The Political Impact of International Migration on Sending Countries

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Much of the current research on international migration focuses on three broad areas: the social, economic and political effects on receiving countries; the variegated and complex effects on migrants (and their families); and the economic, social and cultural effects on sending communities, including the effects of financial remittances. One area, however, that has received relatively little attention is the political effects of international migration on sending countries and its consequent effects on development.

The political effects of international migration on the country of origin can occur through three channels: Absence; Diaspora, and Return.

I. The Absence Channel

The *absence* channel measures the direct effects when some fraction of a country's population has emigrated. The almost canonical theoretical framework for analyzing the political effects of international migration is Albert Hirschman's well known treatment of "exit, voice and loyalty". Hirschman argued that "exit has been shown to drive out voice," and "voice is likely to play an important role in organizations only on condition that exit is ruled out." [2] In this framework, societal groups that exit through international migration would lose voice and their political influence would wane. However, this is hardly inevitable. When emigrants "exit" a given society, it is usually *not* the case that they no longer contribute to that migrant-sending state. Emigrants often have greater access to important resources, ranging from remittances, skills-transfer through return, and networks, that "buy" them voice. International migration can consequently amplify rather that attenuate voice, depending on the selectivity characteristics of the migration.

Exit can also serve a stabilizing role by removing disaffected groups. Since the Cuban revolution more than one-eighth of the population has left the country (Pedraza, 2007), and Kapur (forthcoming) argues that international

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[1] This discussion draws from chapters 1, 2 and 9 from my manuscript, *Democracy, Death and Diamonds: The Consequences of International Migration from India on India.*
[2] Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 76.

migration has eased the political ascendancy of India's numerically dominant lower castes. The introduction of universal franchise in India signalled the death-knell of the political hegemony of India's high castes. In recent decades, as the inexorable logic of numbers has reshaped the political landscape of India, and as lower and middle castes have gained a bigger share of political power, they have sought to use this new-found access to redistribute economic resources. The question was not if this would happen, but when and at what cost. No group gives up its privileges without a fight and the 'silent social revolution" in India could have been much more contentious but for the possibility of exit open to India's elites. The exit possibilities of international migration, whether for jobs or education, has reduced the insecurity of India's elites – thereby making them less implacably opposed to the political ascendancy of hitherto marginalized social groups. In turn, this has made Indian politics less contentious than it might otherwise have been in the absence of possibilities of exit for elites. Thus, while in Cuba's case, international migration may have helped to consolidate an authoritarian regime, in India's case it contributed to the strengthening of its democracy.

But when does the "exit" entailed by international migration consolidate a regime (as in the contrasting cases of Cuba and India), and when does it bring it down – as exemplified by the East German case in 1989? *What political characteristics of the origin country and selection effects inherent in international migration shape the political consequences*? For instance, the exit of Sephardic Jews in the late 1940s and 1950s and more recently of Christians (Sennott, 2004), may have affected the politics of the Middle-East, not just by removing important religious minorities but also by removing the middle-class. For instance, Iraq was one of the most secular countries in the Middle-East. But the Christian population in Iraq, a large constituent of the country's middle class, dropped from 1.4 million in 1987 to one million before the Iraq war to 850,000 in September 2004, leaving some to argue that this mass exodus is "robbing Iraq of a politically moderate, socially liberal, and largely pro-Western population at a critical juncture." [3]

The last example posits an important research question: *are the negative effects of the "brain drain" most manifest on institution building*? International migration from developing countries is invariably positively selected, i.e. the average human capital of migrants is greater than those remaining behind. To the extent that this human capital is critical for institution building, and institutions are critical for development, the long-term effects can be quite negative.

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[3] Yochi Dreazen, "Iraq see Christian Exodus," *Wall Street Journal* September 27, 2004, p. A17.

The loss of human capital can adversely affect a country's institutions in several ways. The option to emigrate could make younger people less willing to invest in skills that are most relevant to local institutions, preferring instead to invest in private sector skills that are more internationally marketable—e.g., becoming programmers rather than lawyers. Most critically the absence of talented individuals affects the *supply* of institution builders (Kapur and McHale, 2005). These are the professional classes with the managerial and technical capabilities to run schools and hospitals, banks and government statistical systems, supervise road building and the like. As Fukuyama (2004, p. 65) notes, "public agencies with poorly trained staff and inadequate infrastructure will have difficulty delivering services." The implications of the loss of scarce educated individuals may go beyond the loss of their narrowly defined human capital: it also undermines social capital and with it the more informal parts of the country's institutional infrastructure. In addition, absence can also impact the *demand* for better institutions. While by new means universal, historically the middle class – professionals and intellectuals – has played an important role in democratization (Kurzman and Leahey, 2004). The more educated (and internationally marketable) are often better positioned to exercise "voice" and press for changes in the status quo (although it is certainly possible that highly talented individuals have a stake in the continuation of bad institutions that allow them to extract rents). Emigration can thus rob the country of influential voices for reform, especially those with internationally marketable talents, and those who are not in the business of rent extraction at home.

Impacts on equity and thereby on politics. The affects of migration on equity are complex depending critically on who leaves. Emigration with a given skill composition changes the size and composition of the domestic labor supply, and with it the distribution of incomes among those remaining behind. Given the reality that international migration from developing countries is inevitably positively selected, this will have adverse impacts on income distribution due to an increase in the skill premium. Although there is now considerable evidence on the importance of remittances in reducing poverty (for a survey see World Bank, 2006, Chapter 5), its effects on equity are more ambiguous. Indeed remittances are more likely to amplify inter-household inequality, especially in the short run, although this may change over the medium and the long run both because of the spillover effects of remittance spending and the lower risks of migration for lower income households. Another negative impact of migration on equity is its possible effects of amplifying regional and inter-ethnic inequality since migrants are rarely randomly selected but rather usually concentrated in the towns and regions of the sending country.

II. The Diaspora Channel
The *diaspora* channel captures the role emigrants play from afar. The central idea is that an emigrant retains certain connections to the home country, and so should not be viewed as "just another foreigner" from the perspective of the home country. Since diasporas reside outside their kin-state yet claim a legitimate stake in it, they challenge the traditional boundaries of nation states. Foner (1997) argues that "immigrants are seen as maintaining familial, economic, political, and cultural ties across international borders, in effect making the home and host societies a single arena of social action." They demonstrate "continuing commitment to the norms, values, and aspirations of the home society," even as they put down roots in the new country. And with today's cheap and fast communications and transportation make it possible "for the first time for immigrants to operate more or less simultaneously in a variety of different places." As actors that straddle national boundaries, diasporas have recourse to autonomous resources and values. Moreover, unlike most domestic actors, they can more easily interact with other actors across state boundaries.

An important research question concerns *the forms of political participation that diasporas engage in and why they vary across immigrant sending countries.* Members of diasporas participate in the politics of their country of origin in a variety of ways. In some cases they have the right to vote (whether as dual citizens or as citizens residing abroad). Perhaps more importantly they influence the voting preferences of kin in the country of origin, an influence that is amplified if they send financial remittances (Dominican Republic and Mexico are good examples). In other cases, they return and run as candidates themselves. Where direct participation is ruled out diasporas attempt to influence politics in the country of origin through financial contributions to political parties and candidates. The impact of these contributions will depend both on the relative magnitude of these contributions as well as the groups and parties to which they are made. *But how important are the different mechanisms, and how does this importance vary with the characteristics of the diaspora, the host country and the country of origin?*

While the flow of financial remittances has received much attention, with few exceptions, *the political economy consequences of remittances* have been weakly analyzed. Kiren Chaudhry investigated the process of institutional development and business-government relations in cases of reliance on two types of external capital in the Middle East.[4] She found that financial

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[4] Chaudhry, Kiren Aziz, "The Price of Wealth: Business and State in Labor Remittances and Oil Economies," *International Organization*, vol. 43, no. 1 (Winter, 1989), pp. 101-145. See also Chaudhury, 1997.

inflows into Yemen in the form of labor remittances from temporary migration initially weakened the Yemeni state bypassing both state institutions and the formal banking system going directly to millions of Yemeni migrants.

Alternatively, to the extent that there are strong selection effects in who migrates (by ethnicity and religion), remittances induced differentials in income and consumption can rapidly reorient hierarchies in the sending country. Note that since in poor countries even small amounts of overseas remittances can have large effects, the resulting rapid hierarchical changes could drive conflict. Another variant stems from the fact that remittances are used more for consumption rather than investment and "conspicuous consumption of religion" through the buildings of new and lavish places of worship. The cognitive effects can increase inter-community conflict.

The complex long-term political effects of migration are evident in Wood's analysis of democratic transition in El Salvador (Wood, 2000). The landed oligarchy had long suppressed democratization leading to a near civil-war in the 1980s. The resulting political instability led to a large outflow of uprooted peasants (especially to the U.S.). Even as agricultural exports dropped, by 1991 remittances exceeded export earnings. On the one hand, due to Dutch disease affects, the upward pressure on the exchange rate undermined the competitiveness of Salvadoran exports (further impelling elites out of agriculture). According to Wood, Salvador's political economy was driven not by export agriculture and its processing but by international assistance and oversees remittances. The shift in elite interests reshaped Salvadoran politics. The new winners were sectors that controlled significant shares in courier companies that transferred remittances, foreign exchange financial intermediaries, retail sectors that provided consumption goods, and real estate and construction companies. The broad shift in elite economic interest from agriculture to services in turn abated the severity of rural repression and shifted elites to adopt a bargained instead of a coerced resolution toward conflict (Wood, p. 62-65).

There is a large literature on the political economy effects of international financial flows, be it from international financial institutions, FDI and portfolio flows or natural resource windfalls. For instance in contrast to the effects of remittances on Yemen, in the neighboring Gulf countries and Saudi Arabia, oil rents have strengthened the state strong by creating a huge, financially autonomous distributive bureaucracy. *Thus the different sources and channels of external financial inflows differentially affect state-society relations – and we have very limited understanding on the macro-political effects of financial remittances.*

Another channel through which a diaspora can affect the politics of its

country of origin is its *cognitive impact and a channel for the flow of ideas*. Is it the case that it is the less visible, non-quantifiable, and intangible remittances or the flow of ideas, that may have a more critical impact than the flow of money? Levitt (2001) shows the power of "social remittances" at the household and societal level. But is there a political counterpart?

There are several mechanisms through which diasporas influence policy changes in the country of origin. It can do so directly particularly on issues where the diaspora has strong economic interests, or as Wood's study shows by reshaping policy preferences of elites. Thus, a developing country's political economy might be affected not just by the usual sources of influence – be it the Bretton Woods Institutions, international financial markets, or the US Treasury – but also by its diaspora, in particular if the latter enjoys legitimacy and points of contact with decision-making elites in the country of origin.

A very different mechanism through which diasporas affect the country of origin is their *role as key drivers of global criminal networks*.[5] There are several factors underlying the growing role of diasporas in international criminal activities. Much like any international industry, many criminal networks rely upon expatriated populations to help facilitate their activities abroad. As with any business, international criminal activity also requires enforcement mechanisms and trust, and diasporic networks can more easily internalize these mechanisms. Increased migration—much of which stems from states with weak economies and political instability—has created a large demand for both financial support and larger global networks. In many cases, the strength of such networks is compounded by diasporas' weak integration into host societies. Finally, forced repatriation of felons (e.g. from the US to Central America) has also strengthened international criminal networks.

While the impacts are large on source and destination countries, the effects are understandably much greater on the former. These transnational links provide domestic criminal groups in source countries with substantial financial resources that are often large enough for them to emerge as significant political actors with the power to destabilize weak states. The profits from drugs, often funneled through diasporic networks, have played an important role in Haiti's narco-coup in 2004, the ongoing violence in Colombia, and the war-lordism in Afghanistan. These activities bring in billions of dollars of revenue to source countries each year, but also increase

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[5] According to UN estimates, international crime is a $1-1.5 trillion annual industry, with drug trafficking, illegal arms trade, human trafficking and smuggling (especially women and children for prostitution and servitude), and money laundering constituting the principal activities.

their economic dependence on drug trafficking, prostitution, and other forms of illegal activity. Virtually all international criminal networks—whether Albanian, Italian, Colombian, or Chinese—rely upon their respective diaspora as a base for their activity (Table 1).

Table 1. Diaspora based Global Criminal Networks

Organized Crime group	Country of Origin	Global Presence
Italian Mafia	Italy	Europe, Central and South America, the Caribbean, the US and Canada.
Russian Organized Crime	Russia	Nearly 60 countries but especially East and Central Europe
Albanian Criminal Groups	Albanian	EU, East Europe
Chinese Triads	China, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan	Netherlands, the UK and Germany.
Nigeria	Nigeria	Over 80 countries in West Africa, Europe, North America
Latin American	Colombia, Central America	Europe, US

Source: Kapur (2007).

Long distance nationalism:
Diasporas have long been known to engage in long-distance nationalism. Diasporic identities range from the cosmopolitan to virulent ethnic nationalism. It should therefore not be surprising that the actions of a diaspora towards the country of origin manifest itself in complex ways. The fact that diasporas are prone to long-distance nationalism is now well established and indeed nationalism as a modern phenomenon of imagined communities is one that often grew in the minds of diasporic elites. *The act of migration and living abroad affects identities, attenuating some and amplifying others – but which ones and why*?

Most explanations on why diasporas engage in long distance nationalism put cognitive explanations centering on identity issues as the driving force. *However, these theoretical explanations are of little help in understanding the intensity of a diaspora's nationalism relative to that in the country of origin, the intensity of one diaspora's nationalism relative to others, or what form this long-distance nationalism takes: whether ethnic or civic nationalism.* Diasporas engage in civic nationalism, ranging from lobbying the government

of their adopted country on foreign policy to sending funds during a natural calamity – what might be expected of a civic nationalism. Yet they also support, to varying extents, ethnic nationalism, whose consequences can be deeply inimical but can also be easily exaggerated.

The role of diasporas in ethnic violence and civil wars in the country of origin has drawn particular attention given the serious implications (Shain and Sherman, 1998). Historically, however, as was the case with Greeks, Poles, Irish and Slovak diasporas in the 19th and 20th centuries, or the communities of Russian Socialists throughout Western Europe at the start of the 20th Century, long-distance nationalism of diasporas was portrayed in a more benign and positive light as "freedom fighters". Context makes an ideology appear threatening or not. While diasporas in the earlier period were fighting multinational non-democratic empires, today they are battling democratic states, and hence perceived as more threatening. When they are not (Cuba, Iran), they appear to enjoy greater international forbearance.

In recent years diasporas have played a particularly important role in sustaining insurgencies. The cases of Palestinian, Irish and Sri Lankan Tamil diasporas in helping foster strong insurgencies are well know. The sudden upsurge in strength of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) during the summer of 1998 at the expense of more compromise-oriented Kosovo elites may have been at least partially due to fundraising efforts by the Albanian diaspora in the West. The Croatian diaspora was quite effective in helping swing the international community behind the Croats in their conflict with the Croatian Serbs in the mid-1990s. Collier and Hoeffler (2000) find that, all other factors being equal, the risk of conflict starting after at least five years of peace is six times greater in nations with the largest diasporas as compared to those with the smallest. Moreover, "after peace has been restored, the legacy of conflict-induced grievance enables rebel movements to restart conflict by drawing on the support of their diasporas." Still, although their study also presents suggestive evidence that diasporas are an important factor in civil wars, their relative importance relative to other factors continues to be disputed.

Why have diasporas emerged as important actors and supporter of civil insurgencies, militant movements and terrorism around the world especially after the end of Cold War? In their survey of 74 active insurgencies between 1991-2000, Byman et. al. (2001) found that 44 received state support of a magnitude critical to the survival and success of the movement; another 21 movements received significant support from refugees, 19 received significant support from diasporas, and 25 gained backing from other outside actors, such as Islamic organizations or relief agencies. Table 2 lists diaspora support for extremist causes (including insurgencies) in the "home country". Non-state actors including diasporas apparently play a particularly

important role in funding.

Table 2. Diaspora Extremism since the 1990s

Conflict Country	Insurgent Group/Ultra-nationalist/Extremist groups	Diaspora Hostland
Afghanistan	Taleban	Pakistan
Kosovo	Kosovo Liberation Army	Albania
Algeria	Islamic Salvation Army (AIS); Armed Islamic Group (GIA)	France
Azerbaijan	Armenian separatists in Ngorno-Karabakh	Armenia, North America, EU
Croatia/Former Republic of Yugoslavia	Croatian nationalists	Croatia, Germany
Cuba	Cuban Exiles	US
Egypt	Gamaat Islamiya (IG)	Middle-East, UK
India (Kashmir)	Hizo al-Mujahideen, Harkat al-Ansar, Lashkar-e-Taiba	Pakistan
India	Vishwa Hindu Parishad	US, UK
Indonesia	Free Aceh Movement (GAM)	Libya, Malaysia
Israel (occupied territories)	PLO, Hamas	Midde-East
Israel	Zionist Organization of America; Jewish Defense League	US
Lebanon	Hezbollah	Americas, Middle-East
Russia	Chechen Rebels	EU, Middle-East
Rwanda	Forces Armees Rwandaises	Burundi
Sri-Lanka	LTTE	Canada, EU
Turkey	Kurdish Workers Party (PKK)	EU (especially Germany)
United Kingdom	IRA, PIRA, Islamic groups	US, Pakistan

Source: Kapur (2007)

A different research questions centers on why certain diaspora fuelled conflicts ebb while others continue to simmer. For instance in South Asia, conflicts within Punjab (in India) and Sri Lanka led the Sikh diaspora in the former and the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in the latter to actively support armed

groups. Yet, while overseas support for the Khalistan movement has waned, overseas Sri Lankan Tamil communities continue to finance the LTTE. What explains this divergence? Fair (2005) argues that an important factor in this divergence was differences in the geographical and political reach of their institutional arrangements. However, it could be argued that changes in the domestic context that gave rise to these movements in the first place were even more important. While India succeeded in the restoration of democracy in Punjab and the elimination of militants there, Sri Lanka was unable to do so. A similar case could be made of Northern Ireland where concessions and agreements made by the British government, together with changes in the international context post-September 2001, led to a sharp decline in the Irish diaspora's support for militant groups there.

The factors that affect the likelihood, form and intensity of diasporic long distance nationalism – fine grained characteristics of the diaspora and the countries of origin and settlement – need better understanding. The conventional wisdom is that diasporic nationalism is a consequence of the failure of immigrants to identify with the host society: it fills their identity "needs" in the host society primarily because of low levels of assimilation. Thus Portes (1997) argues that the preoccupation with the country of origin is greatest among those immigrants who intend to return (e.g. political exiles and migrant laborers) and least among those immigrants who have made a long-term commitment to the host society (e.g. professionals and immigrant entrepreneurs). Others argue that ethnic identity will be salient even among professionals if they experience discrimination (Gellner, 1983). Similarly, another view argues that loss of status is a driving force behind diasporic transnational political activity. Jones-Correa (1998) for instance argues that Latino males face a greater loss of status upon migrating to the United States and consequently are more likely to participate in political activities in the country of origin. While these theories argue that diasporic nationalism is linked to levels and aspirations regarding assimilation, Kenny (2001) argues that support for diasporic nationalism is strategically adopted by particular groups within the immigrant community as a means of generating support for their own local goals in the host society.

Ethnic diasporas have been empowered in recent years because of their growing size, visibility, and impact within the international system. Diasporic communities now have more mechanisms to call attention to issues of interest in their home countries. The ongoing communications and information technology revolution, including the Internet, allows non state actors to more easily fundraise, mount international public relations campaigns, or exert pressure upon governments in host countries. Global banking nets make it easier, faster and cheaper to move money than ever before. *What is the role of new technologies in the political empowerment of international migrants?*

III. The Return Channel

The final channel through which emigration affects the country of origin is the *return* channel when emigrants return with new skills, savings, connections and ideas. Return migrants are often viewed as those "who did not make it." However, a smaller subset who return are those who may be more intensely nationalist and more committed to national building— exemplified by the leaderships of ant-colonial nationalist movements, virtually all of whom had studied and lived abroad.

A different way of thinking of ideas is the role of migration in developing new skills, changing preferences and expectations, particularly through higher education abroad. The role of the "Chicago Boys," – economists trained in the University of Chicago who retuned to spearhead neoliberal reforms in Chile – is an example (Barber, 1995). In general, however, this is an area that is poorly understood. Given, the current large movements of international students (nearly half million from China and Indian alone), this issue deserves much greater examination.

Here too, there is no reason to believe that skills and ideas acquired abroad always have positive consequences. The new skills of return migrants could lie as much in new agricultural techniques as the organization and techniques of violence. Pakistanis and Yemenis, who migrated to Afghanistan in fight in the wars there and returned, have brought with them a set of new ideas, which is unlikely to be beneficial to their countries. Similarly gang members of Central American origin in the United States who were deported back to their countries are much more adept in the use of guns. This appears to have increased the levels of violence in their countries when they return.

Final Thoughts

It must be remembered that citizens leave their country for a reason. And when they leave the factors that caused them to leave do not disappear – indeed they could worsen. There are likely to be considerable differences on the motivations for individual action between migrants who leave for better economic opportunities versus those forced out by conflict.*Understanding the reasons for leaving is critical in understanding the varying behavior and effects of diasporas.*

Theories that try to explain the salience of long-distance nationalism among diasporas are weaker in helping to understand the form this nationalism takes. Analytically examining why diasporas may behave in a certain fashion is seldom clearly accomplished other than with regard to the selection effects of who leaves and a perceived "identity crisis". It is not clear what characteristics of emigrants would result in specific such behavior or why an identity crisis (even if that term can be clearly specified) would necessarily

manifest itself in support for violence.

Finally we need to think about several critical overarching or "meta questions" regarding the political effects of international migration on sending countries. *How does international migration reconfigure origin state sovereignty in the international system as a result of changing demands and material resources of their diasporas and return migrants? What factors drive or shape states policies on international migration? When do they promote labor exports or try to rein in the "brain drain"? What explains the differences in steps that states are taking to expand sovereignty over people located outside of their national territory? How does the status of émigrés in host countries affect changes in policies of the origin state?* As Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini (1997), in their discussion of the "cultural politics" of the Chinese diaspora, diasporas don't just "transcend" or "subvert" the nation-state's political and economic discipline and liberate their agents, they are just as likely to strengthen them, while at the same time perpetuating old forms of exploitation or inventing new ones, and granting them extraterritorial impunity. "One should not assume that what is diasporic, fluid, border-crossing, or hybrid is intrinsically subversive of power structures." *But when do diasporas attenuate or amplify state power? What are the effects of international migration on the nation building project? And when (and how) are diasporas themselves used as political resources by origin and destination countries?*

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