

6-1-2018

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Recommended Citation

Cohen, Theodore W. Ph.D. (2018) "Danielson, Michael S. Emigrants Get Political: Mexican Migrants Engage Their Home Towns. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 9 : No. 2 , Article 17.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol9/iss2/17>

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Danielson, Michael S. *Emigrants Get Political: Mexican Migrants Engage Their Home Towns*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

In *Emigrants Get Political: Mexican Migrants Engage Their Home Towns*, Michael S. Danielson examines the relationship between Mexican migration and democratization in the twenty-first century. From a primarily quantitative perspective, but also through forty-six interviews, he analyzes the Three for One (3x1) Program for Migrants and the politicization of migrants who have returned home to become emigrant mayors of their municipalities. Municipalities in three states—Guanajuato, Oaxaca, Zacatecas—ground his research. While all three states have experienced histories of out-migrations, they differ in their political histories and demographic composition, and this is why Danielson specifically selected them as case studies. The state of Oaxaca, where the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) ruled in an authoritarian style, serves as the point of departure for his research. Conversely, Guanajuato and Zacatecas were sites where opposition parties, the National Action Party (PAN) and Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), respectively, made inroads against the PRI.

Pushing back on the idea that the United States has been an incubator of democratic thought and praxis in Mexico, Danielson argues that the political presence and economic influence of Mexican migrants “do not uniformly enhance local democracy” (p. 6). Rather, the political and economic activity of migrants serves as “an indication that the PAN (and to a lesser extent the PRD) has succeeded in capturing the ‘migrant sector’ in a new iteration of the old corporatist mode of incorporation that prevailed under the hegemonic party system of the PRI in postrevolutionary Mexico” (p. 193). Transnational migration and its role in democratization, he explains, cannot just be seen as a subaltern form of resistance, a “transnationalism from below,” as he puts it; rather, the process of crafting democracy also must be viewed in relation to the people and institutions with greater political capital, the architects of a “transnationalism from above” (p. 19).

Quantifiable statistics frame *Emigrants Get Political*. Since 1995, monies sent by migrants to Latin America have increased threefold and, to Mexico, fourfold. After the Great Recession, more Mexicans have returned to Mexico than have migrated to the United States, even after dual citizenship was codified into Mexican law in 2005. Yet a broader but more implicit historical narrative undergirds Danielson’s research questions. As the ruling party, the PRI and its predecessors, the National Revolutionary Party (PNR) and Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRM), controlled Mexican politics between 1929 and 2000, thereby guaranteeing that members of these parties held the office of the presidency through some combination of clientelism, electoral fraud, and violence. These same practices, made in the name of fulfilling the aims of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, also permeated countless governorships and municipal positions, the institutional locations examined in *Emigrants Get Political*. The election of the PAN’s Vicente Fox as president in 2000 has typically been interpreted as having signaled the end of PRI rule and Mexico’s embrace of democracy. The weakening of the state through drug wars and neoliberal policies, especially after the economic downturn in 2008, have pointed toward a broader crisis in Mexican society that complicates the nation’s supposed embrace of democracy. In this sense, Danielson’s research elucidates some of the trans-local party-based dynamics that scholars of Mexico typically overlook as they grapple with the most recent iteration of post-revolutionary politics.

To understand the politicization of emigrants who become mayors of their municipalities, Danielson contends that we must understand the 3x1 Program. This remittance program is a

coordinated financial matching initiative where three levels of government—the municipal, state, and federal—match the monies that pre-selected migrant organizations in the United States send home. This “prepolitical” indicator helps contextualize the more direct political forms of migrant engagement, whether through visits, repatriation, or even engagement in local politics after returning to Mexico (p. 35). To chart its importance, Danielson analyzes the rate of remittances in relation to per capita gross municipal product (GMP) and various other factors that may contribute to collective action north of the border: the historical roots of migration, altruism, and community solidarity. To justify the relevance of this perspective, he notes that remittances are five times more impactful in gross state products than at the national level, where they contribute less than three percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). One of Danielson’s more interesting findings, which profoundly affects the rest of the research, is that the poorest municipalities, which either lack the history of out migration or do not have the inability to make the political connections necessary for the 3x1 Program to thrive, do not receive as much of an economic benefit from remittances as communities with larger GMPs.

The majority of *Emigrants Get Political*, chapters 3 through 8, highlights the political ascension of emigrant mayors in six municipalities in Oaxaca and three each in Guanajuato and Zacatecas. Danielson astutely proves that we cannot pigeonhole the political ideologies and modes of engagement of these mayors into neat juxtapositions of resistance and cooptation, individual and collective action, democratization and authoritarianism. The full spectrum of political possibilities needs to be acknowledged so that the structures of political power that emerge locally, regionally, nationally, and transnationally can be seen within a single multivariate system. Looking empirically at data regarding emigrant relationships with the dominant political class and migrant networks, Danielson draws a sweeping range of conclusions: the presence of migrant mayors typically indicated a dependence on remittances, but the presence of remittances did not increase the likelihood of the mayor being a former migrant; migrant mayors tended to have more socio-economic privilege than their constituents but less of it than non-migrant mayors; and migrants were more oppositional in Oaxaca, where the PRI controlled politics, than they were in Guanajuato and Zacatecas, where other political parties occupied the governor’s mansions and were more receptive to integrating migrant actors into their clientelist networks. Danielson concludes that migration did not facilitate democratization but rather the extension of political cooptation: PRI authoritarianism had been destroyed, even destabilizing Oaxacan society, but the corporatist politics that sustained its single-party rule for more than seventy years remained unscathed, built into the political repertoires of the PRI, PAN, and PRD.

Danielson’s empiricism simultaneously gives *Emigrants Get Political* its greatest strengths and weaknesses. Methodological discussions of bivariate and multivariate approaches, extensive literature reviews, and data analysis with t-tests will interest scholars of comparative politics but will likely force audiences in history and anthropology, for instance, to look elsewhere to understand the important questions he answers. Moreover, students not versed in statistics, comparative politics, and Mexican history would have a steep learning curve to unpack the book’s dense analysis. Danielson also misses several opportunities to expand his audience and give life to the migrant mayors he interviewed. He spent five months in Oaxaca as well as two more in both Guanajuato and Zacatecas. Yet, his informants are surprisingly absent: their words are “data for the specific biographical cases” (p. 101). A few short quotes, rarely more than a phrase, pepper his discussion of their political biographies in chapter 5. For example, the political biography of San Miguel Tlacotepec’s Arturo Pimental Salas focuses on his political

capacity after having organized workers in Northern Mexico and California. Yet, Danielson quickly passes over Pimental Salas's role in the anti-PRI protests of 1968 and his training as a teacher. Accordingly, Danielson misses the opportunity to discuss the 2006 Oaxacan teacher strike that the PRI violently repressed, a historical moment that probably shaped at least some of Pimental Salas's political motivations (and, if it did not, a discussion of its irrelevance would have been equally interesting). Deeper inquiries into the contingencies of historical biography would have given voice to his interviewees, helped provide a greater historical context for his questions about democracy and the decline of PRI hegemony, and made the text more accessible to scholars in other disciplines.

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