

Social Capital, Networks, and Emigration from Latin America: A Comparative Analysis **Douglas S. Massey, Princeton University**

The concept of “social capital” was introduced into social science by the economist Glenn Loury (1977) but was elaborated theoretically by the sociologists Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and James Coleman (1988). Since its incorporation into the field in the 1980s, it has been applied to a variety of social settings, from neighborhoods (Sampson and Morenoff 1997) to nations (Putnam 2000). Massey et al. (1987:170-71) were the first to apply the concept to migration, noting that poor Mexican peasants “may be poor in financial resources, but they are wealthy in social capital, which they can readily convert into jobs and earnings in the United States.”

It is now well established in the migration literature that interpersonal networks are a source of social capital (Espinosa and Massey 1997) and that prospective migrants draw upon them to migrate (Massey and Espinosa 1997), cross the border (Singer and Massey 1998), find jobs (Espinosa 1997; Aguilera 1999; Aguilera 2002; Aguilera forthcoming), and housing in the United States (Espinosa 1997). Recent work has revealed that network effects are not simply artifacts of unobserved heterogeneity or common underlying characteristics (Palloni et al. 2001) and that over time they expand to build a self-sustaining momentum into the process of social capital accumulation (Massey and Zenteno 2000). Migrant networks have been shown to influence other migratory outcomes as well, such as the sending of remittances (Durand et al. 1996; Roberts and Morris 1996), patterns of investment (Massey and Parrado 1997), and wages and working conditions experienced in the United States (Massey 1987; Phillips and Massey 1999).

According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:119), “social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.” The defining characteristic of capital—whether financial, physical, human, social, or cultural—is its convertibility, the fact that it may be turned into something of value, such as income, prestige, power, or wealth (Harker, Mahar, and Wilkes 1990). People gain access to social capital through membership in networks and institutions and then convert it into other forms of capital to improve or maintain their position in society. Coleman, in particular, stressed the productive consequences of social capital: “just as physical capital and human capital facilitate productive activity, social capital does as well” (Coleman 1988:S101).

Scholarly recognition of the fact that migrants use social networks is not new. Early in the 20th century, Thomas and Znaniecki (1918-20) and Gamio (1930) documented the operation of interpersonal networks among Polish and Mexican immigrants (although naturally they did not refer to social capital). Drawing on social ties to relatives and friends who had migrated before, they argued that prospective migrants gained access to knowledge, assistance, and other resources that facilitated their international movement. Although ties of kinship and friendship, in and of themselves, provide few benefits to prospective migrants, once someone in an interpersonal network migrates, social ties to that person are *transformed* into a resource that can be used by friends and relatives to gain access to foreign employment. As Coleman (1990:304) notes, “social capital is *created* when the relations among persons *change* in ways that facilitate action” (emphasis added). Massey et al. (1994) identify migration itself as the catalyst for

change.

Migrant networks incorporate all the forms of social capital identified by Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993). They facilitate *value introjection* because they support the socialization of people into a “culture of migration” (see Kandel and Massey 2001). They function as *reciprocity exchanges*, in which favors are extended to friends and relatives as part of a generalized system of exchange in which migrants help friends and relatives not because they expect immediate repayment, but because they anticipate help being extended to them or their kin at some future date (Massey et al. 1987). They also provide for *bounded solidarity* to reinforce the ties of kinship, friendship, and common community origin among migrants (Massey 1986). Finally, they are characterized by *enforceable trust*, since migrants who refuse to help friends or family may be ostracized or punished by relatives and friends at home and abroad (Mines 1981; Reichert 1982; Goldring 1990).

Prior research in Mexico has documented the powerful role played by migrant networks in promoting emigration to the United States. A major question is whether networks have similar power in other countries that do not border the United States and lack such a long migratory tradition. This paper combines data from the Latin American Migration Project and the Mexican Migration Project to undertake a comparative analysis of how networks operate to promote emigration from three regions: the Caribbean (Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, and Haiti); Mexico; Central America (Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Guatemala); and the Andes (Peru and Ecuador). Discrete time event history models will be estimated to measure the effect of personal connections to migrants and the prevalence of migrants in the community affect the odds of international out-migration, and whether the effect differs by place of origin and point of destination (USA versus Europe or other destination).

As Massey et al. (1998:107) point out in their exhaustive review of the empirical literature on immigration to North America, “far too much of the research is centered in Mexico, which because of its unique relationship to the USA may be unrepresentative of broader patterns and trends.” To address this gap in the research literature, the Latin American Migration Project (LAMP) was launched in 1998. Modeled on the Mexican Migration Project (MMP), which began in 1982, the explicit goal of the LAMP was to compile data on immigration from non-Mexican source countries by applying a similar blend of ethnographic and survey methods to sending communities throughout Latin America. To date the LAMP has made data publicly available from surveys of 21 communities in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, each accompanied by a purposive sample of settled out-migrants who were located and interviewed in the United States. In this analysis, we draw upon these data to develop a profile of Caribbean and Central American migrants to the United States, comparing their patterns of migration with those of Mexican migrants.

The LAMP was designed to emulate the MMP and to produce comparable data. Although questionnaires and procedures naturally were tailored to the specific circumstances of each country, to the extent possible investigators sought to standardize questionnaires while applying exactly the same sampling methodologies and fieldwork procedures. As in the MMP, the LAMP compiled simple random samples of households within specific communities deliberately chosen to represent a range of positions on the urban continuum. At each community

chosen for study, investigators conducted a house-to-house enumeration of dwellings, taking care to include any structure that might conceivably be used as a residence. From the resulting list, a simple random sample of 100-200 households was selected within each location, which produced varying sampling fractions depending on the total number of households in the area of study. As indicated in the last column of Table 1, sampling fractions ranged from a low value of 0.04 to a high of 1.0, with the latter indicating 100% coverage of the specified geographic area. If, upon selection, a unit proved to be vacant or not a dwelling, it was simply discarded as ineligible and another potential unit was drawn from the list. By this method, investigators sought to ensure coverage of poorer families in irregular housing.

A few months after the completion of the community surveys, field interviewers traveled to points of destination in the United States to locate people from the origin communities who had settled abroad. Names, addresses, phone numbers, and other information were compiled in the course of fieldwork in Mexico, and these contacts provided points of entry into the out-migrant communities. Beginning with these initial sources, fieldworkers assembled snowball samples using the chain referral method, ultimately seeking to interview a number of households equal to around 10% of that of the origin community. In order to be eligible for inclusion in the U.S. sample, a household had to be headed by someone born in one of the sending communities included in the database. In countries that sent migrants to locations other than the United States, interviewers were sent to destination areas in those places to interview non-US out-migrants.