

# **BEYOND NETWORKS AND ECONOMICS POLICY, POLITICS AND POLITICAL MIGRATION**

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**WORKING DRAFT**

## INTRODUCTION

In response to international migration's continued expansion in recent decades and the perception that it has become a major source of social, political and cultural tensions, scholars have increasingly focused on explaining why people migrate. Current theories such as world systems theory and social network theories (Massey, et.al. 1999) as well as microeconomic theories that focuses on individual choices made by rational actors (Massey, 1993: 434; Goss and Lindquist, 1995) pay little attention to how politics and policies affect emigration. To the extent that they deal with political factors, they tend to invoke one-dimensional caricatures of the State and describe it either as puppet-like representatives of capital's interests or as a bureaucratic entity in charge of determining family reunification criteria (Massey, et.al. 1999). More noteworthy is that they pay no attention to the affect that state policies and political practices have on stimulating individual decisions to emigrate, i.e., in stimulating political migration.

The purpose of this paper is to begin filling this void. That is, like microeconomic eplanations of emigration, it explores the extent to which emigration reflects individual level responses that may be understood as cost-benefit calculations that lead individuals to expect a positive net return from migration (Massey, 1993: 434). It differs from microeconomic explanations of migration in that its focus is on the role that individuals assign to political factors in making their decisions. Given the paucity of literature examining this question, this should be considered as the second stage<sup>1</sup> of an exploratory exercise the results of which may lead to a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the topic.

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<sup>1</sup> The first state resulted in de la Garza and Hazan (2000).

The paper is divided into four sections. The first begins with a review of the theoretical foundation of the project and also includes our conceptualization and operationalization of political migration, the dependent variable, and of state policies and political processes, the core of the independent variables. The next section consists of our analysis. In the final section, we evaluate the results of the analysis from both a theoretical and political perspective. That is, we assess the extent to which migration theory is enhanced by incorporating a political dimension, and we suggest how states can use politics and policies to influence emigration.

## **POLITICS AND EMIGRATION**

The paper is based on Hirschman's classic, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* (1970). Unlike sociological and economic analyses of immigration, this approach recognizes the state as an entity that is actively involved in the migratory process explicitly via its policies and implicitly through its relationships with public institutions. Thus, it views decisions as potentially reflective of individual level attitudes toward government. In other words, it hypothesizes that the decision to emigrate may be politically driven.

In this paper, we consider emigration to be a voluntary decision rather than the forced response to state sponsored political, ideological or ethnic violence or threats (Goodwin-Gill 1990). We acknowledge, moreover, that not all citizens dissatisfied with governmental practices manifest their dissatisfaction by exiting the state. For most citizens, voice is the principal way "to register ... dissatisfaction with the way things are going" (Hirschman, 1970 p. 76). Voice may take the form of mass protests, the emergence of dissident groups within governing coalitions, the creation of new political parties or letters to the press complaining of a specific

situation or the way a service is provided. Voice, thus, is often direct and explicit, and offers clear and sometimes immediate feedback to state actors.

Nonetheless, some citizens may express their discontent by voting with their feet. i.e., by exiting the state. This option, in contrast to the voice option, is usually a silent and anonymous form of expressing discontent with the state and its political or policy processes (Hirschman, 1974: 16). For these reasons the existence of politically motivated migration as well as its intensity and scope are less likely to be recognized.

Political migrants, in sum, are citizens who instead of voicing their discontent opt instead to at least temporarily break their voluntary membership with the state and emigrate. Although some political migrants emigrate because they are threatened by political, ideological or ethnic violence, most do so because of public policies and political processes they oppose but feel impotent to change. Moreover, while analytically it is helpful to consider these reasons as constituting the end points of a continuum, “in ordinary life they exist as mixed rather than pure cases of the one or the other (Ahmed 1997, 167). Therefore, in this paper we group all individuals who cite political factors as among the primary reasons for emigrating as political migrants.

Thus, in addition to migrating for economic reasons or to join family members abroad, individuals may exit a government/state when it is not responsive to their needs, or has failed in the provision of public services such as health, education, and public safety, or when the political system lacks public accountability or is highly corrupted. This combines the claims made by Hirschman (1970) and Barry (1974) regarding the source of citizen dissatisfaction. Hirschman (1970) predicts that individuals would be more likely to exit the state if the quality of the

services supplied by the state is very low while Barry (1974) suggests that it is not about the quality but about the types of goods and services provided by the state. In our view, dissatisfaction may be the result of both the quality and the type of services available.

The objective of this paper is to determine the extent to which, if at all, political factors influence emigration decisions. To that end we measure the extent to which individuals report that dissatisfaction with economic issues, state social policies and state sponsored or sanctioned institutional practices influenced the decision to emigrate.

The data we analyze are from a Tomás Rivera Policy Institute telephone survey designed to measure remitting behavior among Mexicans and Salvadorans in pre-selected counties in California, Texas, Illinois, and New Jersey during November and December of 2003. The survey included 400 respondents from Mexico and 400 from El Salvador. All respondents were at least 18 years old, were born in Mexico or in El Salvador, were at least 16 years or older when they first came to live permanently in the United States, and had personally or via a household member sent money to their countries of origin. The sample, thus, is not representative of Mexican or Salvadoran immigrants and our results therefore may not be used to generalize to these groups.

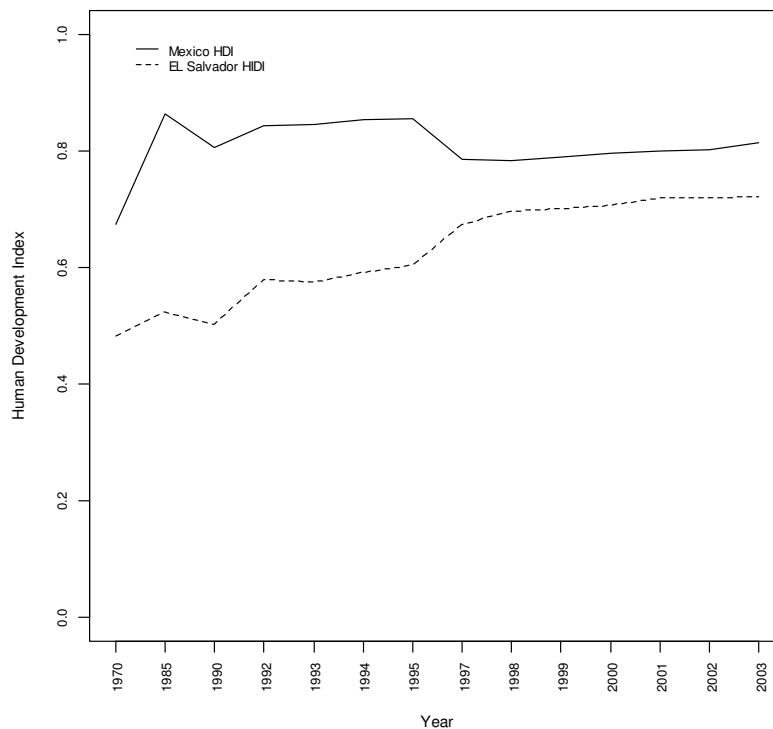
## **ANALYSIS**

As we have indicated, our objective is to gain insight into the extent to which political rather than economic factors influence emigration decisions. To answer this question, we examine individual evaluations of the effect of economic factors, public policies and political practices on the decision to migrate. Our analysis, in effect, is measuring the extent to which émigrés perceive their state to have failed to provide its citizens with sufficient economic opportunities,

social services, and/or political accountability to make them stay in their home countries rather than to migrate to the U.S.

Although both countries are characterized by poorly performing economies and high rates of poverty, El Salvador is much worse off than Mexico in this regard. This is evidenced in the ratings of the Human Development Index (HDI) developed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which “is a composite index that measures the average achievements in a country in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, as measured by life expectancy at birth; knowledge, as measured by the adult literacy rate and the combined gross enrolment ratio for primary, secondary and tertiary schools; and a decent standard of living, as measured by GDP per capita in purchasing power parity (PPP) US dollars” (UNDP 2005 pg. 214). On average, from 1970 to 2003 Mexico’s HDI score was around 0.8 while El Salvador’s was 0.6 approximately (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. UNDP Human Development Index for Mexico and El Salvador  
1970 - 2003



Furthermore, neither country has deeply rooted democratic systems with well institutionalized public accountability. To the contrary, El Salvador has a long history of undemocratic rule and has only recently seen the end of a violent civil war. Furthermore, Mexico has only recently made the transition from authoritarian, occasionally violent and unaccountable populist rule to a democratically elected national government. Additionally, although Mexico has a much more institutionalized social policy apparatus than El Salvador, Figure 1 strongly suggests that neither state's educational and health services meet the needs of their respective citizens and both societies increasingly suffer from wide spread organized crime. Overall, then, it may be argued

that both states have failed their citizens, but that El Salvador has performed less well than Mexico. In other words, the Salvadoran State has been significantly less successful than the Mexican State in creating the appropriate conditions for its citizens to stay in the home country.

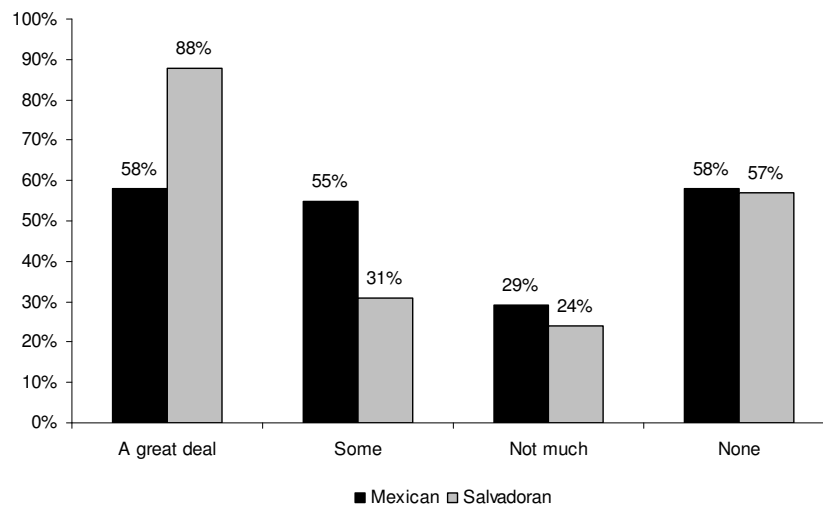
Our major concern, however, is the relative impact of political vs. economic factors on the decision to emigrate. To reiterate, what is distinctive about our theory is that in addition to recognizing that non-political factors such as increased economic opportunities in host countries and social and migrant networks influence emigration decisions, it claims that political factors also influence these decisions. It says nothing, however, about how important they are. Indeed, we do not expect them to be of greater salience than economic factors.

To measure the impact of these two types of factors, we asked respondents how much each influenced the decision to emigrate, a great deal, somewhat, not much or not at all (see Appendix 1 for the phrasing of these items) As we expected, when respondents were asked about how economic factors such as employment, the cost of living, the cost of doing business and taxes influenced their decision to migrate to the United States, 54 percent of the total sample reported that such factors greatly influenced their decision, 46 percent said that social conditions such as educational opportunities, the availability of health care and public safety influenced their decision to come to the U.S. a great deal, and more than one-quarter said that lack of governmental accountability, how clean elections were, and how honest government officials were greatly influenced their decision to migrate to the U.S.

This pattern is altered when the salience of economic factors is compared with that of political factors when the latter are combined and evaluated as one factor. As Figure 2 illustrates, combining the assessment of the significance of social policy and the performance of political

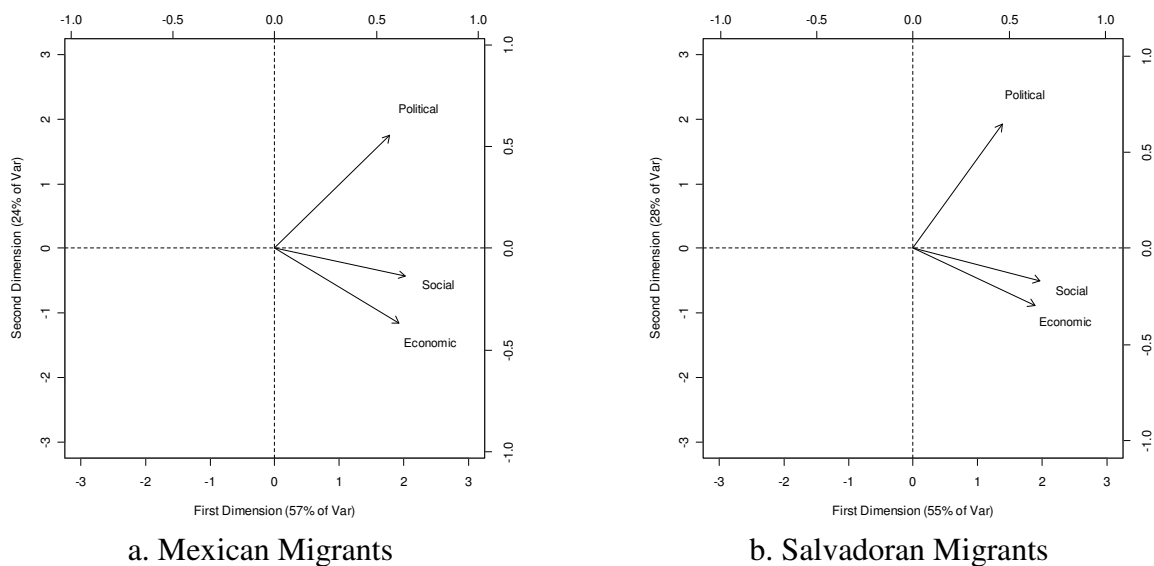
institutions indicates that approximately 73 percent of respondents (Mexican and Salvadoran immigrants) state that political factors had a great deal of influence over the emigration decision compared to 54 percent who say economic factors have a great deal of influence over migration decisions (see Figure 4a).

Figure 2. Assessment of Combined Political Factors on Migration Decision



To determine the validity of combining the responses in this way, we conduct a principal components analysis which will explicate the key dimensions underlying these assessments. Given the multidimensional nature of these factors (economic, social, and political), a principal components analysis reduces the multidimensionality of the data to lower dimensions. The first component accounts for as much of the variability in the data, and each succeeding component accounts for as much of the remaining variance as possible. Figure 3 shows the result of this analysis for our sample populations. The principal component analysis suggests that there are two dimensions. The first component for both, Mexicans and Salvadorans is given by a social and economic dimension. The second component is given by a political dimension. On average, these two principal components explain more than 80 percent of the variance.

Figure 3. Principal Component Analysis of Reasons for Migrating by National Origin



Significantly, especially given our hypothesis, this analysis clearly suggests that political considerations play an independent role in migration decisions. Not only do evaluations of political practices stand alone, but evaluations of state policies combine with more explicit economic considerations to create a second independent evaluative component. This latter result also invites us to suggest that economic considerations include a variety of factors not normally incorporated into economic explanations of migration. That is, in addition to the weight employment opportunities have in migration decisions, politically based economic considerations such as government-funded social services and education also are influential. In sum, then, the results of the principal component analysis strongly confirm the centrality of political considerations in the migration decision.

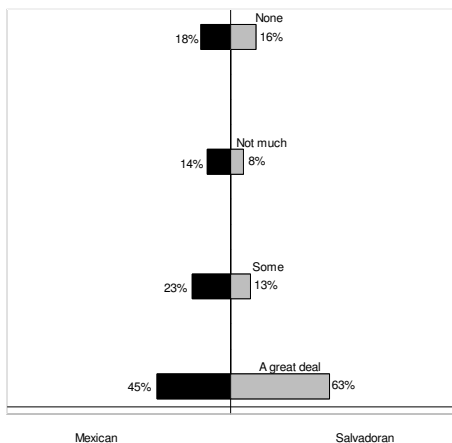
Further evidence of the significance of political factors having an independent impact on migration decisions is suggested by the results of interviews with 56 Mexican immigrants in Austin, Texas in 1998 and 1999, and with thirty nine Mexicans interviewed in Zacatecas, Guanajuato and Mexico City in 1999. In 1998, Austin respondents were asked about the factors that influenced their decision to migrate. Twenty-five out of 38 respondents (66%) said that the main reason was economic, but seventeen (45%) indicated that political issues had been a primary concern prior to emigrating. Furthermore, fifty-seven percent reported that they would not have left Mexico if they had had an opportunity to influence the political system, compared to twenty-four percent who would have left anyway.

Similar patterns characterized respondents interviewed in Austin in 1999. When asked about their primary concerns prior to emigrating, economic issues were the most frequently mentioned. But half of the respondents identified political issues, and one-third mentioned social issues. Furthermore, 50 percent reported they would not have left Mexico had the political situation been different. They were most concerned with political corruption, lack of representation, and the lack of accountability of governmental and political authorities.,

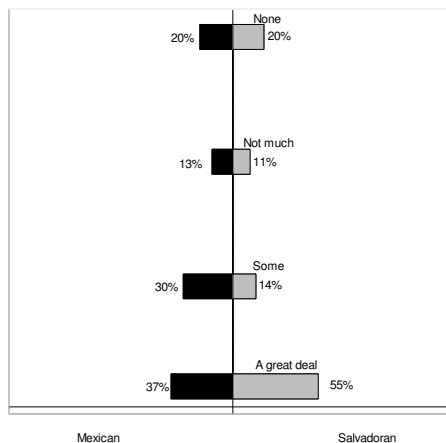
Of respondents interviewed in Mexico, almost 87 percent cited economic problems as one of their primary concerns, two-thirds reported they were also very concerned about political problems and forty one per cent mentioned social problems as a major source of concern. Overall, twenty percent of these thirty nine respondents indicated that they had considered emigrating, and two-thirds of these reported they stay in Mexico if there were fewer political problems (de la Garza and Hazan 2000).

Finally, given that our results indicate that politics influences migration decisions, we would expect its affect to vary with differences in state capacity and characteristics. In other words, political migration should be higher in poorer states because such states would provide less and lower quality social services. Similarly, less democratic states should experience higher rates of political migration because the citizenry has fewer expectations regarding its ability to influence state policy. Given our assessment that the Salvadoran state has been less successful than the Mexican state in economic and political arenas, we expect Salvadorans to be more likely than Mexicans to say that economic problems and political factors influenced their emigration decisions. As Figure 4 shows, these patterns are evident in our data.

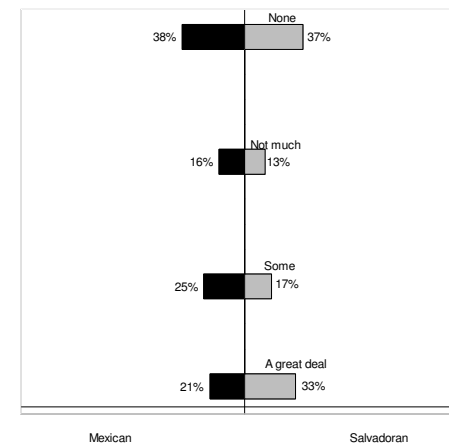
Figure 4. Reasons for Migrating to the United States, by Nationality



a. Economic Factors



b. Social Services



c. Political Institutions and Processes

As predicted, Salvadoran immigrants attribute more importance to home country economic, social, and political factors in determining their decision to come to the U.S. than did Mexican immigrants. For example, almost 20 percent more Salvadoran immigrants than Mexican immigrants reported that economic factors significantly influenced their decision to come to the U.S. Similarly 18 percent more Salvadorans than Mexicans cited the lack of social services as having greatly influenced their emigration decision. to come to the U.S. respectively. Although significantly lower percentages of both groups indicated that political factors greatly influenced their decision, Salvadorans were almost 50 percent more likely than Mexicans to voice this view. We also expect, given their low incomes and the low level of social services available to them, that the least educated and poorest respondents would be more concerned about economic factors than those who, because they are better educated and have higher incomes, have less need of such benefits. We also expect those with the lowest levels of human capital to be less concerned about political processes since such individuals have historically had very little influence in their respective political systems. The results of our analysis support the first two of these predictions. However, respondents characterized by low human capital are also more concerned with political processes than are the better educated and more affluent. It is also noteworthy that regardless of levels of education and household income, Mexican and Salvadoran immigrants articulate similar evaluations of how much emigration decisions are influenced by economic considerations or social policy. On the other hand, their evaluations of the salience of political considerations vary significantly with demographic characteristics (See Figures 5-6).

Figure 5. Reasons for Migrating and National Origin by Educational Attainment

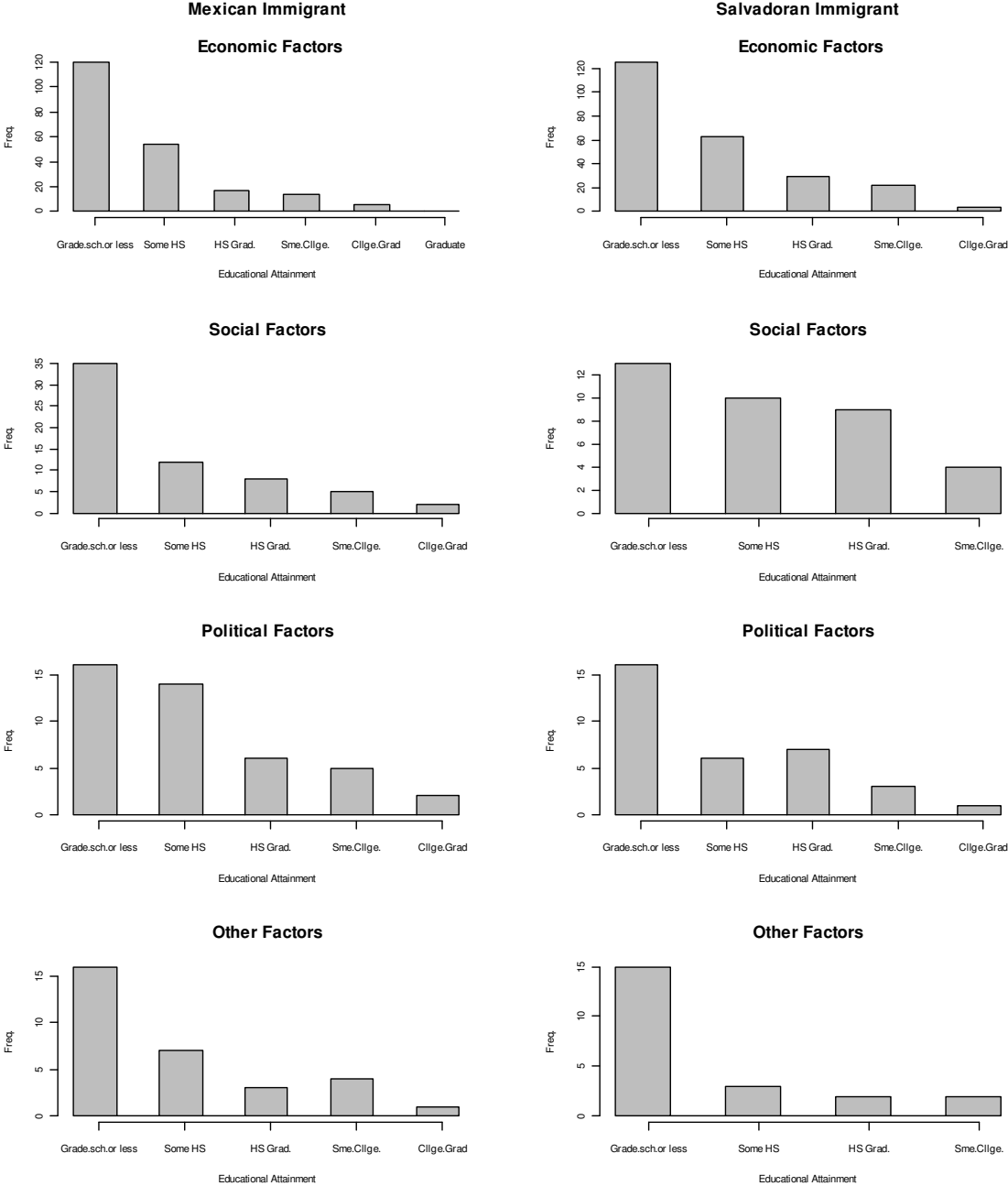
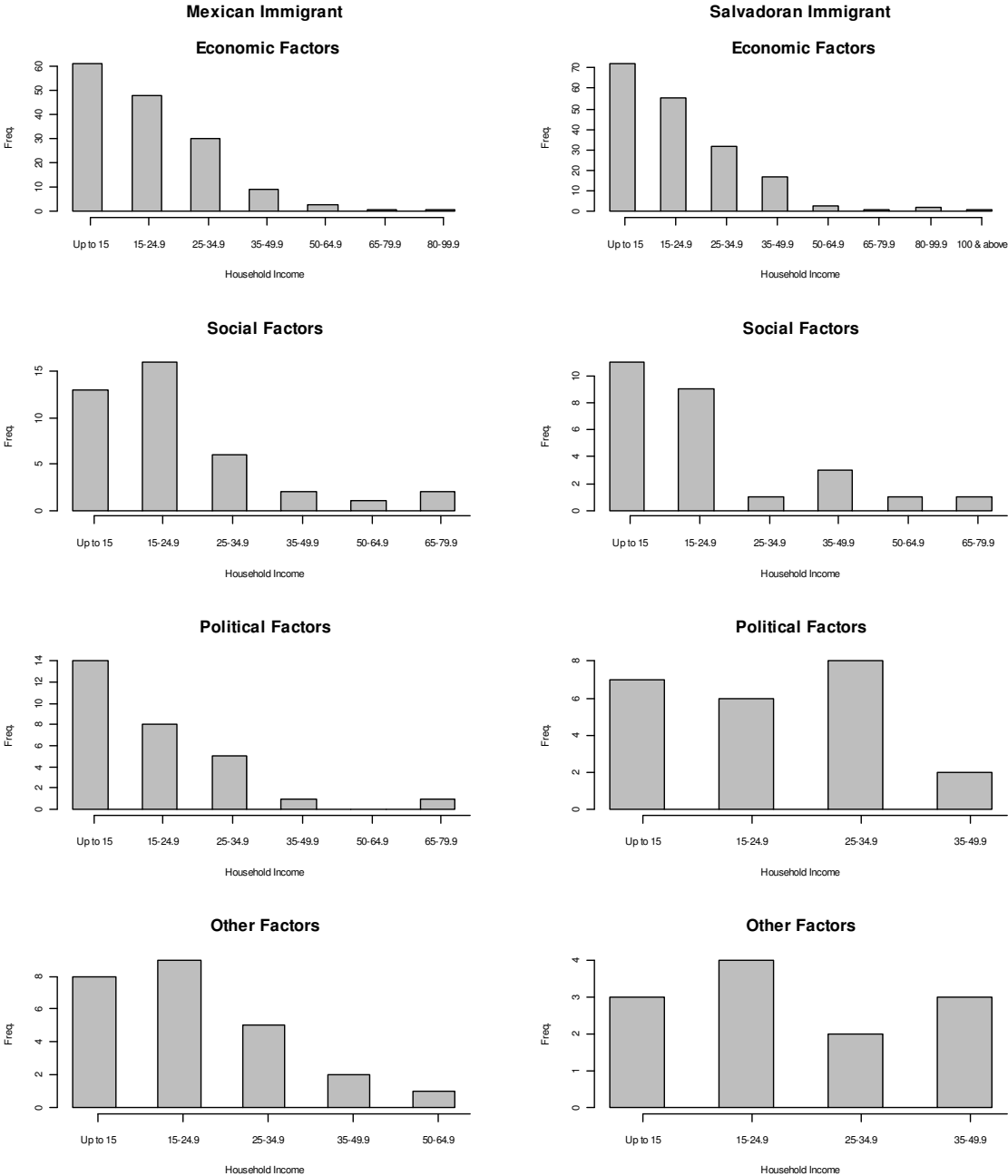


Figure 6. Reasons for Migrating and National Origin by Household Income



Figures 5-6 indicate that regardless of national origin, the individuals at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, measured in terms of years of education and income, were more likely to report being greatly influenced in their decision to come to the U.S. by the failure of the state in economic, social, and political terms than those respondents with more years of education and higher incomes. This pattern suggests that those at the bottom of the SES ladder are those who, though they are the least politically influential, are the ones in greatest need of a new politics that will begin to address their concerns and allow them to remain in their homelands.

## **CONCLUSION**

The results of our analysis clearly indicate the utility of analyzing emigration in terms of individual assessments of state policies and institutional political practices. That is, how an individual evaluates state social services and political institutions may influence the decision to emigrate as much as international labor market characteristics do. If individuals feel they can influence policy to be more attentive to public needs, they may be more willing to return home or to remain there. On the other hand, if they feel underserved by the state and feel inefficacious about their ability to influence governmental behavior, as did many of our respondents in Austin and Mexico, they have no reason not to emigrate.

To fully explain emigration, therefore, it is necessary to go beyond economics and social factors such as networks and include citizen attitudes toward the State and its political institutions. Future research combining such variables would enable us to assess the significance of these distinct types of factors.

From a policy perspective, our results suggest that sending states might be able to play a greater role in managing emigration than they may want to acknowledge. To do so, however, is

likely to require major changes in domestic policy including the development of new and more comprehensive social services as well as the strengthening of democratic political institutions including mechanisms for holding government accountable. These types of changes could generate controversy, but failing to enact them is likely to result in continued and perhaps increased high levels of political migration.

**APPENDIX 1**

Overall, how much did [HC] economic factors such as employment, the cost of living, the cost of doing business and taxes influence your decision to come to the U.S.? Did it influence you a great deal, some, not much, or none? A great deal ... 1

Some ... 2

Not much ... 3

None ... 4

DK ... 8

RF ... 9

Overall, how much did your concern about social conditions such as educational opportunities, the availability of health care and public safety in [HC] influence your decision to come to the U.S.? Did it influence you a great deal, some, not much, or none?

A great deal ... 1

Some ... 2

Not much ... 3

None ... 4

DK ... 8

RF ... 9

Overall, how much did [HC] political factors such as how accountable government was to people like you, how clean elections were, how honest government officials were influence your decision to come to the U.S.? Did it influence you a great deal, some, not much, or none?

A great deal ... 1

Some ... 2

Not much ... 3

None ... 4

DK ... 8

RF ... 9

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