

**Socialization, Migration, and Cultural Identity: The Effects
On Migrants' and Their Children's Political Identity**

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Abstract

This paper explores the causes of migration, such as cultural influences, language, and the political structures of countries, and how these factors affect the identity of migrants and their children in the U.S. The experiences of a Vietnamese minority group, the Montagnard refugees who have settled in North Carolina, provide insight on how building in-groups can prevent complete assimilation while the experiences of Cuban migrants provide insight on how in-groups can successfully assimilate and gain political representation. There is an emphasis on the Latino community and how the country of origin has varying effects on the political and social choices depending on the age of the individual and the dependency on in-groups. The socialization theory and political socialization of children covers how political conflict affects early partisan attachments. This paper examines how social choices formed by the lack of integration can affect the ability of migrants to fully create a new identity in the U.S. as well as how the effects of identity incompatibility on dual identity can be avoided. This paper also examines minority representation, political parties, age, political exposure, and the effects of changing political structures.

Keywords: socialization, socialization theory, Montagnard refugees, migrants, cultural identity, in-groups, partisan attachments

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With migration comes assimilating a new culture, and just as race, ethnicity, language, and religion create someone's identity, how an individual is politically shaped affects their political decision making in regard to supporting domestic policies. While the type of political structure in which a migrant has been raised in, such as a dictatorship, which severely limits the political influence an individual has, socialization with groups of migrants can create a bubble which prevents a migrant from fully integrating in a new culture and political atmosphere. If an in-group prevents a migrant from fully integrating themselves in a culture and adopting a new political identity, then these social factors affect the children of these migrants by limiting what exposure they have to outside ideologies. As political socialization is an area of study that is still relatively new, retrospective studies that collect data on migrants' political upbringing can be used to provide insight on the political identity of the children that are raised in another country. Cultural beliefs and personal stances of an individual affect political identity, early socialization, and the political framework of the country of someone's origin and is the root cause and the greatest influence on identity due to the legal and social rules placed on the individual.

Beginning with the generation of migrants that are directly influenced by their country of origin, political scientists can look at how dual identity, the connection to the current society where an individual resides and the attachment to country of origin, affects their political identity. Kinefuchi (2010), an assistant professor of communication studies at the University of North Carolina, interviewed members of a Vietnamese minority group, Montagnard refugees who had migrated to North Carolina, to understand their perspective of how adaptation to U.S. culture has affected them. While her findings lack much clarity on how the Montagnards identify

in the U.S. political atmosphere, they do provide insight in how the lack of integration could explain the lack of participation in social and political activities in the U.S. The in-depth analysis on what the Montagnards define as a home, includes Kinefuchi analyzing how the Montagnards have clustered in North Carolina and largely built their own community away from Vietnam. Since the tensions between the Montagnards and the Vietnamese government still influence the family members back in their home country as well, Kinefuchi's interviews reveal, "The nation-state [Vietnam] continues to define, regulate, and discipline transnational migrants thus influencing how they construct and perform themselves" (p. 237). With family members still remaining in their homeland and the belief that the Vietnamese government is watching them, fear of retribution also adds to the reluctance that migrants face over integrating themselves in another culture. By analyzing Kinefuchi's findings, it is safe to make the assumption that by adopting another culture and pushing for political action to help their remaining relatives in Vietnam, the Montagnards feel as if they risk losing their identity and placing their family in danger.

Additionally, the emotional ties expressed by the Montagnards to their homeland and the families and communities left behind show that they still refer to Vietnam as their home, even though the likelihood of returning is unknown. Kinefuchi interprets their emotions and draws a conclusion: "Home, in short, consists of emotional, relational, sociocultural, and political spheres, and it is through the workings of these spheres that identity is formed" (p. 231). Due to barriers such as language, cultural differences, and lack of social integration with American neighbors, the Montagnards felt little motivation to create a new identity and need to adjust to a new culture when their ethnic community provides the support they need. Kinefuchi notes that in comparison to the Montagnards who stayed attached to their social circle, those who fully

immersed themselves into the new culture found it easier to integrate themselves. Kinefuchi mentions a sponsor, someone who assists Montagnard refugees in assimilating to their new lives, telling her the following:

When you talk about adaptation, there are very few Montagnards I know that are well adapted to this society. . . . But a few parents I know, they made conscious decisions not to have their children spend much time with other Montagnards. They really pushed them. When parents make conscious effort to immerse their children into the society, they will succeed. (p. 241)

It is important to note that there are key factors that allowed this immersion to even be possible, for one, those that left the Montagnard community had some level of English proficiency and were able to connect to Americans. This level of English proficiency led their children to be raised in an environment not framed by the Montagnard people. While Kinefuchi does not state whether the dissociation from the migrant community eventually led to more political involvement, her findings do suggest that the children who were raised without the cultural values of their parent's homeland had a smoother transition into American society.

Wong (2000), who at the time was a PhD candidate in political science at Yale University, emphasizes how fluency in English and length of residence affects migrants' adaptation to a new culture and eventual political identity. She theorizes that with a lengthy stay in a new country, integration leads to eventual English proficiency, which is positively correlated with political involvement. The proficiency in English influences where and how migrants get information about U.S. politics, as stated by Uhlaner (2016), a professor of political science at the University of California, Irvine. However, while these findings apply to Asian and Latino communities analyzed by Wong, she notes that there is an insignificant relationship between English fluency

and political involvement among the Cuban community. This anomaly may be due to Cuban community influences, as Wong points out that “Cuban immigrants tend to migrate to areas where there is likely to be mobilization and voter education by Cuban elected officials, who often speak Spanish” (p. 356). Similarly, to the Montagnards, Cuban immigrants typically choose to remain in communities where they are familiar with the language and have an accessible understanding of political ideas, processes, and do not have the incentive to learn English when politicians they vote for will represent them. However, unlike the Montagnards, the Cuban community has been able to gain some representation in the U.S. government and somewhat assimilate without the fear their homelands government will affect them or their families.

The migrants that successfully involve themselves in political activities in the U.S. typically experience partisanship due to their country of origin’s political structure. Although they are like many migrants with low education and occupation levels who leave their countries due to political conflict, Cubans align themselves with the Republican Party due to the party’s anticommunist image, as explained by Uhlaner & Garcia (2016), professors of political science at the University of California, Irvine, and the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque. Uhlaner & Garcia go on to explain this anticommunist and antisocialist stance is likely due to their experiences with Communist regime in Cuba and Fidel Castro, a revolutionary and politician who overthrew Cuba’s previous dictator and introduced communism. Factors such as socialization, immersion in a new culture, and language all play a role in political identity, but as described by Uhlaner & Garcia, partisanship is the product of experience. As seen with Cubans aligning themselves with a party with anticommunist ideals, Uhlaner & Garcia explain that party identification among those who can vote have already had some sort of reinforcement of which ideals they do and do not identify with. Uhlaner & Garcia conclude, “Latinos most integrated

into their national-origin group are most likely to adopt the group's dominant party preferences" (p. 82). This demonstrates that socialization plays a significant role in determining political affiliation early post-migration.

This learned partisanship is part of the group's and individual's identity as shared traits in a group extend past cultural values and into politics. This is further analyzed by Greene (2004), an associate professor of political science at North Carolina State University, in his research in voting and party identification patterns. Using the social identity theory, Greene concludes that just as a person identifies with a religion, culture, or race, they also identify with a political party. The party's values are supported by the group's ideologies and reinforced by group mentality. In a classic, us vs. them situation, social identity, as explained by Tajfel and Turner (1986), social psychologists from Great Britain and Poland, is based on "the theory that individuals attempt to maximize differences between the in-group (the group to which one psychologically belongs) and the out-group (psychologically relevant opposition group) and thus perceive greater differences between an individual's in-group and the relevant out-group than actually exist and show favoritism toward in-group members." As shown with the Cuban community, in Uhlaner & Garcia's research, Cubans tend to migrate to areas with other communities which depend on representatives who are Cuban, while the Montagnard community continues to hold onto their old national identity, which has led to unsuccessfully assimilating in a new environment. Through Greene's research, the social identity theory explains how group identification shapes the cultural and political movement of the two groups and how that has led to successfully and unsuccessfully immersing a community into another society.

While it is easy to assume that a migrant's country of origin affects their political identity, the country of origin also affects both children who may have immigrated at a young age, and

children who were born in different countries. Uhlaner & Garcia point out, “children develop subjective partisan attachments at very young ages, typically reflecting parental socialization. Very importantly, people enter the political world in the context of their own particular socioeconomic and sociocultural context; their demographic environment significantly structures their learning experiences” (p. 77). Young children mimic what they see and hear so naturally, partisanship attachments are passed down at an early age, but depend on how quickly and extreme the parents become partisans in their country of origin or new home. The political position a parent has reflects their time spent in the country, which in turn influences children until they are capable of forming their own opinions when they are exposed to opposing political philosophies. Uhlaner and Garcia also bring up an important hypothesis: “age, or even time in the United States, may reflect not experience but cohort differences” (p. 77). With the use of the transmission model, where a leading figure teaches someone under them either in age or status, or intent participation, where observation leads to learning an action or ideology, Sapiro (2004), an American political scientist and political psychologist, analyzes how children are politically shaped by the environment and social influence.

While socialization not only encompasses the political growth of an individual, age itself serves as a proxy for political exposure. This is further explained by Uhlaner and Garcia as immigrants who arrive in new countries as adults or approaching adulthood do not receive partisan socialization from their parents as they are capable of creating their own political experiences. Depending on the political framework of a country, Sapiro states, “adults probably tend to emphasize attachment, obedience, and passive citizen virtues in their earliest messages to children, and only later shift toward more active, critical, and analytical perspectives. Of course, the balance between passive and active messages children receive is likely to depend on context

and culture” (p. 16). Even though exposure to political increases with age and awareness to how issues affect an individual’s freedoms, younger children “may not be competent to analyze the details of social policy [immediately], [but] by the age of five or six they display the tendency to perceive and react to people through social-group categorization, and they are certainly capable of developing social identities that are potentially politically relevant” (p. 14). For example, even in countries such as Cuba, children were capable of understanding there was tension during the Castro regime regardless of whether they understood why. Attributable to interactions with teachers, siblings, friends, and observations of all those individuals, children are able of drawing their own conclusions. Whether these conclusions are correct or not, they can lead to participation in collective memory or political activism once these children are old enough to actively participate in demonstrations.

Additionally, Sapiro points out “children’s experiences are probably directly affected in societies that are undergoing dramatic political change or turmoil, although there is little research on this” (p. 17). Sapiro implies there is little evidence to determine how children are shaped by countries with political turmoil. However, it is known that “by a young age, children begin to be inducted into the intergroup relations that may be politically important in their environments” (p. 14). Children who develop cognitive competence in countries shaped by conflict and then migrate to countries with different values, may develop identity incompatibilities with their new dual identity. As explained by Simon et al. “in combination with (perceived) identity incompatibility, dual identity can also foster political radicalism among migrants. It thus appears that when dual identity is burdened with identity incompatibility, it becomes a liability eroding the overlapping consensus regarding acceptable political action” (p. 255). Dual identity negatively impacted by previous political experiences and the desire to create new in-groups can

become the trigger for what causes sympathy for radical groups from an individual's homeland. The familiarity with two ways of living and political structures may prove to be incompatible. However, familiarity with two identities does not always mean that identity incompatibility will always happen, just like some individuals who are born in the U.S. will not always agree with mainstream parties or ideals. As explained by Carter and Teten (2006), P.h.D. candidates in political science at Vanderbilt University at the time of publication, migrants who are parents in the U.S., are less likely to shield their children from negative views of political leaders, children seem to have more jaded views themselves. This may be attributable to socialization in a country that is more individualistic with some group's values, as Greene theorizes in regards to the United States, "given the strong civic virtue and social norms placed on political independence in America, it may be that either in addition to, or in place of, a social identification with a political party, some citizens may also socially identify with other political independents" (p. 139). Due to the United States' political structure, while there are two main parties, smaller interest groups are encouraged to grow as they raise awareness for policies targeting special interests. While smaller independent parties do not have the same power as larger parties, they still receive political and media attention and thus, provide options for individuals who do not completely agree with their in-group's political ideals.

As seen with the Montagnards and other migrant groups such as Cuban migrants, strong social identification not only shapes day to day socialization but both political involvement and avoidance. The country from which migrants come from influences the developed mindset not of only cultural values, but also of political values as well. As observed in the integration of the descendants of these migrants as well as differing values, political identity is based more on the nurture and direct experience. With the continuous assimilation of migrants, descendants are

influenced by media exposure, places of worship, schools, and extracurriculars such as athletics and clubs. As political socialization is still a growing field, more long-term research would need to be done to observe how affected an individual's identity is based on cultural history, ethnic history, language proficiency, and individualistic views formed by personal experience.

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