

Cruzando fronteras: transnacionalismo político en la comunidad dominicana de Nueva York

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**[Crossing borders:
political transnationalism
among Dominican
New Yorkers]**

LAS MIGRACIONES CONTEMPORÁNEAS

Este artículo analiza la participación simultánea de los migrantes Dominicanos en elecciones de los Estados Unidos y de la Republica Dominicana en 2004 y los esfuerzos de campaña de políticos dominicanos y estadounidenses como manifestaciones de transnacionalismo político. Usando evidencia de las propuestas de campaña y datos electorales del Distrito Electoral 72 en Nueva York, sostengo dos hipótesis que contribuyen a entender algunas de las formas de participación política complejas y no tradicionales que involucran a comunidades migrantes. Primero, el transnacionalismo político de los dominicanos, definido aquí como aquellas actividades que electores y políticos llevan a cabo en diferentes países simultáneamente, está aumentado al interior de la comunidad migrante Dominicana. Este fenómeno se manifiesta en la participación simultánea de los migrantes en elecciones de sus países de origen y destino, y también en el notable esfuerzo de los candidatos por hacer campañas que cruzan fronteras. En segundo lugar, la lealtad hacia una nación no es una precondition necesaria para que exista participación electoral simultánea. Tal participación es más bien el resultado de la expansión de la comunidad dominicana migrante, así como de la creciente preocupación de los migrantes por sus condiciones de vida. Esta hipótesis tiene importantes implicaciones en nuestra forma de entender las consecuencias de la doble nacionalidad y del derecho de los migrantes a votar desde el exterior. El artículo concluye sugiriendo que el concepto de transnacionalismo es crucial para entender las prácticas políticas tan novedosas que están ocurriendo al interior de la comunidad migrante dominicana. Sin embargo, la idea de lealtad hacia una nación que es asociada frecuentemente con el concepto de transnacionalismo no contribuye a entender las principales motivaciones que tienen los migrantes para participar electoralmente. Planteo que es crucial entender cómo la marginalidad económica de los migrantes, más que su lealtad a una nación, se convierte en un factor de movilización electoral.

Palabras clave: transnacionalismo, migracion, lealtad, participación política, migrantes dominicanos.

Abstract

This paper analyzes the participation of Dominicans in elections in the United States and the Dominican Republic in 2004 and the campaign efforts of Dominican and US politicians as a manifestation of political transnationalism. Using evidence from campaigns and electoral data of the 72nd Assembly District in New York, I present two hypotheses that advance the understanding of the complex, non-traditional practices of political participation that involve migrant communities. First, political transnationalism, defined as the activities of politicians and citizens that cross borders, is growing among Dominican New Yorkers. It is

manifested in an increase in electoral participation of citizens in both home and host countries, and also in the effort of politicians to campaign across borders. Second, loyalty to nations is not necessarily a precondition for simultaneous electoral participation. Such participation is rather the by-product of an expanding Dominican migrant community and of the increasing concern of migrants with their own living conditions. This hypothesis has important implications for understanding the consequences of granting dual citizenship and the right to vote from abroad. I conclude by suggesting that the concept of transnationalism is crucial to understand the novel political dynamics that occur within the Dominican migrant community. Yet, the idea of loyalty to nations that is often associated with transnationalism does not suffice to explain the main motivations behind the electoral mobilization of migrants. I suggest that it is crucial to understand how the economic marginality of migrants, rather than their loyalty, becomes a factor of electoral mobilization.

Key words: transnationalism, migration, loyalty, political participation, dominican migrants.

In 2004 dominicans residing outside the Dominican Republic used for the first time the right to vote for the President of their country since dual citizenship was granted in 1997. At the same time that Dominican presidential candidates strongly campaigned amongst members of the Dominican community in New York, Dominicans showed more involvement in US electoral politics. This trend was particularly remarkable in New York City and reinforced what in 1996 Graham had identified as an increasing “readiness of Dominicans to acquire political power” derived from institutional changes that took place in the early nineties in New York City aimed at expanding Latino political participation¹. The 2004 electoral events showed a trend toward equal and simultaneous participation of Dominicans in New York City in the elections of “host” and “home” countries and thus represent “new forms of political action and citizenship that transcend the territorial and political boundaries of the state” (Itzigsohn, 2000:1127). The purpose of this paper is to analyze what these events can tell us about the idea of transnationalism. The concept of “transnationalism” appears highly appropriate to analyze these events as well as the implications of dual citizenship and the right to vote from abroad used by Dominicans for the first time in 2004. However, along this paper I argue that this concept is appropriate to understand simultaneous electoral participation when it is defined as a strategy for migrants’ economic advance and is not tied to ideas of loyalty to a nation or seen as part of nation building processes.

I elaborate two hypotheses in the paper. First, political activities that take place across borders, such as simultaneous electoral participation of Dominican migrants in both host and home countries, and the cross border campaign activities of politicians, are increasing. These activities are accurately described as political transnationalism because they imply “multi stranded social relations” and activities that “cross national borders” (Basch et al., 1994). Second, simultaneous electoral participation, a crucial practice of political transnationalism described in this paper, does not necessarily lead to, or entail, loyalty or commitment to a nation, as some notions of transnationalism would imply. Hence every Dominican vote in US elections or in the Dominican presidential election is not a sign of commitment to a nation. The right of Dominicans to vote from abroad, the growing number of Dominican migrants, and other institutional and social changes that have contributed to reduce the barriers that migrants

1. For example in 2002 a reform granted residents (and not only citizens) the right to vote in local elections for school boards in New York City and in 2004 another bill proposed to extend such right to municipal elections.

often face when they want to participate, partially have contributed to increases in simultaneous participation. Yet, the factor that can create more incentives for migrants to engage in simultaneous electoral participation is mainly their concern with their own living conditions.

To elaborate these hypotheses the paper has three sections. The first discusses the concepts of transnationalism and dual citizenship and their relation with the idea of loyalty. The second analyzes political transnationalism by describing political practices of both Dominican and US politicians in the 2004 elections. It also describes patterns of electoral participation in the 72nd Assembly District in New York City (NYC). This district has the largest concentration of Dominicans and thus, it can be used as a rough proxy of Dominican participation in NYC². This section also discusses the implications for our understanding of dual citizenship. The third, analyzes the messages of electoral campaigns and their focus on community needs rather than on nationalist appeals as evidence that loyalty is not necessary for migrants to participate politically. I conclude by emphasizing that transnationalism is the concept that best describes simultaneous electoral participation even though loyalty to a nation is not inherent to political transnationalism.

Political transnationalism, dual citizenship and loyalty

Transnationalism is usually defined as a new type of social relation that involves dual interactions and exchanges that cross borders, and in these broad terms, it includes many different economic, political, and social practices. In order to narrow the scope of the term and to differentiate transnationalism from other activities which may have existed for decades or even centuries, Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt (1999) defined transnationalism as events that link groups in advanced countries with their respective hometowns, and require regular and sustained contacts over time across borders. The problem with this definition is that it limits the scope of transnationalism to practices that affect migrants' home countries only. In this paper, I assess political transnationalism, following Baubock (2003), as political practices that transcend borders but affect not only countries of origin but also countries of destination. Thus political transnationalism is characterized by "overlapping memberships, rights and practices that reflect a simultaneous belonging of migrants to two different political communities" (Baubock, 2003:705). I here focus

2. The 72nd Assembly District has 78% of Hispanic population, the highest percentage of Hispanic population within New York State Assembly Districts and is recognized as the biggest Dominican migrant community in New York.

on the activities of party officials, government functionaries, community leaders and regular citizens, whose main goal is the achievement of political power or the exercise of citizenship rights. Before illustrating why Dominicans' political practices can be accurately captured with this definition, it is necessary to discuss some of the controversies that surround the term.

Transnationalism and Loyalty

The concept of transnationalism has been in constant redefinition. As the term was used as an all-encompassing concept, authors started to limit its scope using it to explain specific practices and not all migrants' behavior (Portes et al., 1999). However, the discussion of transnationalism is still plagued by innumerable debates regarding the scope, relevance and scale of transnational practices (Dunn, 2010; Waldinger, 2008). Other debates refer to the definition of the nation state, the impact of transnational activities, the relation of transmigration with other transnational activities (such as commerce), the role of identities, and the relation with assimilation theories. For the purpose of this paper I only discuss how transnational theory deals with the concept of loyalty to nations.

The idea of transnationalism has a conflictive relation with the concept of nation state. On one hand, it questions the concept of nation-state as a geographical entity, but on the other hand, it remains tied to the idea of the nation as an imagined community. In other words, transnationalism emphasizes that the idea of nation-state no longer captures the complexity of migrant behavior, but at the same time, it attributes high centrality to commitments and loyalties to nation states³. Some scholars of transnationalism implicitly consider that migrants are motivated more by the well being of their country than by their own well being. Thus, loyalty appears as the psychological element that explains why migrants decide to engage in transnational practices while being away from home.

There are two main notions of loyalty in the literature on transnationalism. The first emphasizes that in transnational practices, host and home countries have equal value for migrants. Therefore, migrants can be engaged at the same time in the processes of nation building in more than one nation state (Basch et al., 1992). Even authors that try to avoid giving

3. A contentious debate in discussions about transnationalism is in fact whether the state remains central or not in the current world. My analysis here does not delve into this debate about whether the state is relevant or not (and I will argue that the state is relevant even though practices that transcend, but do not eliminate the state, proliferate) but rather focuses on the puzzling and persistent reference to loyalties to nation in the discussion of migrant transnational practices.

a positive connotation to transnational behavior (Guarnizo and Smith, 1998), usually treat national identities as crucial to sustain transnational ties. The second notion privileges the impact of transnational activities in one nation state, usually the migrants' home country, to which the "love" remains unaltered despite migration (Glick-Schiller and Fouron, 2001). Transnationalism is thus seen as the mechanism that redefines the political and social boundaries of *one* nation and diversifies traditional ways of constructing it (Itzigsohn et al., 1999; Itzigsohn, 2000). Thus, regardless of whether transnationalism is seen as affecting mainly the sending country, or both sending and receiving countries (the definition I use in this paper), it usually embeds some notion of loyalty.

Dominicans are commonly seen as the paradigmatic example of transnationalism due to their strong ties and permanent relations with the Dominican Republic, but reflecting the above mentioned controversies, this assessment is sometimes controversial or subject to different interpretations and uses of the concept. Some authors consider Dominicans as one of the Latino communities most likely to engage in US politics and society, and see the idea of transnationalism as capturing the interest of Dominican migrants in US politics. Pamela Graham (1996) argues that the concept of transnationalism explains political practices that are relatively new among Dominican migrants. She argues that although Dominicans engaged in political activity in the Dominican Republic before the 1960s, there was not a simultaneous interest in local politics in New York and Santo Domingo as the one seen today. Other authors consider Dominicans to be too focused in home politics, and use the notion of transnationalism to capture the stronger interest and commitment of Dominicans to their home country (Itzigsohn, 2000). Finally, other scholars criticize the labeling of Dominicans as the paradigmatic case of transnationalism. For them, the concept overemphasizes the newness of transnationalism, disregards the economic conditions that allow Dominicans in New York to maintain "binational" relations (Torres-Saillant, 2000) and reinforces some prejudices and racialized identities (Howard, 2003). Back and forth movements, these scholars argue, do not correspond to the lives of all immigrants and are limited to wealthy individuals, and thus the use of the "transnationalism" concept fails to capture the efforts of Dominicans in New York to achieve a sense of belonging to a locality.

One problem common to all the positions in this debate is that they tend to assume that loyalty is inherent to transnationalism. I argue that transnational political behavior does not necessarily imply loyalty to a nation and it can be more accurately seen as an alternative way for migrants to achieve economic advancement and success (Portes et al., 1999).

This definition of transnationalism is less restrictive and less normatively charged and thus facilitates the understanding of migrants' motivations to engage in transnational political practices as well as the impact of these activities, and focuses more on the contingent character of transnational political practices (Smith and Bakker, 2007)

Dual citizenship and loyalty

This discussion about loyalty is not only relevant conceptually, but also practically, as ideas about loyalty are embedded in contentious debates about dual citizenship of Dominicans (and other Latino communities) in the US. Both opponents and supporters of dual citizenship consider that while granting citizenship, which is essential for simultaneous electoral participation, governments should consider how "loyal" citizens are to their nations. For opponents, migrants are not able to have dual loyalties. For supporters, migrants are able to commit in the receiving country as they commit in their home country.

In the United States, opponents of dual citizenship consider crucial to determine which individuals deserve or are entitled to practice citizenship. They consider a danger for the US to grant citizenship rights to individuals who do not share the language, culture or loyalty to the country. For them, "Citizenship is something you have to earn, and work for" (*Michael Long, chairman of the NY State conservative party*). Scholars such as Samuel Huntington (1996), but especially politicians and media, warn that Latino immigrants threaten the US nation as they maintain ties to their homelands. As Michael Jones Correa (1998) notes, this belief increases opposition to the political engagement of immigrants and to the granting of dual citizenship. Reflecting this opposition, a New York Times editorial in 2004 stated that the right to vote is the most important privilege tied to US citizenship and therefore it should be granted to those who are really committed to the country:

[...] recently a few politicians, union officials and community groups in New York City have begun pushing to give noncitizens the right to cast their ballots in local elections [...] this page believes that it is in the nation's best interest to encourage people who live here permanently to become citizens and throw in their lot with the interest of the United States. Extending the most important benefits of citizenship to those who *still hold their first allegiance to another country seems counterproductive* (NYT, april 19 2004) [italics are mine].

Opponents of dual citizenship state that Latinos are politically isolated, show very low levels of participation in US politics, and maintain

stronger links with their home country (Baubock, 2003). Dominican immigrants are particularly blamed for being “obsessed” with Dominican politics forgetting US local politics. Diana Reyna, a NYC councilwoman of Dominican origin, complained that although “Dominicans seem more likely to participate in the 2004 US presidential election [they are] obsessed with island politics to the exclusion of local and US politics” (Frontline, 2004).

By contrast, advocates of dual citizenship emphasize that in a transnational relation there can be strong commitments with both home and host countries. Thus loyalty is not exclusive: it is possible to maintain compromises to make better the homeland and at the same time have political interest in the host society (Glick Schiller & Fouron, 2001:11). In fact, immigrants can develop a higher sense of commitment to US politics than with home countries despite their low levels of electoral participation (De la Garza, 2004). From this point of view, De La Garza contradicts the idea that Dominicans are less likely to vote and states that naturalized Dominicans in New York are in fact more likely to vote than other Latino groups (2004:107).

For advocates, the right to vote in the US should be granted to all legal residents and not just to citizens, because residents pay taxes, send their children to school, and thus they are as committed to life in the host country as citizens born in the US. Dual citizenship is thus not seen as a threat to the host nation or a source of segmented loyalties as it “does not result in migrant’s political disengagement from their country of residence” (Escobar, 2004:45) and “ethnic attachments do not lead to alienation from the larger community” (De La Garza, 2004:111). Cristina Escobar argues that even if immigrants use citizenship instrumentally to retain privileges restricted to US citizens (i.e. travel legally back and forth) they can still have substantial interest in political participation. Michael Jones Correa argues that even when dual citizenship has been granted as an answer to community struggles from below (as in the Dominican case) and privileges a commitment with the home country, it serves different goals to citizens, home states and host states, and encourages incorporation. Therefore, it can strengthen both the practices of American citizenship and answer to migrants’ commitment to their home country (Jones Correa, 2001).

As I show in the next section, the political practices of Dominican migrants defy the idea that loyalty is embedded in transnationalism, and thus show that both positive and negative expectations about dual citizenship are overstated. The granting of dual citizenship neither undermined a slow but sustained trend of increased participation of Dominicans in US

elections nor it did translate automatically into an increased participation of Dominicans in the elections of their home country. Thus, the fear of a stronger commitment of migrants to their home country in detriment of politics in the host country was disproved. Nevertheless, dual citizenship did not strengthen the “commitment” to American and Dominican nations that supporters expected either. It rather increased the opportunities for transnational political practices but based more on electoral incentives for politicians and on the economic concerns of migrants, than a loyalty to nations.

Electoral participation can indeed rely on, or generate, loyalties with processes of nation building in one or more nation states. However, loyalties are neither a necessary condition nor an automatic outcome of transnational electoral participation. As advocates of dual citizenship argue, participation in the home nation does not undermine loyalties or commitments to the host nation. However it does not automatically create loyalties either. Each notion of loyalty and its consequent stance on dual citizenship has an element of truth, but none is generalized.

Political transnationalism in the dominican community

The evidence of migrants’ commitment with the politics of the Dominican Republic, and thus the evidence of transnational political practices, dates back at least to the 1960s and existed even before the right to vote from abroad was granted. For the 2000 Dominican Presidential Elections it was stated

[...] that those who stayed in New York could not vote did not seem to matter: they passionately argued politics on street corners, tuned in to Spanish-language broadcasts and phoned relatives on the island [...] Dominican political parties have become highly adept at stirring nationalist sentiment among the rapidly growing community (NYT, May 17 2000).

Until 2004 Dominicans in New York were usually involved in politics of the Dominican Republic mainly as a source of funding for parties. According to Mónica Santana, director of the Center for Latino Workers, “Until now, Dominicans have been orphans. We did not have a government that defended our basic rights in this country. We were pretty much the politicians’ piggy bank during campaign seasons” (Fernandez, 2004). Yet, in 2004, for the first time they were seen as a source of votes and made substantial demands to candidates. The candidate who won the election in the Dominican Republic (DR) in 2004, Leonel Fernandez, got an overwhelming support from Dominican New Yorkers (73.6%) a

percentage higher than what he got nationwide in the DR (57.1%).⁴ Such success was predictable given Fernandez's background. Fernandez, who had been President in the period 1996-2000, grew up in New York. Thus, he had a close appeal to the migrant community. His agenda and empathy with Dominican immigrants proved that the successful incorporation of Dominicans in electoral politics as voters depends on the ability of politicians to give them a sense of protection as Dominicans in New York. Fernandez was considered an "informed and articulated spokesman for Dominicans with respect to city, state and federal authorities in the US" and such perception fostered his popularity.

The effective right of Dominicans to vote from abroad strengthened the transnational activity of Dominican politicians while obliging them to look not only for support, but also for votes in the Dominican migrant community. The change however, did not translate immediately into an overwhelming participation of Dominicans in their home country or in a complete disengagement of Dominicans from US politics. It did open the door for a new set of practices that entail regular and sustained interactions across borders which can only be explained using the notion of transnationalism.

The first election in which Dominicans abroad were allowed to vote for President in the Dominican Republic was characterized by surprisingly low levels of voter registration. The Dominican Electoral Board calculated a potential of 166.000 voters in New York, but only 24.343 of those did register to vote. Therefore, only 10% of those able to vote actually exercised their right. This could have been a result of either apathy or lack of information as this was the first election in which Dominicans were allowed to vote for Dominican President. As shown in Table 1, for the 2008 election (which led to the reelection of Leonel Fernandez) the number of registered voters almost doubled (55.989), although still remained low compared to the number of potential voters.

Despite the low level of registration, turnout among Dominican New Yorkers was higher in the elections for the Dominican President (68%) than in the elections for US President (50%). Opponents of dual citizenship would argue that these differences in turnout reflect that migrants become more attached to their home countries, disengaging from domestic politics in the US. However, as seen in Table 2, turnout in the US Presidential election in the 72nd Assembly District in NY was not far from the state or national turnout in the US (51 and 59 respectively).

4. Fernandez's support among Dominican New Yorkers was again notable when he got reelected in 2008, although such percentage was far lower than in 2004.

These numbers suggest that the pattern of participation of Dominicans in NY fits with the pattern of turnout that characterizes US elections, and then it is difficult to infer that the right to vote in the Dominican Republic hindered participation in the US. Furthermore, it is important to note that the data also suggest that Dominicans in New York did not change significantly their electoral behavior in Presidential elections between 2000 and 2004 (See Table 2). Although turnout in the 72nd District decreased between 2000 and 2004, there was a reduction in the gap of participation that usually existed between this District and the New York State area as a whole. Furthermore, between 2000 and 2004 the number of registered

Table 1

Results for Presidential elections of the Dominican Republic.

	Voter registration	Turnout	% Turnout	Winner's votes	%
New York 2004	24,343	16,608	68.2	12,061	73.6
New York 2008	55,989	30,145	53.8	17,625	58.9
Total nationwide (DR) 2004	5,020,703	3,656,850	72.8	2,063,871	57.1
Total nationwide (DR) 2008	5,764,387	4,086,541	71.3	2,299,134	53.3

Source: Dominican Electoral Board and press records, my calculation

Table 2

Electoral Results for US Presidential Elections in the 72nd Assembly District

		Voter registration	Turnout	Turnout %	% Increase voter registration	% Increase turnout
2000	72 District	55,452	28,618	51.60		
2004	72 District	63,460	32,226	50.78	14.4	12.6
2008	72 District	69,050	36,467	52.8	8.8	13.1
2000	NY State Total	11,262,186	6,960,215	61.8		
2004	NY State Total	11,733,051	6,902,735	58.8	4.2	-0.8
2008	NY State Total	12,031,312	7,772,019	64.6	2.5	9.8

Source: NYC and NY State Board of Elections, my calculation.

voters in the 72nd District increased by 14% and the number of actual voters increased by 12% whereas at State level those percentages were smaller. By 2008 the tendency remained on the rise with both turnout and registration increasing in the District.

These observations about the 72nd Assembly District must be taken just as an indication of trends, and it is important to note that many non-Dominicans could have voted in each of the elections and thus, the changes seen may have occurred among these voters. Likewise, voters registered for the Dominican elections may not even be US citizens or do not participate in Dominican politics. In order to disentangle with certainty the electoral behavior of Dominican migrants it would be necessary to analyze survey data or to conduct interviews. Yet, with these caveats in mind, it is possible to suggest that dual citizenship did not hinder participation in the US as critics expected. On the contrary, the granting of dual citizenship rights may have encouraged participation in US politics by 1) facilitating the naturalization of migrants in the US, and thus their possibilities to engage in US elections, and 2) providing more skills, networks and resources to those involved in home country politics, which could have been applied to politics in the US.

The levels of naturalization of Dominican migrants in the US have increased since dual citizenship was granted. By 2000, only 33% of Dominican immigrants had naturalized (Boswell and Castro, 2002) but in 2004 that percentage increased to 57% (Taveras 2004). As a consequence, combined with US born Dominicans (second generation), in 2004 61.3% of the Dominican population were US citizens, 38.5% were of voting age and about 78% of young Dominicans (under 18) were US citizens. Since the fear of losing rights in the home country while naturalizing in the US is identified as one of the main factors hindering the ability of migrants to engage in the politics of the receiving country (Jones-Correa, 2001) then it is possible to infer that dual citizenship has encouraged participation by making naturalization more likely. Thus dual citizenship may actually facilitate, rather than hinder, the engagement of Dominican voters in the US.

Along with the electoral behavior of Dominican migrants, indications of political transnationalism appear in the practices of US politicians. In 1998, Michael Jones Correa stated that the apathy of US political parties was a huge hindrance for Latino participation. Yet, in recent years, US political parties have increased their efforts to promote the registration of Dominican voters for US elections. In 2004, the Republican Party decided to open its second office in New York and to locate it in the Dominican Area of Upper Manhattan. New York has traditionally been a Democrat

state with only one Republican voter registration office in Albany. Therefore the decision of Republicans to open a new office reflects their increasing interest in mobilizing Dominican votes. US politicians increased their efforts to ally with well known Dominican leaders to get voters registered. The prominent businessman and community activist Fernando Mateo was crucial in the effort to get Dominicans registered as Republicans and not as Democrats as they commonly did. Mateo stated that Dominicans “come here with the mentality that they are supposed to be Democrat [...] There’s a huge movement for Dominicans to realize that deep in their hearts they are Republicans, but they are led to believe they are Democrats”, Personalities as Mateo have been effective in gaining votes and funds for US candidates: Mateo claimed that in 2004 he helped raise \$1 million for Republicans from Hispanic voters (Gerson, 2004). Mateo also spoke in the 2004 Republican National Convention defending then President George Bush.

As the role of Dominican politicians (and Dominican Americans prominently) has proved crucial in mobilizing voters, both Democrats and Republicans are more likely to support Dominican politicians in New York. American political parties increasingly support Dominican candidates because in this way they can foster the popularity of US parties among Dominicans. The relations of former New York’s Governor George Pataki (1995-2006) with Dominican politicians reflect the need of candidates to build electoral support in places different from the ones in which they actually govern. Even though they do not govern in the Dominican Republic, they need to appear popular there in order to remain popular with Dominicans in New York. In October 3, 2002, Pataki hosted a meeting with Hipolito Mejía, then Dominican Republic’s president. They discussed trade and how to make easier for Dominican immigrants to apply for residence. Governor Pataki also established strong links with Fernando Mateo and participated in Dominican traditions like Dominican Day Parade in Manhattan (NYT, Aug 13, 2002). Similarly, while seeking reelection in 2002, New York’s Mayor Michael Bloomberg, made several attempts to gain immigrant votes. In his effort he visited different countries, including the Dominican Republic. In another similar instance in February 2005, Gifford Miller, who ran as candidate for mayor in New York, made a trip to the Dominican Republic with the support of the Dominican council member Miguel Martínez. These events illustrate the importance of Dominican votes for US local politicians and show how as the migrant community grows it becomes a source of votes crucial for politicians’ success.

At the same time that New York politicians furthered their links to the

Dominican Republic in order to engage a fast growing community as a source of votes and as an unavoidable target of policies, Dominican politicians continued acquiring centrality while participating in mainstream US politics in a way that they did not do before. In 1991, a Dominican was elected for the first time to the City Council of New York. By 2004, New York had two Dominican Assemblymen and two Dominican council members, and by 2009 five Dominicans won posts as council members in NYC. The alliance in 2002 of two prominent Dominican politicians that used to be harsh electoral competitors –Guillermo Linares and Adriano Espaillat– in order to get a seat in the American Senate was another indication of the increasing importance of Dominican politicians in NYC elections.

The increased incidence of Dominican candidates in US politics has been pulled to a large extent by second generation Dominicans (those born in the US but with Dominican parents). Many successful politicians (like Diana Reyna) are Dominican Americans and others like Guillermo Linares or Adriano Espaillat are not Second Generation but migrated young and went into the New York School System (Graham, 1996). Dominican Americans are prone to be more politically active connecting both countries because they have some particular skills such as a growing demographic incidence, language skills, and citizenship status. Adult Dominican Americans have been crucial in materializing a link between the Dominican community and American politics while fostering the interest of Dominicans in US elections and creating bridges between migrants and politicians. As they are a group mainly composed of young people, we can expect their role to be more important in the near future as they become adult citizens with the right to vote.

It is likely that for many second or third generation immigrants loyalty and transnationalism are not significant issues, and they can be heavily involved in elections in the receiving country and not so much in the sending country. Yet, their political activism can make more visible the political power of Dominicans, thus increasing the interests of US parties in reaching out to Dominican migrants (and even to Dominicans in the Dominican Republic), as well as the interest of the Dominican Government to reach out to successful Dominican Americans. Furthermore, the relations between first and second generation immigrants expand the networks that link countries of origin and destination (Itzigsohn, 2000:1142). An indication of the importance of Dominican politicians in the US for the politics of the Dominican Republic can be seen in the statement made by the Government of the Dominican Republic congratulating the success of Dominican politicians in the US 2009 elections. According

to the Government, these electoral accomplishments will have a positive impact on the lives of Dominican migrants. (Dominican Today, November 6, 2009)

The evidence presented in this section suggests that political transnationalism, understood as practices that affect sending as well as receiving countries, is the most appropriate term to describe the diverse practices that link regularly Dominican migrants with the politics of their home and host countries, and that oblige politicians to recur to non traditional ways of recruiting voters and candidates. It also shows that although positive, the move towards simultaneous electoral participation is slow. However, slow change is not necessarily related to the concentration of Dominicans in local politics as opponents of dual citizenship argue. Dual citizenship has not translated automatically into overwhelming participation in any of the countries but it has increased the rates of naturalization of Dominicans and the opportunities for simultaneous electoral participation as those who promoted dual citizenship expected (Graham, 1996; Jones Correa, 2000). The question that remains then is whether loyalty motivates Dominican migrants to increase their simultaneous electoral participation in their host and home countries.

Transnationalism without loyalty

My argument that loyalty to a nation is not necessary for political transnationalism to emerge is related to some existing critiques to definitions of transnationalism based on the idea of loyalty. Some authors have argued that transmigrant and transnational activities do not necessarily entail commitments with single and homogeneous identities (as loyalty to a nation). On the contrary, transnational activities generate contradictions, heterogeneous and changing identities (Rouse, 1989) an also complex connections between national, regional, and local identities (Smith and Bakker, 2005). Furthermore, political transnationalism can be seen more accurately from an instrumental perspective, not as a reflection of loyalty, but as an alternative way for migrants to achieve economic advancement. Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt (1999) argue that traditionally the migration literature saw assimilation in the receiving society as the highest point in a migrant's struggle for economic achievement. Yet, they argue, migrants have much more varied ways to achieve economic success, and transnational activities that link groups in advanced countries with their respective hometowns, constitute one of those alternatives.

The fast growth of the Dominican community in the US has become an important topic of academic research and a growing political concern.

Between 1990 and 2000 the Dominican population in New York increased by 49% from 520.121 to 1.041.910 (Hernandez and Rivera, 2003). This increase places Dominicans as one of the fastest growing immigrant blocs in the city. At the same time, according to the Dominican Studies Institute, the per capita income of Dominicans is below that of Latinos in general. I argue that the combination of growing numbers of migrants and declining living conditions has contributed to a slow change in the barriers for participation and a consequent growth of simultaneous electoral participation. Thus, economic necessity, rather than loyalty is a strong incentive for the simultaneous participation of Dominican migrants. Ideally one would test this argument using survey data about the reasons that lead citizens to participate simultaneously in elections in the DR and in the US. Here, I use some evidence derived from a content analysis of campaign messages⁵. Thus, I do not aim to provide an exhaustive analysis of the determinants of migrant participation, since this is by itself a different and large area of research in American Politics. I just suggest that Dominican migrants may be more compelled to vote simultaneously when politicians refer to their own well being, at least discursively, and that a focus on ideas of loyalty can mask this simple but important reality.

As illustrated in the previous section, the increasing size of the migrant community, and the reduction of some costs of participation for Dominican migrants has resulted in an increased number of transnational political practices. Recent transformations have contributed to reduce the barriers that studies of Latino political participation in the US usually identify as factors hindering electoral participation. Dual citizenship reduced the costs that Dominican migrants face in their country of origin, while the increasing interest of political parties in gaining Dominican votes (De La Garza, 2004; Jones Correa, 1998) has reduced the costs of access they face in the US⁶. While each of these factors contributes to understand why migrants participate more, they do not necessarily explain why citizens participate *simultaneously*. Some traditional ideas of

5. Obviously this is a huge methodological problem of “ecological inference” it is of drawing conclusions about individual preferences from information that pertains to another level of analysis. Further work must deal with this methodological issue.

6. In 1996, Graham argued that political parties in NY did not show special interests in mobilizing new legal immigrant groups. Jones Correa stated that the atrophy of patronage systems and the little interest of political parties in bringing new players into the system (enrolling voters for example) showed such lack of interest. Institutional reforms aimed at increasing participation, growing appeals to Dominican migrants, and increasing registration efforts have expanded the space for immigrant communities to engage in electoral politics

transnationalism would suggest that Dominicans participate simultaneously because they want to strengthen and advance their commitments to a nation. Yet there is no evidence in the campaigns showing that politicians effectively convey ideas about nationalism in order to get voters. The increasing size of the Dominican community in New York and its declining economic conditions are rather the elements that foster simultaneous electoral participation. Growing size has made transnational campaigns an unavoidable necessity for both New Yorker and Dominican politicians attempting to increase their electoral strength⁷. The content of campaigns suggests that Dominicans participate simultaneously because thus they find more alternatives to improve their worsening living conditions. This does not mean that citizens cannot participate politically out of their love to both nations, or at least to one of them, but it rather suggests that such love is not a necessary condition for a migrant to participate. In this sense, one can define electoral participation in the US not as a side effect of the commitment with home, but as a manifestation of the concern with the well being of the narrower migrant community.

Unlike other transnational practices, simultaneous electoral participation seems to be related more with communitarian well being concerns, than with loyalties to the nation, and in fact, the most successful politicians within Dominicans are those who better campaign about migrants' living conditions. Transnationalism deals with the existence of two separated spheres (host/home, sending/receiving country) that are juxtaposed but can still be differentiated. The interesting thing that arises while analyzing how Dominicans were involved in 2004 electoral events is that two processes of campaigning in different countries were juxtaposed and merged on the basis of the same issues, those that affect Dominican migrants' lives.

In the 2004 Dominican election, Leonel Fernández, targeted the migrant community using different campaign messages than those he used in the DR. He based his campaign agenda on the economic recuperation of the country since by the time of that election the Dominican Republic was under a harsh monetary and financial crisis, huge inflation, and electric sector deficit. Fernández's promises about reducing inflation were attractive for immigrants because lower inflation would translate into

7. It is important to note that it has been argued that the increasing number of Dominican migrants and more importantly their role as a source of hard currency through remittances was a huge incentive for politicians in the Dominican Republic to promote dual citizenship (Itzigsohn 2000). Here I argue that once the benefit of dual citizenship is effective in elections, migrants also become an attractive source of votes.

an improved real value for remittances. He appealed directly to migrants offering expatriates “closer economic and political ties to their homeland”, and promising “to establish formal relationships with the authorities of their adopted country and to promote technological and educational exchanges between the two nations” (Fernandez, 2004). He also promised a strong mandate for the consular authorities to be more vigilant on the rights of Dominican citizens in NY. Finally, he questioned the forcible repatriation from the US of Dominican former prisoners, which was (and is still) seen as a cause of the growing crime rates in the DR.

Fernandez also benefited from his successful efforts to appear linked to both the US and the Dominican Republic, notwithstanding his “transnational” background. For example, in May 2004 Fernandez joined efforts with New York City’s Mayor Bloomberg and New York State’s Governor Pataki to raise money for the victims of torrential rains in the DR. Dominicans expected Fernandez to work together with Bloomberg and Pataki in the promotion of programs that benefit Dominican immigrants directly. Some of the expectations included increasing the number of Hispanic teachers, adult educational programs or scholarships for Dominicans (Viva New York, 2004).

For the 2004 Presidential race in US, I did not find direct appeals of Presidential candidates to Dominican migrants. Therefore, the evidence to analyze the involvement of Dominicans in the 2004 US Presidential election is limited both qualitatively and quantitatively. Qualitatively because the US Presidential Campaign is too broad to appeal to differentiated ethnic segments and therefore it has to be located within the appeal to Latinos in general. Quantitatively, electoral statistics do not differentiate turnout according to ethnic or cultural groups. Surveys about electoral preferences and political attitudes as well as in depth interviews are necessary to improve the knowledge about the perceptions of Dominicans and how they involve in US and Dominican politics at the same time.

Voting patterns in 72nd District suggest that Dominicans answered positively to George Bush’s apparent better grasp of immigrant issues (and also to the registration efforts described in the former section). The vote for Republican candidates went from 7% in 2000 to 10% in the 2004 elections. Although the support among Dominicans for Democrats was still a high 85%, between 2000 and 2004 it increased just by 18% whereas the support for Republicans increased by 60%. It seems that in the Bush – Kerry race in 2004 some appeals and electoral strategies weakened the already mentioned Democrat preference of Dominican New Yorkers and Latinos in general, increasing republican votes:

In the days before the presidential election, some opinion surveys said Democrats would get as much as 65 percent of the Hispanic vote. But on the morning after the voting, some exit polls held that Democrat nominee John F. Kerry had received about 56 percent of Hispanics' votes and that President Bush had gotten 44 percent (Fears, 2004).

George Bush talked about a plan for restoring the legality of immigrants through guest worker programs and amnesties. Kerry promised to sign two measures that had wide bipartisan support in Congress and therefore were not so crucial for migrants. Those measures were a legalization program for farm workers, and the permission for children of undocumented immigrants to obtain legal U.S. residency and attend college at in-state tuition rates. Yet the Washington Post described President Bush's better appeal to immigrants as follows

Bush's appeal to Hispanics is clear: As a former governor of Texas, the president has a better grasp than his opponent of immigrant issues. Bush's brother Jeb, governor of Florida, speaks Spanish like a native Cuban and appealed directly to Latino voters on the president's behalf (Fears, 2004).

Both Bush and Kerry coincided while proposing to crack down the hiring of undocumented immigrants and other measures that were very restrictive about immigrant issues. This reflects that unlike New York, at the national level conservative pressures are still very strong despite the electoral weight of Hispanic votes. However both media and politicians are increasingly interested in highlighting the immigrants involvement in US politics as reflected in a case described in The New York Sun

Aurora Martínez, a Dominican immigrant who speaks little English, planted herself on Inwood's Dyckman Street yesterday afternoon and handed out photocopies of a grainy picture of the president as an eager National Guard officer, while shouting to passersby, "Mañana Bush." Before the confused pedestrians could respond, she would say in Spanish, "Tomorrow we are going to celebrate," and explain the photo would be perfect to place on the wall when President Bush wins today's election (Gerson, 2004).

A sign of the likely success of Republican messages among Dominicans appears while comparing voter enrollment rates by political party from 2000 to 2004 in 72nd District. The District has been traditionally Democrat and it is still Democrat. Before the Presidential elections in 2004 the Board of Elections reported 44108 registered Democrats

vs 3801 registered Republicans, and despite the opening of the new office, by November 2004 there were 3417 new registered Democrats whereas there were only 465 new registered Republicans. Yet, the rate of registration for Republicans had increased by 6.9 percent between 2000 and 2004. Another interesting trend is that the percentages of registered Republicans and Democrats decreased while the registration with other parties as the Independent and Working Families Party doubled or tripled as shown in Table 3. The new (although still very small) appeal of those non traditional parties was as a sign of a increasing interest of Dominicans in US politics, but specially of their concern in fighting for their well being moving away from traditional parties. The Working Families Party (whose votes were added to John Kerry's in 2004) increased its popularity among New York Latinos addressing issues such as the eradication of lead poisoning, the rejection of the harsh Rockefeller Drug Laws, and the increment of the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$.10 an hour. Notably, one of the three Latinos who belonged to the 13 member Executive Committee of the Party was the Dominican Wilfredo Larancuent. By 2008, the trend towards increased registration of Dominicans in independent parties persisted.

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Dual citizenship in the DR was an answer to a bottom up struggle of Dominicans that had leverage in the Dominican Republic but not in the US and wanted to ensure that power (Jones-Correa, 2001). Thus, loyalty to home nation and economic power were crucial motors behind the decision to grant Dominican migrants dual citizenship. But clearly these are not the same factors that determine the effective use of dual citizenship. The

Table 3
Number of voters registered by party 2000-2008, 72nd Assembly District, New York

	2000	% of total voters	2004	% of total voters	% increase 2000-2004	2008	% of total voters	% Increase 2004-2008
Republican	4,016	9.03	4,381	6.90	9.08	4,251	6.1	-2.9
Democrat	41,680	93.76	47,974	75.59	15.10	52,835	76.5	10.1
Liberal	393	0.88	302	0.47	-23.15			
Conservative	200	0.44	181	0.28	-9.5	180	0.26	-0.5
Independent	529	1.19	1,037	1.63	96.03	1,138	1.64	9.7
Working families	35	0.07	105	0.16	200	146	0.21	39.0
Total	44,452		63,460			69,050		

Source: NYC Board of Elections, my own calculations

preceding review of campaign proposals suggests that Dominican and American politicians were able to increase their appeal to Dominican immigrants as they addressed issues related with their living conditions. An appeal to immigrants' loyalty with the broader nation (being host or home) was less notable. Of course migrants may be interested in issues beyond their own well being (in fact the interest of Dominicans in economic stability as a key point of Fernandez's agenda is a proof of this broader connection with home country), but their vote seems primarily linked to their own living conditions as migrants.

Parallel electoral participation of Dominicans has been fostered by the quantitative importance of immigrant Dominican community that converts them in a source of votes in both sides. At the same time, Dominicans' concern with their own well being promotes their involvement in both countries. De La Garza (2004) coincides with this idea stating that it is reasonable to expect Latinos to be more interested in immigrant issues and special programs for Latinos than on broader issues either in the US or in the DR. One can thus expect that once immigrants advance socially and economically, their motivations for participating may change. In the case of Dominicans in New York, as long as their economic conditions remain difficult, it is likely to expect that they will continue mobilizing mainly around the well being of their own migrant community.

Conclusion

In recent years the concept of transnationalism has become increasingly popular due to its ability to capture the novel character of many of the political, economic, and social practices that link migrants simultaneously to their host and home countries. In this paper I emphasized that the concept does capture effectively the political practices of Dominican migrants in New York as well as they way in which politicians in the United States and the Dominican Republic relate to them. The 2004 electoral events in the Dominican Republic and United States represented a still slow, but positive change toward simultaneous electoral participation of Dominican New Yorkers, facilitated by the introduction of dual citizenship rights. Dual citizenship, contrary to what was expected among its opponents, has not undermined the commitment's of Dominicans to their host nation nor has it been translated into overwhelming participation in Dominican elections. On the contrary, dual citizenship can foster participation in the US by promoting migrants' naturalization.

The analysis of transnationalism here presented confirms the scholarly claim that there are different types of transnational practices and that each type needs to be analyzed separately in order to be properly

understood. This paper supports this claim by showing that political transnationalism, manifested in simultaneous electoral participation, does not imply the loyalty or commitment to the building of nation states that may exist in other transnational practices (such as charitable donations of migrants to their home countries). Citizens may participate simultaneously in electoral processes in their host and home countries motivated by their own concern as a Dominican migrant community. This concern with living conditions is different from the commitment with a national origin or with the general situation of either host or home country. Dual citizens vote in both host and home countries in order to improve their living conditions rather than to reinforce their centrality in the home country. This argument coincides with arguments suggesting that the key for political transnationalism is political learning rather than loyalty. In other words, it is plausible that the skills and networks citizens use in the elections of one country can be effectively applied to the electoral processes of the other. This alternative argument highlights that we need to pay more attention to the Dominican migrant community in itself, more than as part of the home nation. The argument that immigrants' well being is at the core of their simultaneous electoral participation does not deny that nationalism may motivate many transnational behaviors, but shows that it may not be at the core of migrants' electoral participation.

The ideas stated here are preliminary and require further research but suggest an interesting line of inquiry. It is how migrants' economic marginality can become a factor of simultaneous electoral mobilization. Some transnational scholars have already argued that economic marginality creates a necessity to maintain flows with home, that it reinforces participation in the politics of the country of origin and not the country of settlement (Graham, 1996). What I emphasize here is that marginality may create a necessity to solve problems that fosters transnationalism but it does not imply necessarily the "home country" image and may appeal with equal force to the host country. This statement questions the idea that Latino participation is lower in concentrated migrant communities because in these communities levels of education and income are lower and hinder electoral interest. On the contrary, concentrated communities may start to foster simultaneous involvement given their precarious living conditions.

Ideally, further studies of simultaneous participation should compare different migrant communities systematically and consider at least three areas not addressed here: first, how the political participation of migrants is permeated by the same phenomena that affect participation in general (distrust in politics, clientelism, and abstention). Second, more detailed

analysis should address other aspects that affect Latinos' participation such as class, gender, race, interest in politics, church attendance, organizational and school involvement (De La Garza, 2004; Waldinger, 2008); and also age, education and partisanship. As I suggested here however, it is important to note that to explain why migrants vote is not the same that trying to explain why they vote *simultaneously*. Third, in order to confirm that economic hardship is a crucial driver of simultaneous electoral participation, it is necessary to confirm that those individuals more concerned and likely to vote in the Dominican Republic are in fact the same who vote in the United States, thus more survey and in depth interviewing is essential.

The issue of simultaneous electoral participation is crucial to understand modern politics, especially because over the past years more countries have conceded dual citizenship rights to their citizens and as of today more than fifty countries allow dual citizenship (Bronsted Sejer- sen, 2008). Thus, traditional questions such as who has the right to vote, what motivates citizens to participate, or how politicians appeal to voters, have acquired new meaning given the introduction of dual citizenship rights and the ever expanding size of migrant communities. Clearly, many migrant political practices transcend –although do not necessarily negate– the boundaries of nation states. This will certainly continue affecting our notions of democracy, participation and representation, as well as our assessment of the realities of migration.

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