do with the deeply rooted Ecuadorean disenchantment for la política. This is related, in turn, to the long-term

instability of the political institutions in the country.⁴⁰ Altogether, while most voters seem to perceive absentee ballots as a tool for impinging on Ecuadorean politics – rather than considering this 'only' as a citizen right – a relevant minority displays a more critical or disenchanted stance.

The firmly 'nation-centred' orientation of Ecuadorean voters should also be noted. For most interviewees, participating in presidential elections matters much more than voting for candidates in 'home' municipalities (which, in any event, is not provided by the current Ecuadorean regulation of the external vote). This finding is consistent with the predominant emphasis on national symbols and identifications rather than on local or ethnicity-based ones that we were able to observe across the electoral settings. Significantly, overseas elections themselves could be understood as an institutionalised display of homeland attachment – that is, a state-driven ritual whereby Ecuadorean citizens are enabled to exercise, from afar, 'the evocative language and [the] powerful iconography of patriotism'.⁴¹

From Electoral to Civic Participation

Migrants' political participation, however, should not necessarily be framed only in strictly electoral terms, even if it is explored in the context of an electoral event.⁴² Much empirical literature has recently argued for a close connection between migrants' political engagement and their involvement in civic organisations – the latter often being conducive to other forms of participation in the public sphere.⁴³ With a view to understanding the civic background of migrants' external voting, then, we explored their membership of a range of civic associations, whether overseas or related to their lives in Ecuador.

⁴⁰ See World Bank, *Ecuador: Development Policy Review*, Report no. 27443 (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2004); Felipe Burbano, 'Deinstitutionalized Democracy', in Carlos De la Torre and Steve Striffler (eds.), *The Ecuador Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 271–5; Santiago Serrano, Simón Pachano and Andrés Mejía Acosta, 'La democracia inconclusa', *Revista de Ciencia Política*, 30: 1 (2010), pp. 65–85; and James Bowen, 'Countries at the Crossroads 2011: Ecuador', in Freedom House, *Countries at the Crossroads 2011* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012).

⁴¹ Rogers Brubaker, 'In the Name of the Nation', *Citizenship Studies*, 8: 2 (2004), pp. 115–27.

⁴² For a wider framework of analysis, whereby external voting is only one of the relevant indicators of migrant political transnationalism, see Guarnizo Portes and Haller, 'Assimilation and Transnationalism'; and Marco Martiniello and Jean-Michel Lafleur, 'Transnational Politics from a Transatlantic Perspective', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 31: 4 (2008), pp. 645–63.

⁴³ See Meindert Fennema and Jean Tillie, 'Civic Community, Political Participation and Political Trust of Ethnic Groups', *Connections*, 24 (2001), pp. 26–41; Dirk Jacobs and Jean Tillie, 'Introduction: Social Capital and Political Integration of Migrants', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 30 (2004), pp. 419–27; and on Ecuadoreans, Laura Morales and Katia Pilati, 'The Political Transnationalism of Ecuadorians in Barcelona, Madrid and Milan', *Global Networks*, 12 Feb. 2013.

³⁸ Adrián López and Paula Celis, 'Análisis del referéndum constitucional 2009 en Ecuador', *Íconos*, 33 (2009), pp. 13–20.

³⁹ Cf. Silvia Mejía Estévez, 'Is Nostalgia Becoming Digital? Ecuadorian Diaspora in the Age of Global Capitalism', *Social Identities*, 15: 3 (2009), pp. 393–410.

We also approached their involvement in collective initiatives related to politics, unionism, migrants' sociability or solidarity with those 'left behind' (Table 3).

At first sight, Ecuadorean voters' membership in civil society associations is a relatively limited phenomenon. As we reached this point in the interviews, the most common reaction of our respondents was simply a leap into the next section, whether with a hand gesture suggesting a lack of concern or with a sigh – as if associations were an unaffordable luxury in light of their daily concerns with livelihood. No associational form, among those proposed to interviewees, enjoys participation rates higher than 6–7 per cent: the list includes trade unions, religious organisations, leisure associations and political groups.⁴⁴ The exception is membership associations involved with migrancy, for which the participation rate is one out of four voters. Some of these associations, including in relation to churches or sport clubs, may simply mean a weekly informal gathering. As to the associational composition, no predominant ethnic pattern emerges – although membership of immigrant-only associations far exceeds that of associations involving native citizens (see note below Table 3).⁴⁵

Once these figures are compared with those concerning Ecuador, two more remarks can be made. First, the average rate of involvement in associations overseas is systematically lower than that observed for the same subjects before they left Ecuador (with the exception of trade unions). To that extent, harder life conditions in immigration seem to hinder civic participation, especially in the early migration stages or under critical economic circumstances, such as the current ones on a worldwide scale. In this context, however, it is especially striking that our data show an under-representation of associational memberships in the Spanish sub-sample (including about 200 interviewees in Madrid and Barcelona). While the structure of opportunity in that country may be one explanation, respondents in Spain report significantly lower rates of civic participation even considering their past lives in Ecuador.

Second, however, once the broader patterns of participation of Ecuadorean citizens are taken into account, a different picture comes into view. Despite a public discourse and drive from the president toward a sort of 'politicisation of everyday life', as evident by the holding of seven elections (six open to absentee

⁴⁴ A recent survey of the Ecuadorean labour market estimated that no more than 3 per cent of Ecuadoreans overseas are affiliated to a civil society organisation. See ENEMDU, *Encuesta nacional de empleo y desempleo 2005–2007* (Quito: INEC, 2007).

⁴⁵ Most forms of associational involvement overseas seem related to length of stay in the country of immigration and gender. Male voters tend to report higher levels of associative participation – whether overseas or in Ecuador – than their female counterparts. No significant association emerges between education and associational membership, in general terms; better-educated interviewees participated more often in Ecuadorean politics-related initiatives, but active involvement remains marginal.

Table 3. *Characteristics of Respondents' Forms of Civic Participation (Valid Cases: from 561 to 572)*

Belongs to associations here	Political: 5.2%	Trade union: 6.6%	Religious: 6.8%	Charitable: 4.6%	Sport: 7.2%	Cultural or recreational: 6.8%	Belongs to at least one: 27.6%	Over 10 years abroad: 38.5% belong to at least one Spain: 11.5% belong to at least one
Belonged to associations in Ecuador	Political: 10.1%	Trade union: 4.0%	Religious: 9.1%	Charitable: 6.1%	Sport: 10.8%	Cultural or recreational: 8.7%	Belonged to at least one: 34.7%	
Recently took part in...	Political initiatives for Ecuador: 9.5%	Sport, culture or leisure initiatives with Ecuadorians: 16.1%	Solidarity initiatives for Ecuador: 12.6%	Political initiatives here: 4.4%	Public demonstrations Here: 5.6%	University degree: 16.7% political initiatives for Ecuador Over 10 years abroad: 19.2% political initiatives for Ecuador		

Notes: Last column displays significant differences in relevant variables. Only one response allowed.

* Those belonging to one association at least (N = 152) report the following ethnic patterns of membership: associations including only Ecuadorians, 32.9 per cent; associations including both Ecuadorians and citizens of the country of settlement, 28.3 per cent; associations including Latino and other immigrants, 26.3 per cent; associations including mostly native citizens, 12.5 per cent.

ballots) in two and a half years, surveys in Ecuador point to very low levels of concern or involvement with politics. According to recent estimates, membership of political parties in Ecuador is at 7.7 per cent, of trade unions at 6.7 per cent and of neighbourhood committees at 6.7 per cent.⁴⁶ To put it another way, emigrant voters' rates of civic participation are, on average, no lower than those of their non-migrant co-nationals in Ecuador, and higher than those of Ecuadorean migrants in general.

Homeland-Addressed Relationships and Practices

It was our contention in designing the survey that voters' political and civic transnationalism was to be appreciated in its interfaces with other forms and channels of cross-border participation (Table 4). We will now outline some key points in this respect, to be then theoretically revisited in light of the rest of our analysis at the end of this article.

An obvious but significant fact lies in the transnational scale of most Ecuadorean voters' family lives.⁴⁷ This is manifest in the high reported incidence of children and, to a lesser extent, spouses left behind.⁴⁸ The persistence of family-based transnational relationships may account for the exclusive identification with Ecuador as one's home, which applies to one respondent out of two. This tends however to decrease the more time is spent overseas, ranging from 57.5 per cent for the newest immigrants (four years or less) to 35.1 per cent for those with more than a decade abroad. Remarkably, a primary identification of home with the country of settlement has, instead, a systematically low score, irrespective of the time span spent there. It is rather the relative weight of the 'Both' option which tends to increase in correlation with the length of stay away from Ecuador. Overall, the salience of this twofold, simultaneous identification – which is reported by one respondent out of three – indicates a surprising degree of attachment to the society of reception, for such a recent immigrant flow.

Whatever the voters' personal constructions of home, remittance to relatives is by far the most widespread transnational social practice. One interviewee out of two reports sending money to Ecuador on a monthly basis, while only a small number of respondents (about 15 per cent) do not remit at all.

⁴⁶ INEC–SENPLADES, *I encuesta nacional sobre participación ciudadana en el Ecuador* (Quito: INEC–SENPLADES, 2008).

⁴⁷ See, among others, Gioconda Herrera (ed.), *La migración de los que se quedan: organización social de los cuidados y desigualdad social en Ecuador* (Quito: INSTRAW–FLACSO, 2010).

⁴⁸ As Table 4 shows, about 40 per cent of respondents have one or more child (still) at home, with a significant but not drastic decrease for those living abroad for more than a decade (24.4 per cent). While the commonsense view of migration – including that of most migrant parents – assumes transnational parenthood as a provisional condition, available data suggest that, in aggregate terms, such condition is far from ephemeral.

Table 4. *Characteristics of Respondents' Transnational Relationships and Practices in Other Life Realms (Valid Cases: from 554 to 572)*

Close relations left behind in Ecuador	Parent(s): 73.3%	Spouse: 16.1%	Children: 40.2%	Brother(s) or sister(s): 75.7%	None of the previous: 8.6%	Over 10 years abroad: spouse at 6.4%; children at 24.4%
Regards as 'home'	Ecuador: 46.4%		Country of settlement: 16.5%	Both: 34.9%	Neither: 2.2%	Over 10 years abroad: Ecuador at 35.1%
Family remittances	Every month: 48.1%		Several times a year: 23.6%	Once or twice a year: 13.2%	Hardly ever: 14.8%	
Collective remittances (last year)	To local community (public works): 7.5%		To local community (feasts): 4.0%	To church or association: 3.8%	To political party or movement: 0.0%	Spain: collective remittances (aggregate) at 6%
Housing in Ecuador	Already owned house before leaving: 12.5%	Built/bought new house after leaving: 29.1%	Is building/buying new house now: 12.3%	Not yet, but would like to: 36.1%	Cannot do it, or not interested in it: 10.0%	Over 10 years abroad: built/bought new house at 49.4%; not yet, but would like to at 24.7% US: built/bought new house at 61.8%

Notes: Last column displays significant differences in relevant variables. Multiple responses allowed for first question, only one response allowed for all other questions.

If analysed in light of the length of stay abroad, the evolution of remittances seems to follow a peculiar curve, somewhat reflecting migrants' typical life cycle overseas: a relatively low rate among the newly arrived (0–4 years abroad, with monthly remittance rates of 41.4 per cent), then rising in the 5–10 years abroad group (54.7 per cent on average), and dropping for those with over ten years abroad (24.7 per cent on average). When collective remittances are analysed – that is, money sent for philanthropic or public utility initiatives in the community of origin – the rates are lower.⁴⁹ Collective remittances occur on an occasional basis among about 15 per cent of interviewees, with lower rates in the case of Spain. Significantly, no emigrant donations at all have been reported in favour of Ecuadorean political parties or movements. This makes the Ecuadorean case distinct from others reported in Latin America where emigrants' contribution has apparently been documented.⁵⁰

A further indicator of the Ecuadorean voters' strong attachment to their homeland, and of their homeward-bound future life projects, has to do with their holding of property in Ecuador. The expectation of buying a house of their own has been satisfied, or is being met, by almost half of those who did not own a house before leaving. The figure is slightly lower for those who would like to buy a house but have been unable to do so thus far. Whether accomplished or not, the project of a new 'migrant house' back home testifies once again to a remarkable point: generally speaking, the biographical centrality of the homeland is here to stay, whatever one's intended future life course.

Taking Stock of One's Emigrant Life: Self-Identification, Sociability and Constructions of Ecuador

In order to investigate the voters' self-understandings of their life courses abroad, along lines of increasing reflexivity, we have elicited views on issues of national identification, the perceived success of the migrant experience, the distribution and composition of friendships, and assistance networks (see Table 5).

In looking at responses, the first point to stand out is people's self-framing as Ecuadoreans. Four out of five respondents depicted themselves as Ecuadoreans only, as opposed to accepting identification, however partial, with any other national category and regardless of length of stay overseas.

Nevertheless, while feeling Ecuadorean is a predominant identity marker, the data indicate that life experience abroad is much more complicated. Voters' answers suggest that only one respondent out of three feels altogether satisfied about their immigration experience. A satisfied attitude is positively associated, first, with respondents' education – on average, the most educated have a rate twice that of the least educated – and second, with being resident in Latin America, where respondents were relatively more satisfied than if resident elsewhere. Geopolitical proximity to the homeland, and perhaps a higher share of skilled migrants in the Latin America-related emigrant flow (compared with different areas of destination), may account for this difference.⁵¹

An attempt was also made to map the potential sources of help on which emigrant voters could rely, in their own perceptions, under critical circumstances. Apart from the central position attributed to family members, two issues deserve further comment. First, despite the emotional attachment to Ecuador, the potential contribution of co-nationals abroad is perceived as greater, in practical terms, than that of the Ecuadoreans left behind. Indeed, a frequent (and bitterly ironic) remark of respondents was that *they* were 'naturally' expected to be the ones to help the rest. A reversal of roles in migrant/non-migrant relationships would make little sense, despite the over-exposure to vulnerability in a number of countries resulting from the current recession circumstances.⁵²

Second, the states where respondents are settled are perceived as relatively more reliable, at least in case of severe necessity, than Ecuador itself. Whether this is a marker of integration overseas or of persisting scepticism about the state at 'home', a key fact remains that only a minority of interviewees (ranging between 20 and 30 per cent) expect to encounter *any* form of support outside of the family. A picture of perceived isolation and limited reciprocity, therefore, applies to most respondents regardless of their social characteristics or country of residence. Such a fragmented relational background raises further questions about the predominant location and ethnic composition of friendship networks (if any). As Table 5 shows, a sort of 'friendship endogamy' – that is, a privileged reference to co-nationals only – holds for over 40 per cent of interviewees. Friendship relationships prior to emigration (25.8 per cent), however, seem to be perceived as sounder, or more authentic, than those developed between co-nationals abroad (16.8 per cent). One respondent out of three puts the emphasis on friends – no matter their backgrounds – while 15 per cent of respondents report a more sceptical and disillusioned view in this respect.

⁴⁹ See Luin Goldring, 'Family and Collective Remittances to Mexico', *Development and Change*, 35: 4 (2004), pp. 799–840.

⁵⁰ Guarnizo, Portes and Haller, 'Assimilation and Transnationalism'. However, for a critical revisit of the same data set – arguing that politics-related donations were almost non-existent among the interviewees that had been selected on a random basis – see Roger Waldinger, 'Engaging from Abroad: The Sociology of Emigrant Politics', *Migration Studies*, 24 August 2013.

⁵¹ See FLACSO, *Ecuador*.

⁵² Philip Martin, 'Recession and Migration', *International Migration Review*, 43: 3 (2009), pp. 671–91.

Table 5. Respondents' Sense of Belonging, and Representations of their Migrant Experience and of their Helping and Sociability Networks (Valid Cases: from 508 to 555)

In five years, would expect to feel...	Always and only Ecuadorian: 79.5%	Belonging more to this country than to Ecuador: 18.2%	Belonging only to this country: 2.3%	
Would advise an Ecuadorian to emigrate, if similar life conditions applied	Yes: 32.1%	No: 49.4%	Don't know: 18.5%	University degree: yes at 42.5% Latin America: yes at 64.6%
In case of need or trouble, could rely on the help of...	Family members: 74.9%	Other Ecuadorians in Ecuador: 22.5%	Ecuador as a state: 22.4%	Charitable organisations here: 21.6%
			Other Ecuadorians here: 28.3%	The receiving state: 33.5%
Significant others, out of the family realm	Friends in Ecuador: 25.8%	Ecuadorian friends here: 16.8%	Native friends here: 7.3%	Friends, Ecuadorian or not: 35.3%
				No real friends: 14.8%
				Over 10 years abroad: friends, Ecuadorian or not, at 54.5%

Notes: Last column displays significant differences in relevant variables. Multiple responses allowed for 'In case of need' question, only one response allowed for all other questions.

A significant influence on the perceived distribution of non-family 'significant others' is exerted, once again, by the length of time spent overseas. Remarkably, however, this variable is not associated to any greater emphasis on friendship ties with the native populations. Reliance on the latter as 'best friends' is reported very infrequently (7.3 per cent). Nor is length of stay associated to a lesser emphasis on friendship ties with co-nationals; rather, it seems that as an Ecuadorean gets settled abroad, the perceived salience of the ethnic boundary tends to blur, whatever one's persisting self-representation along ethnic or national lines.⁵³ Greater salience is hence attributed to friends, irrespective of their national background.

Finally, in terms of 'taking stock', we turn to Ecuadorean engagement with the idea of homeland. The literature suggests that Ecuadoreans express a pervasive nostalgia for their homeland, although the concept of 'homesickness' would benefit from some greater deconstruction.⁵⁴ A fuller understanding of the issue would require, in principle, more attention to migrants' emotional attachments – and to the ways in which they express them – than a questionnaire can allow. Even so, voters' attitudes are quite telling. As Table 6 highlights, nostalgia is a matter of attachment to family members left behind, a feeling more deeply held than to any other aspect of earlier life in Ecuador. Both an emphasis on homesickness and on its predominant connection to family life back home are documented across our sample, whatever the interaction between 'agency' (that is, migrants' characteristics and initiative) and 'structure' (the external context they cope with).

Given these premises, keeping in contact with the homeland is generally recognised as an inherent moral duty for migrants, whatever the distance from Ecuador in space and time. When it comes to the potential channels mediating this contact, however, a less univocal picture emerges. Our sample is equally divided between subjects who are predominantly informed through interpersonal networks, and those who rely more on information and communications technology (ICT) and mass media (although the two options are obviously not at odds with each other). Among the former, relevant information on Ecuador is mostly circulated by relatives left behind (40.3 per cent). Of the latter, access to relevant information via ICT and mass media is dependent on migrants' education and on the ethnic media supply.

The future prospects for Ecuador itself, however uncertain, are regarded by most respondents as the watershed for their own future life projects. In

⁵³ Andreas Wimmer, 'Elementary Strategies of Ethnic Boundary Making', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 31: 6 (2008), pp. 1025–55.

⁵⁴ Pallares, 'Ecuadorian Immigrants and Symbolic Nationalism in Chicago'; Mejía Estévez, 'Is Nostalgia Becoming Digital?'; Barry, 'Home and Away'; Paolo Boccagni, 'Public, Private or Both?', in Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist (eds.), *Diaspora and Transnationalism* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), pp. 185–205.

Table 6. Respondents' Representations and Expectations of their Homeland (Valid Cases: from 538 to 558)

What is missed most about Ecuador	Family: 52.2%	Friends: 3.2%	Way of life: 16.3%	The country overall: 25.3%	Almost nothing: 3.0%
An Ecuadorian migrant should try to keep in touch with the motherland	Yes, in any way: 87.6%	Yes, but only with family: 9.2%	No, it's impossible while one is living here: 1.3%	No, migrants are just fed up with Ecuador: 1.4%	
Keeps informed on what happens in Ecuador	Yes, through friends or relatives left behind: 40.3%	Yes, through TV, newspapers and/or radio: 20.5%	Yes, through the internet: 25.3%	Yes, through friends or relatives here: 5.5%	No, not possible or not interested: 7.1%
					<i>Women:</i> through friends or relatives left behind at 51.2% <i>University degree:</i> through the internet at 42.5% <i>Spain:</i> through TV/papers/radio at 32.7% <i>US:</i> through TV/papers/radio at 70.6%
In five years, would expect to return	Yes, for good: 33.2%	Sometimes here, sometimes there: 13.9%	Impossible to foresee: 24.7%	No, will still be here: 28.2%	

Notes: Last column displays significant differences in relevant variables. Only one response allowed.

an apparent contradiction, their disillusionment towards homeland politics coexists with an abstract if pervasive wish to return. Of relevance here is the concept of ambivalence as stressed by Sayad.⁵⁵ Migrants' expectations for a 'near' return home, as plenty of case studies show, typically exceed the actual rates of return migration.⁵⁶ Even so, it is striking to find that the share of respondents expecting to be back for good within five years is even higher than that of those who plan to stay overseas. In either case no significant association exists with the country of settlement, the length of stay abroad or the age of the interviewees. Just slightly less relevant, nevertheless, is the perceived impossibility of foreseeing one's future life trajectory, even within a relatively short period. This is a particularly eloquent indicator of uncertainty, given the 'emotional tug' of the homeland for most interviewees.

External Voting as a Critical Window on Migrant Transnationalism

Within the recent literature on political transnationalism, diaspora-building and state-led transnationalism, external voting has been relatively under-researched as a distinctive topic.⁵⁷ After all, despite its strong symbolic power, electoral participation from afar is not the only or even necessarily the main channel through which expatriates can impact on the homeland polity and emigration states can in turn cultivate strong connections with them.⁵⁸ Ironically, external voting may be less important for its direct political outcomes than for the variety of cross-border ties, from above and below, that it brings together. Carrying out empirical research on the topic has provided an opportunity to delve into the reach and distribution of voters' homeward connections. What, then, does voter transnationalism actually amount to, judged from the voters' reported social practices and attitudes?

Importantly, the answer to this question need not be reduced to the simple centrality of the voters' homeland as a source of belonging, identification and future life projects. Our results, indeed, suggest caution about the intensity,

⁵⁵ Abdelmalek Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

⁵⁶ See, for instance, Russell King, 'Generalizations from the History of Return Migration', in Bimal Gosh (ed.), *Return Migration* (Geneva: IOM, 1999), pp. 7–55; and Paolo Boccagni, 'The Framing of Return from Above and Below in Ecuadorian Migration', *Global Networks*, 11: 4 (2011), pp. 461–80.

⁵⁷ The literature on diaspora-building and state-led nationalism includes José Itzigsohn, 'Immigration and the Boundaries of Citizenship', *International Migration Review*, 34: 4 (2000), pp. 1126–54; Østergaard-Nielsen, *International Migration and Sending Countries*; Gamlen, 'The Emigration State and the Modern Geopolitical Imagination'; and Peter Mandaville and Terrence Lyons (eds.), *Politics from Afar* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

⁵⁸ Martiniello and Lafleur, 'Transnational Politics from a Transatlantic Perspective'; Terrence Lyons and Peter Mandaville, 'Think Locally, Act Globally', *International Political Sociology*, 4: 2 (2010), pp. 124–41.

extensity and significance of external voters' transnational relationships. As soon as one delves into their constructions of Ecuador as a distant *patria*, a mixed and diverse range of representations, expectations and ties emerges – possibly questioning the appropriateness of transnationalism as a single conceptual category.⁵⁹ The first point, then, is to underscore that the bulk of voters' cross-border ties, interests and relationships do not have a lot to do with Ecuador *per se*. Instead, connections are constrained to a limited set of significant others left behind, whose boundaries are typically negotiated along kinship lines. It is often family that serves as the primary mediator of flows of information, emotional attachments and aspirations that connect Ecuadorean voters with their homeland. Second, despite their retention of home-addressed attitudes and feelings, their 'actually existing' social practices – that is, the transnational ties they do enact with some frequency and intensity – are much more limited, fragmented and costly (remittances, as a moral duty embedded in transnational familial relationships, being a case in point). Once again, moreover, such ties are mostly family-bound. Third, while the homeland may maintain a strong attractive power as an elicitor of nostalgia and belonging, it is also there as a reminder of past failures, of pervasive corruption, of very dubious life prospects – all perceptions that emerge from the voters' responses.

None of these remarks, admittedly, is really new, at least for the most critical and reflexive analyses of mainstream transnationalism.⁶⁰ What they do suggest about the 2008 Ecuadorean external vote is, however, quite telling: even among the self-selected minority of real voters, interest in Ecuadorean politics is less salient than their willingness to express a sentimental national identification. Despite the unprecedented efforts of their homeland government to build a vigorous external constituency, expatriates' reactions seem diverse, emotionally mixed and irreducible to (hence, of limited relevance for) the realm of party politics. Assuming political transnationalism as a phenomenon in itself, to be neatly distinguished from a variety of other cross-border ties (often more significant for those involved), thus turns out to be an elusive, possibly illusory effort. At a grassroots, everyday-life level, transnational ties prove to be multifaceted or fragmented, and less sustained than is often depicted in the most celebratory versions of the transnational narrative.

The very label 'political', when it comes to external voting, should not be assumed as coextensive with the party politics field. Reclaiming and reproducing the (territorially based) nation, rather than cultivating (or even enlarging) the diaspora as a cohesive political constituency, is likely to be the real core of external voting, as our transnational survey suggests. While the literature on

the topic has been generally driven by the categories of external citizenship and diaspora-building, a focus on the contentious reproduction of a *nation*, under circumstances of massive *emigration*, may provide a promising way ahead for research on state-led transnationalism, in the political sphere and beyond.

Conclusion

One might argue that the circumstances underlying our fieldwork – we interviewed participants in a referendum rather than in ordinary elections – and our exploratory approach undermine our findings, yet the significance of the massive approval of the 2008 Constitution can hardly be questioned.⁶¹ Moreover, the simultaneity of our survey across various national settings highlighted significant differences as to the public salience of Ecuadorean politics-related symbols and slogans. Ecuadorean party political issues, and referendum-related claims, had high visibility in Madrid and Barcelona – Spain being the main destination of recent emigration from Ecuador – and were much less apparent in Italy and elsewhere.⁶² To that extent, the electoral settings proved significant in themselves, even apart from the original data collected in each of them.

Our study focused on a self-selected minority of Ecuadoreans, whose home-oriented attitudes and practices have provided a rich terrain for empirical analysis. Even for this minority, patriotism, national identification and the reassertion of national belonging – resulting in a collective celebration of Ecuadoreaness, whatever the ways to express and practice it – matter more than strictly politics-related motivations.⁶³ External elections can be appreciated, therefore, as a key site to publicly (re)assert 'the nation', even while living far away from its geographical boundaries.⁶⁴ Importantly, the national symbols of Ecuador – such as the national flag and its colours – were much more widespread and visible than any party politics-related symbols across the electoral venues where the fieldwork was undertaken.

The three research questions outlined at the beginning of this article could be answered as follows, allowing the caveat of a non-representative case study.

⁵⁹ López and Celis, 'Análisis del referéndum constitucional 2009 en Ecuador'.

⁶⁰ The flamboyant graffiti in the streets around the ballot venue in Barcelona, appealing to migrants to support the new Constitution, were in striking contrast to the lack of references to the electoral stakes in Milan, and even more so in Queens, New York. In the latter, despite (or indeed, due to) a far earlier settlement of Ecuadorean immigrants than in Europe, the electoral turnout was low, and the public celebration of expatriates' national loyalty and belonging prevailed over any political concern.

⁶¹ Pallares, 'Ecuadorian Immigrants and Symbolic Nationalism'.

⁶² Rogers Brubaker, 'Migration, Membership and the Modern Nation-State', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 41: 1 (2010), pp. 61–78.

⁵⁹ Boccagni, 'Public, Private or Both?'.

⁶⁰ For example, Roger Waldinger, 'Immigrant Transnationalism', *Sociopedia.isa*, 2011.

First, electoral participation from abroad displays, even within the minority of real voters, a deeply ambivalent attitude towards the homeland, whereby nostalgia and patriotic identification go hand in hand with suspicion and disenchantment about Ecuadorean politics and the future prospects of the country. Second, judging from our data, Ecuadorean emigrant voters can be appreciated as a minority with significantly higher civic commitment than their non-migrant, and non-voter, counterparts. Third, the 'map' of voters' transnational ties and relationships turns out to be diverse and stratified. These amount to a variety of cross-border *tracks* – rather than fully-fledged *fields* – which share two basic commonalities.⁶⁵ There is a prevalence of home-oriented affective, emotional and moral projections, over empirically detectable social practices; and a richer texture of cross-border ties within the family life domain as opposed to generally looser and more intermittent ties with the public sphere of the home society.

Our fieldwork results suggest that fragmentation and ambivalence are the terms best suited to describe voters' emerging transnational profile, the reach of their cross-border ties, the orientation of their future life projects and their construction of Ecuador as a real place rather than a source of nostalgia or expressive identification. In a 'transnational track' optic, then, their homeland attachment can be helpfully deconstructed at a variety of levels, from intimate kinship ties to broader and generally more superficial forms of affiliation and identification. Such levels, which correspond to more or less significant references and interlocutors for migrants' transnational practices, need not overlap – they may even conflict – with each other. They are simultaneously (if ephemerally) elicited, however, by events with a strong evocative power such as national elections from abroad.

Even so, neither the weak influence of emigrants' votes on Ecuadorean domestic politics, nor the isomorphism between the electoral trends overseas and in the homeland, can tell the whole story of the political significance of external voting. At a minimum, the exercise of Ecuadorean emigrant voting rights has already produced two major political effects. First is a gradual process of selection and empowerment of migrant leaders, with an increasing potential and scope to act on behalf of their constituencies – although the common ground within the latter is limited, despite the 'Fifth Region' rhetoric. Second is the legitimate development, within the main contexts of settlement, of an unprecedented political space for debate, re-evocation, communal identification and search for visibility, potentially addressed both to the homeland institutions and those overseas.

⁶⁵ Boccagni, 'Public, Private or Both?'; on the idea of 'fields', see Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick-Schiller, 'Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society', *International Migration Review*, 37: 3 (2004), pp. 1002–39.

On two key issues, our study has highlighted the need for more empirical research. On the one hand, the role and the potential involvement of migrant associations – once external voting results in migrants' right to be elected – is far from obvious or univocal. Our data suggest that associations by themselves are not necessarily an effective channel for immigrant democratic participation and representation. Overseas associations may be a unique resource for migrants' political co-optation, rather than pushing for the recognition of their political rights, or they may act as an oppositional force unwilling to make compromises with the homeland *política* or be co-opted by it. On the other hand, although emigrants' political participation has been institutionally acknowledged in the new Ecuadorean Constitution, it is still unclear whether it relies on a broadly patriotic attachment or also on a distinctive identification with the political agenda of a political leader or party. The charismatic leadership of president Correa, whose term has overlapped with the rhetorical emergence of the 'Fifth Region', makes it even harder to differentiate between these levels. Yet, the distinction – external voting as a matter of patriotism or of party political involvement – remains important and challenging.

Ultimately, there is no straightforward answer to the question of whether emigrant voting builds democracy or reproduces Ecuadoreaness. While the latter stance is substantiated by our study, the former should not be taken for granted – as the early researchers on political transnationalism tend to recognise by now.⁶⁶ By way of provocation, one may even wonder on what factual grounds – leaving a normative approach aside – external voting should be more than a device to reinforce expatriates' connectedness by enabling the civic celebration of a significant trait of their earlier lives. At the same time, there is no necessary contradiction between the diverse agendas that drive states' appeals to emigrants, and those emigrants' increasing participation in homeland political life.⁶⁷ Whether this may ever involve a full symmetry between the rates of (and the grounds for) participation of resident citizens *and* of their emigrant counterparts is a question that calls for further comparative research.

Spanish and Portuguese abstracts

Spanish abstract. Ecuador ha surgido como un buen caso de estudio sobre la interacción entre las diásporas y sus países de origen. La reciente aprobación del derecho al voto desde el exterior ha reflejado un discurso político novedoso que pone el énfasis en la contribución positiva de los 'hermanos migrantes' y su sólida alianza hacia la madre patria. Las reacciones de quienes se encuentran en el exterior hacia estos nuevos desarrollos políticos constituyen el núcleo de nuestro artículo, el cual

⁶⁶ See Itzigsohn and Villacrés, 'Migrant Political Transnationalism and the Practice of Democracy'. ⁶⁷ Bauböck, 'Toward a Political Theory of Migrant Transnationalism'.

reconstruye heurísticamente las raíces sociales y significados de la participación de los migrantes en el referéndum constitucional llevado a cabo en 2008. Los cuestionarios fueron aplicados simultáneamente a votantes ecuatorianos en nueve ciudades y siete países. Basado en este innovador muestreo por conveniencia, las expectativas y motivaciones debajo del involucramiento electoral y la participación cívica popular son exploradas en el contexto de las conexiones transnacionales y sus lealtades nacionales. Se busca entender el involucramiento de los votantes en un terreno de patriotismo simbólico, afirmación identitaria y 're-evocación del hogar' en vez de hacerlo estrictamente en términos electorales. Más allá del impacto en la política doméstica, el voto externo debe ser apreciado como una oportunidad institucional para hacer visible la identificación y pertenencia nacional de los migrantes.

Spanish keywords: voto externo, Ecuador, transnacionalismo de migrantes, participación cívica, 'lo Ecuatoriano'

Portuguese abstract. O Equador emergiu como um bom estudo de caso das interações entre diásporas e seus países de origem. A recente entrada em vigor dos direitos ao voto para os cidadãos fora do país reflete um novo discurso político que enfatiza a contribuição positiva dos 'irmãos emigrantes' e sua intacta lealdade à terra natal. As reações dos expatriados a esses novos desdobramentos políticos formam o núcleo de nosso artigo, que resgata, de forma heurística, as raízes e significados da participação de expatriados no referendo constitucional ocorrido em 2008. Questionários foram fornecidos simultaneamente a eleitores equatorianos em nove cidades de sete países. Com base nesta inovadora amostra de conveniência, as expectativas e motivações por trás do envolvimento eleitoral e da participação cívica são exploradas tendo em mente as conexões e pertencimentos transnacionais. Ao invés de enfocar os aspectos estritamente eleitorais, propomos um entendimento do envolvimento dos eleitores através do patriotismo simbólico, da reafirmação identitária e da 're-evocação da terra natal'. O voto no estrangeiro, quaisquer que seja seus impactos nas políticas domésticas, deveria ser reconhecido como uma oportunidade institucional para que a identificação nacional e sentimento de pertencimento dos emigrantes tenham representatividade.

Portuguese keywords: voto no exterior, Equador, transnacionalismo dos migrantes, participação cívica, 'equatorianidade'

On the Trail and Trial of a Palestinian Diaspora: Mapping South America in the Arab–Israeli Conflict, 1967–1972

JOHN TOFIK KARAM*

Abstract. Centred around a May 1970 shooting at the Israeli embassy in Asunción, this article traces a chain of actions and reactions that began with Israel's victory in the Six-Day War in June 1967 and ended after the June 1972 verdict of a Paraguayan court regarding two Palestinians. Situated among Israeli officials, Palestinian refugees and Syrian-Lebanese elites, authoritarian Paraguay was not only encompassed by but also accommodated the post-1967 Arab–Israeli conflict, revealing the connection between the 'areas' of South America and the Middle East through ideas about relocating Palestinians as well as their actual displacement.

Keywords: Paraguay, Arab–Israeli conflict, Palestinians, refugees, Stroessner

Palestinians displaced after the June 1967 war are practically absent from scholarship on the relations between the Middle East and South America. Perhaps reflecting the defeat of the forces led by Egypt, Jordan and Syria, most scholars focus on Israel's ties to Latin America in this period, epitomised by the landmark work of Edy Kaufman, Yoram Shapira and Joel Barromi.¹ In the 1980s, intellectual and social critics published exposés of Israel's military support of repressive states in Central and

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* This article is based on research funded by DePaul University. In Asunción, I am indebted to Rose Palau, Zayda Caballero Rodríguez, Alcides Albariño Barrios and the staff members at the Archivo del Terror, the Biblioteca Nacional del Paraguay and the Archivo del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores. I should like to express my deepest gratitude to Paraguayans of Arab origin in Asunción, but I have changed the names of the two Palestinian defendants, their Syrian-Lebanese lawyer and a Syrian immigrant from Mohardi. I also want to thank Uri Rosenheck, who translated a 2004 *Ma'ariv* article for me, as well as several colleagues and the anonymous *JLAS* reviewers who commented on earlier versions. All shortcomings are my own.

¹ Edy Kaufman, Yoram Shapira and Joel Barromi, *Israeli–Latin American Relations* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1979).