



Understanding transnational political involvement among Senegalese migrants: The role of acculturation preferences and perceived discrimination



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ABSTRACT

In political debates, migrants' political involvement in their countries of origin and successful adaptation to receiving countries are often portrayed as incompatible. We address this concern by examining the links between acculturation preferences, perceived discrimination, and migrants' transnational political involvement in their country of origin. In line with collective action research, a cross-sectional questionnaire study ($N=84$) among Senegalese migrants in Paris (France) and Geneva (Switzerland) examined three pathways to transnational political involvement (motivations and actual behaviour). Perceived discrimination, the *grievances* pathway, was positively related to both transnational motivations (but only when desire to adopt the receiving culture was low) and political behaviour in Senegal. Desire to adopt the culture of the receiving society as an acculturation preference, the *embeddedness* pathway, was also positively linked to transnational motivations and political behaviour. Finally, desire to maintain the culture of origin as an acculturation preference—the *collective identification* pathway—was unrelated to transnational political involvement in countries of origin and adaptation to receiving societies. We discuss the pivotal role of political psychology in bringing together acculturation psychology and transnationalism studies.

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1. Introduction

The political involvement of migrants is a sensitive topic in contemporary democracies. On the one hand, the conditions for enabling political participation in receiving countries through voting rights or naturalisation are debated. On the other hand, migrants' political involvement in their countries of origin raises doubts about loyalty to the receiving country. Concerns about the compatibility of such involvement with migrants' adaptation have been expressed. To address such concerns, during its first session held in Brussels, the [Global Forum on Migration and Development \(2007\)](#) invited the research community to study the links between the adaptation of migrant communities in receiving countries and their transnational activities related to development in home countries. The current paper aims to shed light on this question by examining how the ties migrants seek with and the way they are treated by the receiving country, as well as their relationship with the

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country of origin, link to transnational political involvement. Social psychological acculturation and collective action literature can contribute to the debate on the compatibility of migrants' adaptation and transnational activities by investigating the relationship between acculturation preferences, perceived discrimination, and transnational political involvement.

Research on transnational behaviour has shown how socio-structural factors (e.g., length of residence, employment) and social skills acquisition (e.g., language skills) relate to affiliations and patterns of exchange, including political involvement in countries of origin. While social psychological research has for over two decades examined the psychological and inter-group outcomes of migrant acculturation within receiving countries (for overviews, [Brown & Zagefka, 2011](#); [Sam & Berry, 2006](#)), links between acculturation preferences and political behaviour in countries of origin have received little attention (see [van Oudenhoven & Ward, 2013](#); [van Oudenhoven, Ward, & Masgoret, 2006](#)). To fill this gap, we use notions from collective action research to bridge transnationalism and acculturation research. We first define transnational motivations and political behaviour. Second, we summarise the debate on the compatibility between adaptation in receiving countries and transnational political involvement in countries of origin. Third, drawing on research on antecedents of collective action, we argue that transnational political involvement is determined by perceived discrimination and acculturation preferences, defined as grievances, embeddedness, and collective identification. We examine our assumptions in a cross-sectional study conducted among Senegalese migrants in Switzerland and France recruited through Senegalese associations.

1.1. *Transnational motivations and political behaviour in countries of origin*

The growing interdisciplinary field of transnationalism studies has defined transnationalism as increased family, social, cultural, religious, economic, and political interlinkages between people across the borders of nation-states (e.g., [Basch, Glick Schiller, & Blanc-Szanton, 1994](#), [Kivisto, 2001](#); [Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007](#); [Portes, 2001](#); [Vertovec, 2009](#)). Such links have existed, to various degrees, throughout history but are now facilitated by improved transportation, technology, and telecommunication.

Transnational political involvement can be divided into *motivations* to transnational activities (labelled commitment or capabilities) and *actual* transnational activities ([Al-Ali, Black, & Koser, 2001](#); [Bloch, 2008](#)). Transnational motivations refer to the abilities and willingness to engage in, and dedication to political, economic, and social activities in countries of origin ([Al-Ali et al., 2001](#)). For example, the desire to contribute to the development of countries of origin depicts transnational motivations (e.g., [Bloch, 2008](#)). These motivations promote collaboration and solidarity within migrant communities in receiving countries as well as mobilisation for a common purpose, for example through participation in migrant associations ([Faist, 2008](#)). Indeed, migrant associations are seen as central actors in the development of countries of origin. In the current research, we examine solidarity- and development-related motivations to participate in migrant associations in receiving countries.

Transnational political behaviour, in turn, consists of migrants' actual electoral and non-electoral political activities in their countries of origin. Electoral activities include for example membership in a political party in the country of origin, participation in political campaigning and monetary contributions to these parties, whereas non-electoral activities include membership in non-governmental local associations (NGOs) and monetary contributions to these associations ([Guarnizo, Portes, & Haller, 2003](#)). Non-electoral activities are also considered to have political force to the extent that they influence governments of countries of origin for example by determining which projects in local communities receive financial support. These facets of transnational political behaviour are examined in the current research.

1.2. *The relationship between transnational behaviour and adaptation*

The relationships between transnational cross-border political involvement and migrants' adaptation to the receiving country have been debated in academic migration research. According to assimilation theory, immigrants are expected to adapt to the cultural and economic systems of the receiving country and over time shed the cultural practices of their countries of origin (e.g., [Alba & Nee, 1997](#); see [Erdal & Oeppen, 2013](#); [Kivisto, 2001](#) for a discussion). From this perspective, adaptation and transnational activities are antagonistic. Maintaining strong, in particular political ties with one's country of origin supposedly puts migrants in a position of dual loyalty that will impede adaptation in the receiving country and ultimately marginalise migrants. Transnationalism scholars have contested this vision and argued that transnational political involvement and adaptation are not mutually exclusive, but compatible (see [Erdal & Oeppen, 2013](#); [Guarnizo et al., 2003](#); [Portes, 2003](#); [Smith & Bakker, 2008](#); [Tamaki, 2011](#)) Indeed, pursuing transnational activities in home countries requires financial and relational resources. Acquisition of these resources is facilitated through adapting to the receiving culture by joining the job market and by seeking connections with members of the receiving culture, in addition to compatriots (e.g., [Al-Ali et al., 2001](#); [Snel, Engbersen, & Leekers, 2006](#)).

In the transnationalism literature, *adaptation* to the receiving country has typically been assessed with language knowledge, length of residence in or citizenship of the receiving country (this differs from the notion of sociocultural adaptation that refers to cognitive and behavioural dimensions of adaptation, see [Ward & Kennedy, 1999](#)). These factors have been demonstrated to positively relate to transnational political behaviour (e.g., [Bermudez, 2010](#); [Guarnizo et al., 2003](#); [Lacroix, 2009](#); [Portes, 2003](#); [Tamaki, 2011](#)). Other *socio-structural* factors such as gender, employment or education also affect participation in transnational activities (see [Carling & Hoelscher, 2013](#)). For example, among Dominican and Salvadoran migrants in the U.S., men, higher educated, and those with large social networks were more likely to engage in transnational political

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