



Diaspora policies in comparison: An application of the Emigrant Policies Index (EMIX) for the Latin American and Caribbean region



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ABSTRACT

In this paper we present the Emigrant Policies Index (EMIX), an index that summarizes the emigrant policies developed by 22 Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) states. In recent decades sending states have increasingly adopted policies to keep economic, political or social links with their emigrants. These “emigrant policies” vary in scope and nature between different countries and include measures as diverse as dual citizenship policies, programs to stimulate remittances, the right to vote in the home country from abroad, and the creation of government agencies to administer emigrant issues. The EMIX proposes a useful tool to condense and compare a wide spectrum of policies across countries. Its development involved the collection of official data, as well as a critical review of secondary literature and input from experts as complementary sources. Through a rigorous framework for constructing the index, we show how emigrant policies can be aggregated to measure the overall degree and volume of emigrant policies in LAC states. The results of the EMIX portray a region that has indeed made serious efforts to assist their diaspora in the states of reception and to encourage their involvement in the political, economic and social fabric in the states of origin. The results, however, also reveal great variation in the emigrant policies and the administrative setting adopted by LAC states.

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1. Introduction

Data on the migrant flows in Latin American and Caribbean countries show a complex picture: the region deals with immigration, emigration, transit migration, return migration, and trans-border livelihoods. Still, the overwhelming focus is on emigration as the key flow and primary interest of states in the region. Correspondingly, there has been a boom in literature on diaspora policies or diaspora governance in case studies and small-n studies. But to which degree are findings from case studies generalizable to the whole region? How representative is the well-studied relation of the Mexican state to its diaspora (for example [Délano, 2013](#); [Fitzgerald, 2006](#)) of other Latin American countries in the degree and manner in which the state has engaged emigrants? To what extent can we speak about Latin American and Caribbean countries sharing orientations in their emigrant policies or, in a more basic sense, developing a dense web of emigrant policies?

The broad literature on diasporas' agency in state-diaspora

relations ([Ancien, Boyle, & Kitchin, 2009](#); [Bauböck & Faist, 2010](#); [Chen, Racine, & Collins, 2014](#); [Ho, Hickey, & Yeoh, 2015](#); [Margheritis, 2016, 2011](#)), tends to identify state policy making in this field mainly with a few concrete policy areas such as external voting rights, dual citizenship and remittances ([Burgess, 2014](#); [Collyer, 2013](#); [Gammage, 2006](#)). Studies on emigrant policies in particular (also known as “diaspora policies” or “diaspora engagement policies”) differ in the number and kinds of policies they consider relevant. More importantly, they differ in the range of cases they cover, and, most significantly, the theoretical insights they apply. A dense web of hypotheses on the contemporary interactions between state and emigrants has developed from several in-depth studies ([Délano, 2011](#); [Margheritis, 2011, 2014](#); [Ragazzi, 2014a, 2014b](#)), studies with comparative perspectives ([Lafleur, 2011](#); [Martiniello & Lafleur, 2008](#); [Délano & Gamlen, 2014](#); [Ragazzi, 2014a, 2014b](#); [Collyer, 2013](#)) and theoretical studies on the new conceptions of statehood and citizenship ([Bauböck, 2007, 2009](#); [Itzigsohn, 2000](#)). What this fast-developing literature lacks so far is an understanding of emigrant policies that derives inductively from a systematic collection of policies for a whole region, allowing different profiles to emerge and display variations (i.e. refraining from selecting by outcome) before organizing and

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explaining those variations with theory. In this paper we aim at filling this gap by building an Index of Emigrant Policies (henceforth EMIX) that covers 22 Latin American and Caribbean countries of very different migration profiles, and not only the “usual suspects” (e.g. Mexico). The EMIX measures the degree of adoption of emigrant policies in the following countries: Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, México, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela. The EMIX findings reveal that there is significant variation in the LAC region regarding the degree of adoption of emigrant policies. Countries such as Brazil, Ecuador or Mexico have developed almost all the emigrant policies canvassed by the EMIX, but some countries have minimal focus on emigrant policies (e.g. Belize or Panama). More interestingly, the index reveals that countries follow diverse strategies to keep or create links with their non-resident citizens, adopting certain concrete policies while disregarding others (for instance, developing social protection programs for emigrants instead of policies to incentivize remittances). In addition, the EMIX makes evident how LAC states have developed very different administrative settings to manage emigrant policies. While some countries have created specific administrative units at the highest levels of their executive hierarchy (e.g. Ecuador), others do not have a dedicated office for emigrant policies. Finally, the EMIX makes a crucial contribution to the very conceptualization of the concept of *emigrant policies* and to its measurement, serving both the academic and the policy communities by providing transparent information on the emigrant policies of this region. The systematization required for such an effort of index building addresses shortcomings of previous studies on emigrant policies by delimiting and defining exhaustively their dimensions. We also contribute to the literature on indices for migration policies by completing the often neglected side of emigrant integration policies as it contrasts with immigrant inclusion and integration.

The paper is structured as follows. In the [next section](#) we explain the rationale for constructing this index. Then, we discuss the concepts (e.g. “emigrant policies”, “state of origin”, “state of reception”) that delineate and inform the ordering of the constitutive policy items. Then, we elaborate in detail on the framework of the EMIX and its components, subcomponents and attributes. The [fourth section](#) presents the data that we used, providing details of its collection and codification process, as well as the variables that compose the index, including their measurement levels and descriptive statistics. We then broadly summarize the findings. Later, we present an analysis of the statistical coherence of the framework, the overall statistical reliability of the index, and test the effect of the assumptions used to construct it, namely the weights and aggregation rules. Finally, we conclude the paper with some reflections on the limitations of the EMIX and its potential applications beyond this paper.

2. Theoretical framework

Scholars and international organizations have recently highlighted how states develop policies to engage their emigrants in the state of origin, piloting new migrant membership practices and facilitating the transnational political involvement of migrants (Agunias, Rannveig, & Kathleen Newland International Organization for Migration and Migration Policy Institute, 2012; Bauböck & Faist, 2010; Délano & Gamlen, 2014; Gamlen, 2014; Iskander, 2010; Lum, Nikolko, Samy, & Carment, 2013; OECD, 2015; Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Rhodes & Harutyunyan, 2010).

Case studies, small-n comparative studies that look into an ever-growing catalog of policies and theories on new state-emigrant

relations have dominated the literature on emigrant policies (cfr. Margheritis, 2011; Délano, 2013; Escobar, 2007; Hoffmann, 2010; Ragazzi, 2014a, 2014b; Mahieu, 2014; Shain, 1999; Bauböck, 2008; Bravo, 2014; Bermúdez, 2014; Padilla, 2011; Margheritis, 2014; Crosa, 2014; Hinojosa Gordonova & Alfonso, n.d.). However, this is not to say that rigorous cross-case empirical research is lacking. As we will discuss below, there is already excellent comparative research available, some of which has been published in this very journal. What is lacking, we find, is a descriptive and broad-based survey of the existing policy landscape that precedes theoretical interpretation.

In this paper we want to take a step back from the theory: we want to firstly reflect on the emigrant policies that already exist and their variation, to only later proceed with expectations about the variation across countries based on different migration profiles. To spark this reflection we include cases with different migration profiles in a large region of the world. Rather than letting theory pre-determine which policies we look at, we focus on conceptualizing the full array of what we found can be defined as emigrant policies. We think that a strong comparative angle on the wide range of policies found will inform a more rigorous theoretical development in the literature. An index helps us achieve this.

In the last two decades various scholars have made inroads into constructing datasets and indices to systematize migration policies. This has happened mostly in the field of study of immigration, integration and access-to-citizenship policies (see Boucher et al., 2012; Cerna, 2009; Helbling, Bjerre, Römer, & Zobel, 2014; Ruhs, 2011; Thielemann, 2012; Vink & Bauböck, 2013). Most of these efforts have a geographic and thematic focus that reveals a receiving-country bias in the subjects/objects of research: they primarily include Western European, OECD and a few other –typically Anglo-Saxon– countries, and deal primarily with a particular subset of immigration policies (asylum, labor migration, high-skilled migration, etc.). Some notable exceptions are the EUDO project hosted at EUI, which recently expanded to the Americas, and the DEMIG project at the IMI, University of Oxford, which focused on two aspects related to emigration policy: regulation of outflows and conditions of citizenship loss (see Haas & Vezzoli, 2014).

Parallel to this, comparative research focusing on a wide range of policies developed by states of origin to engage with citizens living abroad (i.e. what we understand in this paper as “emigrant policies”) has developed greatly, ordering the well-studied cases into typologies around theoretical models of citizenship (Bauböck, 2003) or as types of sending-state – diaspora relationships (Collyer & Vathi, 2007; Smith, 2003). Attempting a more inductive approach, some pioneer systematic cross-case comparative studies have made a contribution by in clustering states according to their emigrant policies: Ragazzi (2014a, 2014b), Gamlen (2006) and Gamlen, Cummings, Vaaler, & Rossouw (2013) have taken into account an ample set of emigrant policies across countries and the institutions that direct them. We want to continue on the trajectory set by these studies and, in some senses, correct them, addressing the problems noted by Chen et al. (2014) regarding the “black hole of unspecified concepts with regard to how such kind of relationship can be theorized” (p. 6). Without such conceptual groundwork, we find that the theoretical lenses used by Ragazzi and Gamlen, as illuminating as they are about the relations between state and diaspora, narrow the field of vision before we know how far-reaching the horizon of emigrant policies can be.

In his article published in *Political Geography*, Gamlen (2008) first outlines two main “diaspora mechanisms”, namely: “diaspora building”, which included policies to cultivate and recognize the diaspora, and “diaspora integration”, which condensed the extension of rights and the extraction of obligations. He classified

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