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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
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The Political Incorporation of Children of Refugees: The Experience of Central Americans and
Southeast Asians in the U.S.

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Political Science

by

Kenneth Chaiprasert

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Louis DeSipio, Chair
Professor Carole Uhlaner
Professor Linda Vo

2016

DEDICATION

To

my parents and committee

in recognition of their guidance and encouragement

my most heartfelt gratitude and appreciation

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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Teaching Awards and Distinctions

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- 2013 As a Ph.D. student, competitively selected to be a Pedagogical Fellow and recipient of the Pedagogical Fellowship from the Teaching, Learning & Technology Center (TLTC), University of California, Irvine.
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- 2013 Co-Instructor of a professional development workshop on teaching for the School of Social Sciences, University of California, Irvine
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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Political Incorporation of Children of Refugees: The Experience of Central Americans and Southeast Asians in the U.S.

By

Kenneth Chaiprasert

Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

University of California, Irvine, 2016

Professor Louis DeSipio, Chair

Many refugees experienced unique traumas associated with the refugee context. This unique refugee experience might affect the politics of the children of refugees who are born and/or raised in the U.S. Understanding the impact of the traumatic refugee background on the political incorporation of children of refugees will become increasingly important as more of them come of age and participate in politics. My dissertation addresses the effects of the refugee background on the political incorporation of 1.5 and 2nd generation children of refugees living in the U.S., especially the children of Southeast Asian and Central American refugees, two very large groups of refugees that fled political turmoil and sought refuge in the U.S. during the 1970's and 1980's. Through quantitative analysis of large-N survey data and a number of targeted interviews with individuals from the Cambodian American and Salvadoran American communities, I find the following: although it is often hard for the refugee background to have any political effect, whenever it does have an effect, it tends to heighten the political engagement as well as the unconventional/grassroots political participation of the younger generations (the 1.5 and 2nd generation children) vis-à-vis the parental home-country and U.S. contexts.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Political Incorporation of Refugees and Their Children in the U.S.

Throughout the 20th Century, the U.S. became a refuge to thousands who fled war, violence, and persecution from regions such as Europe, the Caribbean, Southeast Asia, Central America, and Africa. Now into the second decade of the 21st Century, violence in Central America, disorder in North Africa, and the civil war in Syria have led to new waves of people fleeing their home-countries—all of which has caused the U.S. and the rest of the world to turn their attention again to the issue of refugees. Although there is a lot of scholarship on immigrant assimilation in America, the intergenerational political incorporation¹ of refugees in America needs much more scholarly attention. It is well documented how many of these refugees experienced distinctive traumas associated with the refugee context. For instance, many refugees were abruptly forced out from their home-countries for political reasons, experienced a perceived (and sometimes actual) loss of all connection to the home-country, and desire political reform in the home-country in order to repatriate someday. Many refugees were also pawns in a greater geopolitical game between the U.S. and other nations. As a result, the U.S. government often became directly involved in refugee immigration and settlement. As a consequence of these close connections to politics, refugees often are very active in home-country politics and American government. Such unique facets of the refugee background should affect the politics of the children of refugees who were born and/or raised in the U.S.

¹ I use the term political incorporation as Lee et al. (2006) use it: an umbrella term that “encompasses various processes that relate to how immigrants gain political voice in the United States or find their political opportunities constrained” (15). Political incorporation includes not only “a wide range of political activities, institutional behaviors, and measures of civic engagement limited to only U.S. citizens”, but also various informal and “transnational political engagements” (Lee et al. 2006, 14-15).

My dissertation examines the effects that the refugee background/context might have on the political incorporation of the 1.5 generation (U.S.-raised) and 2nd generation (U.S.-born and raised) children of refugees. Using quantitative analysis and qualitative interviews, I explore how the overall refugee background affects the 1.5 and 2nd generations' political activities vis-à-vis the parental home-country as well as the U.S. With regard to the qualitative interviews, special emphasis will be placed on Cambodian Americans and Salvadoran Americans because many of them have refugee backgrounds, their political incorporation has not been extensively studied thus far, and they have sizable populations in the Southern California region where I live. My overall theory is that the distinctive refugee background will help to heighten the political involvement among 1.5 and 2nd generation children of refugees in terms of both home-country politics and American politics.²

The issues to be examined in my dissertation will become increasingly important as more and more children of refugees come of age and become a part of the American polity. Because these children of refugees constitute a growing segment of the ethnic minority population in the U.S., the findings of my dissertation will help add to the scholarship on U.S. ethnic politics as well as U.S. political participation in general. In addition, my dissertation may also be of interest to anyone studying American immigration law, political institutions, and foreign policy because much of the refugee experience (e.g. classification, admission, reception, and settlement of refugees) often depends on legal definitions in immigration law and foreign policy decision-making in the executive branch. My dissertation will help to shed more light on how decisions made in these areas may affect the politics of refugee descendants growing up in the U.S.

² I use the term involvement in politics or political involvement to mean a person's overall engagement, association, and participation in politics as well as a sense of being or feeling closely connected to politics.

In order to fully understand my theory and put it into context, the refugee experience and the process of immigrant political incorporation in America need to be understood. What follows is a short background exposition about the refugee experience in the U.S. as well as a brief look at the current scholarship on how immigrants assimilate into the American social and political mainstream.

Refugees in America: History, Experience, and Overall Immigration Contexts

Refugees have a distinctive immigration experience. Rather than wanting to leave the home-country, refugees are forced out from their home-country oftentimes because of war and persecution (Zake 2009; Aykroyd 2004; Rose 2005). They would have been perfectly content to stay in the home-country had external circumstances like war, political turmoil, violence, and persecution not forced them to leave the country. For instance, Hungarian refugees were forced to flee from Hungary to escape violent Soviet crackdowns during the 1950's (Zake 2009; Bon Tempo 2008; Zucker and Zucker 1987; Loescher and Scanlan 1986). Many Cuban refugees escaped from Cuba starting in the late 1950's because of the communist takeover and oppression by the Castro regime (Zucker and Zucker 1987; Loescher and Scanlan 1986; Eckstein 2009). Southeast Asian refugees were forced to leave their home-countries starting in the mid-1970's due to the violent persecution/oppression by the communist forces in the aftermath of the bloody wars in the region (most well-known of which was the Vietnam War) (Zucker and Zucker 1987; Loescher and Scanlan 1986; Do 1999; Freeman 1995; Ong and Meyer 2004; Le 2009; Valverde 2002; Kibria 1993; Chan 2004; Cahn and Stansell 2010; Tang 2002; Lee 2010a). Central American refugees fled from bloody civil wars and violent governmental persecution/oppression during the late 1970's to early 1980's (Zucker and Zucker 1987; Loescher and Scanlan 1986; Hernandez 2004; North and Simmons 1999; Castillo 1999; Cordova 2005).

Finding themselves suddenly having to flee their home-country, many refugees abruptly settle in the U.S. without any preparation; they often speak no English, are unfamiliar with the U.S. in general, and suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (Harles 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 1990). Indeed, in light of the violent, deadly contexts which forced them to leave their home-countries, the emigration and immigration process can be incredibly traumatic for refugees, and many refugees experience post-traumatic stress disorder. For example, Cambodian refugees suffer from intense post-traumatic stress syndrome after having witnessed the deaths of at least 1.5 million to 2 million Cambodians (about one quarter of Cambodia's total population) by execution, unspeakable acts of torture, forced labor, starvation, and disease—one of the worst cases of auto-genocide in human history—at the hands of the communist Khmer Rouge regime (Kiernan 2008).

Furthermore, because refugees were forced out of their home-countries because of war as well as political violence and oppression, refugees are more likely than voluntary immigrants to continue to long for their home-country which they feel they have lost, and they dream of one day returning to their home-country when the situation in their home-country becomes more opportune (Zake 2009; Aykroyd 2004; Alba and Nee 2003). Case studies of many 1st generation refugee communities attest to this lingering desire to return to the home-country. For instance, 1st generation Cuban refugees “would choose to leave [the U.S.] if Castro's communist government came to an end” (Aykroyd 2004, 74). As Cuban American Alex Cambert once reported on the *Good Morning America* television show, “My father came from Cuba for what he thought was a temporary stay, and is still hoping for the demise of Castro” (Aykroyd 2004, 73-74). Likewise, 1st generation Vietnamese refugees often repeat the refrain “the boat that took us out of (Viet Nam) will one day take us home”, which illustrates how the “prospects of

returning home” are still on their minds (Le 2009, 189). 1st generation Hmong refugees similarly reveal that the “home to which the older Hmong dream of returning...is prewar Laos”, and that they still “dreamed of Laos every night and had never once dreamed of America” (Fadiman 1997, 205). According to a Minnesota survey, only 10% of Hmong refugees polled said “they were certain they would spend the rest of their lives in the United States; the rest were either certain or hopeful that they would die in Laos” (Fadiman 1997, 205). Similarly, many Salvadoran refugees who fled from the civil war in El Salvador believed for a long time that their stay in the U.S. would be temporary, that naturalization in the U.S. would mean betrayal to the Salvadoran motherland, and that they would repatriate once the political turmoil/bloodshed ended in El Salvador (Coutin 2000; Cordova 2005; Landolt et al. 1999).

Therefore, refugees often have a preoccupation with the home-country and a persistent desire to repatriate as soon as political conditions in the home-country change for the better. Because of this, many refugees pay very close attention to politics in their home-country, thereby making their involvement in home-country politics very intense (Alba and Nee 2003; Shain 1994-1995; Portes and Rumbaut 1990). Thus, 1st generation Cuban refugees used their political efforts to promote “their anti-Castro mission which they refused to concede...to debilitate the Cuban government to the point of collapse” (Eckstein 2009, 89). Vietnamese refugees’ political aspirations were often designed to “destabilize the Vietnamese government, incite the Vietnamese people to rebel against the regime, and promote democracy in Viet Nam” so that they could finally return to the home-country (Le 2009, 196-197). Hmong refugees of the 1st generation donate millions of dollars to support the resistance fighters who could topple the Laotian communist government and enable them to finally return to their home-country (Vang 2009; Alisa 2007). Salvadoran refugees of the 1st generation focused on establishing

committees/organizations in the U.S. to raise funds for their revolutionary, anti-government, political party in El Salvador in hope of achieving total political victory there and then repatriating (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001; Coutin 2000; Cordova 2005; Itzigsohn 2000; Landolt et al. 1999).

Therefore, the traumatic refugee context is heavily infused with home-country political preoccupations. Home-country political activism is often part-and-parcel of the refugee background. Nevertheless, the close connection between politics and the refugee background is not simply relegated to home-country concerns. The refugee background is so often closely implicated with American politics and the dealings of the U.S. government. This is yet another facet of the extremely close relationship between refugees and politics, in this case, U.S. politics and U.S. governmental interests.

The U.S. and refugees have had a peculiarly close relationship throughout much of the 20th Century. Unlike for other immigrants who came to the U.S., American politics and American political institutions were often directly involved with refugees from the very outset of their emigration. Beginning in the wake World War II, the refugee began to gain prominence in U.S. immigration policy. The rise and fall of Nazi Germany and the rise of the communist Soviet Union created a flood of European refugees (Aykroyd 2004). Congress initially reacted to these refugee emergencies through the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 and the Refugee Relief Act (Aleinikoff et al. 2008; Aykroyd 2004; Tucker et al. 1990). Later, the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 contained an emergency provision which gave the U.S. executive branch discretionary authority to “parole” any alien into the U.S. for reasons “deemed strictly in the public interest” (Aleinikoff et al. 2008, 161-187; Aykroyd 2004, 31; Tucker et al. 1990, 108). The language of the parole power was broad enough to permit U.S. presidents to use parole to unilaterally grant

entry into the U.S. to immense groups of refugees starting with the Hungarian refugees during the mid-1950's, and soon paroling refugees into the U.S. became the primary tool to respond to broad refugee emergencies in the world such as the Cuban and Southeast Asian refugee episodes (Bon Tempo 2008; Ford 1979; Loescher and Scanlan 1986; Sutter 1990; Zucker and Zucker 1987; Le 2009).

Thereafter, the American government became very interested in (and had a direct role in) accepting refugees into the U.S. Refugees became a key geopolitical tool for the U.S. during the Cold War. The U.S. government's acceptance of refugees who fled from communism would show the world that communism was a failure; in other words, by coming to the U.S., the refugees were "voting with their feet" for freedom (Zucker and Zucker 1987, 104-105; Haines 2010, 3-5). Thus, the admission and support of refugees became a key interest in American politics. U.S. presidents throughout the latter half of the 20th Century took the lead in announcing the admission of refugees into the U.S., and Congress then followed suit with legislation to recognize and assist the refugees following their admission into the U.S. Thus, it was this confluence of presidential executive power in immigration law and foreign policy calculus which made it possible for waves of refugees to enter the U.S. from Hungary during the mid-1950's in the aftermath of the Soviet crackdown in Hungary, from Cuba beginning in the late 1950's in the aftermath of the communist takeover, and from Southeast Asia since the mid to late 1970's following the communist takeovers of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia (Zake 2009; Loescher and Scanlan 1986; Bon Tempo 2008; Zucker and Zucker 1987; Sutter 1990; Do 1999; Freeman 1995; Le 2009; Ong and Meyer 2004; Valverde 2002; Kibria 1993).

These refugees then would be granted official refugee status by the U.S. government which entitled them to stay in the U.S. with access to various governmental benefits (Le 2009;

Do 1999; Freeman 1995; Ong and Meyer 2004; Loescher and Scanlan 1986; Sutter 1990; Zucker and Zucker 1987). Such refugee status meant that the U.S. government would become directly involved with refugees by giving public assistance to them and supervising where they would settle in the U.S. (often trying to disperse refugee populations throughout the U.S. as much as possible) (Aykroyd 2004; Harles 1993; Alba and Nee 2003; Fuchs 1990).³ Many of these refugees were entitled to the same means-tested social programs as American citizens, programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children, Supplemental Security Income, Medicaid, and Food Stamps, as well as special refugee programs like Refugee Cash Assistance, Refugee Medical Assistance, English language classes, and job training (Vo 2008; Kibria 1993).

In light of how the American government has been so closely implicated in refugee immigration and settlement, it is not surprising to learn of various examples of refugees being so intertwined with the American political system. Due to the U.S. government's involvement with refugee assistance and settlement, many refugees are very vigilant about governmental programs. For instance, Hmong Americans have been vocal in protesting cuts to welfare and special refugee programs, and they successfully lobbied the federal government to ease naturalization for Lao-Hmong veterans (Alisa 2007; Mote 2004). The foreign policy dimension in the U.S. government's dealings with refugees has often led to a close, symbiotic relationship between the American political establishment and refugee communities residing in the U.S. For example, nearly all levels of American government would officially—albeit sometimes only symbolically—sanction or endorse various home-country political objectives of refugee communities. Examples abound of Cuban Americans, Vietnamese Americans, and Cambodian

³ Although the U.S. government tried to disperse refugee settlements throughout the U.S., many refugees initiated secondary migrations to locales in the U.S. which suited them better (usually in terms of climate), thereby creating their own ethnic enclaves in the U.S. (Vo 2008; Freeman 1989; Do 1999; Kibria 1993; Chan 2004).

Americans gaining governmental support at the local, state, and federal levels for their opposition against their home-country governments (see Eckstein 2009; Lieu 2011; Aguilar San-Juan 2009; Phan 2010; Wattanabe 2001; Hein 1995; Schlund-Vials 2012). Within this environment, refugees often take the lead in incorporating themselves into the American political system. Vietnamese Americans have one of the highest citizenship rates of any Asian American group and, when registered to vote, do vote at some of the highest rates compared to any Asian American group (Wong et al. 2011; Collet 2008b; Lien et al. 2004). Similarly, Cuban Americans have some of the highest naturalization rates among any immigrant group, and these naturalized Cuban Americans register to vote at very high rates (DeSipio 1996). Many refugee communities are also very close to American partisan politics as seen in the longstanding, reciprocal/mutualistic relationship between the Republican Party and two refugee communities in particular, Cuban Americans and Vietnamese Americans (Vo 2008; Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner 1991; DeSipio 1996; Wong et al. 2011; Nhi 2011; Lai et al. 2001; Gonzalez-Pando 1998; Eckstein 2009).

One highly visible exception to this overall close relationship between refugees and the U.S. political system are the Central American refugees who came to the U.S. to escape the civil wars that erupted during the early 1980's (Hernandez 2004; Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001; Cordova 2005). The American government labeled them economic migrants who did not legally qualify as being persecuted refugees (Hernandez 2004; Zucker and Zucker 1996; Landolt et al. 1999; Loescher and Scanlan 1986). Consequently, so many Salvadorans and Guatemalans had to enter and settle in the U.S. without any legal status let alone refugee status (Rodriguez 1987). The implicit reason for the American government's refusal of conferring refugee status and assistance to Central Americans was that the Central Americans had fled from regimes which

were anticommunist allies of the U.S. (Coutin 1998; 2000; Hernandez 2004; Rodriguez 2007; Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002; Portes and Rumbaut 1990). Although many Central Americans were denied refugee status by the U.S. government, they often felt that they were *de facto* political refugees since they escaped political violence whether or not they were *de jure* refugee in the eyes of the U.S. government (Cordova 2005; Hernandez 2004; Rodriguez 1987). Nevertheless, the U.S. government was often unsympathetic to these Central Americans' demands to be recognized as political refugees and their efforts to oppose their home-country governments (including efforts to ask the U.S. government to cease financially supporting their home-country governments) (Coutin 2000; 1998; Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001). Therefore, unlike Cuban and Southeast Asian *de jure* refugees who found a receptive and responsive American governmental/political system, many Central American refugees found an American governmental/political system which did not support their refugee cause, refused to grant them refugee status, denied them government assistance, and constantly tried to deport them (Coutin 2000; Hernandez 2004; Cordova 2005; North and Simmons 1999; Castillo 1999; Zucker and Zucker 1996; Landolt et al. 1999; Loescher and Scanlan 1986). Thus, although these refugees from Central America faced somewhat similar *emigration* experiences as the refugees from Cuba and Southeast Asia, they faced a harsher *immigration* and settlement experience at the hands of the U.S. government.

In sum, from emigration to immigration and then to settlement, 1st generation refugees have amassed very unique experiences, many of which are highly political in nature. It is possible that this distinctive refugee background—the overall politically-charged refugee context—could affect the children of refugees who are born and/or raised in the U.S., even possibly molding their political consciousness into the future. As Min Zhou states, “the refugee

experience is a process qualitatively different from that experienced by regular immigrants; the process of exile has become a central family myth which shapes the understanding, behavior, and identity formation of the second generation” (Zhou 2001, 195-196).

Indeed, although children may not perfectly mirror the parents’ politics, parents are an important source of the child’s political socialization (Verba et al. 1995; Jennings and Niemi 1974; 1981; Davies 1965; Achen 2002). As Verba, Scholzman, and Brady state, “having politically involved parents or being exposed to political discussion at home” does account “for the propensity to become active in politics as an adult” and “[e]arly exposure to political stimuli—by virtue of having parents who are politically active in politics or who discuss politics at home—inculcates interest in politics later in life” (Verba et al. 1995, 20, 419, 439). Indeed, by being the “early and the continuing primary source” for the child’s needs, “the child identifies with both parents” when it comes to grasping the political world, and the degree to which the child conforms to the politics of the parents depends on whether the child grows up “in families that are highly politicized” (Davies 1965, 15-16). As detailed above, refugee parents who fled the home-country often remain vigilant, active, and vocal when it comes to home-country politics as well as the politics of their new American host-country. In light of how parents play a role in a child’s political socialization, these refugee political proclivities should be passed down to their children and thus influence the politics of the younger generations who have grown up in the U.S.

There are many accounts of political activism being passed down from refugee parents to their children. For instance, 2nd generation Cuban American Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart’s father made it a priority to raise “his sons to be both ‘100 percent American and 100 percent Cuban’” groomed to be political leaders “in the hope that they would one day return to Cuba and

fulfill his own ambitions there” (Eckstein 2009, 95-96, 124). In other words, the younger generations were “schooled in American values of compromise and tolerance”, but their “parents socialized them to a hardline stance on Cuba under Castro” so that “the first who fled the revolution passed on to their progeny a commitment to Cuba” (Eckstein 2009, 95-96, 124). Likewise, some Vietnamese Americans of the younger generation are also known for carrying on the torch of refugee political activism. As C.N. Le states, “[e]ven though U.S.-raised Vietnamese Americans may not have the same level of attachment to the trauma of the Viet Nam War, they are still likely to share the anti-communist sentiments of their community” and the home-country politics of their parents “may not die out so quickly after all” (Le 2009, 207). Indeed, so many 1.5 and 2nd generation Vietnamese Americans stood alongside their parents to protest the display of the picture of Ho Chi Minh at a Vietnamese American video store in Southern California (Ong and Meyer 2004; Lien et al. 2004; Wong et al. 2011; Collet 2008b). Also, younger generation Hmong Americans have been known to continue a legacy of political activism as evidenced in their attendance at mass protests/rallies in Minnesota and Wisconsin in support of 1st generation Hmong Americans who attempted to destabilize the Laotian government (Vang 2009).

As is discussed above, the trauma and political context surrounding 1st generation refugees is documented, and anecdotal/news reports illustrate instances of political activism persisting among many American-born and raised children of refugees. There is a possibility that the traumatic and politically-charged refugee background could possibly be passed on to the 1.5 and 2nd generation children of refugees who have grown up in America, continuing to influence their political involvement throughout their lives. Nevertheless, there is no systematic study of whether there is actually a refugee effect on the overall political incorporation of

refugee descendants in the U.S. The literature on refugees cited above does not explore this issue, and this lacuna in the scholarship is what this dissertation attempts to address. As will be unveiled in more detail in chapter two, my theory is that there is an independent effect of the refugee context on the political involvement of the 1.5 and 2nd generation children of refugees living in the U.S.

Similarly, the studies on immigrant assimilation (as will be discussed below) also do not investigate the issue of whether there could be an independent effect of the refugee background on the incorporation of refugee descendants into the American societal and political mainstream. Nevertheless, the assimilation scholarship which I will describe below does provide the traditional factors which usually account for the political incorporation of immigrants in America. This scholarship should be understood before proceeding with my dissertation because it will serve as the backdrop that I will test my theory against to determine if there is an independent effect of the refugee background on the political incorporation process of the 1.5 and 2nd generations living in the U.S.

Scholarship on Immigrant Incorporation into American Politics

Several strands of theoretical literature address immigrant incorporation. These include classical assimilation theory, neo-assimilation theory, and segmented assimilation theory. Besides theorizing about immigrant cultural and economic adaptation to the U.S. context, each of these theories contains insights into the political incorporation of immigrants, especially with regard to the transition from home-country politics to mainstream⁴ U.S. politics.

⁴ I use the term mainstream U.S. politics to refer to political activities and issues which are strictly in the domestic American sphere and unrelated to the ancestral home-country.

Classical assimilation theory is the earliest theory to explain immigrant political incorporation. Classical assimilation theory posits that 1st generation immigrants will find U.S. politics too unfamiliar and will continue to be attached to home-country politics (Handlin 1951; 1959). Only the succeeding generations who are U.S.-born, U.S.-educated, and spend most of their lives in the U.S. will increasingly dissociate from their parents' home-country and adopt exclusively American concerns—especially American political concerns (Handlin 1951). The succeeding generations' socioeconomic mobility will enable them to become just like any other American citizen; they will give primacy to the American “host” society and its “American” political concerns, and ethnic politics connected to national origin will lose its salience (Warner and Srole 1945; Gordon 1964; Dahl 1961).

On the other hand, neo-assimilation theory is a more nuanced theory of immigrant incorporation. Neo-assimilation theory contends that classical straight-line assimilation, based on observations of mostly white, European immigrants who entered prior to 1965, is inapplicable to the post-1965 immigrants who were mostly non-white and came from regions such as South and Central America and Asia (Bean and Stevens 2003; Alba and Nee 2003). According to neo-assimilationist scholars, some immigrant groups will assimilate at slower rates than others (Alba and Nee 2003). Low socioeconomic status and discrimination can lead to a heightened sense of ethnicity which can slow assimilation for some immigrant groups such as undocumented Mexican immigrants and blacks (Bean and Stevens 2003). Nonetheless, upward assimilation into the American societal and political mainstream continues to be the inevitable trend among all immigrant groups, and neo-assimilationists discount the idea of segmented assimilation (to be described below) which posits a totally separate—sometimes downward—assimilation trajectory for some immigrant groups (Bean and Stevens 2003; Alba and Nee 2003).

Segmented assimilation theory also challenges classical assimilation theory's applicability to post-1965 immigrants. Proponents of segmented assimilation theory argue that many post-1965 immigrants showed the persistence of ethnic difference and maladaptive socioeconomic outcomes regardless of length of U.S. residence or the passage of generations (Zhou 1997; Portes and Rumbaut 1996). As a result, unlike neo-assimilation theorists who affirm the inevitable—albeit sometimes slow—upward assimilation of immigrant groups, segmented assimilation theorists posit that adaptation processes will not be uniform, but are more *segmented* as a consequence of interactions among family and community resources, consonance between 1st generation and 2nd generation acculturation, and external barriers such as labor market prospects and racial discrimination (Zhou 1997; Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 1996; 2001a).

Important among the external barriers studied by segmented assimilation theorists is racial discrimination (Portes and Rumbaut 2001a). In response to such discrimination, the 2nd generation may choose to embrace their parents' nationality in a form of reactive ethnicity—a reaction away from things American and toward embracing parental immigrant identities and ethnic political mobilization (Portes and Rumbaut 2001a; 2001b). Due to these various contextual configurations, three separate trajectories (or segments) of socioeconomic, cultural, and political assimilation can be the ultimate outcome for 2nd generation immigrants: classical upward assimilation into the white middle-class, downward assimilation into an underclass, and a third assimilation-path where economic advancement accompanies the preservation of the immigrant community's values (Portes and Zhou 1993).

In sum, the foregoing literature provides very useful insight into the ongoing process of immigrant incorporation in America. They give us the primary determinants of how immigrants

and their progeny in America transition from being interested and involved in home-country politics to being interested and involved in U.S. politics. The overall assimilation scholarship cited to above (classical, neo, and segmented) assumes that factors such as resources (especially socioeconomic status and educational attainment), passage of time/generations, and presence of societal and socioeconomic obstacles are enough to account for any immigrant's propensity towards either home-country politics or American politics. Nevertheless, such theories give an overly broad account of immigrants in general. The scholarship usually does not differentiate between voluntary immigrants and refugees. The experience of refugees being pushed out of their home-countries by political unrest/warfare is not explored in detail. This dissertation begins to shed more light on the issue of whether the refugee background passed down from the 1st generation to subsequent/younger generations adds to the younger generations' political activism in home-country politics and U.S. politics. The findings of this dissertation will show whether there is an effect of the refugee background on the political involvement of the 1.5 and 2nd generations, and whether the effect is independent of the traditional assimilation factors discussed above which are seen as determining immigrant intergenerational incorporation into the American political mainstream.

Conclusion

So far in this chapter, I have introduced the concept of the refugee, the traumas associated with the refugee context, the close interaction between refugees and American government/politics, and instances of heightened political activism among some refugees. Moreover, this chapter reviews the assimilation scholarship which serves as the backdrop for my theory which postulates that there might be a refugee effect influencing the political incorporation of the younger generations (i.e. 1.5 and 2nd generations) independent of traditional

assimilation determinants of immigrant political incorporation. The next chapter will unveil my research question and further describe my theory and hypotheses regarding the possible effects of the refugee background on the home-country politics and American politics of the younger generations. The chapter then outlines my research methodology for answering my research question and testing my theory. In chapter three, I will present and discuss my quantitative findings about the effects of the refugee background on the 1.5 and 2nd generations in terms of politics concerning the parental/ancestral home-country. As in chapter three, chapter four presents my quantitative findings about the effects of the refugee background on the 1.5 and 2nd generations, but the focus in chapter four is on American politics rather than parental/ancestral home-country politics. Starting with chapters five and six, I present the thoughts, perceptions, and opinions of actual individuals from two prominent refugee communities in the U.S. in order to supplement/contextualize my quantitative findings and thus better understand the political effects of the refugee background. Chapter five contains my analysis of the political effects of the Cambodian refugee background based on interviews I conducted with a diverse group of Cambodian Americans. Chapter six contains my analysis of the political effects of the Salvadoran refugee background based on interviews I conducted with a diverse group of Salvadoran Americans. Finally, chapter seven concludes this dissertation with an overall discussion of the findings of this dissertation and a look into the possible ramifications of these findings on various fronts.

CHAPTER 2

Research Question, Theory, Methodology, and Data Sources

The previous chapter introduces the refugee background as well as the key theories of how immigrants assimilate into the American political mainstream and away from the home-country over successive generations. As mentioned in chapter one, the existing scholarship does not explore any linkage between the distinctive refugee background/context and whether this has any independent effect on how future/younger generations incorporate politically in the U.S. Thus, this dissertation attempts to provide answers to whether there is any systematic effect of the refugee background on the political behaviors of the younger generations (i.e. the 1.5 and 2nd generation children) in terms of their parents' home-country as well as in terms of the U.S. This chapter is devoted to introducing my dissertation project by unveiling my central research question, theory, hypotheses, methods, and data sources.

Research Question and Theory

This dissertation aims at determining if the experience of being political refugees has any significant effect on the younger generations' (i.e. the 1.5 and 2nd generations') political involvement, both in terms of their parents' home-country context and their own American context. Simply put, the central research question of my dissertation is as follows:

How does the refugee background affect the political involvement of the younger generations (i.e. the 1.5 generation and 2nd generation children of refugees) vis-à-vis parental home-country politics and U.S. politics?

My theory is that the parental generation's refugee experience should tend to positively impact their children when it comes to involvement in home-country politics as well as U.S. politics.

This refugee background should have an independent, positive effect on the younger

generations' political involvement regardless of the traditional predictors of immigrant political incorporation found in the assimilation scholarship.

The refugee background of political persecution, traumatic forced emigration, and nostalgia for an ostensibly lost home-country that I had presented in the previous chapter—all of this should be positively associated with overall involvement in home-country politics among the 1.5 and 2nd generations. Growing up in a refugee household should expose these younger generations to the traumatic history of home-country politics associated with the refugee context. Hearing refugee parents who discuss home-country political issues, who desire political reform in the home-country, and witnessing refugee parents and the refugee community often being so vocal and active in demonstrating for political reform in the home-country should make the children of refugees more likely to grow up to be activists in parental home-country politics.

I also predict that the refugee background would have an overall positive effect on various facets of the 1.5 and 2nd generations' involvement in American politics. Essentially, the assumption behind this is that the refugee trauma, which is associated with home-country activism, should also be associated with American political activism. This logic is premised on various studies which have shown that home-country political activity and political activity in the domestic U.S. context are not mutually exclusive of each other but actually reinforce each other (Nakanishi 2001; 2003; Rogers 2006; Guarnizo 2001; Morawska 2001; Jones-Correa 2001; Lien et al. 2004; Wong 2006; Ramakrishnan 2005). If the refugee background, context, and experience tend to increase the 1.5 and 2nd generations' own activity in home-country politics as I posit above, then the refugee background, context, and experience should also induce these younger generations to be quite active in U.S. politics as well. In addition to this, as I had discussed in chapter one, many refugees encountered a lot of involvement by the American

government in their affairs (e.g. financial aid, settlement supervision, etc.). This refugee affinity with the American government may be another driving force within the refugee background which helps to heighten the younger generations' involvement in American politics.

If I find these hypothesized effects of the refugee background in my quantitative analysis and the effects prove to be statistically significant even after controlling for traditional assimilation factors, this would rebut the assumption of the assimilation scholarship that factors such as resources (especially socioeconomic status and educational attainment), passage of time/generations, and presence of societal and socioeconomic obstacles are enough to account for any immigrant's propensity towards either home-country politics or American politics. Likewise, if the qualitative interviews reveal that the refugee background was an important influence on the younger generations' political involvement vis-à-vis the parental home-country and the U.S., this would further support my theory.

Conversely, having a refugee background should not be determinative if the assimilation theories that I discuss in chapter one hold true. In other words, the null hypothesis would be that the refugee background does not have any effect on the 1.5 and 2nd generations' home-country or U.S. politics once the traditional predictors based on assimilation theory are controlled. Instead, the traditional predictors based on assimilation theory would better explain the 1.5 and 2nd generations' tendencies toward either home-country politics or U.S. politics. Classical assimilation theory predicts that the passage of time (from one immigrant generation to the next) and its attendant upward socioeconomic mobility would lead to straight-line/upward assimilation into the American mainstream and away from the ancestral home-country. This should occur regardless of the parental refugee context. Accordingly, for any 1.5 or 2nd generation immigrant, increasing immigrant generation, education, and income should prove to have

significantly positive relationships with involvement/activity in U.S. politics and negative relationships with involvement/activity in home-country politics.

Neo and segmented assimilation theories predict that other factors can slow the rate of political incorporation into the American mainstream. If these theories hold true, then for any 1.5 or 2nd generation immigrant, factors such as low socioeconomic status, experience with discrimination, and limited labor market prospects can all have negative effects on involvement in U.S. politics.⁵ Additionally, a reasonable extrapolation from segmented assimilation theory is that reactive ethnicity spurred by experience with racial discrimination may also activate home-country political consciousness as part of the reaction against mainstream America.⁶ Thus, experience with discrimination should have a positive relationship with involvement in home-country politics for the 1.5 and 2nd generations. Overall, if the foregoing assimilation theories hold true, then my qualitative results would indicate that these assimilation factors are the significant predictors of how involved all immigrants and their descendants are in either the politics of the ancestral home-country or the politics in America. Furthermore, if the foregoing assimilation theories hold true, refugee background should not have any statistically significant effect in the quantitative findings once these assimilation factors are accounted. Likewise, if the qualitative interviews do not reveal any distinctive influence of the refugee background on the politics of the younger generations, then this would also rebut my theory and corroborate the explanatory power of the assimilation theories. Figure 2.1 below provides a brief overview of how each body of literature applies to my research and theory.

⁵ The negative effects would be temporary per neo-assimilation theory but permanent per segmented assimilation theory. For further details about this, please see chapter one.

⁶ Reactive ethnicity means reacting against discrimination by turning away from all things American and embracing ethnic/ancestral identities instead. Please see chapter one for further explanations about this concept.

Figure 2.1		
Scholarship	Relationship to My Theory	
Refugee Literature	Provides the basis of my theory. The refugee background should have a significant effect on the political incorporation of the younger generations (i.e. the 1.5 and 2nd generation children of refugees). I predict that the refugee background should be positively associated with involvement in both home-country politics and U.S. politics among the younger generations.	
ASSIMILATION SCHOLARSHIP	Classical Assimilation Theory	Assimilation factors like passage of time, passage of immigrant generations, and upward socioeconomic mobility will increase the younger generations' involvement with U.S. politics and decrease their involvement with home-country politics. If the refugee background continues to have a significant effect on the younger generations' involvement with U.S. politics and home-country politics despite controlling for the assimilation factors, this would rebut classical assimilation theory and help support my theory.
	Neo-Assimilation Theory	Similar to classical assimilation theory, except that obstacles like limited labor markets and experience with discrimination can <i>temporarily</i> decrease involvement with U.S. politics. If the refugee background continues to have a significant effect on the younger generations' involvement with U.S. politics and home-country politics despite controlling for the assimilation factors and obstacles, this would rebut neo-assimilation theory and help support my theory.
	Segmented Assimilation Theory	Similar to neo-assimilation theory, except that obstacles like limited labor markets and experience with discrimination can <i>permanently</i> decrease involvement with U.S. politics and increase reactive ethnicity (and perhaps, increase involvement with home-country politics). If the refugee background continues to have a significant effect on the younger generations' involvement with U.S. politics and home-country politics despite controlling for the assimilation factors and obstacles, this would rebut segmented assimilation theory and help support my theory.

Quantitative Methodology and Data Sources

For the quantitative portion of my dissertation (chapters three and four), I perform multivariate regression analysis of data from three existing surveys on immigrants: The Immigration and Intergenerational Mobility in Metropolitan Los Angeles (IIMMLA) study, the Latino National Survey (LNS), and the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS).⁷

The first dataset used in this dissertation is the Immigration and Intergenerational Mobility in Metropolitan Los Angeles (IIMMLA) dataset from 2004. The IIMMLA dataset suits the purposes of my dissertation well. The IIMMLA survey targets the descendants of immigrants and, most importantly, it contains questions about the immigration status of the respondent's mother and father (with refugee being one of the listed statuses). This makes it

⁷ For a detailed description of these datasets, please see the appendix.

possible to determine which 1.5 or 2nd generation respondents are children of refugees and thus had the refugee background. Nevertheless, despite the foregoing advantages of using the IIMMLA dataset for my dissertation, there are some disadvantages. First, the IIMMLA study is not a truly random sample of all 1.5 and 2nd generation immigrants in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. The IIMMLA study targeted the largest immigrant/ethnic populations in the metropolitan Los Angeles region, and only contains a small number of respondents who fall outside of the targeted groups. As a result, the data represent those targeted immigrant groups and underrepresent non-targeted groups. Another drawback is that the number of respondents who give affirmative answers regarding refugee parentage is small, especially if disaggregated by each national origin/ethnicity.⁸

I use the IIMMLA dataset to test the effect (if any) that the refugee background—approximated in IIMMLA by having refugee parentage—has on the political involvement of 1.5 and 2nd generation children of refugees vis-à-vis home-country politics as well as American politics. Consequently, I have two sets of dependent variables to test: those that address the home-country political context and those that address the American political context. Figures 2.2 to 2.4 below describe the variables to be tested using IIMMLA, what each variable measures, as well as each variable’s limitations. Figure 2.2 lists the dependent variables in the home-country political context. Figure 2.3 lists the dependent variables in the American political context. Figure 2.4 lists the primary independent variable of interest.

⁸ For a table which sorts the 1.5 and 2nd generation respondents by ethnicity/national origin and refugee parentage, please see the appendix.

Figure 2.2			
IIMMLA: Home-Country Politics Dependent Variables			
Variable Name	Original Question	What it measures	Limitations
Interest in home-country politics	I am going to read some statements. For each please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree: I am interested in the politics of my parents' or grandparents' home country.	An ordinal variable with 4 ordinal categories recording how interested a respondent is in home-country politics.	Interest in home-country politics may not translate into actual participation.
Participating in home-country political organization	Over the past twelve months, have you participated in any kind of organization which is associated with your (mother's) (father's) (parents') country of birth? Was this a political organization or some other type of organization?	A dichotomous variable recording whether the respondent has or has not participated in a home-country political organization in the past year.	The variable does not measure the frequency or kind of participation within the organization.

Figure 2.3			
IIMMLA: U.S. Politics Dependent Variables			
Variable Name	Original Question	What it measures	Limitations
Contacting the government	In the past twelve months, have you contacted a government office about a problem or to get help or information either by telephone, e-mail or in person?	A dichotomous variable recording whether the respondent has or has not contacted a U.S. government office in the past year.	Question is broad and vague (contact can be for a variety of reasons), and frequency of contact is not recorded. Also, whether the focus here is on the U.S. can only be inferred based on the facts that the survey's focus is on living in the U.S. and this question does not reference the home-country.
Attending political gatherings	In the past twelve months, have you attended any political meetings, rallies, speeches or dinners in support of a political candidate?	A dichotomous variable recording whether the respondent has or has not attended a political gathering in the U.S. in support of a political candidate during the past year.	Does not record the frequency of attendance. Also, whether the focus here is on the U.S. can only be inferred based on the facts that the survey's focus is on living in the U.S. and this question does not reference the home-country.
Protesting	In the past twelve months, have you taken part in any form of protest, such as picketing, a march, demonstration or boycott?	A dichotomous variable recording whether the respondent has or has not protested in the U.S. in the past year.	Does not record the frequency of protest. Also, may not be political protest. Also, whether the focus here is on the U.S. can only be inferred based on the facts that the survey's focus is on living in the U.S. and this question does not reference the home-country.
Registering to vote	Some people are registered to vote and others are not. How about you? Are you registered to vote in the voting precinct where you now live, are you registered to vote somewhere else, or are you not registered to vote?	A dichotomous variable recording whether the respondent is or is not registered to vote in the U.S.	Registering to vote may not translate into actual voting.
Voting in 2003 California Recall Election	Did you happen to vote in the October 7 California recall election last year or not?	A dichotomous variable recording whether the respondent had or had not voted in the special gubernatorial recall election in California in 2003.	Question only asked of U.S. citizens registered to vote in precinct where they live. Also, not a first-order, national election (e.g. presidential election), but a state-wide recall election particular to California in 2003.

Figure 2.4			
IIMMLA: Independent Variable of Interest			
Variable Name	Original Question	What it measures	Limitations
Refugee Parentage	When your mother came into the U.S., did she enter as a refugee? When your father came into the U.S., did he enter as a refugee?	A dichotomous variable recording whether the respondent regards or does not regard the mother or father as coming to the U.S. as a refugee.	Small number of respondents responding affirmatively. Answers are based on respondent's own recollection and not actual parental status (but this should not pose a problem because a respondent who believes in or recollects how the parents are refugees would likely have experienced the refugee background at the heart of my theory.) Also, there is no way to determine if parents are refugees who fled from war and political persecution (the political refugees at the heart of my theory) rather than economic refugees or refugees fleeing from natural disasters.

Figure 2.5 below breaks down the IIMMLA dataset in terms of those in the 1.5 or 2nd generation with refugee parentage (i.e. 1.5 or 2nd generation respondents in the IIMMLA dataset claiming to have at least one parent who entered the U.S. as a refugee).⁹

Figure 2.5		
IIMMLA		
1.5 or 2nd Generation Respondents, sorted by Refugee Parentage		
	Frequency	Percentage
No Refugee Parentage	3,193	92.82
Refugee Parentage	247	7.18
Total	3,440	100.00

The second dataset that I use in this dissertation is the Latino National Survey (LNS) conducted in 2006.¹⁰ A benefit of this dataset is that it surveyed a large sample of Latinos throughout the U.S. Thus, findings based on this dataset are more generalizable beyond the Southern California context which is the focus of the IIMMLA study. Another benefit is that the LNS dataset contains many questions addressing transnational political behavior toward the

⁹ For a table which sorts the 1.5 and 2nd generation respondents by ethnicity/national origin and refugee parentage, please see the appendix.

¹⁰ For a detailed description of this dataset, please see the appendix.

home-country. Unfortunately, unlike the IIMMLA study, the LNS does not record whether a respondent's parents entered as refugees, so making a determination of who is a descendant of refugees is not possible. The LNS does, however, question the respondent about the respondent's own reason for immigrating to the U.S., and one of the possible answers is "escape from political turmoil". Anyone answering yes to this would be a political refugee with the specific refugee background which is the focus of my theory, either of the 1st or 1.5 generation. My research question focuses on the 1.5 and 2nd generation children of refugees. Because determination of being a 2nd generation descendent of refugees is not possible in LNS, this means that for the purposes of my research, the LNS can only be used to look at the 1.5 generation refugee. Another drawback is that the number of 1.5 generation respondents who give affirmative answers regarding escaping political turmoil is small, especially if disaggregated by each national origin/ethnicity.¹¹

In light of the foregoing limitations, instead of testing the effect of refugee parentage as I do in IIMMLA, I use the LNS dataset to test the effect (if any) that the 1.5 generation refugee background has on political involvement vis-à-vis home-country politics as well as American politics. As with IIMMLA, I have two sets of dependent variables to test using the LNS dataset, those that exclusively deal with home-country politics and those that primarily concern U.S. politics. Figures 2.6 to 2.8 below describe the variables to be tested using LNS, what each variable measures, as well as each variable's limitations. Figure 2.6 lists the dependent variables in the home-country political context. Figure 2.7 lists the dependent variables in the American political context. Figure 2.8 lists the primary independent variable of interest.

¹¹ For a table which sorts the 1.5 generation respondents by ethnicity/national origin and refugee background, please see the appendix.

Figure 2.6			
LNS: Home-Country Politics Dependent Variables			
Variable Name	Original Question	What it measures	Limitations
Interest in home-country politics	How much attention would you say you pay to politics in [your home-country]? Would you say you pay a lot of attention, some attention, a little attention, or none at all?	An ordinal variable with 4 ordinal categories recording how much attention the respondent gives to home-country politics.	Attention paid to home-country politics may not translate into actual participation.
Transnational voting	Have you ever voted in [your home-country] elections since you've been in the US?	A dichotomous variable recording whether the respondent has or has not voted in a home-country election since coming to the U.S.	Variable does not measure frequency of transnational voting. Also, time frame is wide (i.e. since coming to the U.S.).
Transnational political donating	Since coming to the U.S., have you contributed money to a candidate or party in your country of origin?	A dichotomous variable recording whether the respondent has or has not donated any money to a home-country political campaign since coming to the U.S.	Variable does not measure frequency or amount of transnational donating. Also, time frame is wide (i.e. since coming to the U.S.).

Figure 2.7			
LNS: U.S. Politics Dependent Variables			
Variable Name	Original Question	What it measures	Limitations
Contacting the U.S. government	Have you ever tried to get government officials to pay attention to something that concerned you, either by calling, writing a letter, or going to a meeting?	A dichotomous variable recording whether the respondent has or has not ever contacted a U.S. government office.	Question is broad and vague (contact can be for a variety of reasons), and frequency of contact is not recorded. Also, time frame is wide (i.e. in the respondent's entire life). Also, whether the focus here is on the U.S. can only be inferred based on the facts that the survey's focus is on living in the U.S. and this question does not reference the home-country.
Registering to vote	Are you currently registered to vote in the U.S.?	A dichotomous variable recording whether the respondent is or is not registered to vote in the U.S.	Registering to vote may not translate into actual voting.
Voting in 2004 presidential election	How about you—did you vote in the presidential election last November?	A dichotomous variable recording whether the respondent had or had not voted in the 2004 U.S. presidential election.	As with most questions in most surveys, this is based on the respondent's own self-reporting.

Figure 2.8			
LNS: Independent Variable of Interest			
Variable Name	Original Question	What it measures	Limitations
Refugee background	What would you say is the main reason you came to live in the United States? Escape political turmoil.	A dichotomous variable recording whether the respondent did or did not immigrate to the U.S. to escape political turmoil (i.e. entering as a political refugee).	Of the two generations of interest to my study, this question only applies to 1.5 generation respondents. Also, the 1.5 generation must be determined indirectly (derived from the age of respondent at arrival in the U.S.).

A breakdown of those who are 1.5 generation refugees in the LNS dataset is contained in Figure 2.9 below.¹²

Figure 2.9		
LNS		
1.5 Generation Refugees		
	Frequency	Percent
Not 1.5 generation refugee	8,586	99.44
1.5 generation refugee	48	0.56
Total	8,634	100.00

The final dataset which I use in this dissertation is the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS) from 1992-2006.¹³ The benefit of CILS is that it questions the respondent about the parents’ reason for immigrating to the U.S. with one of the possible answers being immigrating for “political reasons”. Those respondents who state that either of their parents immigrated to the U.S. due to political reasons I treat as having refugee parentage and concomitantly the political refugee background/context at the core of my theory. Another added benefit is that the CILS dataset allows me to examine those with refugee parentage living in Florida apart from the Southern California region targeted by IIMMLA. Moreover, CILS

¹² For a table which sorts the respondents by ethnicity/national origin and status as a 1.5 generation refugee, please see the appendix.

¹³ For a detailed description of this dataset, please see the appendix.

contains a large number of respondents who reported having at least one parent who immigrated due to political reasons. Finally, CILS only targeted the children of immigrants, so the scope of the study fits the criteria of my dissertation. However, there are some drawbacks to using this dataset. First, CILS does not specifically record immigrant generation, and dividing the 1.5 generation from the 2nd generation must be done indirectly (i.e. designating those who are U.S. born as 2nd generation and all others as 1.5 generation). Secondly, the dataset only contains a limited number of questions dealing with politics. The focus of CILS is more on sociological aspects of immigrant assimilation.

As with IIMMLA, I use the CILS data to test the effect (if any) that refugee parentage has on the political involvement of the 1.5 and 2nd generations vis-à-vis home-country politics as well as American politics. As with the other two datasets, I have two sets of dependent variables to test using the CILS dataset, those that exclusively deal with home-country politics and those that concern primarily U.S. politics. Figures 2.10 to 2.12 below describe the variables to be tested using CILS, what each variable measures, as well as each variable’s limitations. Figure 2.10 lists the dependent variables in the home-country political context. Figure 2.11 lists the dependent variables in the American political context. Figure 2.12 lists the primary independent variable of interest.

Figure 2.10			
CILS: Home-Country Politics Dependent Variable			
Variable Name	Original Question	What it measures	Limitations
Knowledge of home-country political leader	What is the name of the President or Prime Minister of the country where your mother is from? What is the name of the President or Prime Minister of the country where your father is from?	A dichotomous variable which measures whether the respondent correctly knew the name of the political leader of the parental home-country.	Recalling the name of the home-country president/prime minister may not translate into actual home-country political interest or participation.

Figure 2.11			
CILS: U.S. Politics Dependent Variable			
Variable Name	Original Question	What it measures	Limitations
Registering to vote	Are you currently registered to vote?	A dichotomous variable recording whether the respondent is or is not registered to vote in the U.S.	Registering to vote may not translate into actual voting. Also, whether the focus here is on the U.S. can only be inferred based on the facts that the survey's focus is on living in the U.S. and this question does not reference the home-country.

Figure 2.12			
CILS: Independent Variable of Interest			
Variable Name	Original Question	What it measures	Limitations
Refugee Parentage	If your mother (or step-mother) was born in a foreign country, why did she come to the U.S.? Political Reasons. If your father (or step-father) was born in a foreign country, why did he come to the U.S.? Political Reasons.	A dichotomous variable recording whether the respondent regards or does not regard the mother or father as coming to the U.S. for political reasons (i.e. coming as a political refugee).	A large number answering affirmatively, but they are mostly Cuban American, so their context may be particular to Cuban Americans in Florida.

Figure 2.13 below sorts the dataset by refugee parentage (i.e. claiming to have at least one parent who entered the U.S. for political reasons).¹⁴

Figure 2.13		
CILS		
1.5 or 2nd Generation Respondents, sorted by Refugee Parentage		
	Frequency	Percentage
No Refugee Parentage	4,011	76.23
Refugee Parentage	1,251	23.77
Total	5,262	100.00

Because the IIMMLA, LNS, and CILS datasets have survey questions which ask about refugee immigration, it is possible for me to create variables in all three datasets to indicate whether respondents have a refugee background—whether they have parents who entered the

¹⁴ Please see the appendix for a table which sorts the respondents by ethnicity/national origin and refugee parentage.

U.S. as refugees or are themselves 1.5 generation refugees who entered the U.S. prior to age 15. Once I created these refugee background variables, I performed ordinary least squares regression as well as logistic regression of these refugee background variables against the many measures of involvement in home-country politics and American politics contained in each dataset. There is, however, one major drawback to all three datasets. There is a lot of ambiguity with regard to correctly capturing within the data the political refugee background/context which undergirds my theory. Essentially, the refugee background variable may include respondents in the datasets who may consider their parents or themselves to be refugees but who may not be the political refugees I am looking for.

Indeed, looking at all three datasets reveals that many respondents who respond affirmatively to having some sort of refugee background or ostensibly political refugee background actually claim ancestry from countries not known for having had any sort of mass refugee crises let alone political refugee crises.¹⁵ Thus, the problem remains that there will likely be a high number of respondents who may not have the political refugee background at the heart of my theory (a background which includes escaping war and/or political violence/persecution) yet are included in my quantitative analysis. In order to address this possible over-inclusivity in my refugee background variables, in each of the three datasets I further parse the refugee background variables by national origins known for their civil wars and resultant large numbers of political refugees. These national origins which I further controlled for in my overall quantitative analysis are Cuban Americans, Vietnamese Americans, Hmong Americans, Laotian Americans, Cambodian Americans, Salvadoran Americans, Nicaraguan Americans, and Guatemalan Americans. These national-origin groups have characteristics at the heart of my

¹⁵ For a detailed breakdown by dataset of the raw numbers and percentages of respondents who affirmatively responded that they have a refugee background, please see the appendix.

theory, namely being known for producing refugees who escaped from the home-country due to war and political persecution and sought refuge in the U.S.¹⁶

However, controlling for each of these national origin groups which are associated with having the refugee background at the heart of my theory proves difficult because many of these national origin groups have too few respondents in each of the datasets. Because of this limitation, rather than controlling for each national-origin group as separate variables, I created regional variables instead—one for Central Americans and another for Southeast Asians—which aggregate ancestries from countries in either region known for having a high number of refugees fleeing roughly similar contexts of political persecution and/or war. For these reasons, the Central American variables group ancestries from El Salvador, Guatemala, or Nicaragua, and the Southeast Asian variables group ancestries from Vietnam, Cambodia, or Laos (primarily Hmong). Cubans are controlled for separately because, although Cuba has seen a similar political refugee context as the other regions, it is geographically distinct from the other regions.

Nevertheless, even after doing this, there is still a potential problem with the regional refugee variables I created. There are still many respondents with ancestries from each region (in fact, each national origin group) who did not indicate having a refugee background even though, according to U.S. immigration history, they most likely should have. This problem of possible under-inclusivity in my refugee background variables (along with the possible over-inclusivity in my refugee background variables as alluded to above) all stems from the lack of

¹⁶ These are mostly post-1965 groups since survey datasets that are applicable to my research are much more focused on post-1965 immigration, and these groups still have sizable ethnic enclaves which are sustained to this day (perhaps more so than pre-1965 groups like Jewish or Hungarian refugees who may have been more assimilated by this time). This spatial dynamic is important because enclaves help to make home-country politics more palpable and sustainable. I also do not include regions like East Asia, the Middle East, or Africa because their refugee numbers are too small to be grouped together using extant survey data, and they usually came to the U.S. on an individual basis rather than large, identifiable refugee influxes which figure prominently in U.S. immigration history.

specificity of each survey in addressing the central issue of my dissertation, namely the specific experience of being refugees who fled from war and/or political violence/persecution. Due to this ambiguity in the extant survey data, I add qualitative interviews to my dissertation project which are more specifically tailored to my dissertation research question. It is to this qualitative portion of my research that I now turn.

Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative research is added to this dissertation (chapters five and six) in order to explore questions that could not be answered by quantitative analysis of the existing datasets alone. This qualitative research is in the form of semi-structured interviews of people in the Cambodian American community and Salvadoran American community. Such interviews can yield detailed, nuanced narratives about the interviewees' experiences and perspectives—all of which will provide further understanding and context to quantitative findings (Given 2008; Cresswell and Clark 2007; Rubin and Rubin 2012). Most importantly, such interviews allow me to ask questions that are more to the point of my dissertation than those asked in quantitative surveys thus far. For example, I use qualitative interviews to overcome the problem of over-inclusiveness and under-inclusiveness (i.e. the ambiguities about whether someone actually had the political refugee background) found in the quantitative part of my dissertation as I allude to above.

The reason for targeting Cambodian Americans and Salvadoran Americans in particular is that these two refugee groups are ones who escaped political turmoil and persecution in the home-country, and they have significant and substantial ethnic enclaves in Southern California which are readily accessible to me because I live in Southern California. Their concentrated communities in Los Angeles County should help to create a spatial dynamic which sustains the

salience of the home-country, and their political presence would be prominent and more easily studied thanks to this substantial enclave in the metropolitan Los Angeles area. Furthermore, these two refugee communities have not been widely studied with regard to their politics. Most of the scholarship on immigrant politics has focused on Vietnamese Americans and Cuban Americans, two refugee communities that have been highly successful and prominent in the American political scene. Thus, conducting interviews within the Cambodian American and Salvadoran American communities should help to add more knowledge and shed more light on two groups which have thus far been somewhat overlooked when it comes to their political incorporation. In addition, unlike Vietnamese Americans and Cuban Americans who are highly active in politics, or Guatemalan Americans whose ethnic and linguistic cleavages within their own community have impeded their potential to politically organize, Cambodian Americans and Salvadoran Americans are two refugee groups that are not at either extremes of political activeness.

Interviewees for my study were recruited using a snowball sampling technique, a less expensive, less time-intensive method of sampling in which a small pool of initial subjects help to refer other subjects to participate in the study, who then help to refer other subjects, and so on (Given 2008; Neuman 2007). This proved to be a much more daunting task than I had originally anticipated. My first interview protocol had been approved by the University of California, Irvine's Institutional Review Board (IRB)¹⁷ in August of 2015, but that protocol failed to produce any subjects to be interviewed after being put into action in the field. My first IRB-approved interview protocol involved emailing organizations that worked with Cambodian

¹⁷ All human subjects research must be approved by the home-university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before any research procedure involving human subjects can commence. I went through many iterations of applying for IRB approval before finally having a research protocol that not only gained IRB approval, but also actually worked once it was finally put into action in the field.

Americans and Salvadoran Americans asking them to disseminate an email advertisement about my study to their members so that anyone interested can contact me. Anyone who contacted me about the study would then be asked to voluntarily participate in my study by either (depending on whichever method they would prefer) being interviewed over the phone using a preset list of fourteen rather closed-ended questions or by filling out an emailed questionnaire at their own convenience which consisted of the exact same fourteen closed-ended questions as in the phone interview. As soon as either the phone interview or emailed questionnaire has been completed, the interviewee would then be asked to spread the word to anyone else whom they think might want to volunteer to be interviewed for my study. It was a rather loose protocol in hindsight with an overly rigid set of interview/questionnaire questions, and I was very optimistic that this would yield a very high number of participants in my study. However, reality—and a bit of pessimism—soon set in after months of waiting in vain for call-backs or emailed replies to my initial solicitations. As I had alluded to earlier, by the end of the year of 2015, my initially approved interview protocol yielded zero participants.

By the beginning of the year in 2016, I then reassessed my first IRB-approved protocol. First, I looked at the fourteen questions which I had drawn up for the interview. They were mostly closed-ended questions that were curt, to the point, and may have felt too intrusive or overly direct. Many of the people who either declined to participate or promised to participate but ended up not doing so mentioned that they would be interested in more of an oral history project that looks into their specific community than the kind of survey I had. With this knowledge in hand, I began looking into oral history projects for inspiration, and the foremost one that came to my mind is the Vietnamese American Oral History Project housed at my home-university, the University of California, Irvine which was pioneered by Professor Linda Vo. I

realized the importance of a free-flowing, open-narrative style of interview in yielding deep thoughts and emotions of interviewees. I then redesigned my questions to be fewer in number, but more open-ended so that the entire interview would be about the interviewee's stories, reflections, observations, thoughts, and opinions, rather than the curt and cold closed-ended questionnaire. Essentially, I moved away from quantity of questions to quality of questions.

Secondly, there was the issue of incentive to participate. I began to realize that the younger generation individuals whom I had solicited might lack an incentive to participate. As a teaching assistant who worked with undergraduate students of the millennial generation, I noticed that during holidays, birthdays, or other occasions to express appreciation, millennial students often give Starbucks gift cards to one another. In light of this, I redrafted my research protocol to include a ten dollar electronic Starbucks gift card¹⁸ that all participants would receive for participating in my study, something that would be mentioned during the initial solicitation. After making these changes, I submitted new protocols to the IRB, and IRB approval was granted again in the beginning of March, 2016. After being put into action in the field by mid-March, these new protocol procedures containing open-ended, conversational questioning and the added incentive of the Starbucks gift card were ultimately successful in producing participants who agreed to be interviewed for my study.

With this newly approved interview protocols from early March 2016, I began contacting organizations that are involved with Cambodian Americans and Salvadoran Americans as well as Cambodian American individuals and Salvadoran American individuals who are known to me. To diminish the potential for bias, multiple snowball samples were initiated with diverse kinds of Cambodian American and Salvadoran American groups, organizations, and individuals. All of

¹⁸ Each Starbucks gift card was at my own expense.

this was done over a time period that spanned the middle of March, 2016 to the end of May, 2016—a time period that was very politically salient due to the U.S. presidential primaries being in full swing. In initiating contacts with these organizations and individuals for the purposes of my study, I used their publicly available email addresses and/or phone numbers to inquire if they would be interested in participating in my study by being interviewed about their general opinions and perspectives regarding political involvement and the impacts of either the Cambodian refugee history or the Salvadoran refugee history. Although many attempts¹⁹ to initiate contact ended in failure (many did not reply to my emails or my phone calls), a number of contacts did prove to be successful, and after these initial subjects agreed to be interviewed, they were then asked to spread the word about my study (by word of mouth or by forwarding an advertisement email) to anyone else who might be interested in participating in my study. In the end, I was successful in achieving a handful of secondary and even tertiary referrals in addition to my primary group of interviewees.

Ultimately, my snowball sampling using the second IRB-approved protocol procedures throughout mid-March to the end of May 2016 yielded a total of twelve Cambodian American interviewees who were mainly 1.5 and 2nd generation Cambodian Americans, most (but not all) of whom expressed having a refugee background (either their own or from their parents) stemming from the escape during the Khmer Rouge period and the war with Vietnam. At the same time, my snowball sampling yielded a total of six Salvadoran American interviewees who were largely 1.5 and 2nd generation Salvadoran Americans, most (but not all) of whom indicated having a refugee background (either their own or from their parents) stemming from the escape

¹⁹ The idea of making more than one attempt at contact was another lesson that I learned from my first, failed interview protocol. In my first protocol, I only made one initial contact and then waited for a response without any additional follow-up reminders or re-contacts. This second time around, I made initial contacts and followed-up with more than one reminder and/or re-contact.

during the civil war between the FMLN forces and the Salvadoran government. Both the Cambodian American interviewees and Salvadoran American interviewees include current college students as well as recent college graduates, entrepreneurs, professionals, community organizers, and workers in various professions. These interviewees' ages range from their early twenties to forties. The interviewees' family socioeconomic backgrounds (class) in the home-country prior to emigration is not well known, but based on things mentioned by some Cambodian American interviewees in their responses, a few Cambodian American interviewees did come from well-to-do (wealthy and educated, often merchant) classes in Cambodia that would have been the target of the Khmer Rouge. However, these observations are based on things that the interviewees themselves brought up in their responses to the interview questions. I did not specifically question them about their educational attainment, professions, age (except for making sure that they are at least 18 years of age), or class backgrounds in the home-country.

The total sample of 18 interviewees for my qualitative interviews was drawn primarily from the Southern California region where I live, but the sample also includes a few individuals from other parts of the U.S. The Southern California region contains the largest enclave of Cambodian Americans and Salvadoran Americans in the U.S., so the region is very useful for the purposes of my research. Long Beach, California in Los Angeles County has become the largest enclave for Cambodian Americans as a result of secondary migrations to the city which had been home to many Cambodian exchange students who had attended California State University, Long Beach long before the Cambodian refugee crisis during the 1970's and 1980's (Chan 2004; Douglas 2004). The twelve Cambodian Americans whom I interviewed hail from Long Beach, California (the largest Cambodian American enclave in the U.S.) as well as other parts of California, the Pacific Northwest, and even the East Coast. Los Angeles, especially the Pico

Union-Westlake district, has become the largest enclave for Salvadoran Americans. This area of Los Angeles attracted Salvadorans who escaped the Salvadoran civil war during the 1980's because of the large, Spanish-speaking, Mexican American community that was already there (Menjivar 2000; Hernandez 2004; Cordova 2005). The six Salvadoran Americans whom I interviewed come from Los Angeles and other areas of Southern California, the Bay Area in Northern California, and even Washington, D.C.

This spatial context of having such a large ethnic enclave has many repercussions. For example, unlike in other areas of the U.S. where these two refugee groups are scattered, dispersed, and diluted, Southern California's large concentration of both refugee groups permits these groups to maintain their distinguishable/identifiable character and agendas. Their enclaves are substantial enough to allow them to pool their resources and manpower toward home-country political organizing and demonstrations as well as to draw the attention of the local political establishment in Southern California. Thus, individuals whom I interview in Southern California have been exposed to this heightened sense of home-country/national-origin awareness and politicization.

A breakdown of my interview sample population by certain characteristics is contained in Figure 2.14 below.

Figure 2.14		
Breakdown of Sample Population for Qualitative Interviews		
	Cambodian American	Salvadoran American
Total Number	12	6
Refugee Background		
Yes	10	4
No	2	2
Immigrant Generation		
1.5 Generation	4	4
2nd Generation	7	2
3rd Generation	1	0
Family Class/SES at Emigration		
Rich	5	0
Poor	1	0
Unknown	6	6
Education		
Beyond College	2	1
College	9	2
Unknown	1	3
Age Group		
18-22 years	3	0
23 years and up	9	6
Geographic Location		
Southern California	9	4
Elsewhere	3	2

The format of the interviews was as follows. To be eligible for my study, subjects/interviewees had to be at least 18 years of age, must be proficient in English, and must either be of Cambodian ancestry or Salvadoran ancestry. The interviews were conducted over the phone in English and lasted between 15 minutes to 30 minutes, although oftentimes they lasted much longer as insisted and asked for by the interviewees themselves. In order to allow interviewees to freely express themselves without fear and to protect their identities as instructed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), all of the information/data that I gathered from the

interviews are kept completely anonymous. I did not associate any of the interviewees' identifying information with any of their responses and expunged any potentially identifying information from their responses if the interviewees inadvertently included such things in their responses.

Upon being read an IRB-approved Study Information Sheet over the phone to make sure that interviewees understood their rights, to make sure that they were eligible to participate in the study, and to make sure that they freely consented to being interviewed, interviewees were then asked to share their perceptions, thoughts, and opinions in a free-flowing/open-narrative, conversational way on the following topics of discussion: their knowledge about politics, interest in politics, and political activities (they were also asked to specify whether this was with regard to the parental home-country context or U.S. context); their knowledge of whether they (or their family) experienced a refugee history of (for Cambodian American interviewees) leaving as refugees during the mid-1970s to 1980s in order to escape the Khmer Rouge as well as the war with Vietnam or (for Salvadoran American interviewees) leaving as refugees during the early 1980s in order to escape the civil war between the FMLN (Marti National Liberation Front) forces and the Salvadoran government; and what influence, if any, did they think that the refugee history has on political engagement and participation. These interview questions added much more specificity to the refugee background when it comes to fleeing from war and persecution. Therefore, this helps to solve the refugee over-inclusivity and under-inclusivity problem that I faced in my quantitative section which relies on existing, but vague, large-N survey data on refugee background.

After interviewees had finished participating, they were sent an electronic Starbucks gift card worth ten dollars as a form of participant compensation for their time, and they were then

asked to forward an email advertisement about my study or simply spread the word about my study to anyone else whom they think might be interested in participating in my study (so that these other individuals who might be interested can contact me for themselves). As can be seen in chapters five and six, I was able to successfully get the narratives, reflections, thoughts, ideas, observations, perspectives, and opinions of a diverse group of Cambodian Americans and Salvadoran Americans. Their responses were very deep and meaningful and unveiled some important and often unanticipated findings. Should there be any mistake or something being misheard in the transcription of the interviews, I extend my sincerest apologies to the interviewees who sacrificed their time to share their stories. Any such error in the transcription is my fault alone.

Despite the benefits of qualitative interviewing outlined above, there are many drawbacks. First, qualitative interviews allow for a very limited and small sample (Cresswell and Clark 2007). The non-probability snowball sampling method for selecting interview subjects is also not truly randomized so there will likely be sampling bias (Given 2008). I had originally envisioned a much larger number of interviews to add much more diversity to my findings to counter the potential for bias in my sampling. The eighteen interviewees that I was able to cull—12 Cambodian Americans and 6 Salvadoran Americans—fall far short of my expectations. I found that Cambodian Americans were more willing to volunteer for this study than Salvadoran Americans. However, this is understandable because, in light of the U.S. government's historic hostility toward Central American refugees, many Salvadoran Americans may still not have felt comfortable with participating in a study that has refugee/immigration history as topics, regardless of the fact that my interview protocol maintained complete anonymity of responses. In addition to the bias due to having such an extremely small sample

size of eighteen individuals, there is further bias because individuals whom I interviewed were mostly individuals who were linked to home-country directed organizations and who were mostly refugees, or if not refugees, those who work closely with refugees. Meanwhile, potentially hyper-assimilated Cambodian Americans and Salvadoran Americans who may not be involved with any organization, let alone a home-country organization, would likely have been left out of my sample population. Secondly, although drawing a sample from Southern California where I reside is helpful due to the large concentrations of Cambodian Americans and Salvadoran Americans in the region, I will ultimately miss interviewing large numbers of people who live outside of Southern California and experience contexts different from those in Southern California. Therefore, my qualitative findings will have to be qualified in light of the foregoing weaknesses.

In light of all of this, qualitative interviewing and the process of embarking on one's own research and gathering new data is an arduous process that is fraught with mistakes, failures, but also corrections and successes. This is something that I learned, and I now know that I must lower initially lofty expectations about response rates in human subjects research, especially when such research is conducted only by one person—me. Nevertheless, it can truly be a rewarding experience. Throughout this process, I was able to learn from my mistakes and create a second round of IRB-approved research protocols in which I successfully obtained an in-depth look into the stories of younger generation Cambodian Americans and Salvadoran Americans on the issue of politics and refugee background. In the process, I was able to meet interesting, knowledgeable, opinionated individuals who taught me so much. Nevertheless, the fact remains that my interview sample population is very small, but with more funding, time, and personnel in

future research pursuits, I believe that I could better overcome the problem of a low response rate in qualitative research.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined my central research question, theory, and research design of my dissertation. My research question is whether the unique refugee background will affect the home-country political involvement and U.S. political involvement of the younger generation (i.e. the 1.5 and 2nd generation) children of refugees. Based on the literature discussed in chapter one, I theorize that there will be an overall positive effect of having a refugee background on the 1.5 and 2nd generations' involvement in home-country politics as well as their involvement in U.S. politics. This effect stemming from the refugee background should be independent of more traditional assimilationist determinants of immigrant political incorporation. In order to help answer my research question and test my theory, I pursue quantitative analysis of large-scale data on immigrants as well as qualitative interviews of a small sample of twelve Cambodian Americans and six Salvadoran Americans primarily drawn from Southern California but also from other parts of the U.S. In this chapter, I also recount the mistakes, failures, successes, and weaknesses of my qualitative research protocols. I now turn to the quantitative section of my dissertation which begins in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

Home-Country Politics and the Children of Refugees

In this chapter, I use multivariate regression analysis of the IIMMLA, LNS, and CILS datasets in order to examine whether the refugee background (which I approximate as either being a 1.5 generation refugee or being descended from refugee parents) has any effect on the younger generations' political involvement with the parents' home-country. As I had introduced in chapter two, my hypothesis is that the experience of political refugees would have a lasting positive impact on the home-country political involvement of refugee descendants who are born and/or raised in the U.S. This positive impact should be independent of the traditional assimilation factors outlined in chapters one and two that tend to influence how attached (or unattached) future generations are to ancestral home-countries. The trauma of being forced to flee the home-country due to political persecution and/or civil war along with the resultant nostalgia for a home-country which has ostensibly been lost—this overall refugee background should leave a legacy of heightened political activism toward the ancestral home-country that should be passed onto the younger generations (i.e. the 1.5 and 2nd generations). My quantitative findings below reveal that, in the few instances where there is an effect, having a refugee background tends to be a positive influence on the 1.5 and 2nd generations' interest, knowledge, and participation concerning the politics of their parents' home-country. The exception is that for the descendants of Southeast Asian refugees, the refugee background tends to have a negative influence on knowledge about home-country politics.

Interest in the Politics of the Parental Home-Country

The analysis of home-country politics begins here with the 1.5 and 2nd generations' interest in home-country politics. Interest in politics is part of the psychological attachment to politics and is also deemed to be a form of passive political participation (Conway 2000). It involves having a generalized interest in politics such as paying attention to political news and following political developments. When applied to the home-country context, interest in home-country politics simply means that an individual pays attention to political issues related to the parental/ancestral home-country. Both the IIMMLA and the LNS surveys measure this using a variable containing four ordinal levels of interest/attention regarding ancestral home-country politics.

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 below contain my regression results with the dependent/response variable being interest in home-country politics. Table 3.1 contains regression results using IIMMLA data and table 3.2 contains regression results using LNS data. The independent/explanatory variables of interest record refugee background, both in general and from specific refugee-sending regions which figure prominently in U.S. immigration history.²⁰ For the IIMMLA results in table 3.1, the refugee background is approximated by having refugee parentage. For the LNS results in table 3.2, the refugee background is approximated by actually being a 1.5 generation refugee. In both tables (and for all regression models in this dissertation), I also control for traditional assimilationist predictors of intergenerational immigrant incorporation into the American social and political mainstream.²¹

²⁰ For an explanation about why the refugee background variables are further parsed by region, please see chapter two.

²¹ For an introduction of these predictors drawn from the assimilation scholarship, please see chapter one. To understand how these assimilationist predictors relate to my theory and hypotheses, please see chapter two.

Table 3.1: IIMMLA OLS Regression Results. Dependent Variable: Interest in Home-Country Politics

Dataset: IIMMLA	Model with general refugee parent variable		Model with region-specific refugee parent variable		Model with region-specific variable	
Independent Variable	Coef.	Std. Err.	Coef.	Std. Err.	Coef.	Std. Err.
Age	-0.017***	0.003	-0.017***	0.003	-0.018***	0.003
2nd Generation (1.5 Generation as Reference)	0.037	0.034	0.035	0.034	0.027	0.034
College (No College as Reference)	0.038	0.041	0.032	0.041	0.038	0.041
Household Income (Less than \$12,000 as Reference)						
\$12,000-\$19,999	-0.012	0.087	-0.006	0.087	-0.008	0.087
\$20,000-\$29,999	-0.010	0.084	-0.008	0.084	-0.012	0.084
\$30,000-\$49,999	-0.062	0.080	-0.059	0.080	-0.065	0.080
\$50,000-\$69,999	-0.121	0.082	-0.120	0.082	-0.128	0.082
\$70,000-\$99,999	-0.018	0.082	-0.020	0.082	-0.026	0.082
\$100,000 or more	-0.016	0.084	-0.016	0.084	-0.024	0.084
Experienced Discrimination	0.148***	0.035	0.151***	0.035	0.151***	0.035
Refugee Parent	0.089	0.064	----	----	----	----
Southeast Asian Refugee Parent	----	----	0.129	0.136	----	----
Central American Refugee Parent	----	----	-0.106	0.125	----	----
Cuban Refugee Parent	----	----	1.447**	0.652	----	----
Southeast Asian	----	----	----	----	-0.082	0.057
Central American	----	----	----	----	-0.063	0.054
Cuban	----	----	----	----	0.176	0.197
	Sample Size =	3098	Sample Size =	3098	Sample Size =	3098

* = significant at .10 level, ** = significant at .05 level, *** = significant at .01 level

Table 3.2: LNS OLS Regression Results. Dependent Variable: Interest in Home-Country Politics

Dataset: LNS	Model with general refugee variable		Model with region-specific refugee variable		Model with region-specific variable	
Independent Variable	Coef.	Std. Err.	Coef.	Std. Err.	Coef.	Std. Err.
Age	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.000	0.001
Generation (1st Generation as Reference)						
1.5 Generation	-0.116**	0.048	-0.115**	0.048	-0.111**	0.047
2nd Generation	-0.340***	0.031	-0.339***	0.031	-0.326***	0.032
College (No College as Reference)	0.242***	0.031	0.242***	0.031	0.229***	0.031
Household Income (Below \$15,000 as Reference)						
\$15,000-24,999	-0.008	0.042	-0.008	0.042	-0.002	0.042
\$25,000-34,999	0.000	0.045	0.000	0.045	-0.001	0.045
\$35,000-44,999	-0.010	0.050	-0.009	0.050	-0.009	0.050
\$45,000-54,999	-0.022	0.057	-0.022	0.057	-0.018	0.057
\$55,000-64,999	-0.061	0.064	-0.061	0.064	-0.058	0.064
Above \$65,000	0.018	0.051	0.017	0.051	0.013	0.051
Experienced Discrimination	0.138***	0.031	0.139***	0.031	0.146***	0.031
1.5 Generation Refugee	0.273	0.177	----	----	----	----
Cuban 1.5 Generation Refugee	----	----	0.526**	0.233	----	----
Central American 1.5 Generation Refugee	----	----	-0.140	0.341	----	----
Cuban	----	----	----	----	0.342***	0.064
Central American	----	----	----	----	-0.035	0.053
	Sample Size =	6436	Sample Size =	6436	Sample Size =	6436

* = significant at .10 level, ** = significant at .05 level, *** = significant at .01 level

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 indicate that interest in home-country politics does not have a statistically significant relationship with either having refugee parentage in general or being a 1.5 generation refugee in general once factors related to assimilation are controlled. As the results in table 3.1 show, simply having parents who immigrated to the U.S. as refugees does not mean that individuals will be more or less interested in home-country politics than individuals who do not have refugee parents. Likewise, table 3.2 shows that 1.5 generation refugees are not more or less interested in home-country politics than others who are not 1.5 generation refugees. Therefore, the null hypothesis that the refugee background/context may not have any effect on interest in home-country politics cannot be ruled out. This runs contrary to my hypothesis that having a refugee background of traumatic flight from political persecution and/or war in the home-country should lead to a lasting positive impact on the 1.5 and 2nd generations' interest in the politics of the parental home-country. There are many possible reasons for this failure to find a statistically significant effect from the generalized refugee background variables. Of course, one possible reason is that the refugee background/context really does not have any effect on a person's interest in home-country politics and that the other assimilation factors prove to be more influential (i.e. the null hypothesis).

Alternatively, as mentioned in chapter two, another explanation is that there may be some ambiguity when it comes to accurately capturing in extant data the refugee background/context which undergirds my theory. Essentially, the factor which may obfuscate the possible effect of the refugee background on the various political measures is the fact that having a generalized refugee variable may include respondents in the datasets who may consider themselves as children of refugees, but refugees who may have come to the U.S. for non-political reasons. For example, many respondents in the surveys who claim to have a refugee background (be it

refugee parentage or having been a 1.5 generation refugee) also claim ancestry from regions which are not known for producing political refugees but rather economic refugees or refugees fleeing natural disasters.²² My theory is founded on the assumption that the political refugee background influences the politics of the 1.5 and 2nd generations, so I would need to distinguish political refugees from non-political refugees. For this reason, I parse the refugee variables further by regions known for their civil wars which produced large numbers of political refugees who successfully entered the U.S., namely Cuba, Southeast Asia, and Central America.²³

Out of all of the region-specific, refugee background variables, only the Cuban American refugee parentage variable (as seen in table 3.1) and the Cuban American 1.5 generation refugee variable (as seen in table 3.2) have any statistically significant effect. Either having Cuban refugee parents or being a 1.5 generation Cuban refugee has a statistically significant, positive effect on interest in home-country politics. This means that if individuals either have refugee parents from Cuba or are themselves 1.5 generation refugees from Cuba, they will have a higher interest in the politics of their parents' home-country than individuals who lack any sort of Cuban refugee background. This result is not surprising given how highly politically organized and vocal Cuban Americans have been in the U.S. over the years as I had described in chapter one. The salience of Cuban home-country politics is most likely sustained by America's historic focus on its communist island neighbor throughout the Cold War. Simply put, the proximity of Cuba to the U.S. mainland may help to keep Cuban home-country politics at the forefront of the minds of Cuban American refugees and their descendants, perhaps more so than for other refugee populations. This may explain why the Cuban American refugee background is the only one which has a statistically significant, positive influence on interest in home-country politics.

²² For a further elaboration of this, please see chapter two and the appendix.

²³ Please refer to chapter two for a more detailed explanation about why I arrived at these three regional groups.

Based on the IIMMLA results in table 3.1, this positive effect cannot be explained by just simply having Cuban ancestry. Simply being Cuban does not have any statistically significant effect on interest in home-country politics. It is being descended from Cuban refugee parents which has a significantly positive effect on interest in home-country politics. Again, this lends credence to my theory that for younger generation individuals such as younger generation Cuban Americans, it is the refugee background which gives rise to the positive effect on home-country politics, and the effect cannot just be explained away as something endemic to simply originating from a certain country such as Cuba. On the other hand, the LNS results in table 3.2 show that the positive effect of being a 1.5 generation Cuban refugee may largely be driven by the statistically significant, positive effect of simply having Cuban ancestry. A person with Cuban ancestry tends to have a higher interest in home-country politics than someone without Cuban ancestry, regardless of refugee background. However, the magnitude of this positive effect due to simply having Cuban ancestry is less than the positive effect from being a 1.5 generation Cuban refugee. Therefore, overall, having the refugee background tends to boost interest in home-country politics among younger generation Cuban Americans by either increasing interest when there is no inherent interest linked to Cuban ancestry, or enhancing interest that is already there due to an inherent interest linked to Cuban ancestry. This observation aligns with my idea that the refugee background tends to heighten home-country politics among the younger generations.

A surprising observation found in table 3.1 is that the positive effect of the Cuban refugee parentage variables is not reflected in the Southeast Asian refugee parentage variables. Although the Cuban and Southeast Asian refugee situations are not identical, they are roughly comparable. They both involve similar geo-political (i.e. Cold War) tensions between the U.S. and the home-

countries, communist versus anti-communist persecution and subsequent flight to the U.S., and salience in American politics throughout America's Cold War history. Consequently, there should be a positive effect of the Southeast Asian refugee parentage variable similar to that found with the Cuban refugee parentage variables. Instead, as seen in table 3.1, being descended from Southeast Asian refugees does not mean that a person will be more interested in home-country politics than a person who does not have Southeast Asian refugee parentage.

A possible explanation for this finding is that, unlike the case with Cuba, the U.S.'s Cold War tension with the communist home-countries in Southeast Asia has waned over the years, especially since the normalization of relations with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam since the 1990's. The growing economic and cultural interconnection between the U.S. and the communist countries in Southeast Asia since then may have complicated—perhaps even weakened—the erstwhile strong anti-communist interest in home-country politics among descendants of Southeast Asian refugees. For example, studies of Vietnamese Americans are pointing to the growing complexity when it comes to the stance of younger generation Vietnamese Americans toward the home-country in light of growing economic opportunities and cultural transnationalism now possible with the globalized Vietnam of today (Vo 2003; 2008; Le 2009; Lieu 2011; Valverde 2002; 2008; Aguilar San-Juan 2009). Perhaps the incipient moves by the U.S. State Department under the Obama administration in 2014-2015 towards a rapprochement with Cuba may eventually add a similar wrinkle in the picture painted above of the interest in home-country politics among younger generation descendants of Cuban refugees.

As for the Central American refugee variables, neither being descended from refugee parents from Central America (see table 3.1) nor being a 1.5 generation refugee from Central America (see table 3.2) has any statistically significant relationship with interest in home-country

politics. One possible explanation for this is that interest in home-country politics may be muted in light of the U.S.'s lack of support for the home-country political causes of many Central American refugees. Many of the Central American refugees vocally opposed home-country regimes which had persecuted them, but because such home-country regimes were also U.S. allies during the Cold War, these refugees may have felt that their home-country interests were not well-received in the U.S. Seeing how their parents' home-country causes were unsupported and possibly futile in the U.S., the descendants of Central American refugees who lacked legal status may have had their potential for home-country political activism stifled. This would be one possible explanation for why having a refugee background from Central America does not seem to heighten interest in home-country politics among the descendants of Central American refugees.

As expected, many of the assimilationist control variables have the anticipated effects on interest in home-country politics. The more assimilated a descendant of any immigrant is, the less interested that individual will be in home-country politics. As seen in table 3.1, age has the anticipated negative effect on interest in home-country politics among the 1.5 generation and 2nd generation respondents in the IIMMLA dataset. Because IIMMLA focused on the children of immigrants who have grown up in the U.S., increases in age would reflect more time spent living in the U.S. According to classical, straight-line assimilation theory, as time passes and duration of time spent in the U.S. increases, attachments to the home-country will diminish. Thus, the negative effect of age on interest in home-country politics is as expected. On the other hand, the age variable does not have any statistically significant effect on interest in home-country politics in the LNS dataset as shown in table 3.2. This is not surprising, however, because the LNS did not only interview children of immigrants who have grown up primarily in the U.S. Instead, it

interviewed immigrants of all generations. Having a respondent in the LNS dataset who is older in age does not mean that the respondent has necessarily spent more time in the U.S. Thus, unlike in IIMMLA, older age in LNS includes immigrants who may have entered the U.S. at an older age, and therefore, their age would not approximate longer time spent in the U.S.

As for immigrant generation, only the LNS results in table 3.2 show the anticipated, negative effect of the immigrant generation variable in accordance with what assimilation theories would predict. The assimilation scholarship posits that the passage of one immigrant generation to the next would lead to successively less connection to the ancestral home-country. Thus, with each increase in immigrant generation, from the 1st generation to the 1.5 generation and then to the 2nd generation, there is a statistically significant negative effect on interest in home-country politics. What is surprising, however, is that this negative effect is not found in the IIMMLA results in table 3.2. This may be due to the fact that IIMMLA did not interview 1st generation immigrants. Thus, the only generational transition in IIMMLA with regard to interest in home-country politics occurs between the 1.5 generation and the 2nd generation, which may not be as great a generational transition as found in LNS.

The income variables, however, are not as influential as the assimilation theories would predict. Even though assimilation theories predict that upward socioeconomic mobility like increases in income would lead to more assimilation into the socioeconomic and cultural mainstream in America and thus lead to less linkage to the home-country, this anticipated effect does not bear out. In both tables 3.1 and 3.2, increased income is not associated with a statistically significant, negative effect on interest in home-country politics. In fact, there is simply no statistically significant effect of income on interest in home-country politics. This finding of a lack of any statistically significant effect of the income variable is also surprising

because increased income and socioeconomic status usually have a significantly positive relationship with political interest (see Verba et al. 1995; Verba and Nie 1972). On the other hand, high socioeconomic status does not necessarily translate into increased political participation, especially for Asian Americans (Lien et al. 2004; Uhlaner et al. 1989).

Experiencing discrimination in the U.S. does lead to the anticipated positive effect on interest in home-country politics as neo-assimilation and segmented assimilation theories predict. According to these two variants of assimilation theory, obstacles/barriers to assimilation such as being racially discriminated against would lead to less assimilation into the American mainstream. Concomitantly, experiences with discrimination might lead to reactive ethnicity which would mean that immigrants and their descendants would gravitate toward ethnic—and possibly home-country—identity and away from American culture and society. In addition, studies of immigrant political incorporation also point to the idea of racism or racial threat as having an overall positive effect on political engagement (DeSipio 1996; 2001; Ramakrishnan 2005; Garcia Bedolla 2005; Espiritu 1992; Wong et al. 2011; Nakanishi 2001; 2003; Lien et al. 2004), so finding this positive effect on interest in home-country politics because of experience with racial discrimination is expected. Thus, in both tables, having experienced racial discrimination does indeed lead to heightened awareness of ethnicity and home-country identity, in this case, heightened interest in home-country politics. In fact, both the IIMMLA and LNS data reveal that the positive impact of experience with racial discrimination on interest in home-country politics is roughly of the same magnitude in either dataset (as seen in the roughly equal coefficient values for the discrimination variable in both tables).

Having a college education has a positive impact on interest in home-country politics in the LNS results in table 3.2. This goes against what classical, straight-line assimilation theory

predicts. Being more educated in the U.S. should help to assimilate the immigrants and their descendants into all things American and away from all things related to the home-country, thus there should be a negative effect of education on interest in home-country politics. Nonetheless, the positive effect of higher education found here corroborates studies in education which posit that more education leads to greater awareness of world news/issues (Kaufman and Feldman 2004). More education means a more cosmopolitan/worldly outlook which should include increased cognizance of the ancestral home-country. Likewise, studies of political participation point to the importance of education in increasing a person's likelihood of being interested in politics and staying informed about politics in general (Verba et al. 1995; Conway 2000). Thus, increased education in the form of attainment of a college education would tend to increase political interest even in the home-country context. However, it is surprising that the IIMMLA results in table 3.1 do not show any statistically significant effect from the education variable; it is unknown why this is the case.

Knowledge about Politics in the Parental Home-Country

The analysis of home-country politics continues below with the 1.5 and 2nd generations' knowledge about home-country politics. The question is whether the refugee background increases the likelihood that the younger generations will be more informed about home-country political issues than others who are similarly situated. CILS is the only survey which includes a measure that reflects knowledge about something political in the home-country. This variable in CILS is a dichotomous variable recording whether the respondents could correctly name the current political leader of the parents' home-country. Table 3.3 below contains my regression results using the CILS data with the dependent/response variable being knowledge of the home-country political leader.

Table 3.3: CILS Logistic Regression Results. Dependent Variable: Knowledge of Home-Country Political Leader

Dataset: CILS	Model with general refugee		Model with region-specific refugee		Model with region-specific variable	
	parent variable		parent variable		specific variable	
Independent Variable	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.
Age	0.991	0.047	1.003	0.051	1.033	0.057
2nd Generation (1.5 Generation as Reference)	1.491***	0.119	1.098	0.094	0.735***	0.070
College (No College as Reference)	1.230**	0.117	1.246**	0.125	1.470***	0.161
Household Income (Less than \$5,000 as Reference)						
\$5,000-\$9,999	1.432	0.427	1.302	0.421	1.215	0.419
&10,000-\$14,999	1.065	0.300	1.041	0.321	1.078	0.352
\$15,000-\$19,999	1.154	0.324	1.101	0.337	0.960	0.313
\$20,000-\$24,999	1.897**	0.508	1.568	0.454	1.380	0.426
\$25,000-\$29,999	1.481	0.394	1.369	0.395	1.129	0.347
\$30,000-\$34,999	2.099***	0.556	1.956**	0.560	1.474	0.448
\$35,000-\$49,999	1.851**	0.458	1.720**	0.464	1.373	0.393
\$50,000-\$74,999	2.400***	0.589	2.191***	0.584	1.676*	0.475
\$75,000-\$99,999	3.026***	0.783	2.750***	0.771	2.093**	0.624
\$100,000-\$199,999	2.217***	0.595	2.004**	0.587	1.529	0.474
\$200,000 or More	3.566***	1.481	3.234***	1.418	2.034	0.941
Experienced Discrimination	0.760***	0.060	0.927	0.078	1.282***	0.118
Refugee Parent	3.190***	0.308	----	----	----	----
Southeast Asian Refugee Parent	----	----	0.019***	0.014	----	----
Central American Refugee Parent	----	----	3.119***	0.706	----	----
Cuban Refugee Parent	----	----	37.498***	11.141	----	----
Southeast Asian	----	----	----	----	0.022***	0.009
Central American	----	----	----	----	1.724***	0.258
Cuban	----	----	----	----	19.210***	3.054
	Sample Size =	2949	Sample Size =	2949	Sample Size =	2949

* = significant at .10 level, ** = significant at .05 level, *** = significant at .01 level

Table 3.3 shows that the refugee parent variable has a statistically significant, positive relationship with knowledge of the political leadership in the parents' home-country. Those who have refugee parentage are about three times more likely to have correct knowledge about the political leader of the parents' home-country than those who do not have refugee parentage. This finding corroborates my theory regarding the effect of the refugee background on the younger generation's relationship with parental home-country politics. My findings here indicate that having refugee parentage in general does help to increase knowledge about the home-country political leadership. Thus, growing up in a refugee household will keep the child well-informed about the politics in the home-country—at least with regard to who is the current political leader there.

Further dissecting the refugee background variables into the regions known for having high incidences of political refugees reveals that the positive effect of refugee parentage may be largely driven by the strong positive effects of the Cuban and Central American refugee parentage variables. Having Cuban refugee parentage leads to a staggering thirty-seven times the odds of correctly knowing the home-country political leader (although this, until very recently, remained fairly easy because the sole leader for much of the latter 20th Century was the highly visible Fidel Castro). This finding of a higher likelihood of knowing the home-country political leader among Cuban Americans if they also have refugee parents is in accordance with my theory which anticipates the refugee background inspiring higher cognizance of home-country politics in the younger generations. Nevertheless, this positive effect may be partly driven by simply having Cuban ancestry alone. Simply having Cuban ancestry, by itself, already increases the odds of correct knowledge of the home-country political leader by 19 times.

The CILS data also shows a statistically significant, positive effect of having Central American refugee parents on knowledge of home-country politics. Someone who has Central American refugee parents will be nearly three times more likely to correctly know the home-country political leader than someone who does not have Central American refugee parents. This finding of a higher likelihood of correct knowledge about the home-country political leader among Central Americans if they also have refugee parents is in accordance with my theory which anticipates the refugee background inspiring higher cognizance of home-country politics in the younger generations. However, as in the Cuban case above, this positive effect may partly be due to simply having the regional ancestry alone, even without having refugee parentage. Simply having Central American ancestry already increases the odds of correctly identifying the home-country political leader by 1.7 times.

An unexpected finding is that having Southeast Asian refugee parentage tends to decrease the odds of correctly knowing about the home-country political leadership. A person who is descended from Southeast Asian refugees will be only 19% as likely to correctly identify the political leader in the parental home-country as others who are not descended from Southeast Asian refugees. This negative effect of having Southeast Asian refugee parentage on knowledge of home-country political leadership seems to be largely driven by simply being of Southeast Asian ancestry: simply having Southeast Asian ancestry alone already means that a person is only 22% as likely to correctly identify the home-country political leader. This result regarding Southeast Asian refugee parentage totally contradicts my theory and hypothesis which would anticipate a very strong positive effect of the Southeast Asian refugee background on knowledge of home-country politics. Given that Southeast Asian refugees experienced a refugee background that was somewhat similar to the one experienced by Cuban refugees, knowledge of

home-country political leadership should be passed on to the younger generations of Southeast Asian refugees as in the case of Cuban refugees. This, however, is not what is found using the CILS data. This finding points to something peculiar or endemic to the Southeast Asian region when it comes to the younger generations' knowledge about home-country politics. Perhaps Southeast Asian home-country politics is less visible to the younger generations living in the U.S. This may be due to geographic proximity because, unlike Cuba and Central America, Southeast Asia and its politics may be more remote and distant from the U.S. mainland. Another possible explanation for this surprising result is that the Southeast Asian political leadership, except for the fairly continuous leadership of Hun Sen in Cambodia, has been very volatile and fluctuating. These changing faces of home-country political leaders in Southeast Asia may not be as recognizable and visible as the constant presence of leaders such as Fidel Castro of Cuba. Thus, it may be extremely difficult to identify political leaders of the Southeast Asian home-countries, and this difficulty may dampen the potential of descendants of Southeast Asian refugees to correctly identify the home-country political leadership.

When it comes to the control variables premised on the assimilationist scholarship, table 3.3 shows some surprising results that run counter to what would be expected based on any of the assimilationist theories. Education and income consistently have a positive effect on the odds of knowing about the home-country political leadership. According to assimilationist theory, especially classical/straight-line assimilation theory, increased education and socioeconomic standing should lead to more assimilation into the American cultural mainstream and more distance from the parental home-country. Here, however, increased education and income actually serve to increase the likelihood of correctly identifying the political leadership in the parental home-country. This means that being more educated makes individuals more

knowledgeable about the world, which ultimately includes knowledge about the parents' home-country, and having more income means that individuals may be able to afford the luxuries (such as resources like technology and communications or simply having extra leisure time) needed to stay informed about politics in the parents' home-country. This positive effect of education and income corroborates studies in education which posit that more education leads to greater awareness of world news/issues (Kaufman and Feldman 2004). Likewise, studies of political participation also point to the importance of socioeconomic resources like education and income in increasing a person's likelihood of being interested in politics and staying informed about politics (Verba et al. 1995; Conway 2000).

Surprisingly, table 3.3 shows that the variable for immigrant generation has an unanticipated, positive effect on knowledge of home-country political leadership in the model controlling for the general refugee parentage variable, but then has a negative effect in the model controlling for the regional ancestry variables. The statistically significant, positive effect in the general refugee parentage model should not be there according to assimilation theory. A central concept of classical assimilation is the idea that increased immigrant generation will irrevocably turn the individual away from the home-country, thus this finding of a higher likelihood of knowledge of home-country politics with increasing immigrant generation is unexpected. On the other hand, this finding of a positive effect could be akin to something that Marcus Lee Hansen has argued regarding how latter generations—but in Hansen's case, specifically the 3rd generation—try more to remember the ancestral background than the prior generations (Hansen 1938). Conversely, in the model which contains the regional ancestry variables without refugee parentage, individuals are less likely to know the home-country political leadership as they increase in immigrant generation, and this is in accordance with standard assimilation theory.

Also note that the effect of immigrant generation becomes statistically insignificant in the middle model which controls specifically for the regionally-specific, refugee parentage variables. It is uncertain why there is this difference in effect of the immigrant generation variable among the three models in table 3.3.

Having experienced racial discrimination has a negative effect on knowledge of home-country political leadership in the model with the general refugee parentage variable. A person who has faced racial discrimination will be less likely to know about the home-country political leader. This result contradicts neo-assimilation and segmented assimilation theories which posit that being racially discriminated against would activate reactive ethnicity and possible ancestral/home-country consciousness. However, as with the immigrant generation variable discussed above, the positive effect of the discrimination variable as expected by assimilation theory occurs in the model with the regional ancestry variables without refugee parentage. In this model, the person who has experienced racial discrimination will be more likely to know about the political leader in the ancestral home-country. Thus, only in this model does having experienced discrimination activate reactive ethnicity like what neo-assimilation and segmented assimilation theories prescribe. Also note that the effect of discrimination becomes statistically insignificant in the middle model which controls specifically for the regionally-specific, refugee parentage variables. Again, it is uncertain why there is this differential effect of the discrimination variable among the three different models in table 3.3.

Participation in Home-Country Political Organizations

The analysis of home-country politics now moves away from passive, psychological involvement with home-country politics among the 1.5 and 2nd generations to their actual participation in home-country politics. Here, the focus will begin with organizational political participation in the home-country political context, namely being affiliated with a political organization related to the parental home-country. The IIMMLA survey is the only one which records this activity, and the IIMMLA survey does so using a dichotomous variable which asks whether the respondent has participated in a political organization involved with the parents' home-country during the past year. Table 3.4 below contains my regression results using the IIMMLA data with the dependent/response variable being participation in a home-country political organization.

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Table 3.4: IIMMLA Logistic Regression Results. Dependent Variable: Participation in Home-Country Political Organization

Dataset: IIMMLA	Model with general refugee parent variable		Model with region-specific refugee parent variable		Model with region-specific variable	
	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.
Independent Variable						
Age	0.985	0.029	0.986	0.029	0.983	0.029
2nd Generation (1.5 Generation as Reference)	1.688	0.593	1.728	0.610	1.721	0.622
College (No College as Reference)	2.983*	1.849	2.820*	1.751	2.910*	1.809
Household Income (Less than \$12,000 as Reference)						
\$12,000-\$19,999	0.252	0.311	0.259	0.319	0.255	0.314
\$20,000-\$29,999	0.800	0.700	0.823	0.720	0.824	0.721
\$30,000-\$49,999	0.500	0.438	0.522	0.459	0.523	0.460
\$50,000-\$69,999	1.290	1.031	1.333	1.067	1.325	1.061
\$70,000-\$99,999	0.679	0.581	0.704	0.603	0.706	0.605
\$100,000 or more	1.879	1.477	1.948	1.535	1.943	1.532
Experienced Discrimination	2.023**	0.659	2.046**	0.669	1.998**	0.652
Refugee Parent	1.751	0.949	----	----	----	----
Southeast Asian Refugee Parent	----	----	3.555*	2.684	----	----
Central American Refugee Parent	----	----	2.053	2.147	----	----
Cuban Refugee Parent	----	----	(predicts failure perfectly)	----	----	----
Southeast Asian	----	----	----	----	1.339	0.679
Central American	----	----	----	----	1.245	0.679
Cuban	----	----	----	----	3.734	3.949
	Sample Size =	3152	Sample Size =	3149	Sample Size =	3152

* = significant at .10 level, ** = significant at .05 level, *** = significant at .01 level

Table 3.4 shows that the general refugee parentage variable does not have any statistically significant effect on actual participation in a home-country political organization. Therefore, simply having refugee parents does not mean that a person will be more likely to participate in organizations associated with home-country politics than persons whose immigrant parents were not refugees. The null hypothesis that the refugee background in general does not influence participation in home-country politics among the 1.5 and 2nd generations cannot be rejected. This counters my theory which is premised on the refugee background leading to home-country political activism/involvement which gets passed on to the 1.5 or 2nd generations.

On the other hand, exploring the results further by parsing the refugee parentage variable into specific regions shows that having Southeast Asian refugee parentage does have a statistically significant, positive effect on participation in home-country political organizations. Having refugee parents from Southeast Asia means that a person is nearly four times as likely to participate in a political organization related to the parents' home-country as someone who does not have refugee parents from Southeast Asia. Moreover, this effect is independent of simply having Southeast Asian ancestry. Having Southeast Asian ancestry alone does not have a statistically significant effect on participation in a home-country political organization. Therefore, although individuals whose parents came from Southeast Asia are not more likely to participate in a home-country political organization, individuals whose parents came from Southeast Asia as refugees are more likely to participate in a home-country political organization. This finding with regard to how Southeast Asian refugee parentage boosts participation in home-country political organizations supports my theory of increased political activism toward the home-country as a result of growing up with a refugee background.

What is peculiar about this finding with regard to Southeast Asian refugee parentage is that the positive effect found in this organizational context is neither found in the context of home-country political interest nor found in the context of home-country political knowledge as my results in tables 3.1 and 3.3 show. In fact, as seen in my discussion above, there is actually a decrease in one aspect of home-country political knowledge—knowledge of the home-country political leader—that is associated with having Southeast Asian refugee parentage. Usually, political participation should not be associated with a lack of political interest or political knowledge (Verba et al. 1995; Wong et al. 2011). Therefore, this finding of increased participation in home-country political organizations among descendants of Southeast Asian refugees without any concomitant increase in home-country political interest or knowledge is a phenomenon which defies logic.

This peculiar phenomenon that arises with the descendants of Southeast Asian refugees presents a mysterious anomaly for my theory. Essentially, the results with regard to their psychological attachment to home-country politics do not support my theory, but the results with regard to their actual home-country political participation support my theory. It is uncertain why this anomaly exists. One possibility is that participation in home-country political organizations among the descendants of Southeast Asian refugees is the result of things other than their own heightened interest and knowledge concerning home-country politics. For example, perhaps there is a filial obligation or duty to the older generation that is associated with the Southeast Asian refugee background. Many studies of Southeast Asian communities, especially of Vietnamese Americans, find that there is an almost sacrosanct culture of filial duty of children to their parents (Aguilar San-Juan 2009; Kibria 1993; Valverde 1994). If Southeast Asian parents who had been refugees tend to persuade their children to join home-country political

organizations by tapping into the children's sense of filial obligation or duty, then the descendants of Southeast Asian refugees join the home-country political organizations not because they are necessarily very interested/informed about home-country politics, but because of a familial obligation/tradition.

According to table 3.4, none of the other regional refugee parentage variables or regional ancestry variables has any statistically significant effect on participation in home-country political organizations. For example, being descended from Central American refugees does not mean that a person will be more or less likely to be involved in a home-country political organization than someone who is not descended from Central American refugees. This result does not support my theory which predicts a higher likelihood of involvement in home-country politics like participation in home-country political organizations among those with a refugee background. One possible reason for this phenomenon is that the home-country political aspirations and organizational activity of Central American refugees were not looked upon favorably by the American government. As discussed in chapter one, the U.S. government supported the Central American home-country regimes—the same regimes that were so vehemently opposed by Central American refugees and their organizations. Witnessing this situation, the children of Central American refugees would have been dissuaded from involvement in home-country political organizations. As a consequence of this, whatever potential there could have been for heightened involvement in home-country political organizations as a result of having a refugee background would be negated. This could possibly explain why there is no statistically significant increase in the likelihood of participating in a home-country political organization among respondents with Central American refugee parents in the IIMMLA data.

What is very surprising, however, is that table 3.4 shows that being descended from Cuban refugees does not mean that an individual will be more likely to participate in home-country political organizations. Based on my theory, the Cuban refugee parentage variable should have the same, statistically significant, positive effect on organizational activity in home-country politics as does the Southeast Asian refugee parentage variable. Moreover, my findings above show that descendants of Cuban American refugees are more likely to express interest in home-country politics and be very knowledgeable about home-country political leadership. All signs point to a highly positive relationship existing between being descended from Cuban refugees and involvement in home-country political organizations, but this predicted effect is not found. A possible explanation for this surprising result is that the IIMMLA data was only able to capture a small number of Cuban Americans living in the Los Angeles metropolitan region of Southern California which is distant from the Cuban American political enclave in Florida. Although Southern California may contain a substantial Southeast Asian enclave of Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees and may therefore contain various Southeast Asian home-country organizations to join, there are a lot fewer Cuban home-country political organizations to join in Southern California than there is in Florida. Thus, descendants of Cuban refugees who live in Southern California may simply be unable to find any home-country organization to join. This may explain why there is no positive effect of the Cuban refugee parentage variable on likelihood of participating in home-country political organizations as there is for the Southeast Asian refugee parentage variable.

When it comes to the control variables premised on assimilation scholarship, assimilationist theories predict that the passage of immigrant generation and upward socio-economic mobility would tend to diminish home-country connections and involvement. Thus,

increased age (which, in the case of IIMMLA, approximates having spent more years in the U.S.), increased immigrant generation, and having more income should all have a statistically significant, negative effect on participation in home-country political organizations. However, table 3.4 shows that these assimilation control variables do not have any statistically significant effect on the propensity to participate in home-country political organizations. Thus, being older, part of a latter immigrant generation, or richer does not mean that a person will be more or less likely to be involved with a home-country political organization.

The only control variable which has an effect that is anticipated by assimilation theories and that achieves statistical significance is having experienced racial discrimination. An individual who has faced racial discrimination will be approximately twice as likely to participate in a home-country political organization as a person who has never faced racial discrimination. This positive effect that racial discrimination has on the likelihood of participating in an organization related to home-country politics is in accordance with the idea of reactive ethnicity found in neo-assimilation and segmented assimilation theories. Reactive ethnicity holds that facing societal obstacles such as racial discrimination will tend to activate ancestral/ethnic identity, so finding increased involvement in home-country politics here is consistent with this assimilationist idea. This finding regarding the effect of racial discrimination also accords with studies of immigrant political incorporation which show that racism or racial threat has an overall positive effect on overall political participation among immigrants in America (DeSipio 1996; 2001; Ramakrishnan 2005; Garcia Bedolla 2005; Espiritu 1992; Wong et al. 2011; Nakanishi 2001; 2003; Lien et al. 2004). Therefore, the finding here extends this logic by showing that racial discrimination not only heightens the propensity to become politically participative in the American context but also heightens the propensity to become

politically participative in the home-country context such as joining home-country political organizations. On the other hand, there is the possibility of reverse causality between the experience with racial discrimination and the potential to join home-country organizations. For instance, perhaps it is the act of joining home-country organizations which leads to an individual's exposure to the organization's framing of certain things as acts of racial discrimination. In other words, when an individual joins an organization, the organization may then influence the individual to perceive past experiences as being racially discriminatory even though the individual may not have perceived them as such prior to joining the organization. This is a qualification with regard to the discrimination variable which needs to be taken into consideration when it involves organizational capacity.

The education control variable does not have the effect anticipated by assimilation theory. Rather than being an assimilative force to direct attention away from the ancestral home-country as assimilation theory would predict, a college education tends to increase participation in a home-country political organization. Those who have attended college are nearly three times more likely to participate in a home-country political organization than someone who has never attended college. This finding of the positive effect of education corroborates educational literature which shows that a college education tends to increase global involvement (Feldman 2004), so the positive influence of a college education on a person's international involvement—in this case, in the form of joining a home-country political organization—is not surprising. This observation is also consistent with studies of political participation in the U.S. which prove that education is a key resource for political participation in general, including being part of political organizations (Verba et al. 1995; Conway 2000). Thus, it is not surprising that a college

education would also serve to be a resource for participation in political organizations involved with the home-country as well.

Donating to a Home-Country Political Campaign

The analysis of home-country political participation continues below, this time with the focus on making a monetary donation to a political campaign in the home-country. LNS is the only survey which includes a measure that records this facet of home-country political participation, thus only Central Americans and Cubans (but not Southeast Asians) can be analyzed here. The variable in question in LNS is a dichotomous variable recording whether a respondent has ever donated to a home-country political campaign since arriving in the U.S. Table 3.5 below contains my regression results using the LNS data with the dependent/response variable being donation to a home-country political campaign.

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Table 3.5: LNS Logistic Regression Results. Dependent Variable: Donated to a Home-Country Political Campaign

Dataset: LNS	Model with general refugee variable		Model with region-specific refugee variable		Model with region-specific variable	
Independent Variable	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.
Age	1.007	0.008	1.007	0.008	1.010	0.008
Generation (1st Generation as Reference)						
1.5 Generation	0.659	0.247	0.651	0.244	0.638	0.239
2nd Generation	1.609	0.528	1.612	0.529	1.511	0.508
College (No College as Reference)	1.349	0.332	1.348	0.332	1.395	0.345
Household Income (Below \$15,000 as Reference)						
\$15,000-24,999	1.176	0.461	1.177	0.461	1.159	0.454
\$25,000-34,999	1.780	0.681	1.780	0.681	1.767	0.677
\$35,000-44,999	2.165*	0.871	2.168*	0.873	2.169*	0.874
\$45,000-54,999	1.663	0.849	1.663	0.849	1.633	0.835
\$55,000-64,999	3.057**	1.464	3.064**	1.467	2.983**	1.430
Above \$65,000	1.990	0.880	1.982	0.877	1.941	0.861
Experienced Discrimination	1.648**	0.392	1.648**	0.392	1.617**	0.386
1.5 Generation Refugee	(predicts failure perfectly)	----	----	----	----	----
Cuban 1.5 Generation Refugee	----	----	(predicts failure perfectly)	----	----	----
Central American 1.5 Generation Refugee	----	----	(predicts failure perfectly)	----	----	----
Cuban	----	----	----	----	0.356	0.263
Central American	----	----	----	----	1.189	0.431
	Sample Size =	4535	Sample Size =	4542	Sample Size =	4575

* = significant at .10 level, ** = significant at .05 level, *** = significant at .01 level

Unfortunately, the very small number of respondents in the LNS data who actually donated to a home-country political campaign makes any statistical finding about the effects of the refugee background impossible. There is absolutely no variation in responses among 1.5 generation refugees. Essentially, out of the already miniscule number of individuals who responded that they were 1.5 generation refugees, all of them responded that they did not donate to a home-country political campaign. Of course, this statistical failure also persists when this refugee background variable is disaggregated into the respective regions. Therefore, it is also impossible to determine if being a Cuban 1.5 generation refugee or being a Central American 1.5 generation refugee has any effect on the propensity to donate to a home-country political campaign. Overall, because of this statistical failure, my theory cannot be proved or disproved with regard to this facet of home-country political participation. What can be statistically analyzed is whether having Cuban ancestry or Central American ancestry alone, regardless of refugee background, would affect the likelihood of making a monetary donation to a home-country campaign. Any support for my theory from any findings based on regional ancestry alone would be extremely tenuous at best because simply having Cuban ancestry or Central American ancestry does not guarantee that a person will have a refugee background. Nevertheless, the findings in table 3.5 indicate that neither being Cuban or Central American will make an individual more or less likely to donate to a home-country political campaign.

Instead, what provides a slightly better account of whether an individual will likely give to a political campaign in the home-country are a few of the factors related to assimilation. For instance, some levels of household income tend to increase the odds of donating to a home-country political campaign. Individuals who have an annual household income between \$35,000 and \$44,999 are about two times more likely to give to a home-country political campaign than a

person who makes only \$15,000 per year. At higher income levels, the likelihood of donating to a home-country political campaign increases even more. Individuals who have an annual income between \$55,000 and \$64,999 are about three times more likely to give to a home-country political campaign than a person who makes only \$15,000 per year. This is something that would logically happen; the more money a person has, the more likely the person will be able to make monetary donations. And of course, studies of political participation point to the importance of income as a resource for participating in politics, especially monetary donations (Verba et al. 1995; Conway 2000; Verba and Nie, 1972). Nevertheless, this finding with regard to income does run counter to assimilation theory in the sense that the more income should indicate greater upward socioeconomic mobility. According to assimilation theory, higher socioeconomic status in the U.S. would facilitate immigrant assimilation into the American political mainstream which means that they should also turn away from the home-country. Instead, the findings here show that higher socioeconomic status leads to closer connection to the home-country in the form of increasing the odds of donating to a home-country political campaign.

Having experienced racial discrimination also has a statistically significant effect. Experience with racial discrimination increases the odds of donating to a home-country political campaign by about 1.6 times. This conforms to predictions in neo and segmented assimilation theories related to the idea of reactive ethnicity. Racial discrimination leads to the activation of immigrants' ethnic/ancestral identities, so it is expected that immigrants would also be more likely to gravitate toward the ancestral home-country by making donations to political campaigns there in response to societal discrimination in America. This finding regarding the effect of racial discrimination also accords with studies of immigrant political incorporation which show

that racism or racial threat has an overall positive effect on overall political engagement and participation (DeSipio 1996; 2001; Ramakrishnan 2005; Garcia Bedolla 2005; Espiritu 1992; Wong et al. 2011; Nakanishi 2001; 2003; Lien et al. 2004). Thus, the results here extend this logic by showing that racial discrimination not only heightens the propensity to become politically active in the American context but also heightens the propensity to become politically active in the home-country context such as donating to home-country political campaigns.

Voting in a Home-Country Election

Finally, the last form of home-country political participation that can be examined using extant survey data is transnational voting. As in the case directly above, LNS is again the only survey which includes a measure that records this form of home-country political participation. The variable in question in LNS is a dichotomous variable recording whether a respondent has ever voted in a home-country election since coming to the U.S. Table 3.6 below contains my regression results using the LNS data with the dependent/response variable being voting in a home-country election. Once again, because LNS only surveyed persons with Latino heritage, Southeast Asian refugees will not be analyzed here. Only the specific refugee-sending regions of Central America and Cuba can be highlighted using LNS.

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FOLLOWING TABLE ON THE SAME PAGE]

Dataset: LNS	Model with general refugee variable		Model with region-specific refugee variable		Model with region-specific variable	
Independent Variable	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.
Age	1.015***	0.005	1.015***	0.005	1.023***	0.005
Generation (1st Generation as Reference)						
1.5 Generation	0.430***	0.121	0.423***	0.119	0.419***	0.118
2nd Generation	0.684	0.180	0.685	0.180	0.543**	0.145
College (No College as Reference)	1.920***	0.296	1.920***	0.296	2.055***	0.319
Household Income (Below \$15,000 as Reference)						
\$15,000-24,999	1.123	0.240	1.123	0.240	1.095	0.234
\$25,000-34,999	1.102	0.252	1.102	0.252	1.093	0.251
\$35,000-44,999	1.223	0.307	1.224	0.307	1.231	0.310
\$45,000-54,999	1.334	0.393	1.334	0.393	1.276	0.378
\$55,000-64,999	1.046	0.386	1.048	0.386	0.973	0.360
Above \$65,000	1.237	0.335	1.232	0.334	1.226	0.335
Experienced Discrimination	1.075	0.178	1.075	0.178	1.057	0.176
1.5 Generation Refugee	(predicts failure perfectly)	----	----	----	----	----
Cuban 1.5 Generation Refugee	----	----	(predicts failure perfectly)	----	----	----
Central American 1.5 Generation Refugee	----	----	(predicts failure perfectly)	----	----	----
Cuban	----	----	----	----	0.039***	0.040
Central American	----	----	----	----	0.658	0.182
	Sample Size =	4535	Sample Size =	4542	Sample Size =	4575

* = significant at .10 level, ** = significant at .05 level, *** = significant at .01 level

Unfortunately again, the very small numbers of respondents who actually responded affirmatively to having voted in a home-country election makes any statistical analysis about the effects of the refugee background impossible. Of the already tiny number of individuals who responded that they were 1.5 generation refugees, every single one of them responded that they did not vote in a home-country election since coming to America. Of course, this statistical failure also persists when this refugee background variable is disaggregated into the respective regions. Therefore, it is also impossible here to determine if being a Cuban 1.5 generation refugee or being a Central American 1.5 generation refugee has any effect on the likelihood of voting transnationally. Overall, because of this statistical failure, my theory cannot be proved or disproved with regard to this facet of home-country political participation.

As before, what can be statistically analyzed is whether having Cuban ancestry or Central American ancestry alone, regardless of refugee context, would affect the likelihood of voting in a home-country election. Table 3.6 shows that the Central American ancestry variable does not have any significant relationship with the likelihood of voting in a home-country election. However, table 3.6 indicates that simply having Cuban ancestry (not necessarily being a 1.5 generation refugee from Cuba) has a statistically significant, negative effect on the likelihood of voting in a home-country election. If an individual has Cuban ancestry, the person is only about 40% as likely to vote in a transnational election in the ancestral home-country as a person who does not have Cuban ancestry. One explanation for this finding is that transnational voting in the Cuban context is practically impossible. The Cold War tension between the U.S. and Cuba, which included severing of economic and diplomatic ties, effectively precluded any involvement

of Cuban Americans in Cuban elections.²⁴ Thus, being Cuban American would mean that a person is more certain to have never voted transnationally in a Cuban election compared to others who are more able to participate in transnational elections because their home-countries permit such transnational participation in elections. Regrettably, this finding is only tenuously related to my theory because although it can be argued that a substantial number of people with Cuban ancestry also have the refugee background, the fact remains that this finding applies to any person with Cuban ancestry regardless of refugee background. Thus, my theory regarding the refugee background cannot be substantiated based on this finding from the effect of Cuban ancestry on transnational voting.

As for the assimilation control variables, an increase in the immigrant generation tends to decrease the likelihood of voting transnationally. Compared to the 1st generation, the 1.5 generation is only half as likely to vote in a home-country election. Only in the model in table 3.6 which controls for regional ancestries does the 2nd generation also have a statistically significant effect on the odds of voting transnationally. The 2nd generation, in that model alone, is also about half as likely as the 1st generation to vote transnationally. All of this is in accord with classical/straight-line assimilation theory which predicts that the passage of immigrant generations would lead to less connection to the home-country as the findings here regarding tendency to vote transnationally confirm.

Age has a slightly positive effect on the odds of voting transnationally. Although assimilation theory predicts that more time spent in the U.S. would mean less connection to the ancestral home-country, this finding with regard to age and transnational voting does not have

²⁴ This longstanding situation was finally altered by the Obama administration in 2014-2015 when the State Department proceeded to change American diplomatic policy towards Cuba.

any bearing on the assimilation theories. Unlike in the IIMMLA and CILS data, age cannot be used to approximate length of time spent in the U.S. in the LNS data.²⁵ LNS did not interview only the children of immigrants, but also interviewed the 1st generation. Such 1st generation immigrants may have entered the U.S. at an older age, and therefore, their age would not approximate longer time spent in the U.S. Consequently, having a respondent in the LNS dataset who is older in age does not mean that the respondent necessarily spent more time in the U.S. Nevertheless, this finding of a positive influence of age on propensity to vote transnationally does corroborate many studies of political participation which find that age is an accurate predictor of the tendency to vote. The older a person is, the more likely the person is to vote in U.S. elections (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003; Verba and Nie 1972), and as the results from the LNS data show, the more likely the person is to vote transnationally as well.

Meanwhile, education shows a statistically significant positive effect on likelihood of voting transnationally. Having a college education increases the likelihood of voting in a home-country election by about a factor of two. This corroborates educational literature which holds that increased education leads to heightened involvement in global issues (Kaufman and Feldman 2004)—involvement which can include voting in home-country elections as this finding confirms. Also, this finding accords with studies of political participation which emphasize the importance of education as a resource for participating in politics, especially voting (Verba et al. 1995; Conway 2000). On the other hand, assimilation literature predicts that higher education leads to more Americanization and thus less connection to the home-country, something which is contradicted by the findings here which show higher education leading to

²⁵ IIMMLA and CILS only interviewed descendants of immigrants in the U.S. who are of the 1.5 generation and later, so an increase in age would reflect more years a person spent living in the U.S. (either since birth as in the 2nd generation, or since arrival at age 15 or younger as in the case of the 1.5 generation).

more connections to the home-country in the form of increased likelihood to vote in home-country elections.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I use quantitative analysis to examine whether the refugee background has any relationship with involvement in home-country politics among the younger generations (i.e. the 1.5 and 2nd generations). My results show that a 1.5 or 2nd generation individual who has a refugee background more likely will be knowledgeable about the political leader of the home-country. Overall, however, I find that such a positive effect of the refugee background in general is an exception rather than the rule. Overall, the generalized refugee background often fails to have any statistically significant relationship with the home-country politics of the younger generations. This observation contradicts my overall theory that the refugee background would be a consistently significant, positive influence on the home-country politics of the younger generations. Nevertheless, because I cannot ensure that the extant survey data accurately captures the political refugee background at the heart of my theory, I further analyzed the data in terms of refugee backgrounds from specific regions known for producing political refugees. The additional findings based on this extra analysis tend to support my theory. For example, having a Cuban refugee background greatly heightens the interest in and knowledge of home-country politics among the 1.5 and 2nd generations. The Southeast Asian refugee background greatly heightens organizational affiliation in home-country politics among the 1.5 and 2nd generations. Likewise, having a Central American refugee background positively influences the 1.5 and 2nd generations' knowledge of home-country politics. All of this supports my theory that the political refugee background tends to heighten home-country politics among the younger generations.

There are also some unanticipated findings. For the most part, aside from the aforementioned heightening of knowledge about home-country politics, the Central American refugee background usually does not have any statistically significant relationship with the home-country politics of the younger generations. The 1.5 and 2nd generation Central Americans with a refugee background are not more likely than others to be interested or participative in home-country politics. One reason for this discussed above is that the U.S. government's lack of support for the home-country agendas of the Central American refugees may have stifled the home-country political activism among descendants of Central American refugees. In other words, what might be occurring is that the children of Central American refugees may witness the U.S. government's opposition to their parents' home-country political aspirations, and as a result, they become uninterested and non-participative in home-country politics. Nevertheless, their Central American refugee upbringing may still expose them to discussions of home-country politics—enough to make them knowledgeable/informed about the issue even if they are not as interested or active about the issue as my quantitative results demonstrate.

Another surprising finding is that, aside from the increased propensity to participate in home-country political organizations, individuals with a Southeast Asian refugee background are not necessarily more likely to be interested or knowledgeable about home-country politics. In fact, the findings here reveal the most unexpected phenomenon of how the Southeast Asian refugee background is negatively associated with knowledge about home-country politics. This completely contradicts my theory and hypotheses. Furthermore, political interest and knowledge usually go hand in hand with political participation, but in this case, it would seem that individuals with a Southeast Asian refugee background may not be more interested in home-

country politics, may actually be less knowledgeable about home-country politics, but are more participative in home-country politics. One possible explanation which I proffer above is that the descendants of Southeast Asian refugees may be more participative in home-country politics due to a filial duty to the parents' refugee generation rather than their own actual engagement in home-country politics.

Another unexpected result is that the Cuban American refugee background, although associated with heightened interest and knowledge when it comes to home-country politics, is not associated with an increased propensity to participate in home-country politics. Political interest and knowledge are usually part and parcel of political participation, but this is not the case for Cuban Americans with a refugee background. One possible reason for this is that this finding of Cuban Americans not necessarily being more participative in home-country politics is based on data gathered in the Southern California region which is not home to a large Cuban American political enclave.

As for the assimilationist factors which usually determine immigrant social and political incorporation away from the home-country and toward the American mainstream, the factor which consistently proves true in accordance with the assimilation scholarship is experience with racial discrimination. My overall quantitative analysis reveals that having experienced racial discrimination does lead to reactive ethnicity in accordance with neo and segmented assimilation theories, and my quantitative results show that this includes a heightened sense of home-country political activism as well. On the other hand, upward socioeconomic mobility such as increased income and higher education do not seem to have the incorporative functions that the assimilation scholarship posits. Instead, my quantitative results show that, rather than helping to assimilate future generations of immigrants into the American political mainstream and away

from the ancestral home-country, upward socioeconomic mobility such as increased income and higher education actually helps to heighten home-country political activism.

In the next chapter, the analysis moves away from the younger generations' involvement in the home-country political context to their involvement in the U.S. political context, and whether the refugee background affects them in the American domestic political arena.

CHAPTER 4

U.S. Politics and the Children of Refugees

The focus of this chapter is on the American political context rather than the home-country political context. As in the previous chapter, I utilize quantitative analysis of the IIMMLA, LNS, and CILS datasets, but now the focus is on determining whether the political refugee background (which I approximate as either being a 1.5 generation refugee or being descended from refugee parents) has any effect on the involvement of the 1.5 and 2nd generations in American politics. To reiterate, I hypothesize that the refugee background will have an overall positive impact on the younger generations' involvement in American politics. As I had introduced in chapter two, the refugee background which should heighten the younger generations' involvement in home-country politics should concomitantly heighten their involvement in U.S. politics.²⁶ Moreover, the refugee background often contains heavy involvement by the U.S. government in refugee affairs (admission, financial aid, settlement, etc.), and this should also help to heighten the younger generations' involvement in U.S. politics. For my theory and hypothesis to hold true, the predicted effect outlined above should be independent of the traditional assimilation factors which I had discussed in chapter one and two that tend to influence how immigrants assimilate into the American social, cultural, and political mainstream over time.

My quantitative findings below reveal that, in the few instances where there is an effect, having a refugee background tends to be a positive influence on the 1.5 and 2nd generations'

²⁶ As is discussed in chapter two, this logic is premised on various studies which have shown that home-country political activity and political activity in the domestic U.S. context are not mutually exclusive of each other but actually reinforce each other (Nakanishi 2001; 2003; Rogers 2006; Guarnizo 2001; Morawska 2001; Jones-Correa 2001; Lien et al. 2004; Wong 2006; Ramakrishnan 2005).

participation in various kinds of conventional and unconventional political activities in the U.S. The exception is that for the descendants of Central American refugees, the overall refugee background tends to have a negative impact on registering to vote in the U.S.

Registering to Vote

The analysis of U.S. politics begins here with the 1.5 and 2nd generations' propensity to register to vote in American elections. Voting is one of the most conventional and basic forms of political participation, but voting in the U.S. requires being registered. Thus, registering to vote is the prerequisite political activity before the actual act of voting can occur. Registering to vote in the U.S. is one political activity that is measured in all three datasets. IIMMLA, CILS, and LNS all have a dichotomous variable recording whether the respondent did or did not register to vote in the U.S. Tables 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3 below contain my regression results with the dependent/response variable being voter registration in the U.S. Table 4.1 contains results from the IIMMLA data, table 4.2 contains results from the CILS data, and table 4.3 contains results from the LNS data. As usual, the main independent/explanatory variables of interest record refugee background, both in general and from specific refugee-sending regions which figure prominently in U.S. immigration history. For the IIMMLA results in table 4.1 and the CILS results in table 4.2, the refugee experience is approximated by having refugee parentage. For the LNS results in table 4.3, the refugee experience is approximated by actually being a 1.5 generation refugee. As always, I also control for traditional assimilationist predictors of intergenerational immigrant incorporation into the American social and political mainstream.²⁷

²⁷ For an introduction of these predictors drawn from the assimilation scholarship, please see chapter one. To understand how these assimilationist predictors relate to my theory and hypotheses, please see chapter two.

Table 4.1: IIMMLA Logistic Regression Results. Dependent Variable: Registered to Vote in the U.S.

Dataset: IIMMLA	Model with general refugee parent variable		Model with region-specific refugee parent variable		Model with region-specific variable	
Independent Variable	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.
Age	1.050***	0.007	1.049***	0.007	1.051***	0.007
2nd Generation (1.5 Generation as Reference)	2.423***	0.128	2.418***	0.128	2.512***	0.137
College (No College as Reference)	2.701***	0.228	2.699***	0.229	2.637***	0.224
Household Income (Less than \$12,000 as Reference)						
\$12,000-\$19,999	0.964	0.164	0.967	0.164	0.966	0.164
\$20,000-\$29,999	1.256	0.206	1.256	0.206	1.280	0.210
\$30,000-\$49,999	1.448**	0.226	1.448**	0.226	1.493***	0.233
\$50,000-\$69,999	1.760***	0.288	1.760***	0.288	1.805***	0.296
\$70,000-\$99,999	1.872***	0.314	1.864***	0.313	1.928***	0.325
\$100,000 or more	2.182***	0.383	2.179***	0.382	2.226***	0.391
Experienced Discrimination	0.992	0.078	0.994	0.079	0.981	0.078
Refugee Parent	1.019	0.155	----	----	----	----
Southeast Asian Refugee Parent	----	----	0.984	0.327	----	----
Central American Refugee Parent	----	----	0.867	0.249	----	----
Cuban Refugee Parent	----	----	(predicts failure perfectly)	----	----	----
Southeast Asian	----	----	----	----	1.567***	0.222
Central American	----	----	----	----	1.070	0.137
Cuban	----	----	----	----	2.706	1.724
	Sample Size =	4256	Sample Size =	4253	Sample Size =	4256

* = significant at .10 level, ** = significant at .05 level, *** = significant at .01 level

Table 4.2: CILS Logistic Regression Results. Dependent Variable: Registered to Vote in the U.S.

Dataset: CILS	Model with general refugee parent variable		Model with region-specific refugee parent variable		Model with region-specific variable	
Independent Variable	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.
Age	1.023	0.053	1.026	0.054	1.031	0.054
2nd Generation (1.5 Generation as Reference)	3.887***	0.347	3.555***	0.326	3.148***	0.300
College (No College as Reference)	2.618***	0.267	2.623***	0.268	2.667***	0.275
Household Income (Less than \$5,000 as Reference)						
\$5,000-\$9,999	0.766	0.257	0.767	0.258	0.756	0.257
&10,000-\$14,999	0.611	0.191	0.623	0.195	0.613	0.194
\$15,000-\$19,999	0.583*	0.182	0.590*	0.184	0.571*	0.180
\$20,000-\$24,999	0.675	0.204	0.657	0.198	0.632	0.193
\$25,000-\$29,999	0.544**	0.163	0.546**	0.164	0.521**	0.158
\$30,000-\$34,999	0.833	0.251	0.834	0.251	0.766	0.233
\$35,000-\$49,999	0.675	0.190	0.674	0.190	0.635	0.181
\$50,000-\$74,999	0.982	0.277	0.994	0.281	0.927	0.265
\$75,000-\$99,999	0.731	0.214	0.728	0.214	0.661	0.196
\$100,000-\$199,999	1.015	0.318	1.007	0.316	0.943	0.299
\$200,000 or More	1.008	0.490	0.965	0.470	0.869	0.424
Experienced Discrimination	0.855*	0.075	0.887	0.079	0.927	0.084
Refugee Parent	1.092	0.111	----	----	----	----
Southeast Asian Refugee Parent	----	----	0.777	0.155	----	----
Central American Refugee Parent	----	----	0.564**	0.128	----	----
Cuban Refugee Parent	----	----	1.462***	0.204	----	----
Southeast Asian	----	----	----	----	0.531***	0.075
Central American	----	----	----	----	0.621***	0.101
Cuban	----	----	----	----	1.347***	0.154
	Sample Size =	2825	Sample Size =	2825	Sample Size =	2825

* = significant at .10 level, ** = significant at .05 level, *** = significant at .01 level

Table 4.3: LNS Logistic Regression Results. Dependent Variable: Registered to Vote in the U.S.

Dataset: LNS	Model with general refugee variable		Model with region-specific refugee variable		Model with region-specific variable	
Independent Variable	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.
Age	1.048***	0.004	1.048***	0.004	1.047***	0.004
Generation (1st Generation as Reference)						
1.5 Generation	1.641***	0.263	1.653***	0.265	1.627***	0.257
2nd Generation	2.236***	0.236	2.232***	0.236	2.251***	0.242
College (No College as Reference)	2.374***	0.238	2.375***	0.239	2.342***	0.236
Household Income (Below \$15,000 as Reference)						
\$15,000-24,999	1.128	0.174	1.126	0.173	1.134	0.175
\$25,000-34,999	1.864***	0.302	1.864***	0.302	1.858***	0.301
\$35,000-44,999	1.746***	0.290	1.747***	0.291	1.743***	0.290
\$45,000-54,999	1.932***	0.360	1.943***	0.362	1.931***	0.359
\$55,000-64,999	2.374***	0.504	2.379***	0.505	2.378***	0.505
Above \$65,000	3.599***	0.665	3.564***	0.659	3.561***	0.659
Experienced Discrimination	1.080	0.112	1.086	0.112	1.091	0.113
1.5 Generation Refugee	0.956	0.548	-----	-----	-----	-----
Cuban 1.5 Generation Refugee	-----	-----	(predicts failure perfectly)	-----	-----	-----
Central American 1.5 Generation Refugee	-----	-----	0.220**	0.161	-----	-----
Cuban	-----	-----	-----	-----	1.494*	0.358
Central American	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.924	0.177
	Sample Size =	3861	Sample Size =	3841	Sample Size =	3861

* = significant at .10 level, ** = significant at .05 level, *** = significant at .01 level

The IIMMLA results in table 4.1 and the CILS results in table 4.2 indicate that having refugee parentage in general does not have any statistically significant effect on the odds of registering to vote. Because of this, I cannot reject the null hypothesis that a person who has refugee parentage in general is not more likely to vote than a similarly situated person who does not have refugee parentage. Similarly, the LNS results in table 4.3 show that being a 1.5 generation refugee in general also does not have any statistically significant effect on the likelihood of registering to vote. Being a 1.5 generation refugee in general does not mean that a person is more likely to vote than someone who is not a 1.5 generation refugee. In order to ensure that I am analyzing actual political refugees at the heart of my theory, I parse the refugee variables into the Cuban, Central American, and Southeast Asian regions which are historically associated with sending large waves of political refugees to the U.S.²⁸ Parsing the variables further into respective regions reveals the following results.

The CILS results in table 4.2 show that having Cuban refugee parentage has a significant, positive effect on the odds of registering to vote. Those who have Cuban refugee parentage are 1.5 times more likely to register to vote than those who do not have Cuban refugee parentage. This corroborates my hypothesis that the refugee background should be a positive influence on the younger generations' tendency to participate in U.S. politics, in this case, registering to vote. Unfortunately, this finding in table 4.2 is based on only one dataset, the CILS data set. In both the IIMMLA results in table 4.1 and the LNS results in table 4.3, the Cuban refugee background cannot be analyzed because the small number of respondents who have a refugee background do not vary in their responses with regard to voter registration. This causes a statistical failure in both tables 4.1 and 4.3 with regard to the Cuban refugee background and its possible effect on

²⁸ Please refer to chapter two for a more thorough explanation of why I chose these three regional groups.

voter registration. Thus, the foregoing finding of the younger generations' increased tendency to register to vote due to the Cuban refugee background needs to be qualified in light of this problem. In addition, there is another major caveat to the finding above. Both the CILS and LNS results in tables 4.2 and 4.3, respectively, show that Cuban ancestry alone already has a positive effect on registering to vote. Simply having Cuban ancestry makes a person 1.3 times more likely to register to vote (according to the CILS results in table 4.2) and 1.5 times more likely to register to vote (according to the LNS results in table 4.3). What this means is that the positive effect of the Cuban refugee background may actually be driven by simply having Cuban ancestry alone.

The CILS results in table 4.2 show that having Central American refugee parentage has a significantly negative effect on voter registration among the 1.5 and 2nd generations. According to the CILS data, a person who has Central American refugee parentage is about half as likely to register to vote as a person who does not have Central American refugee parentage. The LNS results in table 4.3 also corroborate this finding by showing that being a 1.5 generation refugee from Central America has a significantly negative relationship with likelihood of registering to vote in the U.S. An individual who is a 1.5 generation refugee from Central America will only be about 20% as likely to register to vote as a person who is not a 1.5 generation refugee from Central America. These findings with regard to the Central American refugee background contradict my overall contention that the refugee background should help to boost the younger generations' involvement in American politics such as registering to vote. One possible explanation for this finding is that the descendants of Central American refugees would likely be dissuaded from participating in formal channels of U.S. politics, like registering to vote, given the history of hostility by the U.S. government. The U.S. government and American politics

often opposed the presence of Central American refugees in the U.S. because it conflicted with American Cold War interests which supported the Central American home-country regimes from which these refugees had fled. This opposition, and in many cases intimidation, by the U.S. governmental/political system may have possibly left a bad impression on the descendants of Central American refugees, thereby stifling their potential to participate in the American political process like registering to vote.

The LNS results in table 4.3 do not indicate any significant relationship between simply having Central American ancestry and registering to vote. Thus, the LNS data shows that the significantly negative effect of the Central American refugee background on the younger generations' voter registration is independent of simply having Central American ancestry. However, the CILS results in table 4.2 do indicate that Central American ancestry alone has a similar negative effect on registering to vote, meaning that the negative effect of the Central American refugee background may largely be driven by simply having ancestry from Central America. It is uncertain why the Central American ancestry variable is somewhat significant in the CILS results in table 4.2 but is not statistically significant in the LNS results in table 4.3. In any case, if it does prove true that Central American ancestry alone is the factor driving the largely negative effect of the Central American refugee background on the younger generations' voter registration, this finding is still a blow to my theory. My theory posits that the refugee background will be a positive influence on voter registration, so if there is a dampening of voter registration endemic to Central American ancestry, the refugee background should—according to my theory—counteract this dampening effect. The fact that it does not counteract this dampening effect or is in anyway associated with a positive effect undermines my theory. To reiterate, one possible reason for not finding a positive influence of the refugee background

among Central American descendants is that the U.S. government's hostility towards Central American refugees may have stifled their potential for political activism in the American context.

When it comes to the Southeast Asian refugee background, both the IIMMLA results in table 4.1 and the CILS results in table 4.2 show that having Southeast Asian refugee parents may not have any significant effect on the propensity to register to vote in the U.S. This is surprising given how the refugee circumstances of Southeast Asian refugees often paralleled those of Cuban refugees. Yet, the findings here do not point to a similarly heightened tendency to register to vote. This finding is very peculiar because various studies show greater political incorporation into the American political establishment by refugee populations such as the Vietnamese Americans who lead the way among Asian Americans in voting in the U.S. and involvement with the Republican Party establishment (Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner 1991; Lien et al. 2004; Collet 2008b; Wong et al. 2011; Nhi 2011; Lai et al. 2001). What is even more unexpected is that the IIMMLA results in table 4.1 show that simply having Southeast Asian ancestry alone increases the odds of registering to vote. A person who has Southeast Asian ancestry is 1.5 times more likely to register to vote than an individual who does not have Southeast Asian ancestry. Thus, although having Southeast Asian ancestry tends to increase voter registration, the problem is that combining this with the Southeast Asian refugee background makes the statistical increase in voter registration disappear. In other words, the descendants of Southeast Asian refugees do not exhibit a higher likelihood of registering to vote even though Southeast Asians in general do exhibit a higher likelihood of registering to vote.

Meanwhile, the CILS results in table 4.2 indicate something that is the total opposite of the foregoing observation. Having Southeast Asian ancestry tends to decrease the odds of registering to vote. According to the CILS data, individuals with Southeast Asian ancestry are

half as likely to register to vote. One possible explanation for these unexpected findings is that IIMMLA focused on the Los Angeles metropolitan region (including Los Angeles County and Orange County), a region that is home to the most Vietnamese Americans and Cambodian Americans in the U.S. and where these two groups have significant enclaves. So many Vietnamese American and Cambodian American organizations exist in the Los Angeles metropolitan region, and these organizations often hold voter registration drives (Lieu 2011; Collet 2008b; Chan 2004). Meanwhile, CILS looks at Miami/Fort Lauderdale, Florida and San Diego, California, and although these areas are home to many Southeast Asian Americans, the Southeast Asian presence may not be as well organized as in Los Angeles/Orange County. Thus, the strong negative effect of the Southeast Asian ancestry variable in the CILS data may suggest that the lack of enclave/organization in the regions targeted by CILS may prove to be detrimental to Southeast Asian voter registration.

In any case, if it does prove true that having Southeast Asian ancestry alone has a largely positive effect on the younger generations' voter registration (as found in IIMMLA) or it proves true that having Southeast Asian ancestry alone has a largely negative effect on the younger generations' voter registration (as found in CILS), either result is still a major blow to my theory. My theory posits how the refugee background leads to heightened political activism and closer connection to the American political/governmental system, and therefore, the refugee background will be a positive influence on the younger generations' voter registration. Thus, if there is a heightening of voter registration endemic to Southeast Asian ancestry as in IIMMLA, the refugee background should—according to my theory—further boost this heightening effect. Alternatively, if there is a dampening of voter registration endemic to Southeast Asian ancestry as in CILS, the refugee background should—according to my theory—counteract this dampening

effect. Consequently, the fact that the Southeast Asian refugee background is not associated with any statistically significant effect on the younger generations' voter registration greatly undermines my theory.

Overall, the assimilationist control variables derived from the assimilation scholarship work as expected in all three datasets. Those who are older are more likely to register to vote in the U.S., and this corroborates the idea found in assimilation theory which holds that the more time spent in the U.S. (approximated by increased age) leads to more political incorporation and involvement in the American political mainstream.²⁹ Furthermore, this finding also conforms to the idea found in studies of political participation in the U.S. that the older a person is in general, the more likely the person is to vote, and of course, register to vote (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003; Verba and Nie 1972). Classical assimilation theory predicts that the passage of immigrant generations would turn the immigrant's attention away from the home-country and more toward the host-country of the U.S. This is confirmed by my results. According to the IIMMLA and LNS data, those in the 2nd generation are approximately twice as likely to register to vote in the U.S. as the prior generation, and the CILS data show that those in the 2nd generation are approximately three times as likely to register to vote in the U.S. as the prior generation.

Assimilation theory as well as literature on political participation all point to how increased education and income would increase political participation in America. Assimilation theory predicates this on increased socioeconomic integration into the American mainstream, and political participation literature predicates this on education and income serving as key resources for participating in American politics (Verba et al. 1995; Verba and Nie 1972; Conway 2000). In

²⁹ Unlike in IIMMLA and CILS which contain only 1.5 or later generations that grew up in the U.S., LNS also includes 1st generation immigrants who may have come to the U.S. at older ages. Therefore, age in LNS does not have any bearing on the idea that older age approximates increased time spent growing up in the U.S.

terms of education, all three datasets show that having a college education consistently leads to a doubling of the likelihood that a person will register to vote. As for income, both the IIMMLA and LNS data show how the odds of registering to vote steadily increases with higher income levels all the way up to the highest income bracket which leads to the greatest increase in the odds of registering to vote.³⁰ Surprisingly, the CILS data reveals almost no significant relationship between income level and likelihood of registering to vote save the even more unexpected finding of a decrease in the likelihood of registering to vote at the middle income levels.

A very surprising result is that the effect of racial discrimination does not achieve statistical significance with regard to registering to vote. Assimilation theory, primarily neo and segmented assimilation, would predict that experience with racial discrimination should be a strongly negative factor to vote and register to vote. Discrimination would pose an obstacle to incorporating into the American social and political mainstream and may lead to reactive ethnicity away from conventional American politics and possibly downward assimilation. On the other hand, studies on immigrant political incorporation would predict some activation of politically incorporative activities like registering to vote in the U.S. in response to discrimination and racial threat (DeSipio 1996; 2001; Ramakrishnan 2005; Garcia Bedolla 2005; Espiritu 1992; Wong et al. 2011; Nakanishi 2001; 2003; Lien et al. 2004). Both of these opposite predictions, however, do not pan out as the findings here show that a person who experienced racial discrimination is neither more likely or less likely to register to vote than someone who has never experienced racial discrimination. This is surprising in light of how the

³⁰The odds of registering to vote increases a bit more in the context of the LNS survey which reaches a high of around 3.5 times the odds of registering to vote at the highest income bracket in LNS compared to a high of around 2 times the odds of registering to vote at the highest income bracket in IIMMLA.

majority of my findings with regard to home-country politics in chapter three show how racial discrimination is a consistently, statistically significant variable affecting younger generations.

Voting in the U.S.

Having looked at registering to vote, the next step is to look at actual voting. Unlike registering to vote which is captured in all three datasets, actual voting in an American election is only recorded in IIMMLA and LNS. In IIMMLA, voting is represented by a dichotomous variable recording whether the respondent did or did not vote in the California Gubernatorial Recall Election, a special state election that occurred in 2003 to recall the California governor. In the LNS data, voting is recorded as a dichotomous variable which shows whether the respondent did or did not vote in the 2004 U.S. General/Presidential Election. Therefore, results based on the IIMMLA data will be in the context of a California state election while results based on the LNS data will be in the context of a federal election. Table 4.4 below contains my regression results using the IIMMLA data with the dependent/response variable being voting in the 2003 California Gubernatorial Recall Election. Table 4.5 contains results from the LNS data with the dependent/response variable being voting in the 2004 Presidential Election.

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FOLLOWING TABLE ON THE SAME PAGE]

Table 4.4: IIMMLA Logistic Regression Results. Dependent Variable: Voted in the 2003 California Gubernatorial Recall Election

Dataset: IIMMLA	Model with general refugee parent variable		Model with region-specific refugee parent variable		Model with region-specific variable	
Independent Variable	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.
Age	1.066***	0.006	1.065***	0.006	1.067***	0.006
2nd Generation (1.5 Generation as Reference)	1.596***	0.071	1.594***	0.071	1.640***	0.076
College (No College as Reference)	2.500***	0.215	2.527***	0.217	2.525***	0.218
Household Income (Less than \$12,000 as Reference)						
\$12,000-\$19,999	0.951	0.181	0.947	0.180	0.946	0.180
\$20,000-\$29,999	1.233	0.220	1.231	0.220	1.227	0.219
\$30,000-\$49,999	1.777***	0.293	1.760***	0.290	1.778***	0.293
\$50,000-\$69,999	1.966***	0.329	1.962***	0.329	1.974***	0.331
\$70,000-\$99,999	2.142***	0.364	2.131***	0.362	2.166***	0.368
\$100,000 or more	2.388***	0.411	2.394***	0.412	2.440***	0.420
Experienced Discrimination	0.901	0.064	0.900	0.064	0.895	0.064
Refugee Parent	1.090	0.168	----	----	----	----
Southeast Asian Refugee Parent	----	----	0.640	0.216	----	----
Central American Refugee Parent	----	----	1.510	0.449	----	----
Cuban Refugee Parent	----	----	(predicts failure perfectly)	----	----	----
Southeast Asian	----	----	----	----	1.092	0.147
Central American	----	----	----	----	1.484***	0.190
Cuban	----	----	----	----	2.652**	1.173
	Sample Size =	4256	Sample Size =	4253	Sample Size =	4256

* = significant at .10 level, ** = significant at .05 level, *** = significant at .01 level

Table 4.5: LNS Logistic Regression Results. Dependent Variable: Voted in the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election

Dataset: LNS	Model with general refugee variable		Model with region-specific refugee variable		Model with region-specific variable	
Independent Variable	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.
Age	1.053***	0.003	1.053***	0.003	1.052***	0.003
Generation (1st Generation as Reference)						
1.5 Generation	1.201	0.169	1.199	0.168	1.212	0.167
2nd Generation	1.684***	0.153	1.682***	0.153	1.716***	0.160
College (No College as Reference)	2.287***	0.190	2.284***	0.190	2.254***	0.188
Household Income (Below \$15,000 as Reference)						
\$15,000-24,999	1.075	0.151	1.074	0.151	1.081	0.152
\$25,000-34,999	1.653***	0.237	1.651***	0.236	1.649***	0.237
\$35,000-44,999	1.820***	0.268	1.820***	0.268	1.823***	0.269
\$45,000-54,999	1.986***	0.320	1.990***	0.321	1.992***	0.321
\$55,000-64,999	2.404***	0.426	2.404***	0.427	2.411***	0.428
Above \$65,000	4.059***	0.624	4.032***	0.620	4.018***	0.618
Experienced Discrimination	0.966	0.084	0.970	0.084	0.976	0.085
1.5 Generation Refugee	1.218	0.575	-----	-----	-----	-----
Cuban 1.5 Generation Refugee	-----	-----	5.065	5.322	-----	-----
Central American 1.5 Generation Refugee	-----	-----	0.378	0.283	-----	-----
Cuban	-----	-----	-----	-----	1.537**	0.291
Central American	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.969	0.169
	Sample Size =	3861	Sample Size =	3861	Sample Size =	3861

* = significant at .10 level, ** = significant at .05 level, *** = significant at .01 level

Both the IIMMLA and LNS data reveal that the refugee variables do not have any significant relationship with the likelihood of actually going to the polls to vote in either a state or federal election. Either having refugee parentage or being a 1.5 generation refugee does not mean that a person is more likely to vote in either the state or federal election than a person who neither has refugee parentage nor is a 1.5 generation refugee. Furthermore, any possible effects from the region-specific refugee variables also do not achieve statistical significance. The Cuban, Southeast Asian, and Central American regional refugee variables do not have any statistically significant relationship with the likelihood of voting among the 1.5 and 2nd generations.³¹ The null hypothesis, that the refugee background may have no effect whatsoever on the odds that the younger generations exercise the U.S. franchise, cannot be ruled out.

This is surprising in light of how the regionally-specific refugee backgrounds did impact the younger generations' propensity to register to vote as was discussed in the previous section. The Cuban refugee background tends to increase the odds of the younger generations' voter registration as is discussed at length above, yet it does not tend to increase the odds that they actually go out to vote. Analysis of the regional ancestries alone also indicates that being of Cuban ancestry has a positive effect on the likelihood of voting. A person with Cuban ancestry is more than twice as likely to vote in the 2003 California recall election and more than 1.5 times as likely to vote in the 2004 presidential election as a person who is not of Cuban ancestry. This is a very surprising result because my theory predicts that this increase in the likelihood of voting should occur among the younger generations who have a Cuban refugee background, not just anyone of Cuban descent. If Cuban Americans are innately predisposed to vote more than others

³¹ Unfortunately, the Cuban refugee parentage variable could not be analyzed using IIMMLA data due to statistical failure: the few respondents who have Cuban refugee parentage do not vary in their responses about voting in the California recall election, thereby predicting failure of voting perfectly.

as is found here, my hypothesis would be that the Cuban refugee background should intensify this tendency to vote even more. On the contrary, this discovery in my findings that being of Cuban descent, but not Cuban refugee descent, is associated with a statistically significant increase in the likelihood of voting directly contradicts my theory.

Also interesting is that the findings here point to how the Central American refugee background may not increase the likelihood that the younger generations actually vote, but does decrease the likelihood of their registering to vote as my results in the previous section show. Looking at the regional ancestries alone without refugee backgrounds adds some additional, interesting insights. As seen in the rightmost column in table 4.4, the IIMMLA data indicates that having Central American ancestry alone actually has a positive influence on the likelihood of the 1.5 and 2nd generations going to vote. People of Central American ancestry are about 1.5 times more likely to vote in the California recall election than people who are not of Central American ancestry. This result is unexpected because my earlier findings about registering to vote indicate that Central American ancestry is negatively associated with the odds of registering to vote in the U.S. Here, however, Central American ancestry is found to be positively associated with the odds of voting in a U.S. election. Thus, Central American ancestry can be a positive factor in the political incorporation into the American political mainstream as this increased tendency to vote demonstrates. Nevertheless, the LNS data does not show any statistically significant relationship between having Central American ancestry and voting in the U.S. presidential election. It is unknown why this occurs, but one possible explanation is perhaps the increased voter participation among Central Americans in the California election captured by IIMMLA stems from the greater Central American enclave in California, something which is missing nationwide during the federal election captured by LNS.

On another note, this finding in table 4.4 also suggests how those who have Central American ancestry are more likely to vote in the California recall election, but those who have Central American ancestry and whose parents are refugees are not necessarily more likely to vote in that election. Essentially, the statistically significant, increased tendency to vote in the California election that is innate to Central Americans disappears once it is associated with the refugee background. This runs counter to my theory which anticipates the refugee background enhancing the Central American propensity to vote in the California election, not to make that propensity disappear. One possible reason for this is that the U.S. government's hostility directed at Central American refugees whose existence contradicted American foreign policy interests may have stifled any potential for their descendants to be politically active in the U.S., to the point of actually stifling their innate tendency to vote in the California election endemic to having Central American ancestry.

The assimilationist control variables based on assimilation scholarship have the same predicted effects on the likelihood of voting as they do on the likelihood of registering to vote which I had examined in the previous section. For example, both the IIMMLA and LNS results show that the age variable works as predicted: the older a person is, the more likely the person will vote. Assimilation theory is predicated on increased time spent in the U.S. causing immigrants to become more politically assimilated and therefore more participative in mainstream political activities like voting. In the case of the IIMMLA data, this finding corresponds to assimilation theory because older age in IIMMLA approximates longer time spent (and thus more assimilation) in the U.S. among the 1.5 and 2nd generations. Thus, the finding in IIMMLA that increased age and concomitantly increased assimilation leads to a higher

likelihood of voting confirms assimilation theory.³² Furthermore, this finding that increased age is associated with a higher likelihood of voting confirms various studies of age's positive effect on political participation in America, especially on voting (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003; Verba and Nie 1972).

Also, both the IIMMLA and LNS data point to how being more educated and having a higher income lead to a higher likelihood of voting. Tables 4.4 and 4.5 clearly show that having a college education more than doubles the likelihood of a person voting in either the recall election at the state level or presidential election at the federal level. Similarly, the results in both tables reveal that having an income level beginning in the \$30,000 level also leads to a slight increase in the odds of voting in either the state or federal election. Although the odds of voting steadily increases with higher income levels all the way up to the highest income bracket which leads to the greatest increase in the odds of voting in either election, the odds of voting skyrockets much more in the context of the federal election: at the highest income bracket in IIMMLA as displayed in table 4.4, a person is more than twice as likely to vote in the state recall election as someone in the lowest income bracket, but at the highest income bracket in LNS as displayed in table 4.5, a person is more than four times as likely to vote in the federal election as someone in the lowest income bracket. These findings accord with assimilation theory which posits that higher education and income reflect upward socioeconomic mobility into the American mainstream and thus greater participation in mainstream political activities like voting. These results are also expected because studies of political participation point to education and income as key resources for voting (Verba et al. 1995; Conway 2000).

³² Unlike in IIMMLA and CILS which contain only 1.5 or later generations that grew up in the U.S., LNS also includes 1st generation immigrants who may have come to the U.S. at older ages. Therefore, age in LNS does not have any bearing on the idea that older age approximates increased time spent growing up in the U.S.

Of course, the passage of immigrant generations leading to increased political incorporation into the American political mainstream is a hallmark of assimilation theory. This phenomenon is very evident in the results about voting obtained from the IIMMLA and LNS data. Passage of generations, especially passage into the 2nd generation, has a strongly positive influence on the likelihood of voting. As tables 4.4 and 4.5 show, passage into the 2nd generation increases the odds of voting by a factor ranging from 1.5 to 1.6 for the California election, or by a factor ranging from 1.5 to 1.7 for the federal presidential election. Thus, these results all confirm assimilation theory's prediction that the passage of generations would significantly increase an immigrant's propensity to engage in mainstream American political activities like voting.

On the other hand, both tables 4.4 and 4.5 reveal that experience with racial discrimination does not have any statistically significant effect on likelihood of voting. This means that a person who has experienced racial discrimination is no more or less likely to vote in either kind of election than a person who has never experienced racial discrimination. This is surprising because both the assimilation literature and studies of immigrant political incorporation point to how racial discrimination should significantly affect political participation, albeit in different ways. The neo and segmented assimilation literature posit that societal discrimination would inhibit assimilation and thus hurt the prospects for immigrants to partake in the American political mainstream. Thus, racial discrimination should have a negative effect on voting. Meanwhile, studies of immigrant political incorporation posit the mobilizing and incorporating effect of racial discrimination so that racial discrimination should be a positive effect on voting (DeSipio 1996; 2001; Ramakrishnan 2005; Garcia Bedolla 2005; Espiritu 1992;

Wong et al. 2011; Nakanishi 2001; 2003; Lien et al. 2004).³³ Either scenario is not realized as seen in the lack of a statistically significant effect on voting due to racial discrimination in both the IIMMLA and LNS data. Thus, this lack of a statistically significant effect from racial discrimination in the context of voting (and as mentioned in the previous section, also in the context of registering to vote) is very surprising given how the scholarship underscores the importance of racial discrimination, and given how the majority of my other findings regarding home-country politics in chapter three confirm the importance of racial discrimination.

Contacting the U.S. Government

The analysis now turns to non-voting forms of political participation in the U.S. One conventional form of non-voting political participation is to personally contact the U.S. government by writing, calling, or visiting government officials and offices to raise concerns about various issues. This form of political participation is regarded as having a higher capacity for conveying precise information from the citizenry to the government than simply going to the polls and voting (Conway 2000; Verba et al. 1995). Contacting the government is recorded in IIMMLA and LNS. In the IIMMLA data, contacting the government is represented by a dichotomous variable recording whether the respondent did or did not contact the government by mail, phone, or in person in the past year. Meanwhile, in the LNS data, contacting the government is represented by a dichotomous variable recording whether the respondent has ever contacted the government by mail, phone, or in person. Table 4.6 below contains my regression results using the IIMMLA data with the dependent/response variable being contacting the U.S.

³³ For instance, in the face of racial threat in the form of English-only movements or Proposition 187 in California, immigrant communities in America became activated and began to naturalize and vote more (DeSipio 1996; 2001; Ramakrishnan 2005; Garcia Bedolla 2005; Espiritu 1992; Wong et al. 2011; Nakanishi 2001; 2003; Lien et al. 2004).

government during the past year. Table 4.7 contains results from the LNS data with the dependent/response variable being having ever contacted the U.S. government.

Dataset: IIMMLA	Model with general refugee parent variable		Model with region-specific refugee parent variable		Model with region-specific variable	
Independent Variable	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.
Age	1.034***	0.006	1.034***	0.006	1.033***	0.006
2nd Generation (1.5 Generation as Reference)	1.079*	0.049	1.075	0.048	1.054	0.049
College (No College as Reference)	1.604***	0.140	1.620***	0.142	1.629***	0.143
Household Income (Less than \$12,000 as Reference)						
\$12,000-\$19,999	1.036	0.194	1.034	0.194	1.051	0.197
\$20,000-\$29,999	1.235	0.219	1.237	0.220	1.227	0.218
\$30,000-\$49,999	1.294	0.215	1.285	0.214	1.285	0.214
\$50,000-\$69,999	1.251	0.213	1.250	0.213	1.244	0.212
\$70,000-\$99,999	1.393*	0.239	1.392*	0.239	1.389*	0.239
\$100,000 or more	1.557**	0.270	1.567***	0.272	1.566***	0.272
Experienced Discrimination	1.876***	0.133	1.871***	0.133	1.886***	0.134
Refugee Parent	1.377**	0.207	----	----	----	----
Southeast Asian Refugee Parent	----	----	0.667	0.244	----	----
Central American Refugee Parent	----	----	2.285***	0.635	----	----
Cuban Refugee Parent	----	----	6.031	7.491	----	----
Southeast Asian	----	----	----	----	0.734**	0.106
Central American	----	----	----	----	1.194	0.155
Cuban	----	----	----	----	0.554	0.284
	Sample Size =	4256	Sample Size =	4256	Sample Size =	4256

* = significant at .10 level, ** = significant at .05 level, *** = significant at .01 level

Table 4.7: LNS Logistic Regression Results. Dependent Variable: Ever Contacted the U.S. Government

Dataset: LNS	Model with general refugee variable		Model with region-specific refugee variable		Model with region-specific variable	
Independent Variable	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.
Age	1.020***	0.002	1.020***	0.002	1.020***	0.002
Generation (1st Generation as Reference)						
1.5 Generation	1.587***	0.156	1.569***	0.154	1.596***	0.153
2nd Generation	1.956***	0.123	1.957***	0.123	1.913***	0.123
College (No College as Reference)	1.933***	0.118	1.930***	0.118	1.929***	0.118
Household Income (Below \$15,000 as Reference)						
\$15,000-24,999	1.408***	0.139	1.409***	0.139	1.413***	0.139
\$25,000-34,999	2.009***	0.201	2.008***	0.201	2.016***	0.202
\$35,000-44,999	1.880***	0.203	1.876***	0.202	1.887***	0.203
\$45,000-54,999	2.061***	0.247	2.056***	0.247	2.072***	0.248
\$55,000-64,999	2.478***	0.326	2.476***	0.326	2.485***	0.327
Above \$65,000	3.134***	0.336	3.132***	0.336	3.166***	0.340
Experienced Discrimination	1.576***	0.099	1.576***	0.099	1.583***	0.099
1.5 Generation Refugee	1.224	0.422	-----	-----	-----	-----
Cuban 1.5 Generation Refugee	-----	-----	1.409	0.633	-----	-----
Central American 1.5 Generation Refugee	-----	-----	2.024	1.359	-----	-----
Cuban	-----	-----	-----	-----	1.006	0.128
Central American	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.779**	0.094
	Sample Size =	6560	Sample Size =	6560	Sample Size =	6560

* = significant at .10 level, ** = significant at .05 level, *** = significant at .01 level

The IIMMLA results in table 4.6 support my overall theory which holds that refugees would pass their political activism onto their descendants who would then be involved in American politics like contacting the U.S. government to address problems. The results in table 4.6 reveal that the generalized refugee parentage variable does indeed have a significant, positive relationship with the odds of contacting a U.S. government office. Individuals who have refugee parents are about 1.4 times more likely to contact government offices than individuals who do not have refugee parents. However, unlike the IIMMLA results, the LNS results in table 4.7 do not show any significant relationship between being a 1.5 generation refugee in general and the likelihood of contacting the government. According to the LNS data, being a 1.5 generation refugee does not mean that a person will be more likely to contact a government official than someone who is not a 1.5 generation refugee. This finding based on the LNS data contradicts my theory which predicts a positive effect of the refugee background on the younger generations' propensity to contact government officials.

One possible explanation for this finding is that IIMMLA permits analysis of more refugee generations than the LNS data. Unlike in IIMMLA or CILS, it is impossible to make a determination of 2nd generation children of refugees within LNS. Instead, the only refugee descendant generation that can be ascertained using LNS data is the 1.5 generation refugee.³⁴ Thus, this finding may suggest that for 1.5 generation refugees in particular, the refugee background does not affect their tendency to contact the U.S. government as much as it does for the 2nd generation descendants of refugee parents. Perhaps it is being born and raised in the U.S. combined with having parents who are refugees which produces more of a positive effect

³⁴ Unfortunately, unlike IIMMLA and CILS, LNS does not record whether a respondent's parents entered as refugees, so making a determination of who is a descendant of refugees is not possible. My research question focuses on the 1.5 and 2nd generation descendants of refugees. Because determination of being a 2nd generation descendent of refugees is not possible in LNS, this means that for the purposes of my research, the LNS can only be used to look at the 1.5 generation refugee. Please see chapter two for further explanations of this.

than simply being raised in the U.S. with a refugee background. Those who are born and raised in the U.S., the 2nd generation, may be more assimilated and thus may be more familiar with contacting the government. Consequently, the background refugee activism combined with an American-born-and-raised familiarity with contacting the government may be the reason behind the refugee background variable having a statistically significant, positive effect on contacting the government in the IIMMLA results but not in the LNS results.

Another possible reason is that IIMMLA contains more refugee groups. LNS only focuses on Latino groups so the refugees in its dataset are not as ethnically diverse as the ones in IIMMLA. On this note, parsing the refugee background variable into the respective regions reveals the following results. Table 4.6 reveals that the positive effect of the general refugee parentage variable may be largely due to having Central American refugee parents in particular. A person with Central American refugee parentage is about twice as likely to contact the U.S. government as a person who does not have Central American refugee parentage. Furthermore, this effect cannot be explained by simply being of Central American ancestry because table 4.6 shows that the Central American ancestry variable alone does not have any significant relationship with contacting the U.S. government. In fact, the LNS data in table 4.7 shows that simply having Central American ancestry significantly decreases the likelihood of contacting the U.S. government. According to the LNS data, simply being an individual with ancestry from the region of Central America makes the individual only 78% as likely to contact the U.S. government as someone who does not have Central American ancestry. My overall theory is that the refugee penchant for political activism would be passed down to the younger generation children of refugees, so it is not surprising to find that descendants of Central American refugees would be more activist and more willing to contact the U.S. government.

Nevertheless, the foregoing result is a bit unexpected. An explanation which I proffered above to explain the negative relationship between the Central American refugee background and U.S. political participation like voter registration is that the U.S. government's hostility toward Central American refugees (whose migration contradicted U.S. Cold War interests) may have prevented their descendants from being active in what is perceived to be a hostile American governmental/political system. However, finding that descendants of Central American refugees are significantly more likely to contact the U.S. government as seen in table 4.6 undermines this idea. It seems that the political activism of the refugee background translates into continued political activism by the descendants of Central American refugees, at least in the context of being more likely than others to contact the U.S. government.

That being said, the LNS data in table 4.7 does not show any statistically significant relationship between being a 1.5 generation refugee from Central America and contacting the U.S. government. The Central American refugee variable in table 4.7 does have a positive coefficient which mirrors the one found in the IIMMLA results in table 4.6, but this coefficient in table 4.7 is not statistically significant. One possible explanation for this discrepant finding between IIMMLA and LNS regarding the effect of the Central American refugee background is that, as stated above, IIMMLA permits analysis of more refugee generations than LNS. Because LNS does not permit determination of refugee parentage, the LNS refugee variable will lack the 2nd generation Central Americans with refugee parentage which IIMMLA contains. It may be that the heightened potential to contact the U.S. government requires a combination of a refugee background and a familiarity with contacting the government borne from being inculcated since birth in the American tradition of contacting the government, something which the 2nd generation Central American refugees in IIMMLA have but the 1.5 generation Central American

refugees in LNS lack. An alternative explanation for finding no statistically significant effect of the Central American refugee background in LNS is that the LNS data covers a wider expanse of Central Americans throughout the U.S. which may differ from the Central Americans in the Southern California context found in IIMMLA. This may explain why the IIMMLA data in table 4.6 shows such a strongly significant, positive relationship between being a descendant of refugee parents from Central America and likelihood of contacting the U.S. government. Perhaps the substantial Central American enclave in Southern California which is home to many politically active Central American community organizations helps to sustain a tendency to contact the U.S. government among the younger generations more than elsewhere in the U.S.

What is most unexpected is that none of the other regional refugee variables, Cuban refugee background or Southeast Asian refugee background, has a statistically significant effect on the younger generations' tendency to contact the U.S. government in either the IIMMLA or the LNS data. This result contradicts my theory which holds that the refugee background should heighten the tendencies of the younger generations to do things such as contacting the U.S. government. I would expect that descendants of Cuban and Southeast Asian refugees should be particularly more involved in American politics by contacting the U.S. government in light of how Cuban and Southeast Asian refugees had such a close relationship with the U.S. government which was so involved in aiding them and settling them. On the contrary, table 4.6 indicates that neither being descended from Southeast Asian refugees nor being descended from Cuban refugees means that a person will be more likely to contact the U.S. government. Likewise, table 4.7 shows that being a 1.5 generation refugee from Cuba does not mean that a person will be more likely to contact the U.S. government than a person who is not a 1.5 generation refugee from Cuba. In fact, the IIMMLA data in table 4.6 show that simply having Southeast Asian

ancestry alone independent of refugee parentage decreases the likelihood of the 1.5 and 2nd generations' contacting the U.S. government, and both IIMMLA and LNS show that having Cuban ancestry alone has no significant relationship with the younger generations' contacting the U.S. government.

In both datasets, the control variables based on assimilation theory have the predicted positive effects on likelihood of contacting the U.S. government. Increases in age would approximate longer time spent in the U.S. (for the IIMMLA data, not the LNS data), which therefore reflects more assimilation into the American political mainstream.³⁵ Thus, the older the person is, the more likely the person will contact the U.S. government. This association between increased age and contacting the U.S. government also corresponds to studies of political participation which show that the older a person is, the more politically participative the person will be (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003; Verba and Nie 1972). Assimilation theory is premised on the passage of generations leading to increased assimilation, and this idea again proves true because passage from the 1st generation to subsequent generations steadily increases the odds of contacting the U.S. government by nearly a factor of two in both tables 4.6 and 4.7.

Education also has a positive effect. Both the IIMMLA and LNS data indicate that those who are college educated are between 1.6 to over 2 times as likely to contact the U.S. government as those who did not attend college. This finding corresponds with the logic of assimilation literature that more education makes an immigrant more informed about American civics which therefore facilitates assimilation into the American political mainstream. Those who are more assimilated are thus more likely to partake in traditional American political activities like contacting the government to air grievances or seek redress. Moreover, the

³⁵ Please see footnote 9 above.

positive effect of education accords with political participation literature which finds that the more educated a person is, then the more knowledgeable about political issues the person is, and this is a key resource for participating in politics (Verba et al. 1995; Conway 2000).

Of course, income is another key economic resource which is conducive to political participation (Verba et al. 1995; Verba and Nie 1972; Conway 2000), and assimilation theory holds that the wealthier a person is, the more the person will become assimilated into the American mainstream. It is not surprising, then, to find here that the more income the person has, the more likely the person is to participate in the mainstream American tradition of contacting the U.S. government. However, the positive effect of income is very slight and inconsistently significant as seen in the results in table 4.6 which show that those in the highest income bracket have about 1.6 times the odds of contacting the U.S. government compared to the lowest income level, but this effect of income only reaches statistical significance for the highest income bracket only. The LNS results in table 4.7, however, show a consistently growing positive effect on likelihood of contacting the U.S. government thanks to increasing income. The effects are statistically significant at each income level, and they reach a high with a person being more than three times as likely to contact the U.S. government if they are at the highest income level in LNS.

Both the IIMMLA and LNS data show that experience with racial discrimination serves to increase the likelihood of contacting the U.S. government. Based on the data in both datasets, those who have experienced racial discrimination are between 1.5 to 1.8 times more likely to contact the U.S. government than those who have never experienced racial discrimination. This runs counter to assimilation theory because neo and segmented assimilation theory would view racial discrimination as an obstacle which impedes and perhaps undoes straight-line assimilation

into the American mainstream. In the face of racial discrimination, the individual would be more reluctant to participate in mainstream political activities like contacting the U.S. government. On the contrary, my finding based on the IIMMLA and LNS data here accords more with the findings in literature on immigrant political incorporation which show that racial discrimination or racial threat can serve to activate American political activity among immigrants (DeSipio 1996; 2001; Ramakrishnan 2005; Garcia Bedolla 2005; Espiritu 1992; Wong et al. 2011; Nakanishi 2001; 2003; Lien et al. 2004).

Participation in Political Gatherings/Meetings

The analysis of participation in American politics now continues with attending political gatherings. Political participation in America may be focused on purposeful activities in which citizens directly try to influence political outcomes, but it also includes more passive forms of participation such as attending supportive campaign rallies or events (Conway 2000). Only the IIMMLA survey records this facet of American political participation. The variable in IIMMLA which records this is a dichotomous variable asking the respondent whether they have attended any political gathering (such as meetings, rallies, speeches, or dinners) in support of a political candidate in the U.S. Table 4.8 below contains my regression results with the dependent/response variable being participation in a political gathering in the U.S.

Table 4.8: IIMMLA Logistic Regression Results. Dependent Variable: Participated in a Political Gathering in the U.S.

Dataset: IIMMLA	Model with general refugee parent variable		Model with region-specific refugee parent variable		Model with region-specific variable	
	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.
Independent Variable						
Age	0.999	0.010	1.000	0.010	0.999	0.010
2nd Generation (1.5 Generation as Reference)	1.171**	0.091	1.179**	0.091	1.171**	0.094
College (No College as Reference)	2.063***	0.349	2.064***	0.350	2.055***	0.349
Household Income (Less than \$12,000 as Reference)						
\$12,000-\$19,999	1.104	0.343	1.101	0.342	1.101	0.342
\$20,000-\$29,999	0.981	0.297	0.982	0.298	0.982	0.298
\$30,000-\$49,999	0.852	0.244	0.850	0.244	0.852	0.244
\$50,000-\$69,999	0.964	0.278	0.967	0.279	0.963	0.278
\$70,000-\$99,999	0.973	0.283	0.964	0.281	0.971	0.283
\$100,000 or more	1.617*	0.457	1.627*	0.460	1.614*	0.457
Experienced Discrimination	1.912***	0.226	1.921***	0.227	1.908***	0.225
Refugee Parent	1.049	0.285	-----	-----	-----	-----
Southeast Asian Refugee Parent	-----	-----	1.425	0.688	-----	-----
Central American Refugee Parent	-----	-----	1.467	0.708	-----	-----
Cuban Refugee Parent	-----	-----	10.470*	13.073	-----	-----
Southeast Asian	-----	-----	-----	-----	1.033	0.233
Central American	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.951	0.230
Cuban	-----	-----	-----	-----	2.468	1.384
	Sample Size =	4256	Sample Size =	4256	Sample Size =	4256

* = significant at .10 level, ** = significant at .05 level, *** = significant at .01 level

As seen in table 4.8, having refugee parents in general does not have any statistically significant effect on the likelihood of attending a political gathering or meeting. A person who does not have refugee parents may be just as likely as those with refugee parents to attend such political gatherings in the U.S. This finding runs counter to my theory that the refugee background would lead to a lasting legacy of activism which would be transmitted to children of refugees who would therefore be politically active in U.S. politics, including a higher proclivity to attend political gatherings. Nevertheless, parsing the results further by regional refugee parentage reveals something different. The data show that being descended from Cuban refugee parents tends to increase the odds of participating in a political gathering by 10.5 times. In other words, if a person has Cuban refugee parents, the person is 10.5 times more likely to have attended a political gathering or meeting compared to someone who does not have Cuban refugee parents. Meanwhile, simply having Cuban ancestry alone does not have a statistically significant effect. This means that the increased tendency among descendants of Cuban refugees to attend political gatherings cannot be attributed to something endemic to just having Cuban heritage. This finding with regard to the Cuban refugee background aligns well with my theory that the refugee experience should intensify the political activity of children of refugees, reflected here in an increased probability of attending political gatherings.

However, none of the other regional refugee variables achieve statistical significance. I would expect that Southeast Asian refugees would pass on their political activism onto their descendants similar to Cuban refugees so that descendants of Southeast Asian refugees would likewise have a higher tendency to attend political gatherings. The Cuban American refugee experience shares many similarities with the Southeast Asian refugee experience, including a close connection to the anti-communist political establishment in the U.S. Yet, despite this

similarity, those with Southeast Asian refugee parentage are no more or less likely to attend political gatherings/meetings than those who are not descended from Southeast Asian refugees. One possible explanation for this lack of any significant relationship between Southeast Asian refugee parentage and attending political meetings is that the other two smaller Southeast Asian refugee groups that I included, Hmong Americans and Cambodian Americans, are less connected to the political party establishments in the U.S. Only Vietnamese Americans share as close a link to the Republican Party in the U.S. as do Cuban Americans (Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner 1991; Vo 2008; Wong et al. 2011; Nhi 2011; Lai et al. 2001). Cambodian Americans and Hmong Americans have not been consistently linked to either major political party in the U.S., despite coming from an anticommunist refugee past. Thus, for political gatherings in the U.S. which are often associated with the major political parties in the U.S., it would seem that a background of close linkage to a major party is vital to ensuring that future generations would be more likely to attend political meetings/gatherings. This phenomenon has support in the immigrant political incorporation scholarship (see Hajnal and Lee 2011).

As for Central American refugee parentage, the results in table 4.8 show that there is no significant relationship between having Central American refugee parents and the 1.5 and 2nd generations' tendency to attend political meetings/gatherings. Being descended from Central American refugee parents does not mean that a person will be more likely to attend political meetings/gatherings than someone who is not descended from Central American refugee parents. This finding runs counter to my theory that the Central American refugee background should heighten the tendency of the younger generations to participate in American politics, such as attending political meetings/gatherings. However, as stated earlier, the hostility of the U.S. government toward Central American refugees because they conflicted with American Cold War

interests could be a possible reason why the descendants of Central American refugees might be wary of participating in American politics. They might carry with them an overall negative impression of the U.S. governmental/political system causing them to shy away from political activities such as attending political meetings/gatherings.

The assimilationist control variables derived from the assimilation scholarship, for the most part, do have the intended effects, but there are some exceptions. For instance, age does not have any significant relationship with likelihood of attending a political gathering. Because the analysis here utilizes the IIMMLA data which only includes those who are either born and raised in the U.S. or at least raised in the U.S. from childhood, increased age would reflect longer time spent living on U.S. soil—in other words, reflect time spent in the U.S. According to assimilation theory, increased time spent in the U.S. is key to increasing mainstream political involvement in the U.S. (likely to include activities such as attending American political gatherings). However, in this case, being older and therefore having spent more time living in the U.S. does not mean that someone will be likelier to attend a political meeting/gathering/event than someone who is younger and has spent less time living on American soil. This result also goes against studies which show the positive effect of age on political participation (Verba and Nie 1972; Rosenstone and Hansen 2003), since age here does not seem to be a good predictor in the context of descendants of immigrants attending political gatherings.

What does correspond to assimilation theory is the finding that the passage of immigrant generation does lead to a slightly higher tendency to participate in a political meeting. Those in the 2nd generation are about 1.17 times as likely to attend a political gathering or meeting as those in the previous generation. This is expected since assimilation theory would hold that the passage of immigrant generation leads to increased assimilation into the American political

mainstream, and later generations would thus be more likely to attend mainstream political get-togethers in the U.S. such as rallies in support of a political candidate. Nevertheless, the 1.17 odds ratio is a very slight increase, but this may be attributable to the fact that in the IIMMLA data, the reference category is the 1.5 generation, so the comparison is between the 1.5 and the 2nd generation. Because the generational distance between these two may not be as great as between the 2nd and the 1st generation, this may explain why the increase in likelihood of attending political gatherings is very slight.

Education and, specifically, being in the highest income bracket, are both associated with a higher likelihood of attending political gatherings. If a person is college educated, the person will be more than twice as likely to attend a political gathering as a person who does not have a college education. Meanwhile, being in the highest income bracket, \$100,000 or more, leads to a 1.6 increase in the odds of attending a political gathering. Again, higher education and income—in other words, upward socioeconomic mobility—are what assimilation theory associates with greater straight-line assimilation into the American political mainstream. Thus, the result here which shows that higher education and income leads to greater involvement in American political activities like attending political gatherings in America is expected by assimilation theory. This result also accords with the notion of increased educational and financial resources being vital to increasing political participation in all forms in America (Verba et al. 1995; Conway 2000; Verba and Nie 1972). Surprising, though, is that the other income brackets do not achieve statistical significance except for being in the highest income bracket of \$100,000 or more. This suggests that individuals who have not achieved the highest income levels may not be rich enough to afford spending time away from work to attend gatherings or afford attending such gatherings which are often very expensive fundraisers.

Having experienced racial discrimination tends to increase the likelihood of having participated in a political gathering. Someone who has experienced racial discrimination in their life is nearly twice as likely to attend a political gathering/meeting as a person who has never been racially discriminated against. This finding of racial discrimination increasing a politically incorporative activity accords well with the notion of racial threat in immigrant political incorporation literature which indicates that racial hostility/threat activates immigrant political activism and participation (DeSipio 1996; 2001; Ramakrishnan 2005; Garcia Bedolla 2005; Espiritu 1992; Wong et al. 2011; Nakanishi 2001; 2003; Lien et al. 2004). However, this finding does not accord with assimilation theory. Racial discrimination would tend to be an obstacle to assimilation and therefore may delay upward assimilation or even cause downward assimilation away from the American mainstream. Therefore, the finding here that racial discrimination actually serves to activate the younger generations' attendance at mainstream, American political meetings/gatherings would counter this assimilationist assumption.

Participation in Protest Activity

The analysis now turns to more unconventional forms of non-voting participation, more specifically the practice of protesting. Protesting in the U.S. is a form of political participation which is often regarded as being unconventional as opposed to conventional forms of political participation that are more traditional and part of mainstream/accepted political culture in the U.S. (Conway 2000). Political protest is a political activity which has a high capacity for conveying information but requires a high time commitment (Verba et al. 1995). Political activism in the form of protest should be an especially prominent legacy among the children of refugees. The persistent longing for political reform in the home-country from which they fled has fomented various protests by refugees living in the U.S. In Southern California, Vietnamese

Americans held a massive protest against the display of a picture of Ho Chi Minh, and Salvadoran Americans held FMLN rallies to protest the Salvadoran government (Ong and Meyer 2004; Lien et al. 2004; Wong et al. 2011; Collet 2008b; Menjivar 2000; Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001; Cordova 2005). In Minnesota and Wisconsin, Hmong Americans held mass demonstrations to protest the arrest of General Vang Pao for trying to destabilize the Laotian government (Vang 2009). In Florida, Cuban Americans protested against the repatriation of little Elian Gonzalez to Cuba (Eckstein 2009). These are just a few examples of the many documented protests initiated by refugee communities living in the U.S., and they all seem to demonstrate a refugee proclivity to use protest. Therefore, I hypothesize that children of refugees will be acutely active in protest activity. My theory is premised on how home-country activism often leads 1st generation refugees to protest home-country governments, and this exposure to protest activity would likely make their 1.5 and 2nd generation children more amenable to generally protest in America as well.

The IIMMLA survey is the only one of the three surveys which records participation in protest activity in the U.S. The variable in IIMMLA is a dichotomous variable asking the respondent whether they have participated in a protest (such as pickets, marches, demonstrations, or boycotts) in the past twelve months in the U.S. Table 4.9 below contains my regression results with the dependent/response variable being participation in a protest in the U.S.

Table 4.9: IIMMLA Logistic Regression Results. Dependent Variable: Participated in Protest in the U.S.

Dataset: IIMMLA Independent Variable	Model with general refugee parent variable		Model with region-specific refugee parent variable		Model with region-specific variable	
	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.
Age	1.001	0.008	1.001	0.008	1.001	0.008
2nd Generation (1.5 Generation as Reference)	1.472***	0.092	1.472***	0.091	1.442***	0.093
College (No College as Reference)	1.810***	0.226	1.789***	0.223	1.860***	0.233
Household Income (Less than \$12,000 as Reference)						
\$12,000-\$19,999	2.000**	0.553	2.016**	0.558	2.028**	0.562
\$20,000-\$29,999	1.716**	0.468	1.729**	0.471	1.699*	0.464
\$30,000-\$49,999	2.070***	0.530	2.092***	0.536	2.049***	0.525
\$50,000-\$69,999	1.432	0.380	1.442	0.383	1.423	0.378
\$70,000-\$99,999	2.223***	0.581	2.248***	0.587	2.223***	0.582
\$100,000 or more	1.800**	0.481	1.814**	0.485	1.816**	0.487
Experienced Discrimination	1.885***	0.178	1.884***	0.178	1.902***	0.180
Refugee Parent	1.301	0.266	----	----	----	----
Southeast Asian Refugee Parent	----	----	1.889*	0.721	----	----
Central American Refugee Parent	----	----	1.392	0.548	----	----
Cuban Refugee Parent	----	----	(predicts failure perfectly)		----	----
Southeast Asian	----	----	----	----	0.625**	0.142
Central American	----	----	----	----	1.395*	0.239
Cuban	----	----	----	----	0.278	0.286
	Sample Size =	4256	Sample Size =	4253	Sample Size =	4256

* = significant at .10 level, ** = significant at .05 level, *** = significant at .01 level

The results in table 4.9 using IIMMLA data show that having refugee parentage in general does not have a significant relationship with the likelihood of participating in a protest. Just because a person has refugee parents does not mean that the person will be more likely to have participated in a protest. This finding contradicts my theory which predicts that heightened activism due to the refugee experience would translate into heightened political activism among the younger generations, thereby making them more likely to protest. Nevertheless, as usual, I further parsed the refugee variable further into respective regions. This added analysis reveals that having Southeast Asian refugee parents does have a positive effect on the odds of protesting in the U.S. Those with Southeast Asian refugee parents are nearly two times more likely to have participated in protest activity than those without Southeast Asian refugee parents. This effect is made even clearer because simply having Southeast Asian ancestry alone has an overall negative effect on the odds of protesting. If a person is of Southeast Asian ancestry without being associated with a refugee background, the person is only 60% as likely to protest as someone who does not have Southeast Asian ancestry. This finding corroborates my theory which holds that home-country activism often in the form of protests should lead to an increased propensity to participate in protest activity among the children of refugees. This is exactly what is found here regarding the descendants of Southeast Asian refugees.

The anti-communist tenor of Cuban refugees is quite similar to that of Southeast Asian refugees, so I would have expected a similar positive effect of the Cuban refugee background on the younger generations' tendency to protest. Unfortunately, the Cuban refugee parentage variable could not be analyzed using IIMMLA data due to statistical failure: the few respondents who have Cuban refugee parentage do not vary in their responses about participating in protest, thereby predicting failure of protesting perfectly. Although having a Cuban refugee background

cannot be analyzed due to the statistical error/failure, Cuban ancestry alone can be analyzed using the IIMMLA data. Although findings based on Cuban ancestry alone may not be directly relevant to my theory, they are worth exploring in case the Cuban American respondents underreport being refugees in IIMMLA. Finding any effect based on Cuban ancestry alone, however, would provide only the most tenuous support for my theory which is premised on refugee context. However, an increased tendency to protest does not occur with having Cuban ancestry. Those who claim Cuban ancestry are no more or less likely to protest than those who do not have Cuban ancestry. In any case, IIMMLA focuses on the Southern California context, a place home to the largest Southeast Asian enclave in the U.S. (particularly Vietnamese and Cambodian communities) but home to only a small number of Cuban Americans. Therefore, the statistical error and the lack of any effect due to the Cuban ancestry variable on likelihood to protest may be attributable to this dearth of Cuban American respondents in IIMMLA. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the IIMMLA data did produce results showing how the younger generations have a higher likelihood of registering to vote and attending political gatherings as a result of having a Cuban refugee background. These foregoing results achieved statistical significance despite IIMMLA's dearth of Cuban American respondents. In light of this, there could be something which inhibits the potential for protesting among descendants of Cuban refugees—or for that matter, among anyone with Cuban ancestry—living in Southern California. Perhaps the Cuban American community in Southern California lacks an ethnic enclave which would help in mobilizing and organizing protest activity.

As for the Central American refugee parentage variable, it fails to achieve statistical significance. Having Central American refugee parentage may not have any influence whatsoever on the likelihood that the younger generations participate in protest in the U.S. An

additional wrinkle is that simply having Central American ancestry independent of refugee context does lead to a statistically significant, positive influence on protesting. Individuals with Central American ancestry are about 1.3 times more likely than individuals without Central American ancestry to have participated in protest. Thus, there seems to be something endemic to the Central American context which leads to a heightened propensity to protest, but which, when combined with the refugee context, does not lead to a heightened propensity to protest. My theory is premised on how home-country activism often leads 1st generation refugees to protest home-country governments, and this exposure to protest activity would likely make their descendants more amenable to protest in the American context as well. This finding based on IIMMLA data that a person with Central American refugee parentage is no more likely than others to protest in the U.S., but a person with Central American ancestry without a refugee background is more likely than others to protest in the U.S. goes against my theory. A possible explanation for this finding is again the idea that Central American refugees were opposed by the U.S. government. Many Central American refugees came to the U.S. fleeing from anticommunist regimes allied with the U.S. during the Cold War, and these refugees often tried to protest the brutal regimes allied with the U.S. Their protests often did not find a sympathetic ear in the American political/governmental system during the Cold War. This experience might have stifled the potential for heightened protest activity (which the IIMMLA results show as being inherent to Central American ancestry) among the descendants of Central American refugees in the U.S. Thus, the children of Central American refugees might not be as likely to protest as, for instance, children of Southeast Asian refugees or children of non-refugee Central Americans.

On the whole, the assimilation control variables are largely statistically significant, although their effects may not be exactly as predicted. For instance, the likelihood of protests tends to increase with increases in immigrant generation. The latter generations who are born in the U.S. are about 1.4 times more likely to have participated in protest than the previous generation. If assimilation theory holds true, the passage to subsequent generations would lead to greater political integration into the American political mainstream. Thus, later generations should be more inclined to utilize more conventional forms of participating in politics such as voting or writing to their government officials, not necessarily protesting more. Here, the opposite is true with latter generations being more likely to resort to the unconventional political activity of protest than earlier generations. Nonetheless, many studies of American political participation take issue with the dichotomy between conventional and unconventional political activities (see Verba et al. 1995). If protest activity is becoming more conventional within the sphere of American political activities, then increased immigrant generation and increased likelihood of participation in protest activity would not be surprising. This is a possibility that needs to be taken into consideration.

Education and income tend to be positive influences on likelihood to protest so that more educated, wealthier individuals protest more than people with less education and wealth. According to table 4.9, an individual with a college education is nearly twice as likely to participate in protest as a person who lacks a college education. Likewise, someone who is of a higher income level is about twice as likely as those at the lowest income level to have participated in protest activity. This finding, however, would run counter to assimilation theory which holds that greater educational attainment and wealth would lead to greater straight-line assimilation into the American political mainstream and less need to have to go outside

conventional channels of political activity. Again, though, if protest is deemed to be part of conventional political activity in the U.S. and more accepted in mainstream American political culture, then there is a possible argument that the positive correlation of protest activity with higher education and income is as predicted per assimilation theory. Overall, these findings regarding education and income do corroborate studies of political participation which show that regardless of conventional or unconventional forms of political participation, education and wealth are key resources for being politically active, especially with regard to protest activity (Verba et al. 1995). Indeed, although protest is often thought of as an activity in which time and energy are essential instead of money, studies show that the poor and uneducated are still inordinately underrepresented in protests compared to the rich and educated (Verba et al. 1995). My findings here also attest to this phenomenon.

Surprisingly, though, the effect of income seems to be highest at certain income brackets. Only the \$12,000-\$19,999, \$30,000-\$49,999 and \$70,000-\$99,999 income brackets are associated with a doubling effect on the odds of protesting compared to the lowest income level. At some other income levels, the effects are not statistically significant, while at the highest income level, the effect is less than a doubling effect. Why this is the case is uncertain, but one hypothesis is that really high income levels would mean better access to more traditional political channels and less need to protest, and this would explain why the highest income level does not have as high of a positive effect on protesting. Meanwhile, people at the mid to upper income levels can afford the resources and time available for participating in protest, much more so than those in the lowest income levels.

Having experienced racial discrimination also is a positive influence on protest. Table 4.9 shows that those who have experienced racial discrimination are nearly twice as likely to

participate in protest activity as those who have never experienced racial discrimination. This would tend to corroborate assimilation theory, at least neo and segmented variants of assimilation theory, which holds that obstacles to assimilation such as racial discrimination would lead to reactive ethnicity and going against the conventional political channels of mainstream America. Therefore, the findings here do support the idea that racial discrimination induces individuals to distance themselves from mainstream political activities and resort to unconventional activities like political protest. This finding also corroborates studies of immigrant political incorporation which show that discrimination and racial threat serves to activate political participation among immigrants, be it conventional or unconventional (DeSipio 1996; 2001; Ramakrishnan 2005; Garcia Bedolla 2005; Espiritu 1992; Wong et al. 2011; Nakanishi 2001; 2003; Lien et al. 2004).

Conclusion

I again utilized quantitative analysis in this chapter to explore the possible impact of the refugee background on the younger generations' (the 1.5 and 2nd generations') involvement in American politics. My findings show that the refugee background does have a very strong, positive impact on the likelihood that the 1.5 and 2nd generations will participate in one type of American political activity, namely contacting the government by letter, phone, or in person. This finding tends to support my theoretical assumption that the highly politicized refugee experience should lead to heightened political activity in American politics among the younger generations. Aside from this finding, however, the generalized refugee background fails to have statistically significant impacts on various political activities in the U.S. among the younger generations. This goes against my theory which posits a consistently positive effect of the refugee background on all of the younger generations' political activities in the U.S. As usual,

because I cannot ensure that the extant survey data accurately captures the political refugee background at the heart of my theory, I further analyzed the data in terms of refugee backgrounds from specific regions known for producing political refugees.

Those in the younger generations who have a Cuban refugee background are more likely to register to vote and especially more likely to attend political meetings/gatherings than individuals who do not have a Cuban refugee background. On the other hand, the Cuban refugee background fails to have any statistically significant relationship with various other measures of the younger generations' involvement in American politics. The 1.5 and 2nd generation descendants of Cuban refugees are not more likely than others to contact the U.S. government, participate in protest, or vote in American elections. These findings of no statistically significant relationship with the Cuban refugee background greatly weaken my theory. This is exacerbated when it comes to voting in American elections because, although my findings indicate that the Cuban refugee background does not tend to increase the younger generations' likelihood of voting, my findings also indicate that simply having Cuban ancestry without the Cuban refugee background does tend to increase the younger generations' likelihood of voting. Although a possible explanation is that some of the findings come from the IIMMLA dataset which lacks a large Cuban American contingent, this explanation cannot explain the other findings which are based on more national datasets. These results are very surprising in light of how the Cuban refugee background saw heavy involvement by the U.S. government in refugee assistance and preferential treatment by the Republican political establishment—all of which should induce much more involvement in American politics by the younger generations.

The Southeast Asian refugee background has a strongly positive effect on the younger generations' likelihood of protesting in the U.S. This supports my theory, but overall, the

Southeast Asian refugee background does not have any statistically significant effect on the other measures of political activity in the U.S. Younger generations of Southeast Asians with a refugee background are not more likely than others to contact the U.S. government, attend political gatherings/meetings, register to vote, or go to the polls to vote. A truly unexpected finding is that sometimes, as in the case of registering to vote, Southeast Asian ancestry alone is a statistically significant, positive influence on the younger generations, but the positive influence disappears if combined with the Southeast Asian refugee background. Thus, there is a lot of evidence which undermines my theory which posits a heightened involvement in American politics among the younger generations who have a refugee background, especially the Southeast Asian refugee background in which the U.S. government was so heavily involved through financial and settlement assistance as well as partisan courting by the Republican Party. One possible explanation for some of these findings is that some surveys focus on areas lacking a Southeast Asian political enclave. Nevertheless, the majority of the results regarding the Southeast Asian refugee background which belie my theory cannot be so easily explained away.

Having a Central American refugee background increases the likelihood that the younger generations will contact the U.S. government by mail, phone, or in person. These results corroborate my theory that the refugee background helps to heighten the younger generations' political involvement in American politics. Nevertheless, for so many other indicators of the younger generations' involvement in American politics, the Central American refugee background does not seem to have any statistically significant effect. The 1.5 and 2nd generations with a Central American refugee background are not more likely than others to participate in protest, attend political meetings/gatherings, register to vote, or go out to vote. What is surprising is that the Central American refugee background does have a statistically

significant effect on the younger generations' tendency to register to vote, but the effect is negative. Perhaps even more unexpected is that although the Central American refugee background does not tend to increase voting among the younger generations, Central American ancestry devoid of the refugee background does tend to increase voting among the younger generations. These findings go against my theory which would expect the Central American refugee background helping to heighten political involvement in the U.S. among the younger generations, and definitely not to negate their inherent tendencies to be more politically involved. One possible explanation often proffered throughout this dissertation is that the Central American refugees faced a very hostile and intimidating U.S. governmental/political system which disapproved of them during the Cold War as being inconsistent with American Cold War foreign policy interests. This hostility may have stifled Central American refugee descendants' involvement in American politics.

As for the assimilationist factors which the assimilation scholarship posits as determining the intergenerational incorporation into the American political mainstream, the quantitative findings in this chapter show that they work as expected. Straight-line assimilation marked by upward socioeconomic mobility and the passage of immigrant generations does tend to increase the tendency of the younger generations to partake in various kinds of political participation in America. Surprisingly, experience with racial discrimination does not have any statistically significant influence on electoral participation. However, it does have a positive effect on various forms of conventional, non-voting, political participation in America (running counter to neo and segmented assimilation predictions) as well as non-conventional political participation (agreeing with neo and segmented assimilation predictions).

This marks the end of the quantitative section of my dissertation. Although many interesting findings were gleaned from my quantitative analysis of “large-N” survey data, a more well-rounded picture of the refugee background’s effect on the younger generations’ involvement in politics will be gained by listening to the narratives of some members of the refugee communities in America. Therefore, beginning with the next chapter, quantitative analysis gives way to qualitative analysis of interviews with members of the Cambodian American and Salvadoran American communities in order to gain a more detailed understanding about the influence of the refugee background on the politics of future generations through their own stories, opinions, and thoughts—in other words, through their voices.

CHAPTER 5

Politics and the Children of Refugees: The Cambodian American Experience

This chapter marks the beginning of the qualitative exploration into the political repercussions of the refugee background on the children of refugees. As stated in the conclusion of the previous chapter, additional nuanced insight can be gained by listening to the narratives—the personal stories, reflections, opinions, thoughts, etc.—as told by members of refugee communities in America. The focus of this chapter is on Cambodian Americans, many of whom have experienced (either personally or through family) the Southeast Asian refugee experience that is highlighted in the foregoing quantitative sections. This chapter will begin with a brief exposition of the Cambodian American immigration and political history in the U.S. and then culminate with a presentation and analysis of interviews with diverse members of the Cambodian American community on the topic of how the refugee experience has impacted their politics.

A Brief Introduction to the Refugee and Political History of Cambodian Americans

Prior to 1975, there had been some Cambodian students who had come to study in the U.S. (Chan 2004, 81-85). Also many Cambodian immigrants came and continue to come to the U.S. for economic reasons, family reunification, or to help their children get a better education (Chan 2004, 68; 2006, 231). Nonetheless, a large number of Cambodian immigrants entered the U.S. as political refugees who left their home-countries in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. The initial wave of Cambodian refugees fled Cambodia as both Vietnam and Cambodia fell to communist forces in 1975 (Chan 2004, 1-80). Fulfilling its promise to rescue helpers of the U.S. during the Vietnam War, the Ford administration paroled into the U.S. this initial wave of

Cambodian refugees, some of whom were highly educated collaborators of the U.S.-backed Lon Nol regime in Cambodia (Chan 2004, 62; Cahn and Stansell 2010, 51; Tang 2002, 32-38).

However, the majority of Cambodian refugees entered the U.S. after armed forces from Vietnam entered Cambodia in January 1979 and ousted the heinous Khmer Rouge communist regime headed by Pol Pot (Chan 2004, 1-80; Lee 2010a, 14-15). By that time, Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge regime had already been responsible for the deaths of at least 1.5 million to 2 million Cambodians (about one quarter of Cambodia's total population) by execution (including ethnocide of minority groups and targeted assassinations of the educated or wealthy), unspeakable acts of torture, forced labor, starvation, and disease—one of the worst cases of auto-genocide in human history (Kiernan 2008, 456-458). This second, larger refugee influx from Cambodia who fled in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge's downfall consisted of rural, less educated Cambodians who fled into refugee camps in Thailand before being allowed entry into the U.S. (Chan 2004, 1-80; Cahn and Stansell 2010, 51; Tang 2002, 32-38). Overall, from 1975 to the early 1990's, nearly 150,000 Cambodian refugees entered the U.S. (Chan 2004, 79-80).

Unlike non-refugee immigrants, Cambodian refugees were given public assistance and settlement assistance by the U.S. government and religious voluntary agencies (or VOLAG's) (Chan 2004, 83-86, 105). These refugees were entitled to the same means-tested social programs as American citizens, programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children, Supplemental Security Income, Medicaid, and Food Stamps, as well as special refugee programs like Refugee Cash Assistance, Refugee Medical Assistance, English language classes, and job training (Chan 2004, 83-86, 105). Despite the Ford administration's efforts to disperse the settlement of Southeast Asian refugees across the U.S., many Cambodian refugees initiated secondary migrations to locales in the U.S. which suited them better (usually in terms of climate), thereby

creating many ethnic enclaves throughout the U.S. The largest enclave for Cambodian Americans is in Long Beach, California. Smaller enclaves of Cambodian Americans are also found in Massachusetts (especially Lowell) (Chan 2004, 81-122; Mortland 2010; Tang 2002, 32-38). Today, Lowell, Massachusetts contains the second largest concentration of Cambodian Americans in the U.S. behind Long Beach (Kiang 1994, 131). As of 2010, 276,667 Cambodian Americans live in the U.S. (U.S. Census 2010).

Once in the U.S., Cambodian Americans have begun to formally participate in the U.S. political arena. For example, Ted Ngoy (millionaire doughnut-chain owner) worked in the 1988 Bush presidential campaign, Yasith Chhun mobilized Cambodian Americans in Long Beach, California on behalf of the Republican Party, and Nanda Chamroeun worked with the Republican Party of Orange County, California (Chan 2004, 146, 243-250; Lai et al. 2001, 614). Cambodian Americans have also officially run for elected office in the U.S. For instance, in 1986, Nil Hul, director of the Cambodian Association of Long Beach, ran—though unsuccessfully—for the Long Beach City Council, the first Cambodian American to run for office (Hein 1995, 105). Finally, Rithy Uong became the first Cambodian American to win elected office in the U.S. when he won a seat on the Lowell City Council in Massachusetts in 1999 (Chan 2004, 146). Uong kept the seat for three consecutive terms by appealing to the Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Latino communities over cross-cultural issues like bilingual education in Lowell (Kiang and Tang 2009, 78-80). Later Vesna Nuon became the second Cambodian American on the Lowell City Council (Lowell Sun (Massachusetts) 2/23/12).

In 2009, Republican Cambodian American Sam Meas ran—albeit unsuccessfully—for the congressional seat held by Democrat Niki Tsongas in Lowell, Massachusetts (Lowell Sun (Massachusetts), 10/26/09, 5/18/10, 7/15/10). Despite these political developments, Cambodian

Americans are still much underrepresented in government. A glaring instance of this is the fact that there has been no Cambodian American elected to office in Long Beach, California despite Cambodian Americans' constituting nearly 10% of Long Beach's population (Douglas 2004, 58, 76; Kiang 1994, 140).

Aside from electoral political participation, Cambodian Americans have been politically active at the community level. Cambodian American activists have organized community protests against welfare cuts, gang violence, city-government indifference, unemployment, cuts to education (especially ESL programs), racial violence, and anti-immigrant movements (Fujiwara 2010; Douglas 2004, 57; Shah 1994, 119-124, Kiang 1994, 133, 142-143; Hein 1995, 98). In Chicago, Cambodian Americans were among the many who protested against landlords who evicted Cambodian American tenants without sufficient notice or return of security deposits (Hein 1995, 104). In Lowell, Massachusetts during the 1980's, Cambodian Americans joined Latino groups to form the Minority Association for Mutual Assistance to mobilize the community against anti-immigrant, English-only initiatives (Kiang 1994, 134).³⁶ Other Cambodian Americans have organized citizenship drives, and many Cambodian American women have been at the forefront of political service to Cambodian Americans facing pressing problems in the community (Tang 2002, 45-47, 118-178; Douglas 2004, 77; Shah 1994, 119-124; Hein 1995, 98).

Gang violence is of great concern to the Cambodian American. Recently, the Cambodian American community has become politically active in opposing deportations due to new amendments to the U.S.'s immigration law which now makes many 1.5 generation Cambodian

³⁶ Cambodian Americans in Lowell were further impelled toward political mobilization after an anti-immigrant candidate, whose son had drowned a 13-year-old Cambodian boy in a hate crime, still won in a local election (Hein 1995, 104).

American gang members susceptible to forced-deportation for felony convictions (Lay 2010, 115-125; Cowan 2010, 454-459; Kwon 2012). This has led to younger generation Cambodian Americans in activist groups like the Asian/Pacific Islander Youth Promoting Advocacy and Leadership (AYPAL) and the Southeast Asian Freedom Network (SEAFN) to conduct grassroots campaigns to fight the deportations (Kwon 2012). These groups organized “No Deportation Zone” rallies/marches with Latino groups, held press conferences, lobbied labor groups and church groups, and lobbied members of Congress to support H.R.3309, a House Resolution—albeit ultimately unsuccessful—to rescind the deportation provisions plaguing Cambodian Americans (Kwon 2012).

Cambodian Americans are very political when it comes to home-country politics. This is especially true when it comes to home-country political movements that attempt to oust the ruling regime in Cambodia headed by Hun Sen (Douglas 2004, 54-56; Chan 2004, 245). Prominent among these movements is the Cambodian Freedom Fighters (CFF or *Seiha*), a political organization headed by Yasith Chhun which is officially registered in the state of California since 1999 (Douglas 2004, 54-56; Chan 2004, 245; Marston 2002, 101). The CFF was even responsible for an attack on the Cambodian Defense Department in Phnom Penh in November 2000 (Chan 2004, 245; Marston 2002, 100).³⁷ However, most Cambodian Americans engage in home-country politics using more peaceful political means. For example, many Cambodian American MAA’s publicly endorse or oppose various home-country political parties; some support parties/politicians linked to King Norodom Sihanouk, others want to see those associated with the Lon Nol regime back in power (Hein 1995, 96-99).

³⁷ Seven of the CFF were killed, the CFF’s Richard Kiri Kim was arrested in Cambodia, and Chhun and other co-conspirators were convicted by Cambodian courts in absentia since the U.S. did not have an extradition treaty with Cambodia (Chan 2004, 245; Marston 2002, 100)

Cambodian American home-country activism was further heightened in 1993 when free elections were held in Cambodia under the auspices of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), and Cambodian Americans³⁸ were able cast a ballot in the Cambodian election transnationally in the U.S. (although this only benefited those living in the vicinity of New York City, the sole polling place in the U.S. for the Cambodian election) (Chan 2004, 243; Yimsut 2011, 183-198). Some Cambodian Americans have even run for political office in Phnom Penh during these UNTAC sponsored elections (Chan 2004, 243-244; Hein 1995, 101). In all, two dozen Cambodian Americans ran for office in Cambodia, with Por Bun Sroeu of Long Beach and Ahmad Yhya (both running on the Royalist FUNCINPEC ticket) winning seats in the Cambodian National Assembly in 1993 (Chan 2004, 244). Since the 1993 Cambodian elections, Cambodian Americans have travelled to Cambodia to lend a hand in the election process, especially lending their expertise in the utilization of computer technology to count ballots as well as their expertise in political advertising (Chan 2004, 243-244; Yimsut 2011, 183-198). Many of the leaders of Cambodian American MAA's also travelled back to Cambodia, and they parlayed their cross-cultural mediation/brokering skills gained while working in the MAA's into serving as intermediaries between the Cambodian government and international nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) (Chan 2004, 245).

Following the 1993 elections, Hun Sen and Prince Ranariddh jointly assumed power, but Hun Sen instigated a coup which ousted Ranariddh shortly thereafter in 1997 (Chan 2004, 256). Ever since that episode of political tumult, Cambodian Americans have been further activated with regard to home-country politics. Many Cambodian Americans organized events held in the U.S for various Cambodian political parties opposed to the Hun Sen government in Cambodia

³⁸ Many Cambodian Americans have dual citizenship (Poethig 1997).

while other Cambodian Americans demonstrated against Cambodian temples in the U.S. associated with the Royalist FUNCINPEC Party of Prince Ranariddh (Kiang and Tang 2009, 82-83). Cambodian American politicians in the U.S. continue to feel the effects of home-country politics. For example, Rithy Uong of the Lowell City Council continued to espouse his commitment to the betterment of Cambodia, and was forced by the Cambodian American community in Massachusetts to not seek reelection partly because he had visited Hun Sen on a trip to Cambodia (Kiang and Tang 2009, 80-83). Again, Cambodian Americans in Lowell, Massachusetts opposed Sambath Chey Fennell, a Cambodian American candidate for city council, for his dealings with former Khmer Rouge affiliates (Kiang and Tang 2009, 82-83).

Aside from engaging in home-country politics by going to Cambodia or participating in home-country political events held in the U.S., Cambodian Americans have also sought to influence U.S. foreign policy toward Cambodia through lobbying. Cambodian Americans are engaged in lobbying campaigns to spur the U.S. government to support the restoration of economic well-being, political stability, and justice in the post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia (Watanabe 2001, 642). For instance, over 2,000 Cambodian Americans rallied together in 1988 to petition President Ronald Reagan to ensure that the U.N. peace plan in Cambodia will not pave the way for a Khmer Rouge political comeback (Hein 1995, 101). As recently as February 2012, Cambodian Americans successfully persuaded U.S. Representative Niki Tsongas who represents Lowell, Massachusetts to fly to Cambodia with Vesna Nuon (the second Cambodian American elected to the city council in Lowell) to see the Killing Fields in person and also lobby for U.S.-Cambodia economic development (Lowell Sun (Massachusetts) 2/23/12).

Recently, what has emerged as an additional catalyst for Cambodian American political activism is the fight to bring the perpetrators of the Cambodian auto-genocide to justice. When

news emerged in 2001 about plans by the United Nations and the Cambodian government to jointly create the independent Extraordinary Tribunal (or Extraordinary Chamber) to try Khmer Rouge officials for war crimes and crimes against humanity, Cambodian Americans immediately became active in supporting these proceedings (Mann 2005, 163; Chan 2004, 259; Yimsut 2011, 214-222). Moreover, aside from direct participation in the Tribunal, Cambodian Americans have also lobbied the U.S. government with regard to the Tribunal. In light of Senator Mitch McConnell's opposition in 2003 to U.S. support of the Tribunal in Cambodia and President George W. Bush's 2007 speech attributing the Khmer Rouge auto-genocide to lack of U.S. presence after the Vietnam War, Cambodian Americans are actively trying to persuade the U.S. government into accepting some blame in helping the Khmer Rouge come to power, and thereby obligate U.S. lawmakers to give more support (geopolitical as well as financial) to the U.N.-affiliated Extraordinary Tribunal (Schlund-Vials 2012, 811-815; Lanegran 2005, 115).

Interviews with Cambodian Americans

As can be seen above, there has been some coverage of Cambodian Americans, their immigration history, and their political history, but there is still a lot of room for further study, especially with regard to the politics of younger generation (1.5 and 2nd generation) Cambodian Americans. More specifically, none of the scholarship has investigated the specific intersection of the refugee history/background and the politics of the younger generation Cambodian Americans. Thus, the question still remains as to how the Cambodian refugee experience has impacted the politics of 1.5 and 2nd generation Cambodian Americans. Answers to this question will help elucidate and contextualize my quantitative findings with regard to the effects of the Southeast Asian refugee background (of which so many Cambodian Americans are a part) on the 1.5 and 2nd generations. In this section, I begin to provide answers to this question through

interviews with diverse Cambodian Americans of the 1.5 and 2nd generations.³⁹ Most, but not all, of these interviewees have a refugee background stemming from the era of the Khmer Rouge as well as the war with Vietnam. What follows sheds light on the specific impacts of the refugee experience on the politics of younger generation Cambodian Americans.

Cambodian American Interviewees' Reflections on Refugee Background, Identity, and Legacy

When I asked the Cambodian American interviewees to describe their family's refugee experience, most interviewees did affirm that their parents were refugees who escaped from the Khmer Rouge's violence and persecution and the warfare that raged in Cambodia, but they learned about the details of all of this by doing their own research later in life. Most interviewees described how their parents had shielded them while growing up from details of their refugee history and the traumas associated with fleeing the horrors in Cambodia. For example, a 1.5 generation Cambodian American refugee who escaped from Cambodia as a child during the Khmer Rouge period stated that he had to investigate the refugee past himself.

In my opinion, parents don't speak much about that time period [the refugee period in history]. I had to learn about it myself. I wouldn't say that parents pass [the refugee background] on. It only became apparent with my own curiosity, why this and that happened. Obviously my parents have perspectives, but they are biased. They have predetermined prejudices, so it's hard to know whether what they say is truthful. I would say that I learned about the refugee past on my own, by developing more curiosity, learning through asking questions, but not much parental guidance about our refugee status.

³⁹ To see the methodology behind my interviews as well as generalized statistics regarding my sample population, please see chapter two.

Similarly, although a 2nd generation Cambodian American highly values her family's refugee history of escape during the era of the Khmer Rouge, she indicates that the refugee history was not something that was openly discussed while she was growing up. Therefore, it is hard for this refugee background to be passed on to later generations to influence them. Most Cambodian Americans of the 2nd generation even try to distance themselves from this refugee memory. However, as she grew older, she did broach the topic with her parents.

Me, personally, I think it [the refugee background] is definitely important, but others want to move on and think, "Why talk about something negative?", but I think it is what makes us who we are today. If people don't understand our struggle and understand who we are presently, like today we offer cultural competency training and collaborate with other organizations and they have no idea that this [the genocide in Cambodia] happened, and they didn't know about this, so now they understand our disparities, our stories, it is key to a part of our history. Growing up I would hear things in passing about the genocide, or watered down versions, but definitely as I got older, I heard stories from my dad. He didn't tell me directly; he would never tell me outright. It is hard to talk about, that was my experience growing up.

Another 2nd generation Cambodian American who states that her parents left Cambodia as refugees to escape the Khmer Rouge also mentioned how the refugee background is not something that gets transmitted to her generation. Like many of the other interviewees, she had to learn about the refugee heritage on her own.

The refugee history has been passed on to later generations, not deliberately passed on, like, sit me down and tell me that this is what happened to us. It was not as direct. As a generation, it was not seen as important to pass forward. The genocide, it happened in the past, the people who lived through it have a direct connection, but for us, we don't have as much information about it to pass down, unless we gain the information through our own interviews and research.

This refrain about not growing up immersed in the Cambodian refugee history is repeated again by yet another 2nd generation Cambodian American who indicated that her parents came to the U.S. as refugees during the war.

My parents both came over as refugees and both families were affected by the Khmer Rouge and were forced to come to the U.S. My dad's older siblings and other family members were killed by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, but my dad, his parents and other siblings made it over here, while my mom came over with her mom and her other siblings. Mostly they didn't talk about it to us that much, only that we needed to appreciate what we have here. They sort of mentioned it, but not in detail. We knew how they had to escape and that they were in concentration camps and ate rice porridge, and my mom tells me to watch the movie, *The Killing Fields*, but I haven't watched it yet, but usually the whole thing was not commonly talked about all the time. My siblings and I are aware of the Khmer Rouge, but we don't study it, per se, all the details.

Another 2nd generation Cambodian American who states that his parents escaped as refugees from the persecution by the Khmer Rouge also echoed this observation that the parents' generation does not talk about the refugee past to their children. They might talk amongst themselves, but not to the younger generations. Like the other interviewees, this interviewee had to find out things on his own, but he also feels that his community would be better served if it is not remembered only for the genocide that happened.

You would think that for refugees, a lot of parents would talk about that and have a discussion with the younger generation. For me, I don't remember my parents really sitting me or my siblings down to say this is what happened to us, we think you should know about it, or it is important for you to remember. It was a traumatic ordeal, they want to forget and concentrate on the new [American] society, adopting American ways, so I don't think many of us got that oral history or family knowledge that was passed down to us unless we somehow asked and took the initiative to want to know. It's unfortunate that the older generations don't try to instill this remembrance of what happened. Teaching about it more actively is not there. As for my friends and acquaintances, it's also not the norm to talk about that [the Cambodian refugee history] openly. When one of my friend's mother met my mom, the first thing she asked was, "where were you during the war?", so generation to generation, survivor to survivor, yes, there's talk of it, but from the older generation to someone younger, not much. The younger generation wants to move on, for me anyways, I don't want the Cambodian diaspora to only be known for the genocide.

There was one interviewee who is a 2nd generation Cambodian American whose parents were persecuted by the Pol Pot regime, and she indicated that her parents did actively try to teach her about the family's refugee background. However, even she admits that this cognizance of the refugee history is not the norm because parents feel that revealing the refugee traumas would hurt their children.

My family helped me stay educated [about the Cambodian refugee past], and now so many people have that outlet, and the parents openly share this with their children, but it varies. This applies to some families more than others. Some families don't like to revisit this refugee past because it traumatizes them, but other families that do have an opportunity to share with others find a sense of healing through it—to pass it onto others. Families don't like to share this because they fear it will hurt the children. I feel more proactive about it, to be more educated in order to understand ourselves.

The 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans who came to the U.S. as child-refugees and who now have adult children born in the U.S. can also be open to sharing the refugee history with their children. A 2nd generation Cambodian American whose parents are 1.5 generation refugees who escaped during the war mentioned the following:

When I was younger in elementary school, they [my parents] would talk about growing up in a refugee camp. They did not try to keep it away from me. As I grew older, they exposed me more to it. There was not a specific moment where they told me all that happened, but as I grew older, I grew more curious and I asked more questions and saw

things on the internet and documentaries, and my parents told me because they want me to know what happened to them and to appreciate everything I had here.

Interestingly, I was able to interview a 3rd generation Cambodian American who indicated that his grandparents came to the U.S. from Cambodia as refugees. What I found was even less of an impact of the refugee history by the 3rd generation because the refugee background was basically forgotten. The interviewee began to learn more details about the refugee past after joining a Cambodian American student organization at his university.

My grandparents are from Cambodia, but my parents are born in the U.S., and I am 3rd generation. It [the Cambodian refugee history] is not well known. It has been in a discussion in a meeting of our program [a Cambodian American student organization at a university], but I found that even our members are not well informed about the genocide and the atrocities. If it were impactful, I think it would be beneficial, but so far from what I have seen, it has not done any good. It is not well known enough. I think with our generation, people are being less interested in our history and culture. Most of my friends are involved in cultural shows and that sort of stuff. The Cambodian genocide and history doesn't affect them directly or their parents directly anymore, so they and I don't worry about it as much. My parents never talked about the genocide in front of me, but what has gone on in my family through the years, when we gather with relatives, when watching about politics in the news, then someone may start a conversation, then maybe we get in some sort of debate about the genocide.

Overall though, even if the 1.5 and 2nd generations may not have experienced a household in which the 1st generation refugee parents actively taught their children about the refugee background which would lead to a perpetuation of refugee political activism into the later/younger generations, the younger generations still highly value their distinctive refugee identity. The majority of the interviewees did know that their parents were refugees because, once they realized the history of the Khmer Rouge as they grew up and went to college, they began to research their refugee heritage on their own. The endeavor to remember the Khmer Rouge's genocide and the trials and tribulations of the refugee forebears is a component of the younger generations' overall identity and distinctiveness. As a 2nd generation Cambodian American whose parents are refugees during the Khmer Rouge era said:

I'm Cambodian Chinese, two different cultures, right? But I'm super proud of being Cambodian, not just Chinese. There's a whole bunch more Chinese people in the U.S., but I'm proud of being Cambodian. My parents are refugees from the Khmer Rouge, but I was born here and that's not part of my identity, but I still feel that it's important for my generation to understand that part of the Cambodian history, that is a strong part of our background, so many Cambodians are affected by it, not just the refugees themselves, but their families too. It's important for people in my generation to understand that history, and that their parents went through tough times to get to where they are, to be proud of our parents. I wouldn't say that it's very important for me to be identified as a refugee from the Khmer Rouge, because I'm not. But I need to know about it, I need to research that and what my parents suffered, at least that part, everyone should understand. In history classes in high school, we all learned about Hitler and that genocide. I know that my parents were refugees and were impacted by a genocide that's not focused on in

history textbooks. I would've appreciated it if my history classes would kind of encompass Cambodia's history with communism. I just didn't see it in high school. Especially in Long Beach, you don't see much, currently, about all of that even though it didn't happen more than 50 years ago.

Remembrance of the Khmer Rouge genocide and drawing from this episode a distinctive identity are two things that are missing for recent non-refugee Cambodian immigrants. As one Cambodian American who recently came to the U.S. as a non-refugee immigrant states:

Cambodians do not want the history to repeat itself, but I feel people do not want to learn extra things about the genocide and advocate about it. For me, I never went to one of those events in Cambodia or over here [in the U.S]. I only became aware of it because of my work at [a Cambodian American organization]. I feel that the refugees who move here [to the U.S.], they are more into it than immigrants because they were affected by what happened, and I see how far they've come along after that event. For them [the Cambodian Americans with refugee backgrounds], it's more of a celebration of life. For me, as a regular immigrant who moved to be better off and to get a good education, it was not a forced move, so there was a different process. I was able to pack this and that. If you're a refugee, you had to go, even if you had a sister or daughter, you must leave them behind and let them go. So the Khmer Rouge affects them differently. For refugees, whatever happened, they may not have fully healed from it. They come here, live here, but live here differently and they have to have another strategy or experience of assimilation, so that PTSD and all this other stuff gets taken care of. They keep on

pushing forward. For my family and I, we barely experienced any of that, so it was an easy process.

When I asked the interviewees about whether the overall refugee identity and heritage has had any political effect on them in any way, some people I interviewed viewed the refugee legacy as being a negative influence on their political interest and participation. For example, a 1.5 generation Cambodian American who indicated that his parents were refugees who escaped from the Khmer Rouge believes that the refugee background may have been a hindrance on overall Cambodian American political interest. The horrors of the Khmer Rouge and the resultant refugee flight may have been too traumatic, and this might have led many Cambodian Americans to shy away from politics and to concentrate on mere survival instead.

My thoughts are that [the refugee background] has hindered politics in general. Being civic minded and understanding our rights as refugees and naturalized citizens were not priorities. Coming out of the genocide, the Khmer Rouge, and the war and plight there, there were other priorities other than being civic minded and civically involved. Family elders, aunts and uncles, etc. did not know the political system to know the issues they experienced and faced. The majority of refugees were rural and not as educated and familiar with how to exercise their rights.

Likewise, a 2nd generation Cambodian American whose parents came as refugees during the Khmer Rouge stated that the refugee trauma effectively silenced Cambodian American political voices and stifled any sense of political efficacy.

I would say that having to flee Cambodia as refugees was a negative [impact on politics]. A lot has not been resolved. Many Cambodians had to leave; they were forced, and did not have a choice. Their freedom was taken away and they did not have the right to voice anything in Cambodia, so this was a negative and it traumatized the people to have to stay silent. I think the younger generation just preserves the culture and identity of being Cambodian American and being Cambodian in general, but they want to remove themselves from politics because don't want to be involved and they don't like the idea of getting involved in politics. The more you get into it and how the Cambodian people were being treated so badly, you feel useless.

Another 2nd generation Cambodian American who mentioned that his parents fled from the Pol Pot Regime as refugees also believed that the refugee history was a political hindrance. He mentions how his parents did not try to educate him on their refugee history, and how just simply trying to "make it" in the U.S. was enough. Overall, the refugee background did not activate anything political in him.

There are definitely negatives of being a refugee. PTSD, trying to adjust to the new society and culture, and the struggle many Cambodian families had coming after the war, they were very poor and all they cared about was just trying to make it, trying to improve their lives and their families, that is the overall hardship. So it [the refugee past] does not seem to have an effect on the younger generation's political participation. Politics seems so abstract, not a direct impact on our daily lives.

A 2nd generation Cambodian American who mentioned that her parents are 1.5 generation refugees who came to the U.S. during the Khmer Rouge similarly explained how the refugee experience made political awareness less important than mere survival.

I think it might have something to do with the Khmer Rouge and what's going on, but maybe it's not the only factor why Cambodian Americans here [in the U.S.] are not involved in politics and don't know what happens in politics in general. My parents are not very involved in it [politics], so I just grew up without really knowing what was happening. It's hard to say given what happen to my parents and grandparents under the Khmer Rouge. Now, all they care about is that we are all okay now with food on our table and a roof over our heads, so they are not aware what's happening politically. They just appreciate their lives here and are not that aware of politics.

Further shedding light on this is one observation made by a 1.5 generation Cambodian American who works as an assistant to a community organizer. According to her, the refugee background is linked to a sense dread or fear of the dangers that came with politics under the Khmer Rouge. That is what Cambodian refugees escaped from, and this political silence is the background that later generations experience.

Because of what they went through during the Khmer Rouge, their relationship with politics and experience with politics is low, because over there, politics was dangerous; you had no opinion and were told what to do. The refugee children who grow up here, see the effect of the Khmer Rouge passed on to the younger generation, the parents' trauma and PTSD passed on to the kids. Cambodian American families don't talk about

it [politics]. If they talk about it, it's just the older folks talking amongst themselves. The young people are just not interested in either American or Cambodian politics. If the kids like politics, they must learn on their own, but if they see that no one cares, then they keep it to themselves.

A 2nd generation Cambodian American whose parents came as refugees during the Khmer Rouge period currently works as a civic engagement coordinator and overall community organizer. She also offers some key insight regarding the challenges that the refugee background has created for Cambodian American political interest due to this impression that politics is dangerous.

I do think that the whole refugee history creates challenges for Cambodian Americans, in terms of politics, especially what happened in Cambodia and having to go through refugee camps and then trying to assimilate. Cambodian Americans think it is dangerous to involve themselves in politics.

Nevertheless, there have been some politically positive effects that have come out of the refugee background. Nearly all of the interviewees mentioned that the refugee trials and tribulations have helped to unify and consolidate Cambodian Americans which makes it easier for Cambodian Americans to have a cohesive political community. The refugee commonality helps to bind the Cambodian Americans together. For example, a 2nd generation Cambodian American who identifies herself as ethnic Chinese, but whose parents came to the U.S. as

refugees fleeing from the Khmer Rouge, said that the Cambodian refugee background has been a positive political force to unify the Cambodian American community.

As for the political community, the refugee history brought the whole community together as a unit. My parents are involved in that. My dad loves it and passes it to me as well, and I appreciate that, and I like it. The community sticks together and coordinates events together.

This unifying force of the Cambodian genocide and the history that stems from this is echoed by a 2nd generation Cambodian American whose parents are 1.5 generation refugees who fled from the horrors of the Khmer Rouge.

The incident [the Khmer Rouge and the genocide], I think the incident gave Cambodian Americans who came to America something to look forward to, something to make themselves better, so it's a positive effect because it created more understanding of each other, in a way. There is a stronger sense of connection of Cambodians in America because of the incident. Over the years, there is a stronger sense of community involvement and organization in Long Beach. The genocide and its history is important to our identity, because of the horrors of the Khmer Rouge, it makes Cambodian Americans appreciate what they have here.

Cambodian American Interviewees' Reflections on Home-Country Politics

When I asked additional probing questions about home-country politics, the Cambodian American interviewees mostly expressed their lack of interest or even cognizance of such issues. Only a very few of the interviewees knew about and were involved in home-country political issues. By and large, the main reaction of most interviewees was to point out how they joined Cambodian organizations—albeit cultural organizations—out of their appreciation, love, and respect for their parents. Most of the interviewees indicated that the younger generations were less interested and involved in political matters that dealt exclusively with issues in Cambodia than the 1st generation Cambodian refugees.

For example, one 1.5 generation Cambodian American refugee who left Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge period mentioned this generational difference, with the older, 1st generation refugees being the most active in home-country politics.

Each generation is different. The 45 years and older 1st generation are involved in politics, but it has to do with the politics of Cambodia. Those with the refugee background care a lot about the Cambodian political system, and they don't support the present government in Cambodia. Anyone younger than 45 years old, they don't care about what's going on in Cambodia as much. For the majority of 1st generation Cambodian Americans, Cambodian politics at home is more central than politics here in the U.S. 95% of the older-aged, 1st generation refugees are very vocal in opposing and very active in opposing the current [Cambodian] regime. For example, a couple of days ago there was the U.S.-ASEAN summit in California. A lot of them [the older 1st generation refugees] opposed it because they have a strong feeling or political view to oppose the current government [in Cambodia]. You can see the pictures from the summit

with people opposing the [Cambodian] government, mostly 1st generation Cambodian refugees who are older in age.

This sentiment that the 1st generation refugee is most active in home-country politics is echoed by a 1.5 generation Cambodian American who was born in a refugee camp in Thailand to parents who fled as refugees during the Khmer Rouge era.

When Cambodian Americans of the older generation were civically involved in their communities, it was really more about motherland politics than American city level or county level issues. They are stuck with how to contribute and rebuild in Cambodia than their own Long Beach community. Parents are still more connected and open to doing more mobilizing work in their communities than before because there's more access to what's going on, more info through technology, and they are more comfortable in expressing themselves in protesting now. Something big happened yesterday where over 200 Cambodian Americans entered Long Beach City Hall and did a peaceful protest against Hun Sen's older son who was scheduled to be in the [Cambodian New Year's] parade in April. Those from the younger generation who are more politically active and involved, they are more focused on their community here in the U.S.

A 2nd generation Cambodian American who was born in the U.S. to Cambodian refugee parents who fled from the Khmer Rouge also echoed this generational difference when it comes to home-country politics. She stated the following:

As for home-country politics, it is there as well, but it is a little intergenerational. Mostly younger generations focus on more issues here [in the U.S.], but the people who lived back then [during the refugee flight from the Khmer Rouge] have important opinions on the current government in Cambodia and other home-country issues as well. Definitely everyone has strong opinions about issues in the home-country, but the younger generation is not as active as the older generation is.

Another 2nd generation Cambodian American whose parents are refugees during the Khmer Rouge era in Cambodia observed that his own (and his generation's) lack of interest in Cambodian home-country political matters stems from feeling more American and feeling that home-country politics were too distant and frustrating. He feels that this sentiment also applies to the 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans who mainly grew up in the U.S. Nevertheless, he does feel that his overall experience/view regarding home-country politics may be partly the result of his upbringing in an area of the U.S. which lacks a Cambodian American enclave let alone a significant Cambodian American presence.

Most of my friends that are my age are not political. To us, politics in Cambodia is too frustrating. There's no hope of change, so we feel we don't need to pay attention. The current state of politics in Cambodia, I don't follow it closely. Not enough Cambodian Americans take an interest in that. We feel we are more American, and we can't have an interest in things over there. So many of us in the 2nd generation checked out, especially about politics in Cambodia. It's just over there, and we've never been back to Cambodia, so there's not any motivation to pay attention or to get more involved in Cambodia. For

those growing up in California or Lowell, Massachusetts, maybe it's easier for them to access that history and organization, Cambodian owned businesses and other agencies, to do things related to Cambodia, but for myself who grew up in [the American Southeast] where there was a very small or even negligible Cambodian American community, I didn't get much of that, especially Cambodian politics. The only thing we had was an annual New Year's celebration. We didn't even have a Cambodian temple. I think for the 1.5 generation, there's quite a bit of a range, but if they were born in camps and then left and were too young to remember, then they are more like the 2nd generation, more Americanized and separated from the issues in Cambodia.

Another 2nd generation Cambodian American whose parents came to the U.S. as refugees fleeing from the war equated home-country political involvement with joining Cambodian cultural organizations. She discusses how she had joined such organizations after learning more about her refugee background and the Cambodian culture in college, but then she also indicates how her (and her generation's) involvement in such organizations has waned over the years. She admits that she is not very political and has never followed purely Cambodian political news.

I was active in college where I learned about my Cambodian culture and refugee background since I didn't have that community growing up, so being involved in Cambodian organizations, in college and after college, became important to me, but as I left college, my peers and I have become less active. We have different time constraints due to different priorities and our careers. I do read world news, and in terms of being

connected digitally, Khmerican is a big media hub for Cambodian Americans. I am not very political, so I don't follow politics in Cambodia very much. I don't seek out Cambodian news. You don't hear Cambodia in the news, so unless it is world news, then I don't hear about it.

Joining Cambodian American cultural organizations is something that almost all interviewees mentioned whenever I brought up involvement in home-country political issues. For example, like the interviewee above, another 2nd generation Cambodian American whose parents came to the U.S. as refugees during the time of the Khmer Rouge did not express much interest in home-country politics, but she did equate home-country political involvement with the importance of being involved in Cambodian organizations, albeit cultural ones. Such involvement usually stems from a kind of filial duty to the parents who had suffered so much to escape as refugees.

I'm not too familiar with the hard politics of Cambodia, but I am part of a [Cambodian American organization]. This is how I learned to connect to where I'm from. It brought us all together to share our culture and common interests. I feel like my parents' strong feelings about their experience being refugees, most are negative because of what they had to go through and how they had to escape to get here—life threatening risks. That really touches my heart, especially because they're my parents. I joined these organizations and participated in the Cambodian New Year's parade because I want to make my parents happy.

Cognizance and interest in home-country politics is even more attenuated for 3rd generation Cambodian Americans. One interviewee who is the grandson of Cambodian refugees to the U.S. mentioned how home-country politics and even Cambodia itself is essentially out of sight and out of mind.

I haven't seen any connections for us as, like, for Vietnamese Americans and the politics in their home-country. It seems to be rare. Unfortunately, like I said so far, I am one of those people who may not be interested unless I see it [political issues in Cambodia] in news outlets, but I don't go out of my way to look into it. I don't contribute to that cause, so I'm not interested in this area. I don't even have an aspiration to visit Cambodia at the moment.

Nevertheless, some of the interviewees did express some interest in home-country political issues. They had knowledge about political issues in Cambodia and are actively involved in organizations and/or protests which related to a home-country political issue, like the visit to the U.S. by Hun Sen's son. For the most part, what differentiates these individuals from other interviewees who are less connected to home-country politics is proximity to the refugee background. In the case of the 2nd generation interviewees who are cognizant and involved in home-country politics, the proximity to the refugee background was increased because they are close to refugee parents who are more open about sharing their refugee stories.

For instance, a 1.5 generation Cambodian American who was born in a refugee camp in Thailand described how the parents' refugee experience of escape from the war, once it gets revealed to the child early on, leads to a deeper connection to the home-country for his

generation. The interviewee even recounts how he would listen to the radio for home-country news with his father, and how this has motivated him to make frequent trips to Cambodia in an effort to better the community and the technological infrastructure over there.

If parents had this sort of experience as refugees and explained this during the early years, this had an effect on their offspring. There would be a deeper connection to motherland developments. Radio Free Asia and Free America Radio, my dad and I would listen to these. If lucky, folks would go to Cambodia, and Cambodian political news would spread through family and inner circles. There would be a higher sense and appreciation of being Cambodian American, and there are encouraging signs of a yearning to go back to learn the parents' roots and heritage, and there is a growing sense of a need to go back [to Cambodia]. For the last 5-7 years, there has been a Cambodian American movement to go back to Cambodia. For example, I've created four delegations to go back to Cambodia, led by people of my generation. There has been a development of the Cambodian diaspora in social media and technology that was very absent in the first three decades. It has been a blessing in the last decade to see the big growth in information technology where, by and large, the mass population gets its information. Now for the new generations, it is definitely technology and websites like Khmerican that are important, and other ones are also forming. I just recently visited Cambodia to expand this type of connection in Cambodia.

Another 1.5 generation Cambodian American who also was born in a refugee camp in Thailand to refugee parents who fled from the Pol Pot regime had this to say regarding his

interest in home-country political issues which he associates with the Khmer Rouge genocide. He also expresses pride in knowing how his parents were refugees and how they passed on memories even though he did not actually live through the genocide. This helped him become involved in the fight for human rights and justice in Cambodia, even working for organizations which lobby the American government over these issues. He is also interested in the protests against Hun Sen's son during the Cambodian New Year's Parade in Long Beach, California.

I myself didn't live through the genocide, but it doesn't mean that I'm not familiar with the atrocities. I haven't grown up in that situation and I don't recall what happened, but I am a child of refugees. The younger generation will attach themselves to whichever message rings most to them. I am receptive more than others. It's activism that depends on who will be personally touched by the stories. I have been proactive in getting the greater U.S. population and community to remember what we went through. As for the home-country issues, I have worked with lot of individuals in [a Cambodian American community organization] to fight for rights, opportunities, and justice there [in Cambodia]. It means bringing awareness to the community, constituents in the U.S., friends, senators, to raise awareness, of social issues there. I have subscriptions to newsletters and websites on social and economic issues there [in Cambodia]. Obviously, Cambodia is vulnerable to being abused by the system. I'm not as concerned with all of this as my parents are [but] I want to investigate more about the Cambodian Prime Minister's son attending the Cambodian American parade, and the uproar by many. Now indeed, politics is front and center with this issue that came up regarding the parade.

A 2nd generation Cambodian American who identifies as Chinese Cambodian American and whose parents came to the U.S. as refugees during the Khmer Rouge era also expressed interest in achieving social justice in Cambodia. She explains how she and her cousin who is even more active in home-country political pursuits than she is (she mentions how her cousin works in organizations fighting for justice against the Khmer Rouge) are very close to her father who was able to share stories about the refugee past to both of them.

It's difficult to answer whether many Cambodian Americans are interested in the hard politics of Cambodia. The real political issues in Cambodia, I am not as familiar with that, but my cousin is more involved in the politics of Cambodia than I am, and she's my generation. My cousin advocates as a commissioner of an organization that fights for justice for the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge and the rights of prisoners there. My cousin sometimes makes online posts on social media to advocate for human rights and highlight social injustice in Cambodia. She posts several links on there that shows her great interest in all of that. I went to Cambodia in 2006, in the summer. I should go there again soon. I feel like that my father has strong feelings because of his experience from that [the refugee history], most are negative about what he had to go through to escape to get here, the life threatening risk, that really touches my heart, especially since he's my dad. I do have an uncle who was negatively affected by this [the refugee background]. I remember during family gatherings, how he had PTSD and had nightmares—waking up in a sweat. That hurts me as well, how they went through that. So I know parts of my family were negatively affected by that [the refugee background]. My dad expresses a lot of anger while watching the news and politics on CNN like the genocide in Syria and the Syrian immigration crisis. He relates that to his own experience, same things and same

processes. Sometimes there is a lot of anger at the whole experience of genocide by the ruler back then. That is the moment when he's angry. I try to be more aware of all the atrocities and trauma, all the stories I heard from him. It sparks interest in me and I try to learn more about the political history there [in Cambodia]. I want to know. My dad tells me the story of the king of Cambodia and Hun Sen in his broken English. I hear him bring up this name and that name, and he talks about how things are here compared to there [in Cambodia], and it gets me and my cousin involved. It interests me in what inhumane actions are taking place back there [in Cambodia] and how to achieve social justice and to right the wrongs and get human rights there [in Cambodia]. Obviously that was a traumatic experience. History repeats itself, and I am interested in how to politically change that.

When I asked about actually being involved in a home-country political protest, a few of the interviewees were quite knowledgeable and were even involved. Those interviewees who were involved in protest over home-country issues again showed closer connections to their refugee parents, and their refugee parents showed more of a willingness to share their refugee trials and tribulations with their children. These interviewees got involved in a protest centered on the debacle over the appearance of Hun Sen's son in the Cambodian New Year's Parade. In all of this, the interviewees expressed empathy toward their parents, essentially sympathizing with what they had to go through and how politics in Cambodia today has not changed that much. A 2nd generation Cambodian American whose parents are refugees during the Khmer Rouge period offers the following insight on this dynamic. She acknowledges how many in her generation distance themselves from home-country politics, but she mentions how her closeness

to her refugee family and her desire to know her history overcomes this tendency to disregard politics in Cambodia.

There is still a lot of corruption and chaos in the politics and government in Cambodia today. It is still so sad that after all these years, the government in Cambodia is still negatively impacting people, still bringing people back to insecurity and fear. The government in Cambodia and how the Prime Minister is treating other people, that is the sad part. Even though we are living across the world, Cambodians are still somehow feeling fear. That impacts people like me today. I live with my parents and am very close to my family. I feel for my parents. There is this disconnect, a gap though, between the younger and older generations. With younger generations, not much of the refugee history is being shared. America is a melting pot, and the younger generation is more influenced by the culture here [in the U.S.], but they need to build their history and identity, but many Khmer Americans are not so interested. I think that the younger generation preserves the culture and identity of being Cambodian American and being Cambodian in general, but they want to remove themselves from politics because they don't want to be involved and don't like the idea of getting involved. I understand that it is complicated and frustrating. The more you get into it, the more you learn how the Cambodian people are being treated so badly, and you feel useless. Sometimes I understand that there's not much to do, but I say that we must do in order to have a voice. For me, I am very active and interested, like in the recent invitation of Hun Sen's son to the Cambodian New Year's Parade. The Cambodian people are directly being affected by this. They try to protect their families and people from the fear of the Cambodian government. That is saddening. I was involved in it to help my family and community

members have a voice in this, in what is going to be something that may re-traumatize them again. I want to allow people who are in oppositional parties to come. I am active in this because the Cambodian government's decisions hurt so many people. As a member of the younger generation, I want to bridge that gap and help my parents and community to share their thoughts and my thoughts on this. 400 Cambodian Americans showed up at city hall to have their voices heard, to let the Long Beach councilmen know that this [the invitation of Hun Sen's son is not right], to put pressure on [specific Cambodian American organizations] to cancel the invitation. Also, a couple of years ago, the Cambodian New Year's Parade was done on the same day as the day of remembrance for the Cambodian genocide. There's mistrust too, that some Cambodian American organizations' members are affiliated with political parties in Cambodia and then they shape our community and they make poor decisions that directly hurt others. Thus, we have the protests and demonstrations. I try. I try to get younger Khmer Americans like me to get involved, and our generation helped to attend the protests and translate our parents' grievances into English for the Long Beach City Council to understand.

Another 2nd generation Cambodian American whose parents were 1.5 generation Cambodian refugees during the war also showed a high level of knowledge and interest in home-country politics. Again, the common thread with the others who expressed interest in home-country politics was being close to a family which openly discussed these home-country issues and their refugee past.

I have seen a lot of home-country politics, in the past year, especially. In the last election in Cambodia a year or two ago, Hun Sen is seen by my family as very corrupt leader who cares about his bloodline than the people of Cambodia, and who will get rid of people who might get in his way. I've witnessed the protests. The last 30 years of his reign, he rigged the election to win. With the last election, citizens of Cambodia try to protest and riot. The Cambodian American community here tries to bring this to the attention of the U.S. government. For example, with Hun Sen's son, there was a protest in front of a Cambodian restaurant because he is the military leader of Cambodia. I would say that those going to the protest were predominantly of the older generation, my grandparents' generation. My generation does not care as much, but I personally care about what happens in Cambodia, mostly because my parents tell me of the dangers they went through over there. I visited Cambodia four times with my family, and I got to see the lifestyle over there. I saw a three year old walk around trying to sell things for a dollar to get through the day, and it is all something that was impacted by the Khmer Rouge, and Hun Sen is sort of tied in with the Khmer Rouge, so mostly I feel sympathy for Cambodians and how they have so little. I was raised with my parents who tell me to be thankful for the food on my table and the roof over my head and my college education. They would've had these things too if they had a Cambodian government that cared for them, but they didn't. Personally, that's why I care about what's going on in Cambodia.

On the other hand, a 1.5 generation Cambodian American who recently immigrated to the U.S. also showed some cognizance of home-country political issues despite neither being a refugee nor having come from a refugee family. She observed that her 1st generation, non-

refugee cousin who came to the U.S. from Cambodia does keep track of politics in Cambodia. Although she reiterated that she could care less about home-country politics in Cambodia, she did share some of her family's perspectives on home-country politics. Moreover, she also brought up something different that Cambodian American interviewees with a refugee background did not mention: the non-refugees' reluctance to participate in political protests that implicate home-country political issues. This interviewee learned about a protest concerning a home-country political issue—the visit of Hun Sen's son to Long Beach—by volunteering with Cambodian Americans who are 1st generation refugees or children of those refugees and who were passionate about this protest.

Me personally, I would say that I don't care about politics in Cambodia. I distance myself from it. It does not affect me. I'm not there, and I have no interest. Maybe because I moved here when I was younger, there is no connection to politics in Cambodia, so I cut myself from that connection. My cousin moved to the U.S. when he was 25 years old or older, and he goes to Cambodia pretty often and he's pretty into politics in Cambodia. He goes to websites to find out what's going on in Cambodia and all kinds of Cambodian news. It's interesting that you are living here, so don't you want to learn about here rather than there? It is their home-country. It is mine too, but I don't think about going back there. It's not that I have abandoned my home-country, but I don't have the political knowledge and political connection. I didn't know that Hun Sen's son was invited to the Cambodian parade until it was mentioned by my supervisor whose parents and grandparents were recruited in the protest. That is more of an older generation thing. Even though Hun Sen wasn't in power when they were fleeing as refugees, there is sense of hatred of him among Cambodian Americans here [in the U.S.]

that he didn't do great things for Cambodia, that he's only looking for power and not to benefit the Cambodian people. People in general don't like him and tend to indict him here [in the U.S.], but for what? It would create chaos and protests for Cambodian Americans. This fire rages on for older Cambodian Americans here [in the U.S.], but for me, I don't have that, but to see these elders being so strong-headed about it, I would go along with it too because they are so passionate about that. My family is all talking about it, that he's not doing anything. My whole family is anti-Hun Sen, but not many are taking the initiative to do something risky about it. I don't see them participating in protests because they care about their faces being seen in such protests, but other Cambodian Americans feel like they have nothing else to lose so they want to have change, but my family has a business and doesn't want to join any political group to take him out of office, that's the case for a lot of Cambodian Americans, especially for Chinese Cambodian Americans. The Chinese Cambodian Americans are often merchants, so they wouldn't risk their family business just for that.

A 1.5 generation Cambodian American refugee during the war also adds additional insight into what was said above. Based on his experience working in the community, recent immigrants from Cambodia are interested in home-country politics, but the risk that political expression poses to their immediate family back in Cambodia is something that weighs heavily on their minds. This is similar to what the 1.5 generation non-refugee interviewee mentioned above.

As for the new [Cambodian American] immigrants who just arrived in the U.S., half and half support the current Cambodian political system due to their affiliation before coming to the U.S. If you were involved in the current Cambodian political system before coming to the U.S. [speaking about the new Cambodian non-refugee immigrants], you support them [the current Cambodian regime]. If not and you [speaking about the new Cambodian non-refugee immigrants] were marginalized by the current Cambodian government, you would be opposed. I think more new Cambodian [non-refugee] immigrants lean toward opposing the current government in Cambodia, slightly. There was also a group [at the ASEAN-U.S. summit in California] that rallied in support of the current government [in Cambodia] too. The camp that supported [the Cambodian government] was made up of people younger than 40 years old who are the recent immigrants, not refugees. Remember, recent immigrants from Cambodia are not refugees, because I remember that the refugee status starts to drop around the early 1990's, so anyone after that are just immigrants. The post-1990's immigrants, those are the people who support the current [Cambodian] government at the summit. For them, if you oppose the current [Cambodian] government, you don't show your face out of fear that there might be those who are connected to the current [Cambodian] government, so you oppose quietly. That's another dynamic. Refugees here can oppose the [Cambodian] government openly because they have no association to the old country. Otherwise, you feel that because you have relatives at home [in Cambodia], you're scared, unless you support the current Cambodian government and then it's okay to show your face. That's the dynamic for recent post-1990 immigrants. This is something which

their children [the children of recent, non-refugee Cambodian immigrants] have to think about.

Cambodian American Interviewees' Reflections on U.S. Politics

Cambodian American interviewees confirm classical assimilation presumptions because most of them see themselves as being more focused on American politics, unlike the 1st generation's preoccupation with politics in Cambodia. Nevertheless, most of these interviewees do not see themselves as being very political inclined even in U.S. politics. They do vote in U.S. elections and sometimes follow political news in the U.S., but they do not regard themselves as being American political activists. What the interviews reveal is that the refugee history and trauma as well as the possible unsatisfactory handling of refugees by the U.S. government may have hurt the Cambodian American potential to be politically active in the U.S. context. Nonetheless, the interviewees who are interested in their refugee heritage and who have parents willing to share the harrowing details of the refugee past feel a desire to serve their communities here in the U.S. They feel a duty to improve conditions for Cambodian Americans who they see as having suffered too much as refugees. Thus, the refugee background may help to increase civic activism among Cambodian Americans, at least at the local community level aside from voting participation.

Beginning with the intergenerational dynamic between Cambodian Americans and the U.S. political system, a 1.5 generation Cambodian American refugee who left Cambodia as a child during the war observed that the 1st generation was less assimilated so they tended to be focused on politics in Cambodia. Meanwhile, the Americanized younger generations take on the

American political identity and focus more on purely American issues. Overall, this 1.5 generation Cambodian American refugee mentions that the longer people have lived in the U.S., the more politically assimilated they are, and this interviewee shows his awareness of Cambodian American developments in U.S. electoral politics.

The 1st generation isn't too involved in U.S. politics due to a lack of understanding English and acquiring English [language proficiency], so they are less inclined and less involved, but there are some in the 1st generation who do get involved in U.S. politics. The issue and reason why people say there is less political participation in America by Cambodians is the language barrier and the history of Cambodia which was a dictatorship and full of oppression, monarchy, and all this stuff, so for older generations who are not familiar with the democratic process and are used to being told what to do, they would be less involved. As for the new generations who are born here, the educational system here has helped, so this view of Cambodian Americans should change with the younger generation getting more involved in politics here [in the U.S.] because language is no longer an issue. Those who are 45 years and younger are all over the place in their politics, but their focus is no longer on Cambodia, their focus is here [in the U.S.]. I remember reading an article about a Cambodian being elected to high office on the East Coast, but few have that aspiration. I would say that Cambodian Americans who have been in the U.S. 15 years and longer, yes, they are more involved in U.S. politics and have a longer political view. For me, I actively read about and know what's going on over here [in the U.S.] through the internet and community word-of-mouth and community gatherings, that's how we get wind of political news in the U.S. There is the Khmer media, internet, and I read about local politics in our city. It's important to know

who we are as a community, that is part of our duty to be able to know what's going on and fight for what is needed to be fought for.

Most of the interviewees, as members of the 1.5 and 2nd generation, did say that they are voters, but admitted that they were not very political. For example, a typical response I heard is the following one from a 1.5 generation Cambodian American born in a refugee camp in Thailand to parents who fled from the Pol Pot regime.

I am only somewhat political. My parents, siblings, my colleagues, we all are the same. We all vote.

Similarly, a 2nd generation Chinese Cambodian American, whose parents were refugees who fled Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge, expressed some interest in American politics, although she admits that she is not very political.

I don't know much about politics. When it comes to voting, currently with the presidential campaign, my family is Democrat. I try to be more aware of current issues about Clinton and Sanders. A lot of my friends like Sanders who speaks to younger demographics, but I'm not too much politically involved.

Another 2nd generation Cambodian American born to refugee parents who fled during the Khmer Rouge expresses a lack of interest in American politics. He feels as though his

generation does not have political efficacy and trust in U.S. government, but whether this has anything to do with the refugee background is unclear from this particular interview.⁴⁰ This occurs despite how his politically progressive, 1st generation refugee parents allowed him to feel more American than Cambodian when it comes to his political identity.

I don't feel that politics in our own country of America has any direct influence over us or that we have a direct say in it. Me and my friends are not political. Maybe during a presidential election year like this I may take more interest in it, but it is not very natural for us. Especially with elections, the reason is mistrust and dissatisfaction with the way politics are and the political system. We try to be informed, and there is more information out there about things that we can get involved in, not just the huge campaign donations, but it usually does not get the attention of politicians who are running. My parents are more forthcoming than others whenever I asked about politics, and I feel lucky that I have no problem communicating with them in English. They are politically progressive and don't cling to all of the traditional Cambodian values.

This lack of political activism in the U.S. context may be a result of the refugee experience. As mentioned before, the refugee background is seen by many interviewees as political baggage, traumatizing Cambodian Americans toward all things politics. Although it may not have severely hurt Cambodian Americans in terms of home-country politics, the refugee trauma may have been more of a negative political influence when it comes to U.S. politics. For example, a 2nd generation descendant of 1.5 generation refugees who fled Cambodia as children

⁴⁰ Other interviews do link the refugee background to distrust of the U.S. government among Cambodian Americans. Please see the other interview excerpts below.

during the Khmer Rouge described how in general, Cambodian Americans are simply not politically active in the U.S. and thinks it has something to do with the refugee trauma which caused the parents' generation to not prioritize political involvement in the U.S. Instead, they cared more about surviving, so this might be one of the factors which cause her generation who are born and raised in the U.S. to not really care about U.S. politics.

To be completely honest, not a lot of Cambodian Americans who are born and raised here [in the U.S.] are very active politically or really care about politics over here [in the U.S.]. I think it might have something to do with the Khmer Rouge and what's going on, but maybe it's not the only factor. My parents are not very involved in it [U.S. politics], so I just grew up without really knowing what was happening. It's hard to say given what happened to my parents and grandparents under the Khmer Rouge. Now, all they care about is that we are all okay with food on our table and a roof over our heads, so they are not aware of what's happening politically around them. They just appreciate their lives here and are not that aware of politics here.

Another 1.5 generation Cambodian American offers the following insight about the lack of Cambodian American political participation in the U.S. compared to other ethnic groups, and also attributes it to the refugee trauma that Cambodian Americans experienced which gave the impression that politics, even in the U.S., is dangerous and should not be talked about. According to this interviewee, this has effectively stunted the political growth of the younger generations of Cambodian Americans so that they do not participate in U.S. politics much despite having been educated in school about American civics.

Because of what they went through during the Khmer Rouge, their relationship with politics and experience with politics is low, because over there, politics was dangerous; you had no opinion and were told what to do. So when they moved here [to the U.S.], they did not have a voice as citizens and did not vote in local elections. The mentality was that there was something dangerous about people with power. Only a few community leaders who understood the whole political process [in the U.S.] knew that it's okay, that it's not the same as before, that politics is different here in the U.S., and here you have a voice. The refugee children who grow up here [in the U.S.] see the effect of the Khmer Rouge passed on to the younger generation, the parents' trauma and PTSD passed on to the kids. Cambodian American families don't talk about it [politics]. If they talk about it, it's just the older folks talking amongst themselves. The young people are just not interested in either American or Cambodian politics. If the kids like politics, they must learn on their own, but if they see that no one cares, then they keep it to themselves. The kids are Americanized, they go to school and understand the whole process about voting, but their engagement is not as great as other American youths in society. The family doesn't talk about it, and the kids don't know about it. If the family knows about the voting process, if they talk to and hear their kids, then they can pass it on. Cambodian American families don't talk about it.

This low engagement and participation in U.S. politics may have been exacerbated by the U.S. government's handling of Cambodian refugee settlement in the U.S. which, in the eyes of many interviewees, did not help the refugees and their children become more socially, economically, and politically integrated in the U.S. When asked about their or their family's

experience with the U.S. government and whether it helped them to politically integrate in the U.S., most interviewees said that they either did not know or had no opinion about this. Nevertheless, a few of the interviewees who did have an opinion said that they believed that the U.S. government may have contributed to the lack of Cambodian American involvement in U.S. politics. A 1.5 generation Cambodian refugee who came to the U.S. as a child during the war said that the refugee migration to the U.S. was accompanied by an uneasy feeling of distrust towards the U.S. government for its responsibility in the aerial bombardment of Cambodia, its complicity with the Khmer Rouge, and how the U.S. governmental system let Cambodians down after they arrived in the U.S.

Cambodian Mutual Assistance [CMA's] organizations and temples, of course, were created and established by Cambodian Americans. I know that 40 to 50 CMA's were created in the [19]80's. Now they are umbrella organizations for refugees in general, like Syrians and other refugees in their communities. I would think, in my opinion, that some elders of these groups and organizations, they might have a mixed opinion now on the American government's role. Many of these organizations can't be of use anymore, so it was like a hit-and-run operation, and they struggled and blamed the American government for not giving the resources that would have helped that group still serve their community. For example, Columbus, Ohio had a large Cambodian community with a big budgeted organization that served a big community. During the [19]80's, the [U.S.] government paid them a lot and strategically picked neighborhood pockets to house them in, but these organizations soon disappeared. They became irrelevant and dissolved these days. Some thirty years since, we have become increasingly skeptical and hesitant to have any type of relationship with either city or local government. It's an issue of trust.

We didn't want to come to the U.S. That's a reality, but some of us came to the U.S. because our family and relatives were already here. There is a lot of mistrust with the [U.S.] government. The country folks [Cambodians who came from rural parts of Cambodia] may not have an education, but they know who bombed them, but they had to accept that they had to stay here in the U.S. even though it was the American government that bombed their country. Now they get [U.S.] government support and an allowance, and it creates a weird feeling.

A 2nd generation Cambodian American born to refugee parents who fled from the Khmer Rouge offered another critical perception of the U.S. government's role. For him, the U.S. government did help his family immigrate to the U.S. during the time of the Khmer Rouge and then offered various forms of governmental assistance for which the 1st generation refugees were grateful. However, he also leans toward being critical of the U.S. government for making some mistakes in the resettlement process which has negatively impacted socioeconomics and politics for so many Cambodian Americans. He hardly remembers any governmental assistance to his family, and he thanks the religious VOLAG's for helping his family much more than the U.S. government.

A few years I was at a Khmer student coalition conference where I heard a striking, rousing speech about the resettlement history and treatment of Cambodian Americans by the U.S. government, and it pointed out how the older generation is unquestioningly grateful to the host government here. But this speaker said that the policy of the [U.S.] government was to place Cambodian Americans in communities that were quite poor.

Cambodians were put in different enclaves. An example of that was Oakland, California versus Piedmont, California which is a smaller area in the county. A lot of Cambodians in Oakland, their outcomes, their achievement levels are worse than families in Piedmont. To me, a lot of violence in the Cambodian American environment is attributable to the U.S. government's handling of resettlement, so the [U.S.] government was not fair and not generous at all, but rather short-sighted. Unfortunately, that is what happened. Yes, there were some good things. There was some attempt at doing more to help and to offer these people whatever they could, like the Baptist church which hosted and sponsored my parents, they were very kind and generous, my parents had everything they wanted when they first came [to the U.S.], food, childcare, etc. So at the community level, religious organizations on the ground had more of an active role in helping Cambodian Americans get resettled, and I'm not sure if any government program was offered to us.

Another 2nd generation Cambodian American whose parents were refugees during the Khmer Rouge era shared a similar critique of the U.S. government's role in the Cambodian American settlement and integration. According to this interviewee, the U.S. government's choice to settle Cambodian Americans in certain areas without accompanying support has led to negative outcomes for Cambodian American community involvement and activity.

[The U.S. government] initially scattered Cambodian Americans in different areas. From my personal experience, for the most part, I feel that they [Cambodian Americans] are not too happy about it. Many were placed in lower income areas, and all of these things

have a bad effect on how they [younger generation Cambodian Americans] grow up and get involved in their own communities.

A community organizer who is a 2nd generation Cambodian American born to refugee parents from the Khmer Rouge period also echoed this sentiment, although she did acknowledge that there were both pros and cons to the U.S. government's management of the refugee influx into the U.S. In her view, the U.S. government was helpful in initially bringing Cambodians into the U.S., but the U.S. government may have ultimately mismanaged things from lack of experience. In the end, she feels that the U.S. government may have made Cambodian Americans more dependent and less able to become civic participants on their own, and then the current deportations of Cambodian Americans may be one result of this overall governmental mishandling.

About the U.S. government's role during the refugee migration, that is tricky. It was good in a way that the U.S. government invested in a process of bringing them [Cambodians] here, but I think it is very hard to answer because when you also flip it around, the U.S. government did not need to be holding their [Cambodians] hand like that instead of allowing them to learn and navigate the governmental system on their own. It created a culture of dependency. It's kind of like trial and error, to not know what the outcome will be because the U.S. government did not have much exposure to deal with refugees prior to the Vietnam War, and now there was a whole bunch of Southeast Asian refugees. It is great that they helped us assimilate to the new country, but we also have the deportations of Cambodian Americans today, so they [the U.S. government] did not

know that the systems they created would affect us years later. It's a hard question to answer. There are both negatives and positives.

Although Cambodian Americans may not be the most politically active group in the U.S. possibly because of the negative effects of the refugee background and dissatisfaction with the U.S. government, most of the Cambodian Americans whom I interviewed did mention something positive in U.S. politics arising from their refugee background. Essentially, thanks to the refugee legacy, Cambodian Americans are active in their local communities here in the U.S., and this differentiates the Cambodian Americans of refugee backgrounds from non-refugee Cambodian Americans.

For instance, one 2nd generation Cambodian American whose parents fled Cambodia as refugees during the Khmer Rouge period works as a community organizer for a Cambodian American organization where she provides civic education, voter registration drives, and other services for Cambodian Americans, and she has had success in helping Cambodian Americans take part in local, city-level politics. She indicated that the refugee background was a bit of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, as many had reflected earlier, the refugee background had left an impression on Cambodian Americans that politics, even in their new American home, is dangerous. At the same time, however, coming out of that persecution also helps motivate refugees and their descendants to serve their community. This sense of service includes getting involved in the community and guiding other Cambodian Americans as they take part in the American political/governmental system. She mentioned how this civic motivation and community activism may not be shared by non-refugee Cambodian Americans.

For me, with the organization I work with, especially the civic engagement part, for me, it is hard for us as an ethnic group to get civically involved, especially with so many Cambodian Americans thinking politics is dangerous. It's hard to have people come out to voice their opinions, and maybe to a certain extent for the younger generations as well. Many of us children are assimilated enough and do go out and vote. I met a few people who stand up for their rights. I don't see too much of that compared to other ethnicities. I don't see fear of politics in the younger generation as in the parents' generation, but there is room for improvement to get younger folks to come out and work to make changes to our community. I don't see it as a fear aspect, but more of not understanding the political issues. When it comes to cultural pride and community involvement, it is more so coming from a refugee family, striving to make changes for the Cambodian American community, whereas those who came as immigrants don't have that struggle attached to that whole refugee history. For us who come from a refugee family, it's more so of striving to make changes for the Cambodian American community here, to make a mark here, to serve the community. The Cambodian American refugees are the ones who built the community organizations here [in the U.S.]. For Cambodian immigrants, that's not so much. They don't understand the struggle much. People who came as refugees did not have any social or security system pre-1979. But by time the Cambodian immigrants came around, refugees already established these organizations in America, and new immigrants take advantage of this, the things that refugees already built. Cambodian immigrants since 1999, they are not necessarily coming or running from a genocidal regime, and once they are here, there is already a more established Cambodian American community in America, so it's easier for them to assimilate. Our refugee

families understand the struggle differently because our parents struggled differently. Those who came as immigrants came with something. Refugees came with nothing, so they see their role in world differently, to mentor and serve the community. For us in our program, our take on it, we strive to keep the political issues as intimate as possible, bring up political issues that directly affect Cambodian Americans in the community. That's the only way of getting them to be more aware politically. My job is to help them navigate the American system. We understand that it is difficult for everyone. We understand where they are coming from. I try to make local community issues important to them. We held a class not too long ago about this. They weren't aware of the political power they had because they weren't being civically engaged. When we talked to them and showed them, they were more motivated and became more active. We got them to go to city council meetings. It is a daunting process, but it is possible, and the outcomes are excellent. We help the younger generations too, but we generally focus on the older generation because they are the most vulnerable and need our services the most, but we do train youths in civics as well because our organization's mission is to have people advocate for themselves. The older generation needs a lot of guidance on our side, but it's easier for the younger generation because they can get a quick PowerPoint presentation and the point will get across.

Similarly, a 1.5 generation Cambodian American refugee who came to the U.S. as an infant during the war states that the 1st generation Cambodian refugees were active in creating the organizational foundation for Cambodian American political involvement at the local community level in the U.S., something which the pre-war Cambodian non-refugee immigrants

did not do. However, he also expressed his dissatisfaction with these 1st generation organizations which he sees as becoming increasingly irrelevant to serve Cambodian American needs in the U.S. today. There is an increasing intergenerational tension as older-generation community leaders clash with younger generation community leaders over the direction of these Cambodian American community organizations.

In the Bronx, Philadelphia, and other communities, there had been some activism in the late [19]80's when the Cambodian American community reached a plateau and levelled out. The biggest issue back then was access to medical, educational, and vocational resources in the community. You can still see photos and articles from the Bronx, Providence, and Long Beach where Cambodian elders were leading these efforts and protesting. Affluent Cambodian international students who came to the U.S. pre-1975, they were more successful. In that context, they were more influential in the affairs around the development of the Cambodian American community, but they were not the major players or figures, not the leading spokespersons or ambassadors to mobilize civic work and political action. From what I have seen in Seattle, Long Beach, and the [Washington] D.C. area, most of these community leaders were refugees who had lost family members in the genocide like me. Many of the pre-1975 Cambodian Americans are well off and educated, but they have not suffered like my family and the 90% of the Cambodian American population who were impacted by the genocide. The pre-1975 community, they have more business clout and more economic influence, but they tend to distance themselves politically. To be honest, my assessment of overall Cambodian American involvement in U.S. government is that the 1st generation was integral to the first decade and first 15 years of coming to the U.S., but I feel by and large, for the past

10-15 years now, the Cambodian mutual assistance organizations have become irrelevant. They were great organizations, I acknowledge that, in terms of fostering the [Cambodian American] community to be more civically involved and to be more conscious, more equipped, and more viable. The new generations like me who are taking the lead in community organizations, they lead organizations that are older than they are. Some of these organizations, sadly, they still do the same repetitive programs, and they have lost funding. They have become irrelevant, and we see their attendance drop. By and large, 30-plus Cambodian mutual assistance organizations out there in the U.S. are irrelevant. Not much programming in these organizations to really help the communities today. Not until later, the past 3-4 years, that you see these new developments where younger leaders in their mid-20's to 40's with more education than the previous administrations are taking over. There is still resistance by the current leadership which wants more of the same programs, so they [the younger generations] are having a hard time persuading the whole team to create other programs and to not do the same repetitive programming.

This same interviewee told me how he became active in the Cambodian American community by helping to transition the community from the outdated Cambodian American organizational agendas to newer organizations and online outlets to serve the current needs of Cambodian Americans. He indicates that his community activism was motivated by his refugee identity. Although he does not necessarily feel that he was activated by the 1st generation refugees (his parents' generation) themselves, he did have an epiphany in college about his refugee identity and the need to be politically active.

Our parents' generation's relationship with American government and politics had no effect on our generation—the offspring—and our relationship with the U.S. government and relationship with our community. U.S. politics was not relevant to me until I was in college when there was the issue of deportation of Cambodian Americans. That was a very hot-button issue and made our community more visible. It was in college that I was activated into being more critical and conscious of our own refugee history in the U.S. and the U.S.'s role in that. That was awakened in me as a young adult, and it sparked my civic responsibility and my roles in civil society here [in the U.S.]. I'm part of a website for Cambodian Americans because there was no voice and no media representation of the growing population of Cambodian Americans in the U.S. The older organizations played a small role in the last 30 years of bringing to light the struggle of our community to the U.S., but only about Cambodian development, not the Cambodian American experience. We created this website with better technology that makes the Cambodian American community leaders more mindful of the actual content of the Cambodian American experience today. The leaders are sharing more, and our website has created a great space for communities across borders and state lines to create dialogues. I see our work as being more relevant to the Cambodian American community today, and we are expanding.

Another 1.5 generation Cambodian American refugee who left Cambodia as a child during the war also indicated the positive effect of the refugee history on mobilizing the community and leading to Cambodian American organizational capacity and recognition.

I would say that it [the Cambodian refugee background] has a positive impact on the Cambodian American community. Back then, there weren't many Cambodians in the U.S. and there were no agencies or organizations that were Cambodian-based. Cambodian Americans had no resources to help them to assimilate, to be civic participants in general, but it's the refugees that needed resources and people to help the refugees assimilate and take care of other things they needed. And also, this brings awareness to Cambodian Americans in general, who they are, because most people don't know them and where Cambodia is, but with the whole refugee history, the American people know about this and how Cambodian Americans escaped genocide, and all of this helps to bring awareness about Cambodian Americans and our community.

A 2nd generation Cambodian American had this to say about her father and the organizational capacity and community activism of Cambodian Americans like him who had a refugee background during the Khmer Rouge period.

My dad is so happy be a founding member of [a Cambodian American association], and he makes us aware of our heritage. He knew a lot of people, and his friends asked him to join them in forming [the association] over 5 years ago now. I'm not too sure who is part of the founding board of [the association], but the majority of the founders, I want to say that they mostly escaped as refugees. I was born in the U.S., so I'm not a refugee, but even people my age and younger are involved in all that too, but I'm pretty sure a lot of people involved were refugees. I think the genocide and the refugee past are important for them. It defines all of them together. It's a major part of their past.

A 2nd generation Cambodian American who has refugee parentage from the Khmer Rouge era also describes how his generation does volunteer work in the local community which he sees as being inspired by the refugee background.

My friends of my generation, we volunteer and give back to the community. This is strong among those who do pursue it, and I don't know how it would be without knowing about this refugee experience. Because of this, young Cambodian Americans are pursuing more opportunities to get involved in projects to help Cambodian Americans make progress in various communities throughout the U.S.

An interviewee who is a 2nd generation Cambodian American whose parents were refugees during the war stated that her parents' escape from war and persecution motivated her to be active in serving the Cambodian American community. According to her, this is something which differentiates Cambodian Americans with a refugee background from those without a refugee background.

From my experience, which is actually when I started college, it [the refugee background] helped us be more active and more vocal. My parents did leave Cambodia due to the war, and personally, knowing this, I wanted to be successful to help the Cambodian American community, to strengthen the community, and to give back to the community given what they have been through. So I think that it does help, there is some positive effect of [the refugee background and history] being a motivator for action in the community. I notice that those who did come over as refugees or are the kids of these refugees are a little more involved in the community as opposed to those who came over

not because of the war. So refugees and their kids are joining organizations and reaching out in the community, for instance, over things like voting, translating, or just trying to promote the culture in general. Cambodian Americans who are proud of their Cambodian heritage, but don't see involvement as a priority to them—most of them are non-refugee Cambodian Americans. I feel that the Cambodian American community needs to be more active and more vocal in politics, and I hope this will change in the near future.

This sentiment is shared by another 2nd generation Cambodian American whose parents fled from Cambodia as refugees during the Khmer Rouge. She states that the refugee history and legacy of suffering continues to inspire her to serve as a voice for her community, something which non-refugee Cambodian American might not experience. Moreover, her politics are strongly influenced by her parents' refugee background because, unlike other Cambodian Americans, her parents are more willing to pass on this legacy to her.

Speaking for myself and my generation, I see the pain and suffering that they [my parents] had to go through day after day, the way people were treated in Cambodia. As the 2nd generation, I feel for my parents. It is really frustrating, saddening that this is still going on, people in Cambodia being removed from their homes, the way that they were being treated, fleeing the land, having their natural resources taken away, and the communist party's influence in all of this. I am very interested in how this impacts my parents and family, to fight against such things, political things. I am interested in it, so I want to help my family and community members to have a voice against such things. As

the younger generation, I want to be the bridge that allows my parents and community members to share my thoughts on this. My parents' generation came out of genocide where a lot were killed off. That's unfortunate. We need to preserve and restore our history, connect with the older generation. We need to document these things or else our history is lost. I think that Cambodians who came as refugees have faced many more challenges coming here and settling here. The way they had to flee the country, seeing family members go missing, the whole process of them settling here was not easy. People who immigrate to America have more time, better opportunity to connect with their family and settle. I think refugees have gone through much more loss and pain just because they had to flee so suddenly, I think that definitely has influence overall, having to endure that for so many years. I'm involved in the community out of a sense of support for my parents because they've gone through so much. I try to get younger Khmer Americans to get involved in the community, to be a voice for our community, to help older generations of Khmer Americans have a voice, to be united during key historical moments, like the demonstrations and protests we had at Long Beach City Hall.

Another interviewee who is a 2nd generation Cambodian American whose parents came as refugees during the Khmer Rouge era even offered the following anecdote about pre-1975 Cambodian Americans who were not refugees and their lack of involvement with (or empathy toward) the refugees.

This reminds me of what my dad said the other day, not too sure exactly, maybe just a stereotypical thing, but he mentioned how, when he first arrived in the states, he met

some Cambodian who had arrived earlier, before the Khmer Rouge got started and not the whole genocide yet. They were more condescending. They had more years in America than he did, so they had a sort of stuck-up vibe. They thought they were better than the people who arrived later.

Another 2nd generation Cambodian American who said that her parents came to the U.S. as refugees during the Khmer Rouge period indicated that the refugee background is something which motivates her 1st generation father into serving (and being a voice for) the Cambodian American community, something that is different from her non-refugee relatives who recently came to the U.S. for educational purposes.

Being a refugee shapes your thinking for a certain time of your life. I'm not sure if it's because my dad was a refugee that's why he tends to be so active and involved in helping the community. My cousins recently immigrated here from Cambodia, at first, for a college education, and in my eyes, they came to the U.S. just to pursue education. All they want to understand is American culture. My dad lived in Cambodia before being forced to come to the U.S., and he is more active and involved to have people here [in the U.S.] listen to the Cambodian American community. I'm not saying that there's necessarily any correlation with being a refugee, but yeah, he's more politically active than my cousins.

This observation that recent Cambodian immigrants who came to the U.S. for non-refugee reasons are not as civically involved or politically interested is echoed by another 2nd

generation Cambodian American who mentioned that her parents are refugees who had fled from the Khmer Rouge.

Those who are not refugees who were fortunate enough to emigrate before the outbreak of war or the people who came more recently in the past 10 years or so, they are more educated and financially well-off. I'm not as familiar with the first group, but for the second group who came recently who were not born yet during the war, I see the same thing happening with this later wave of recent, younger generation Cambodian immigrants. They are more concerned with making a living, getting ahead in life. Politics is not something that concerns them. They don't feel it has anything to do with their lives.

For many interviewees, there seems to be a sense of duty to serve the Cambodian American community here. For example, a 2nd generation Cambodian American who stated that her parents left as refugees during the Khmer Rouge equated participation in U.S. politics with her local work helping Cambodian Americans with English-language assistance so that they can have their voices heard in the local community, although she did admit that Cambodian Americans may not be as politically active in U.S. politics as other national-origin groups.

Today, I think Cambodian Americans are more vocal and more involved in politics than before. College-educated Cambodian Americans of my generation serve as translators to help other Cambodian American folks understand English so that we can make our voices heard in our community and local government. Cambodian Americans are not as active in politics here [in the U.S.] as other demographics or other ethnicities, but it is

starting to change and hopefully it [Cambodian American participation in U.S. politics] will increase.

This idea of serving the community by becoming translators for the Cambodian Americans who want to participate in the American political process is something that is also described by another 2nd generation Cambodian American whose parents are refugees who had escaped from the Pol Pot regime. Indeed, she even mentions that translating assistance was one way in which her generation was able to serve the older generation during a political protest at the Long Beach City Council chambers.

Cambodian Americans like me do not take U.S. politics and the American political system for granted. We have a voice and we share our opinions. My family does that every year, especially if there's anything that had to do with the people in my community. We try to make sure that we are educated and informed about who our leaders and representatives are. We actively take part in politics because of the freedoms we have in America, and we are grateful for that because Cambodia did not allow anyone to have a voice. People just had decisions made for them and the government talked for them. In America, Cambodian Americans exercise their rights here, but there are still those who don't try to get politically informed as much as they can, but this is because of a lack of education and other circumstances. When Cambodian Americans were at [Long Beach] City Hall, many Cambodian Americans did not speak English well. Eight to ten of us in the new generation volunteered to translate. It directly affects Cambodian Americans, what our people try to advocate, but definitely the younger generation in

general could be more informed and educated about all of these happenings. My family helped me stay educated. Participants in this demonstration [in Long Beach City Hall] found their voice in their demonstration. This was a real historical moment for those who had been silent before and now could speak up for themselves and be united at City Hall. It was a very powerful moment for me as a younger generation.

One surprising revelation by an interviewee, a 2nd generation Cambodian American born to Cambodian refugee parents, is that one of her non-refugee relatives is extremely active in U.S. politics. According to this interviewee, her relative who is a 1.5 generation recent immigrant from Cambodia has even worked at the White House and attends college in Washington, D.C.

It amazes me how much they [my Cambodian relatives who recently immigrated to the U.S. not as refugees] have integrated and advanced in this country [the U.S.]. My cousin is actually in politics. She interned and worked for the White House and attended [a university in Washington, D.C.]. When she comes to visit, my dad and my cousin talk about Cambodia and the U.S., and it's all politics, and I tune out.

Like the 2nd generation Cambodian American above who mentions how recent non-refugee Cambodian immigrants are active in U.S. politics, I also confirmed this phenomenon when I interviewed a 1.5 generation Cambodian American who immigrated to the U.S. within the past decade, but not as a refugee. Neither she nor her family has a refugee experience. Nevertheless, she is a naturalized citizen, she votes, and she currently volunteers at a Cambodian American community organization where she was assigned to assist the civic engagement wing

of the organization. She is especially passionate about teaching Cambodian Americans how to be active over local issues instead of having lofty political aspirations like seeing a Cambodian American in elected office.

I was never told how the voting process works here [in the U.S.]. I just recently got U.S. citizenship and started learning how to vote and the steps to vote. I went to a voter engagement conference. It is really good to learn about it and keep up with it because this is a crucial year for presidential politics. I was thinking, “Why do I not know much about it [presidential elections]?”, “What are we doing?”, “What are the barriers?” This got me really thinking because I felt like the public perception of young voters is that we go to school and don’t care about society and voting. We do our own thing, finish school, travel—what young people care the most is not politics. I learned about politics in grade school, that we can vote when we’re 18 years or older, but there was no “Voting 101” class to explain, “What about the polling place and voting pamphlets?”. There are people who really try to get people to engage [in politics], especially the new ones [voters] who don’t know it. There needs to be extra information for the young to learn about politics. Usually, we need to learn about it [voting], but after we learn about it, we stop doing it, so we need action to explain now what to do and to register to vote. That’s how we can increase voter engagement of young teenagers and young adults. I work with [a Cambodian American community organization] to build a healthier community, not just health as in medical stuff, but also overall well-being like increasing voter engagement, civic engagement, and leadership training. We talk about this in schools and in neighborhoods and to juveniles—reforming voter engagement. I am pretty interested in it and passionate. I was assigned to be an assistant to a civic engagement

organizer for [a Cambodian American community organization] where I helped to teach about leadership training, responsibility and characteristics of a leader within the self and the community. So I'm doing that, and I was part of a policy day where we invited people who taught a class about why we should voice our opinion, and everyone was really interested in that too. Even if they're not a citizen, they can still participate in little policies in the community. These little policies...but this little scale could turn into a big scale. It is my responsibility to do so, to help them, and teach classes about politics. I know I love social justice, public policy, and youth engagement. For me, it's not that I'm hoping or wishing for a Cambodian American presidential candidate. That's too far and too much to wish for, but for the Cambodian American community, there are many more things that it politically needs, like policies about health care disparity and mental health issues. I want to push them to vote and voice their opinion, and attend city council meetings, attend in order to increase Cambodian American awareness and to voice their opinions. This will help them. To fight for more funding and what not, the basic things for their needs, not to be very, very engaged and do big things, but do the little things that are the basic needs of the community.

Conclusion

The first part of this dissertation which looks at the refugee effect on the younger generations' political engagement and participation from a quantitative standpoint revealed some surprising findings. However, as stated earlier, the quantitative analysis can only go so far. Some findings are still unclear because the large-N data used in the quantitative analysis does not focus on some of the issues which are central to my research question. Therefore, I

supplemented my quantitative findings with a more focused investigation of specific refugee populations in order to more specifically answer my research question about how the political refugee background has impacted the politics of the younger generations.

The first refugee population that I chose to focus on is the Cambodian American community. Cambodian Americans are a very large community in the U.S. containing a substantial number of individuals who experienced the Southeast Asian refugee background which is important to my quantitative section. Moreover, my exploration into Cambodian American politics will further help fill a scholarly lacuna because the politics of Cambodian Americans have not received much attention. This chapter has begun with a brief review of the Cambodian American experience and then proceeded with excerpts from interviews that I conducted with a diverse group of Cambodian Americans of the 1.5 and 2nd generations. Most, but not all, of the interviewees had a refugee background from the Khmer Rouge or the wartime period. These Cambodian American interviewees have provided answers which helped to add further context and insight to my overall quantitative findings, including some of the unclear results from my quantitative analysis.

The majority of interviewees revealed that the refugee background and history were not things that were actively passed on to them by their parents. Instead, Cambodian refugee parents would talk about the refugee history amongst themselves, but they would shield their children from such subject matter which they deemed to be too traumatizing. This is something which rebuts my theory that refugee parents would constantly share their refugee history and political aspirations with their children. On the other hand, most interviewees did indicate that their parents' refugee background, although not actively/intentionally shared with the children's generation, is still something that the younger generations find intriguing. Just vaguely knowing

that their parents escaped as refugees from the brutal Khmer Rouge regime contributes to the younger generations' own sense of self and identity, and interviewees became more aware of their family's refugee past as they grew older. Often triggered by exposure to material about the Cambodian genocide in school or college, they would then go to their parents and learn more about their family's refugee situation.

Further going against my theory which posits a politically positive effect of the refugee background is my finding that the interviewees actually regarded the refugee background as political baggage, something which weighed them and their refugee parents down by instilling a fear of politics. Cambodian refugees seemed to have fled from not only the persecution and genocide in Cambodia, but also from politics in general. Cambodian refugees of the 1st generation desired to move away from all things political by focusing on the here and now in the U.S., like putting food on the table. This again contradicts my hypothesis that the refugee experience should activate the refugee generation in terms of politics, and that this unique refugee political activism would then be passed on to the younger generations who are born and/or raised in the U.S. It is interesting, however, that the interviewees generally describe how the refugee experience has left many Cambodian Americans apprehensive when it comes to anything political, yet they also reveal how 1st generation Cambodian American refugees are vocal in home-country political issues. Perhaps the younger generation interviewees perceive that their refugee parents shy away from all things politics because of a language barrier between parent and child. There remains the possibility that the limited Khmer language proficiency of younger generation Cambodian Americans and limited English proficiency of 1st generation Cambodian refugee parents may be a factor which obviates any deep discussion about complex topics like politics between parent and child. Thus, the child would perceive the parent as not

caring about anything political. Regretfully, I did not inquire about this possible language-barrier dynamic during my interviews. Overall, the interviewees mentioned at least one politically positive effect of the refugee effect in general: the contribution to Cambodian American solidarity due to surviving a harrowing history, something which helps to keep the Cambodian American community cohesive and coordinated.

The interviews with these 1.5 and 2nd generation Cambodian Americans gave mixed results about whether home-country politics (interest/knowledge about it or involvement in it) is of any concern to them. Some interviewees could care less about political issues in Cambodia while a few interviewees were quite knowledgeable and involved in political issues dealing with Cambodia. This somewhat contradicts my theory that refugees would consistently pass on home-country political activism to their children. Overall, my interviews confirm the intergenerational dynamic in which the 1.5 and 2nd generations are much less focused on home-country politics than the 1st generation, something which is underscored by the assimilation literature. However, as mentioned earlier, it is possible that language barriers may have inhibited the parents' ability to broach complex issues like home-country politics in conversation with their children, and this may have contributed to the disinterest in home-country politics among the younger generation interviewees.

Nonetheless, nearly all of the interviewees were quick to indicate that they have joined Cambodian organizations. This is seen as something that is important to the interviewees whenever I bring up involvement in home-country politics. However, further probing reveals that these interviewees have joined Cambodian cultural organizations, not necessarily political—let alone home-country political—organizations. Many of them joined these organizations out of a sense of cultural pride which partly comes from the unique identity as being Cambodian

refugees/survivors of the Khmer Rouge. Others mentioned joining these organizations out of a filial duty to their parents or the elder generation who have suffered so much unhappiness as refugees. Perhaps this home-country cultural involvement mistaken for home-country political involvement might explain the higher probability of involvement in home-country political organizations among the 1.5 and 2nd generation descendants of Southeast Asian refugees found in my quantitative analysis. Nonetheless, there is the possibility that there has not been a mistaking of cultural involvement for home-country political involvement. Essentially, it is possible that these ostensibly cultural organizations may take a stand on certain home-country political issues should they arise or—at the very least—serve as informal forums for discussing home-country political issues, even though their overriding objectives, mission, and purpose is cultural instead of political. Simply put, there is no proof that a cultural organization is completely insulated or hermetically sealed from all things political. If this is the case, these younger generation Cambodian Americans' joining a cultural home-country organization may in actuality be consistent with joining a home-country political organization.

The interviews also reveal that proximity (or closeness) to the refugee experience is influential on home-country politics persisting into subsequent generations. The 1.5 generation as well as the 2nd generation interviewees tended to be knowledgeable, engaged, and involved in political issues exclusively pertinent to Cambodia if they are close to their refugee parents and talk to their parents about the refugee experience and the political context surrounding it. Thus, this finding leads to a caveat to my theory. Essentially, refugee home-country activism is by-and-large something which is incredibly hard to sustain because the 1st generation Cambodian refugees tend to shield the younger generations from the traumatic refugee history. However, if the younger generations tenaciously seek out and learn about the refugee political history from

their parents who are equally willing to teach them about this history, this can help to activate the younger generations' home-country political interest and activity. On a related note, however, perhaps what is actually underlying all of this is how the parents in this dynamic are more proficient in English and are able to speak about political issues with their children, or these younger generation interviewees are more proficient in Khmer to be able to talk about politics with their parents. Unfortunately, I did not inquire about this language-proficiency dynamic during my interviews. In any case, these 1.5 and 2nd generation individuals who come from refugee families which are open about the refugee political history are the ones who also mention fighting for political and social justice in Cambodia, travelling to Cambodia for various betterment projects, and actually helping in protests against political figures from Cambodia. My interviews reveal that much of this activity is driven by a sense of empathy with their parents' refugee trauma and how their parents' voices are often silenced as a result, all of which activates the interviewees into organizational and protest-related action to help their parents.

There was also a difference that was gleaned from the interviews with regard to non-refugee Cambodian Americans' engagement and activity in home-country politics. Refugee Cambodian American families are more likely to engage in unabashed protests against the Hun Sen regime compared to non-refugee Cambodian American families who tend to shy away from openly protesting the Hun Sen regime because they fear what might happen to their family in Cambodia and also do not want to risk their own livelihoods here in the U.S. On this note, the protests in California against the visit by Hun Sen's son and against the Cambodian dignitaries attending the ASEAN-U.S. summit is a topic that frequently came up whenever I broached home-country politics. So many of the interviewees still view Hun Sen as culpable for their refugee sufferings either because he had been involved with the Khmer Rouge or at least has not

been tough enough in bringing the Khmer Rouge to justice, and this continues to inspire Cambodian Americans of all generations (mostly the 1st generation but also some 1.5 and 2nd generations who are close to their refugee identity/history) to protest against this home-country political figurehead. This helps to explain my quantitative findings about the higher likelihood that descendants of Southeast Asian refugees will participate in a political protest.

When it comes to interest and participation in U.S. politics, most Cambodian American interviewees of the 1.5 and 2nd generations reflect generational assimilation. They see themselves as being more focused on American political issues than their parents' generation, but still, they see themselves as not being very political. Most of the interviewees told me that they do vote, but that is usually the limit of their participation. Others mentioned being somewhat politically engaged, like following political news about the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign season. Most of the interviewees pointed to the refugee trauma, the distrust of the U.S. government because of its involvement in Cambodia, and dissatisfaction with the U.S. government for its inadequate/mismanaged assistance during their refugee settlement as hindrances to Cambodian American participation in U.S. politics. These revelations directly contradict my theory that the refugee background along with a closer connection between refugees and the U.S. government would be a positive influence on the younger generations' relationship with U.S. politics. Instead of boosting their political activities in the U.S., the refugee background might have dampened their overall engagement and involvement in U.S. politics. On the other hand, something that needs to be considered is how I interviewed mainly younger generation Cambodian Americans, and how the younger age groups (regardless of refugee background, and regardless of racial-ethnic background for that matter) are often

disenchanted with conventional American politics anyway (see Dalton 2009; Wattenberg 2008; Zukin et al., 2006).

On the other hand, some interviewees with a refugee background are knowledgeable, experienced, and/or active in civic organizations, community organizing, and get-out-the vote campaigns. A common refrain among these activists is that their continued interest in their refugee heritage and the horrors that Cambodian Americans had to go through while coming to the U.S. helped to motivate their desire to give back to the community. This community service sometimes takes the form of creating new resources and forums for community involvement/connection, volunteering in community organizations that help provide civics education and training to Cambodian Americans, and serving as translators to help the oft-silent Cambodian American community have a voice in local politics like during a recent protest at the Long Beach City Hall. This tendency for community action, and more specifically protest activity, might explain my quantitative findings which show that descendants of Southeast Asian refugees, although no more likely to be more active in conventional American political activities, are more likely to have been involved in unconventional activities like protests.

Simply put, although details of the refugee background and history are often not actively transferred to the younger generations because they could lead to fear, aversion, and a de-emphasis of politics in the household or community, some within the younger generations are still able to discover their refugee heritage on their own as they get older. These younger generation individuals who do discover this refugee heritage at a later age, who then make an effort to be close to their parents to learn more about the refugee past, and who have parents who are willing to open up about their refugee experience—these younger generation individuals will then be politically inspired to actively serve the Cambodian American community in the U.S.

which they perceive as having suffered so much as refugees. Their goal is to give a voice to Cambodian Americans so that the greater community and government in the U.S. will listen, and thus finally break the trauma-induced code of silence that often prevails in the Cambodian American community. Again, the caveat to my theory is the following. If the younger generations tenaciously seek out and learn about the refugee history from their parents who are equally willing to teach them about this history, the refugee history can help to inspire the younger generations' activism—albeit more at the community/local level and in unconventional forms than perhaps in terms of conventional political participation.

Moreover, the 1.5 and 2nd generation Cambodian Americans whom I interviewed see a difference between Cambodian Americans who have refugee backgrounds and those who came as non-refugee immigrants. According to the interviewees, those who have refugee backgrounds or are descended from the 1st generation Cambodian refugees are more civically involved and community-oriented. Having faced such trauma and struggle, these refugees and their descendants carry with them a desire to serve and better their community. They tend to be more politically active in the U.S. than the non-refugee Cambodian immigrants of either the pre-1970's or the post 1990's who are more focused on learning the American culture, getting an education, and gaining economic rather than political standing. This tends to corroborate my theory that the refugee background serves to boost overall political activism compared to non-refugees. Conversely, a 1.5 generation non-refugee Cambodian American whom I interviewed displayed high levels of engagement and participation in U.S. politics despite not having a refugee background. Indeed, some 2nd generation Cambodian American interviewees also observed how their relatives who are recent non-refugee immigrants to the U.S. are very politically active in U.S. politics. These findings rebut my theory and predictions that the

refugee background would tend to increase the 1.5 and 2nd generations' overall political engagement and activity in the U.S. context in addition to the home-country context, more so than non-refugee immigrants. Whether or not these instances of high levels of political activity in U.S. politics by non-refugee Cambodian Americans are due to the unique circumstances of these individuals (e.g. attending college in Washington, D.C., being assigned to work at a civic organization, or exceptionally close relationships with individuals with refugee backgrounds) is unclear, but my findings should be qualified in light of this.

Overall, the interviews reveal that, although the refugee experience may not be something which is constantly in the background of the younger generations as I had imagined, being a person of refugee heritage is still an identity to which many Cambodian Americans gravitate. Those who cherish this identity, who further delve into it, and who have a refugee family willing to open up about it will then be politically inspired/motivated by the trials and tribulations of their refugee family and greater community. This inspiration may be something which can be enough to overcome what I now realize are actually the negative impacts/hindrances on politics that comes from the refugee background.

In the next chapter, I turn to another large refugee community, the Salvadoran American community which, for many, traces its roots to the escape from the Salvadoran civil war that occurred during the 1980's. The Salvadoran Americans are a refugee community that was not officially recognized by the U.S. government and was often opposed by the U.S. government during the Cold War. The interviews with a diverse group of Salvadoran Americans in the next chapter will help to add insight into how their refugee backgrounds have affected their politics in the home-country and U.S. contexts.

CHAPTER 6

Politics and the Children of Refugees: The Salvadoran American Experience

This chapter continues the qualitative investigation of how the refugee experience affects the involvement in politics among children of refugees. The focus of this chapter is on Salvadoran refugees and their children. This chapter will begin with a brief exposition of the Salvadoran refugee experience and the Salvadoran American political history in the U.S. I will then proceed with a qualitative analysis of the political effect of the refugee experience on younger generations of Salvadoran Americans using interviews with diverse members of the Salvadoran American community, including those with a refugee background and those without a refugee background.

A Brief Introduction to the Refugee and Political History of Salvadoran Americans

Although a few Salvadoran Americans had entered the U.S. prior to the 1980's,⁴¹ most Salvadorans immigrated to the U.S. during the early 1980's when Central America was caught in the throes of civil wars. One out of every five Salvadorans fled El Salvador during the 1980's because of the bloody civil war between the revolutionaries of the Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) and the U.S.-backed Salvadoran regime (Hernandez 2004, 17-23, 62; Cordova 2005, 11-17). Hundreds of thousands of these Salvadoran refugees headed for the U.S., but under the Reagan administration, the U.S. labeled them as economic migrants who did not legally qualify as being persecuted refugees (Hernandez 2004, 61-65; Zucker and Zucker 1996, 84-85; Landolt et al. 1999, 294; Loescher and Scanlan 1986, 187-197). The implicit reason for the administration's denying refugee status was that the Central Americans had fled from

⁴¹ A few Salvadorans had entered the U.S., especially the ports of California, since the mid to late-19th century when the U.S. increased its maritime commerce with Central America, and especially when the construction of the Panama Canal commenced (Hernandez 2004, 60; Cordova 2005, 60-64; Menjivar 2000, 10-11).

regimes which were anticommunist allies of the U.S. (Coutin 2000, 135; Hernandez 2004, 63; Rodriguez 2007, 85-88). Thus, unlike Southeast Asian refugees who fled from communist enemies of the U.S. and were given refugee status and public assistance, Central American refugees who fled from anticommunist regimes were not given a warm reception by the U.S. government⁴² (Coutin 1998, 906-907; Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002, 775-777; Portes and Rumbaut 1990, 23-24; Rodriguez 2007, 85-88). Although many Salvadorans were denied refugee status by the U.S. government, they often do feel that they are *de facto* political refugees since they escaped abductions, torture, murders, and other acts of political violence whether or not they were *de jure* refugee in the eyes of the U.S. government⁴³ (Cordova 2005, 33-38; Hernandez 2004, 61-65).

Consequently, most Salvadorans were forced to enter the U.S. illegally (Rodriguez 1987, 4). It is estimated that more than 500,000 Salvadorans entered the U.S. illegally during the 1980's (Hernandez 2004, 17, 85-89; Cordova 2005, 32, 42; North and Simmons 1999, 2, 17; Castillo 1999, 133-135). Los Angeles (especially the Pico-Union area) became home to the largest numbers of Salvadorans, followed by New York City, San Francisco, Houston, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. (Hernandez 2004, 62, 68-70; Cordova 2005, 40, 107). Today, 1,648,968 Salvadoran Americans are officially counted as living in the U.S., although experts think that census figures undercount the total population in the U.S. (U.S. Census 2010; Hernandez 2004, 65-72, 98; Cordova 2005).

⁴² Such negative reception by the U.S. government has led some Salvadoran Americans to hide their true identity/origins for fear of being labeled not only as illegal but as a communist enemy of the U.S. (Arias 2007, 109-110).

⁴³ Many Central Americans who entered the U.S. also came for economic reasons—seeking a better life for themselves and their children) or to escape devastation from natural disasters like hurricanes and earthquakes—rather than as political refugees (Cordova 2005, 57-59; Mahler 1995, 46). Nevertheless, more Salvadoran Americans than Guatemalan Americans cite political persecution rather than economic motivation as the reason for emigration (Rodriguez 1987, 22).

More recently, since late 2013 (but especially in 2014 and less so in 2015), there has been a spike in the numbers of Salvadorans as well as other Central Americans from countries like Guatemala and Honduras arriving at the U.S. border (The Washington Post, 12/16/15; The New York Times, 10/6/15). The uptick in these Central American immigrants (numbering in the tens of thousands each year) consists of mostly minors under the age of 18 years (The Washington Post, 12/16/15; The New York Times, 10/6/15). Although some are accompanied by parents or guardians, most of are deemed unaccompanied because they arrive to the U.S. border with no parent or legal guardian in the U.S. who can look after them. The consensus is that the underlying cause of this immigration crisis is the extremely rapid rise in widespread gang and drug-related violence in Central America (The Washington Post, 12/16/15). This “unaccompanied minors” crisis has often been called a humanitarian—and sometimes a refugee—crisis because the minors fled from violence, and many have urged the U.S. government to grant these unaccompanied minors asylum in the U.S. The U.S. government has transferred those who have been detained to temporary holding facilities, and many were allowed entry into the U.S. to stay with relatives while awaiting their immigration court decisions (The Washington Post, 2/22/16).

In the U.S., Salvadoran Americans have been very active in politics. Many Salvadoran Americans joined with religious leaders in mass protests against discriminatory U.S. refugee policy (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001, 136-137). For instance, in the late 1980’s, Salvadoran Americans, led by church leaders and other immigrant-rights activists, staged large protests in support of the “sanctuary movement”—a movement by American religious leaders to turn

churches into sanctuaries for Central American refugees facing deportation⁴⁴ (Coutin 2000, 3-4; 1998, 906-909; Menjivar 2000, 101-102). Many Salvadoran Americans also focused on the home-country, especially specific hometowns (DeSipio 1996, 39). Like many immigrant groups, Salvadoran Americans founded hometown associations (*comites/comunidades*) which pool funds of Salvadoran Americans from the same hometowns in El Salvador to send back to the home-country, and many scholars find that such associations' economic clout also translates into influence over local politics in El Salvador.

Because Salvadoran refugees consisted of many Salvadoran revolutionaries and student activists who fought the Salvadoran government and protested U.S. involvement, Salvadoran Americans stand out among all Central Americans in their home-country political activism⁴⁵ (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001, 125, 182-183; Landolt et al. 1999, 256-257; Menjivar 2000, 105). In the U.S., especially in the Los Angeles area, Salvadoran Americans of the 1st generation as well as the few U.S.-born Salvadoran Americans—born to pre-1980's Salvadoran immigrants—joined forces⁴⁶ to reestablish the Salvadoran revolutionary committees/organizations (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001, 126). Prominent Salvadoran American community organizations like the Central American Refugee Center (CARECEN) and El Rescate were founded by exiled members of the FMLN, and they joined the Committee in

⁴⁴ The ABC (American Baptist Church v. Thornburgh) lawsuit was also filed against the U.S. government alleging that the U.S. denied asylum claims out of foreign policy concerns which unfairly discriminated against refugees from Guatemala and El Salvador. The U.S. eventually settled out of court and allowed for *de novo* reviews of the asylum applications under a new, fairer standard, and the Salvadorans and Guatemalans were allowed temporary protected status against deportation (Coutin 2000, 4, 17; 1998, 909-915; Hernandez 2004, 64; Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001, 141-144; Cordova 2005, 49-50).

⁴⁵ Nevertheless, along with such home-country political activism came home-country political violence which reached the U.S. Activists suffered violent kidnappings and threats, allegedly by those affiliated with the Salvadoran regime (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001, 148).

⁴⁶ Infighting often occurred. U.S.-born Salvadoran Americans who sympathized with the revolution in El Salvador preferred lobbying and other institutionalized/Americanized political recourses instead of the protest/sloganeering strategy favored by the newly-arrived Salvadoran refugees (Menjivar 2000, 105, 223; Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001, 126-127).

Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) to raise funds for the FMLN in El Salvador, protest U.S. intervention in El Salvador⁴⁷, and publicize human rights abuses in El Salvador (Coutin 2000, 82, 138-141; 1998, 905-906; Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001, 120-126; Cordova 2005, 114-115; Itzigsohn 2000, 1144). Moreover, Salvadoran American activists lobbied the U.S. government to be defined as political refugees, not so much in an effort to affect their immigration status, but rather to affect the U.S. foreign policy toward El Salvador; the hope was that, if the U.S. government could recognize Salvadorans as refugees, this would mean that the U.S. government must also recognize the Salvadoran government as a persecutor of refugees, thereby making the Salvadoran government ineligible for U.S. support (Coutin 1998, 905-906).

However, unlike other refugee groups, Salvadoran Americans had to shift its refugee politics because the civil war in El Salvador ended with a peace accord signed between the revolutionary rebels and the Salvadoran government in 1992⁴⁸ (Coutin 2000, 17; Hernandez 2004, 25). From then on, the revolutionary FLMN became a legitimate political party in El Salvador and began winning the majority of the parliamentary seats (Hernandez 2004, 25). But by then, the prospect of repatriation had become less likely as the violence in El Salvador actually escalated following the peace accords, and El Salvador sank into post-war economic decline (Cordova 2005, 40; Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001, 152-160; Mahler 1995, 126). Many Salvadoran American organizations which had devoted so much of their effort to home-country politics began putting more effort into domestic community issues affecting Salvadoran Americans in the U.S., like fighting deportation, community aid, racism, economic justice, and workers' rights (Coutin 2000, 83-84; Cordova 2005, 116-117; Landolt et al. 1999, 304-309;

⁴⁷ Many of these Salvadoran American organizations also partnered with other pan-ethnic organizations like Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition to protest against U.S. intervention in El Salvador (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001, 130-134; Cordova 2005, 115-116).

⁴⁸ However, many Salvadoran Americans were skeptical that the peace accords actually ended violence in El Salvador (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001, 152-160; Cordova 2005, 69-71).

Guarnizo 2001, 238-243). This was especially true in protesting against changes to U.S. immigration law. Just as they did during the 1980's, Salvadoran American activists and organizations continued protesting against immigration policy.⁴⁹ Salvadoran Americans also formed pan-ethnic coalitions with various Mexican American groups in rallies, protests, marches, and voter registration drives following the passage of Proposition 187 (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001, 186, 191; Cordova 2005, 114).

Increasingly realizing the need for citizenship and the power of the vote, Salvadoran American activists began organizing naturalization campaigns (Coutin 2000, 155-156, 177; Cordova 2005, 51-53).⁵⁰ Salvadoran American organizations⁵¹ gave U.S. civics education, trained Central American youths in political leadership, and endorsed political candidates who supported Central American as well as Latino community issues (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001, 185, 192; Ertll 2009, 39). Indeed, empirical studies by Michael Jones-Correa find that Salvadorans have one of the fastest growing 2nd generations, and that once naturalization is controlled for, these Central Americans vote at higher rates than the more prominent Latino groups like Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans (Jones Correa 2007, 21-37).

Many Salvadoran Americans have also won elected office, although these individuals are descended from pre-1980's waves of Salvadorans, not the more recent refugee waves from El Salvador during the 1980's (Cordova 2005, 153-156; Ertll 2009, 46, 60). These include Salvadoran Americans like Ana Sol Gutierrez who was elected to the Boards of Education in

⁴⁹ In the 1990's, thousands of Salvadoran Americans demonstrated against the passage of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) which could have deported thousands of Salvadoran Americans, and they demonstrated against President Clinton's signing of the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act (NACARA) which granted amnesty to only Nicaraguans (Coutin 2000; 1998, 918).

⁵⁰ Many Central Americans were also able to naturalize following the 1986 amnesty given to undocumented immigrants in the U.S. (Coutin 2000, 155).

⁵¹ These include CARECEN, El Rescate, and the Salvadoran Political Action Committee (SALPAC) (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001, 185, 192; Ertll 2009, 39).

Washington D.C. and Maryland (the first Latina elected official in those areas) and was appointed to the Department of Transportation under the Clinton administration, Oscar Rios who was elected to the Watsonville City Council in California and was later elected as the city's first Latino mayor, and Liz Figueroa who was elected as a Democratic state senator in California (Cordova 2005, 153-156; Ertll 2009, 46, 60).

Nevertheless, even though the peace accords caused significant change in Salvadoran American politics, many studies show how connections with home-country politics did not disappear, but rather evolved. Studies find that Salvadoran American political linkage to the home-country will continue to grow due to the forced-immigration/refugee context, hostile governmental reception in the U.S., and the burgeoning transnational realities at the start of the 21st century (Landolt et al. 1999; Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002, 784-786). Also, following the peace accords, the El Salvadoran government reconciled with the FMLN so that the newly united, post-bellum El Salvador could politically coordinate with Salvadoran American activists/organizations like never before (Itzigsohn 2000, 1137-1139; Jones-Correa 2001, 1010; Landolt et al. 1999, 309-310; Guarnizo 2001, 238-243). The FMLN has again coordinated with Salvadoran Americans to revitalize the FMLN transnational political linkages (Itzigsohn 2000, 1137-1139; Landolt et al. 1999, 310). Various Salvadoran American organizations continue to sponsor visits to Los Angeles by politicians/candidates from El Salvador⁵² (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001, 192; Landolt et al. 1999, 256-257; Guarnizo 2001, 240-242).

⁵² In the late 1990's, local Salvadoran American activists arranged to have the mayor of San Salvador, the first leftist candidate to win the office, visit the Salvadoran American community in Los Angeles, El Salvadoran presidential candidates also have visited Los Angeles, and the FMLN even organized a party convention in San Francisco (Coutin 2000, 8, 177; Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001, 188-189, 192; Landolt et al. 1999, 310).

According to most studies, at the heart of this reinvigorated transnational political engagement is remittance money. Salvadoran Americans send back billions of dollars⁵³ on which the home-country government increasingly depends (Hernandez 2004, 18, 79; Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001, 181, 212-215; Cordova 2005, 110; Hernandez 2002, 5; Landolt et al. 1999, 295). Transnational remittances from Salvadoran Americans are now a key policy objective in Salvadoran national politics⁵⁴ (Hernandez 2002, 80-84, 87-89, 131-153; Landolt et al. 1999, 295). The government of El Salvador stresses how Salvadoran Americans should avoid deportation,⁵⁵ fight for legal residency, but remain committed to the home-country, thereby ensuring that remittance flows continue uninterrupted (Hernandez 2002, 137, 159; Coutin 1998, 909-915). The issue of remittance and home-country politics has even led to a surprising confluence of the Salvadoran American immigration agenda and foreign policy/home-country agenda: many Salvadoran American political activists now lobby the U.S. government to stop the deportation of Salvadorans because doing so would interrupt remittance flows and thus hurt El Salvador economically—especially during the post-war reconstruction (Coutin 2000, 150).

Interviews with Salvadoran Americans

The foregoing represents what is currently known about Salvadoran Americans, their refugee history, and their politics. However, like the scholarship on Cambodian Americans, the scholarship on Salvadoran Americans fails to investigate the intersection of the refugee history/background and the politics of the younger generation Salvadoran Americans. Once again, the question that still needs to be answered is how the Salvadoran refugee background has

⁵³ For instance, in 2001, Salvadoran Americans sent about \$1.9 billion to El Salvador (about 17% of El Salvador's total revenue), and this amount continues to grow (Hernandez 2004, 75).

⁵⁴ In 1997, the Salvadoran government commissioned the "*Bases para el plan de nacion*" which stated the importance of Salvadorans living abroad in the development of El Salvador, and reemphasized the objective to sustain the commitment to home-country politics among Salvadorans living abroad (Hernandez 2002, 136-137).

⁵⁵ El Salvador discouraged Salvadoran Americans from being deported from the U.S. because deportation has led to an influx of Salvadoran American gang members who cause problems in El Salvador (Hernandez 2002, 52-91).

affected the politics of Salvadoran Americans of the younger generations (i.e. 1.5 and 2nd generation). To answer this lingering question, I conducted interviews with a diverse group of Salvadoran Americans, most (but not all) of whom have refugee backgrounds.⁵⁶

Salvadoran American Interviewees' Reflections on Refugee Background, Identity, and Legacy

The refugee identity and the idea of a refugee legacy is something that figures prominently for nearly all of the Salvadoran American interviewees who had a refugee background. Overall, when I asked these 1.5 and 2nd generation Salvadoran American interviewees to describe their family's refugee background, most interviewees were able to do so, and they were able to describe how there is a continuing refugee legacy of political consciousness, empowerment, and activism. Relatively few of the interviews described any reluctance on the part of the parents to discuss this political refugee history with their children.

For example, a 1.5 generation Salvadoran American who came to the U.S. with his family as refugees that fled from the Salvadoran civil war mentions how the refugee history of fleeing war is very important to him. This interviewee discusses how the Salvadoran American refugee history is a positive influence on Salvadoran American politics today.

You have to understand that the reason behind the Salvadorans leaving El Salvador was a valid reason—to escape the war. There was no choice. Thousands of Salvadorans abandoned their family at a very young age like myself. We lost relatives during the war. The economy was affected because of all of the professionals that left the country. When we came here [to the U.S.], Salvadoran Americans were more politically organized than other Latinos like Mexican Americans. We come from a country that was very

⁵⁶ To see the methodology behind my interviews as well as generalized statistics regarding my sample population, please see chapter two.

politicized with so many who left who were union organizers, student organizers, etc. Overall, our refugee experience is more of a positive than negative political influence. We've developed and organized community movements for social justice more than others, even more than Mexican Americans. We come from a country that had to confront these issues in a bloody civil war and our people were forced to organize. In general, Salvadoran Americans, it's not that we're smarter, but we are politically and socially more conscious. We have a more developed political consciousness than other Latinos because we came out of that refugee background.

Another 1.5 generation Salvadoran American who came to the U.S. as a refugee fleeing from the war in El Salvador viewed the importance of the refugee background in a unique way. According to him, the 1980's refugee background itself was part-and-parcel of a political movement and revolution that helped to give Salvadoran Americans their solidarity. According to this interviewee, being a refugee gave Salvadoran Americans a unique political identity which helped others understand and empathize with their persecution from the very outset.

For Salvadoran Americans in the 1980's, this refugee history was part of a movement. You could be part of different layers of involvement. The 1st generation faced political repression and persecution in El Salvador, so that moved them to save their own lives by leaving the country [of El Salvador]. When the war started in the 1980's with the killing of officials and nuns, there was the formation of a solidarity movement. In the case of El Salvador, there was a solidarity movement and an anti-intervention [against the U.S. intervention in Central America] movement. You get close to what happened there [in El

Salvador] so you wanted the war to end, but there was also a feeling of revolution. Salvadorans had a purpose. People wanted to improve conditions there [in El Salvador], so Salvadorans were, in a way, part of that movement. If you are a member of this Episcopalian church that declares sanctuary, you will disobey the policy or law of not taking in refugees. In our case, Salvadoran Americans were able to bring in more people to make them understand. The key component was sanctuary so refugees could have a platform to get to speak. So Salvadoran Americans were able to speak as refugees—human beings who were being persecuted.

Another 1.5 generation refugee who fled the war in El Salvador also embraces his refugee heritage as something that is politically positive. He sees his family's background of opposition to the Salvadoran regime and their flight from El Salvador in the face of war and persecution as acts of patriotism.

In general, our refugee background has been a vibrant influence and enhances civic and political participation in the community. In L.A. [Los Angeles] during the [19]70's and [19]80's, this huge wave of unrecognized refugees came [to the U.S.] because they fled political persecution during the civil war hostilities in El Salvador. Our refugee history has been a great contribution to this political activism, from being unrecognized refugees, then to being permanent residents, and later we became a new American community to stay [in the U.S.]. It was this background of coming out of the country [of El Salvador] as political exiles and feeling like patriots.

A 2nd generation Salvadoran American whose parents fled from the Salvadoran civil war also echoes this sentiment. She views the refugee history positively as being one of the main reasons underlying the Salvadoran American community's penchant for political activism.

I think because of that refugee status, it has been a positive thing for civic and community organizing. It's the need to stay connected to El Salvador, and to be influential, to stay influential in our home-country, because we can vote here, and years of doing that shows how far we have come and how much we have achieved. We Salvadoreños are motivated and active participants in politics. The civic and organizing skills they had come from that history.

On the other hand, some interviewees indicate that the refugee political legacy is not necessarily something that the parents' generation successfully passes on to the later generations. This is something that one 1.5 generation Salvadoran American refugee who came to the U.S. during the war mentions. Nevertheless, he also describes this in an overall context of the general tendency of children to not necessarily following in their parents footsteps.

However, it's not necessarily that the refugee parents pass on this political legacy to their children. It's not that the new generations are like their parents. This happens to any parents. They expect the children to follow in their footsteps, but then that doesn't always happen. But the next generations are getting involved, but that doesn't necessarily happen all of the time. They [the younger generations] want to do other stuff—something different.

A 2nd generation Salvadoran American who is born to non-refugee Salvadoran parents who came after the peace accords also mentions the difficulty with passing on this refugee legacy of political activism because of the traumas associated with the refugee past. Nonetheless, this interviewee, despite not having a refugee background in his family, feels that the refugee past and legacy that many within the Salvadoran American community have is something that is important to pass on. This interviewee equates the political gains made by the Salvadoran American refugee generation with successful political/social movements like the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's. As part of an organization founded by the Salvadoran refugee generation, he is close to the refugee generation and is a student of their political history, and he fears that the political gains of Salvadoran American refugees will die with the refugee generation.

A lot of this past is painful so many don't get it from their own family. No one wants to talk about trauma during family reunions. We have a big influence in politics, the economy, etc., but it's hard for us to be archaeologists if there are no institutions to spread knowledge about our history. Our role, unfortunately like many struggles, is not to leave it once the ultimate goal is achieved. It's hard to sustain, like the Civil Rights Movement. Once the Voting Rights Act and Civil Rights Act were won, things became more diffused, and the leaders moved on to state jobs and other diffused jobs. That's what happens to the folks. It's like I did my part, now it's time to live my life. Kind of like being burnt out. That is the challenge for us. That is the question mark—how to connect the new generation. This is something that is important to the U.S. because Salvadoran Americans are the third largest immigrant group. There is no structural way to transfer this wealth of knowledge. A couple of years ago, the state of Texas dictated

what was in the school textbooks. It looked at the request to teach about Father Romero [a vocal critic of the Salvadoran regime whose assassination by the Salvadoran death squads helped to ignite the Salvadoran civil war], but the school board did not allow that part to be taught in school. In the U.S., our education barely gets any world history or U.S. history. Our community is in urban settings in the U.S., so often a bad education system, and this does not help them reconnect with their own history. They have to seek it out themselves. I've worked with a lot of the refugees who did the political work here [in the U.S.], and they are still here with us. They were victims of governmental oppression and they came to the U.S., and there are still opportunities to capture that information of the people who are still around. The refugee community in America is already thirty years old, but the people are still alive and with us. The challenge is that the information is in the people who experienced it, but it is hard get some sort of brain dump into a repository unless you closely connect to these people and they share with you their refugee background and struggles. It's a much slower transfer, so there are some, but there needs to be a lot more. We should be doing more to connect to that political knowledge and experience. Now it's up to the institutions with the historical knowledge to find out how to connect to the youth, but that's still the big question mark.

Whether or not the refugee legacy of political activism gets transferred to subsequent generations all depends on being active in reconnecting with the refugee past. Essentially, if a member of the younger generations continues to be close to the activist refugee generation, then there is a greater chance of the refugee generation discussing their refugee background with the younger generation, thereby enabling the younger generation to carry on a legacy of refugee

activism. The refugee generation must be open to sharing their stories, and the younger generations must open themselves up to receive that information. The surprising thing, as the interviewee above shows, is that the refugee heritage and legacy is also highly cherished by the non-refugee younger generation as well. The important thing is to facilitate the active transmission of this refugee legacy to others. As one 2nd generation Salvadoran whose parents escaped the civil war observes, many Salvadoran American parents are open to sharing their refugee trials and tribulations with their children. If the children are receptive to this and want to learn, they too will remain politically active.

I'm definitely proof of the later generation, how the later generations are really motivated and driven to also shed light on this history, to know about it, to keep this history of activism going. A lot of youths stay closely involved with their Salvadoreño parents, but a few of them, very few, want to assimilate to American culture, but most Salvadoreño parents make it a point to teach their political history to the younger generations. Some say, "Why talk of this history? That just keeps us in the past, and we can't move forward". I say that we must look to the past in order to move forward. We don't want to make the same mistakes again. We see that it happens in our home-country and the younger generation also sees it this way. So for those of us who are born and raised here [in the U.S.] who actually get to go to El Salvador to see the real conditions, that's the wakeup call: that this happened to our home-country, it was because of U.S. imperialism. It is a really difficult situation to explain to the younger generations, but if the parents were deeply affected by the war and come here as refugees, their heart is so committed to explaining that situation, to thoroughly explain it to these kids, and then they [the children] begin to understand, especially with the poverty and the minors fleeing the

country [of El Salvador] and being incarcerated. When the children see those realities, it hits them. Luckily, I feel that a lot more youths start to understand it more and more, especially if they go to school while the parents reveal those truths. They start grasping all of that and then want to be involved in some form of activism.

Nevertheless, this same interviewee also discusses how her parents, who were refugees from the civil war, did not necessarily initiate the conversation about the refugee background. Instead, a documentary film exposed her at a young age to the refugee history, but her parents were open about sharing the details with her when she began to ask. According to her, most Salvadoran refugees are open to talking about the civil war with their children.

My parents did not voice it [their refugee background] at first, but I was interested. I was 8 years old when I saw a video on PBS, so that's when I became more knowledgeable even though, as a little kid, I did not pick up all that information easily. My parents were comfortable with talking with me about this more. Later generations do this too, and parents who fled from the war are open to talking about it more.

A 2nd generation Salvadoran American also mentions how the refugee legacy of activism is something that does get transferred to the children of the 1st generation refugees. These children of the refugees continue the tradition of activism, but not necessarily along the same lines and issues as their parents' generation. Instead, they pursue other civic and social justice issues. Nonetheless, this interviewee also mentions how some children of refugees can be apolitical.

Now a generation of new ones is longing for that [political activism] and they see it in the history books and want to connect to that past. They need to stay closely connected to the refugee generation and learn about their struggles and activities. Some of the Salvadoran Americans who are active today are the children of refugees, and they are involved in the fight against racism and income disparity, so there's more of a menu of issues than just the Salvadoran American refugee experience. They are fighting for political causes and causes in social justice, but not necessarily those that only affect the Salvadoran American community. But some are just living and doing anything that keeps them away from politics. Those ones are not involved and are apolitical.

There is the question of why some descendants of Salvadoran refugees are apolitical as the interviewee above briefly alludes to. One perspective shared by a 2nd generation Salvadoran American who is the child of refugees who fled from the civil war is that it has to do with the history of trauma, PTSD, and fear—and in some cases, hatred—of the extreme left and extreme right battling it out as they had done in the civil war. Some Salvadoran American children of refugees grow wary of the left-versus-right political battle.

In terms of having a galvanizing effect on our population, how we became politicized, the refugee history has helped in politicizing us, but also a larger part of the population suffers from PTSD. As a whole, the people who aren't involved in politics or activism, they suffer from trauma from the political violence. The children and the grandchildren did not experience that in El Salvador, but it affects how they relate to each other and how they deal with politics, especially fear mongering of the right against the left. This

might have left them politically apathetic and in the middle, not being of any party or anything. In terms of behaviors, they learn from their parents, fear, anger, those sorts of things, they affect how we relate to each other and relate to the world. It applies to many different communities that suffered through violence and why it's so polarizing to see the left and right in politics. There's also a direct association that being involved in politics will put yourself in danger, especially when people were involved in politics during the time of war and when there were death squads, a lot of people's parents were affected, so the idea was to just go to school and not get involved in politics, but try to be involved in the community to benefit society. There's still a reluctance to get involved in politics because of that fear and the need to look out for myself. I think just about everyone [Salvadoran Americans] came from that political persecution, not just economic reasons for migration. Many had family members who were involved and many were tired of having to see the bodies in the streets, the curfews, etc. You could be caught in the crossfire very easily, or sometimes others would spread gossip saying that you said something bad about the government, and then you are the target of violence. I may have been rude to you and then you report me to the police, and then I'm tortured and killed. That was the environment that caused the severe trauma.

There is also another surprising reason why some descendants of the Salvadoran American refugees are apolitical or politically apathetic. A 2nd generation Salvadoran American whose parents are not refugees shared his observation that the constant involvement in politics by the refugee 1st generation might have turned off some of their children to politics. Although he mentions that some members of the younger generations do try to reconnect to the refugee

past and activist legacy, he also sees that some members of the younger generations may have resented having parents who were overly political/activist, and this resentment transmuted into their own political apathy.

I think it's a mix bag for the transfer of this refugee activism from generation to generation. It was their fight [speaking about the 1st generation], the children did not see it as their fight. They say that I'm an American. Some [of the younger generations] did get more involved, but some rejected it [political activism]. Some children did not want anything to do with politics because they lived it, not by their choice, but because the parents were involved. But then you see other children; they try to reconnect to the past. They try to organize and discover by the time they get to college. These kids or even grandkids of the [19]80's generation learn of the struggle and connect to where they come from. But I think that the sacrifices that the parents made in their political activities leave a lot of children resenting the parents for being away from home and being in a struggle over political issues, to leave home and attend meetings, so many of the 2nd generation rejects it [political activism], but they may reconcile it later as adults.

When it comes to whether there is a palpable difference between the political activeness of Salvadoran Americans who have the refugee background from the war and Salvadoran Americans who do not have this refugee background, an interviewee who is a 1.5 generation Salvadoran refugee who fled from the civil war mentioned having Salvadoran American relatives who had already lived in the U.S. prior to the war and therefore did not have any refugee experience. This interviewee feels that Salvadoran Americans with a refugee background like

him are the most active and engaged in politics and the least fearful of any consequence that may come from this political activism.

I have relatives who had lived in the U.S. for decades. There had already been a tradition of migrating north. It was not much back then [in terms of the Salvadoran American population], but some well-established Salvadoran Americans in the U.S. came when the Salvadorans helped to build the Pacific Fleet during World War II in the ports of California and when Salvadorans helped to build the Panama Canal. Some of these people are in my family. These older, non-refugees are somewhat [politically] active. They know of the old [home] country. They visit, and they made clear how they were here, and they remained connected. There's no doubt, though, that we refugees came [to the U.S.] linked to political conflict and we remain [politically] active and engaged, more so than the non-refugees despite all of the risks. We know about this, and we know of the consequences.

A 2nd generation interviewee also corroborates this idea that the non-refugee generation of Salvadoran Americans who came in the early 20th Century, although important for their cultural contributions to the U.S., are less politically active than the refugee wave that arrived in the U.S. during the 1980's.

The pre-1980's, the early 20th Century groups, they are less involved. They are like any migratory group with less connection over generations, but they had some influence in the culture. Look at the European migration. The European migration at the end of the 19th Century like the Italian migration brought things like pizza, and the culture absorbed

it, so a lot of the Salvadoran Americans that came before the 1980's, they contributed to that cultural quilt of America. They might recognize their history, but they are not as politically active.

Another 2nd generation Salvadoran American whose parents came to the U.S. as refugees who fled from the war also has relatives who came to the U.S. prior to the outbreak of civil war in El Salvador. According to this interviewee, these relatives do not feel as politically connected to the rest of the Salvadoran American community because they lacked the traumatic experience that is unique to those who were directly affected by the war or were geographically linked to areas devastated by the war.

If you come from parts of El Salvador that suffered from the civil war or at least had experiences near there, you will have really different experiences and political outlooks than if you were not part of the country [of El Salvador] during that time. I don't have any experience with the pre-1980's Salvadoran American population, like the ones that came around World War II or before, but I do have relatives who came during the 1960's. Those [Salvadoran Americans] who came before [the war], they have no idea and have no connection to the [Salvadoran American] community in that way. They didn't live through that, but my parents did. I also heard of upper and middle class families that went to Houston, and they are not connected to that part of the history. Class and geography are key. On [one of my parent's] side, the family was from that part of El Salvador that was devastated by the war. It's about political obliviousness. If you were not in El Salvador at that time or did not watch the news about El Salvador, that was part

of why things were the way they were down there. It's because people didn't know about it. So political activism does have something to do with it [being refugees].

One 2nd generation Salvadoran American whose parents escaped the Salvadoran civil war also mentions the lack of political activism by the pre-1980's Salvadoran Americans who had come to the U.S. as non-refugee, economic migrants during the 1930's. Moreover, she mentions that the Salvadoran Americans who have recently come to the U.S. as non-refugees but who escape from the societal violence and poverty in El Salvador are too traumatized to be politically interested or active.

In 1932, there was definitely social strife. There was also an increase in poverty, that's when we did see Salvadoreños start coming to the U.S. because these people were victims of that social inequality. They were in search of a better life. They are knowledgeable about the civil war and the struggle [of the refugees]. They acknowledge it, but there's not enough of a strong affinity for political activism, so they just talk about it and try to understand it. The newest immigrants [who have recently come to the U.S.], we can't generalize how they will do here in the U.S. yet. Many do arrive here and want to shed light on the social inequalities that have driven them to come to this country [the U.S.], but some are so upset with the political system in El Salvador, so when they come to the U.S., they want to forget about anything involving politics and the home-country.

On the other hand, an unexpected finding is that non-refugee Salvadoran Americans can be quite cognizant of the refugee identity, even if they themselves did not share in the refugee

experience. For example, a 2nd generation Salvadoran American whose parents came after the war and were not refugees described the importance of the refugee background to the entire Salvadoran American community. This interviewee discusses how it is this refugee history of fleeing from war and persecution which has helped Salvadoran Americans become well-known for political activism and organization. He is now part of a community organization initially founded by the refugee generation where he has worked closely with that generation and learned about their stories and their political successes.

Overall in the U.S., in terms of the impact, we've been able to contribute our flavor to the fabric of America, like pupusas, and our political activism, we brought that to America. The Salvadoran American community is better at organizing around political incidents faster than other Latino communities. It is the history of why they left in the first place, the singular violence, and how they came [to the U.S.] because of politics and that there was a whole government resistance. Not everyone left because of being persecuted by the state, though. Some left for other reasons, family reasons, but as a collective, we have made a great impact on the U.S. You begin to see political participation in electoral fields, business, and academia, in many different aspects of American life. I think it is the key component of the Salvadoran refugees who are more politically active. A lot of them were young. They were just teens, but they led the movement that did shape U.S. foreign policy. How many communities can say that? A bunch of ragtag youths that made an alliance with the church and labor to push forward a political issue, to practice proxy politics to recruit citizens to be their face and push for the changes because they were not citizens at that time. I was not a part of that. I am a product of family immigration, and my family came after the [19]92 peace accords. I was one who grew up

unknowing of this struggle, but I started to hear about what happened, I become interested. I had a little spark, and I connected to the people of that refugee generation who then share their stories.

Salvadoran American Interviewees' Reflections on Home-Country Politics

When presented with questions concerning home-country politics in El Salvador, most of the Salvadoran American interviewees who had a refugee background were knowledgeable about party politics as well as political and socioeconomic realities that exist today in El Salvador. Although there is mention of the intergenerational attenuation of the connection to the home-country, most of the interviewees also discussed working in organizations that helped them to frequently visit El Salvador to help in various projects and monitor elections there. For example, a 1.5 generation Salvadoran American who fled the war in El Salvador describes how the younger generations feel more Americanized and less connected to home-country things like the old hometown associations created by the 1st generation refugees. Nonetheless, he still sees the importance of home-country politics and is active in it.

Over the years, many hometown associations have focused their work on helping their own communities in El Salvador. I don't think that the children of Salvadoran American refugees are as interested in getting into hometown associations. The next generations don't care much about hometown association. They've never been there [to El Salvador]. For me, I still have some memories. The older generations kind of try to organize them [the younger generation], force them, but they are more into going to school here [in the U.S.], which is good. But it's our responsibility to make sure that we don't forget who we are, where we come from, that we have this background of both [the U.S. and El

Salvador]. There are some challenges. The immigration crisis continues as we're getting unaccompanied minors who enter the U.S. in the thousands. They are looking for better opportunities here [in the U.S.]. That continues because the violence continues in El Salvador. Because El Salvador is still going through difficult times, a number of Salvadoran Americans are getting concerned with the violence in the country [of El Salvador] and turn this into some type of political action. What are we going to do for the country [of El Salvador]? It can be giving donations to organization that help out there, or to get educated and go to El Salvador to spend time in the country to help. I think this need to help El Salvador, to make it better, this educates the children of Salvadoran refugees. I am personally involved in helping El Salvador in these ways and I make frequent trips there. I want to see more of that in a big way among Salvadoran Americans overall.

The more that the younger generation connects to their refugee heritage by talking to the parents' generation about the refugee history, the more that the younger generation will be actively involved in helping the home-country. For example, another 1.5 generation Salvadoran American who escaped from the war in El Salvador describes this importance of being close to the refugee generation in order to learn about their stories. This helps him connect to El Salvador and inspires his efforts to fight for human rights and self-government in El Salvador. He even organizes delegations to travel to El Salvador to learn about the conditions there. The interviewee also describes keeping track of party politics in El Salvador and also how Salvadoran American home-country politics differs from that of Cuban Americans.

The closer you are to El Salvador, the better you will understand the struggle. You get closer by getting the testimony of the parents and people who will tell you their refugee story or by physically going to El Salvador and seeing things for yourself. For example, people did not know about the Archbishop Romero [a vocal critic of the Salvadoran regime whose assassination by the Salvadoran death squads helped to ignite the Salvadoran civil war]. For anyone under 36 [years of age], they were not alive when this incident happened, but if they get close and curious about who this person was in El Salvador, the closer you get and more factors that get you closer, the more you will be connected. Not that you will necessary like it because now you are closer to the violence happening right now. You might not like it. My organization helps to send delegations to go to El Salvador. Each person goes to El Salvador to learn about the conditions in El Salvador in person. We are very different from Cubans. The Cuban community in Florida gets together and unites against the government down there in Cuba. We have both parts of the political spectrum: 20 years of conservative government in El Salvador and then a 10 year period of a progressive one, then conservative, so it goes back and forth. Some people would like the progressive party, but then gets tired of them and go to the conservative party, and vice versa. So I would say it would be more diverse and the point of unity is by issue more than grouping all together as is the case with Cubans. But Cubans are changing with the 1st generation and 2nd generation changing and wanting to go with Obama. It's exciting.

Another 1.5 generation Salvadoran American refugee who fled the war mentions how his generation continues to be linked to El Salvador. Home-country politics is again getting

attention because of the unaccompanied minors crisis, and this interviewee demonstrates his deep knowledge about the current political and socioeconomic conditions in El Salvador which have caused this crisis. Unlike other interviewees, however, he also keeps track of how the U.S. and international organizations have been handling—and in some cases, have aggravated—socioeconomic conditions in El Salvador. He also echoes the sentiment by most interviewees that remaining close to two parents, both of whom are Salvadoran refugees, helps to keep the children’s generation engaged and involved in home-country politics.

I know the circumstances of the home-country and I remain connected to what’s going on there, especially with the U.S. being involved again in foreign policy in the triangle of Central America and giving foreign aid, and 35 years later, and reliving a new humanitarian crisis, with the unaccompanied minors fleeing the high level of violence in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador—the Northern Triangle of Central America. I always connect it back to the old country, so our realities are connected. The U.S. foreign aid budget gave another \$360 million to \$462 million package to El Salvador, and on top of that, \$400 million to totally try to tackle the roots of the current wave of non-recognized refugees fleeing violence, social exclusion, and economic hardship where the majority of those three countries are low income. So the U.S. is back meddling in that part of the world, working to ensure that the money does not fall into the hands of the corrupt government, and trying to have an impact to counteract the causes of the forced migration. That’s why the kids are leaving. They’re fleeing for their lives and for better futures because their countries-of-origin cannot offer this to them. Mainly it is political corruption, economic exploitation, and social exclusion, those are the roots of the problem. So the solution planned by the international financial community or big foreign

aid agencies does not work because the power is in the hands of the elite mafias. For us to remain active in all of this [home-country issues] depends on the level of involvement of the parents. Also many families are mixed; not everyone is a refugee, but if one of the parents or both of the parents are, the kids get impacted so the kids born here are impacted. Some of the children's generation join [a community program] where the conclusion of that program is to go to El Salvador and live in that community, live with the people in their homes in the countryside, to join with the community, help in an infrastructure project, whether it is building a stable for a house, a community library, a community center, a classroom, a school, a medical clinic, etc. That's good because we have a sense of the challenges and realities of people in the most excluded area of the country [of El Salvador] and how people struggle to survive there. That has helped to shape the children's generation as adults and to involve them in other political causes for El Salvador.

A 2nd generation Salvadoran American whose parents fled from the war in El Salvador was also able to describe how she and her generation continue to be very engaged and active in home-country politics. According to her, even young, 2nd generation Salvadoran American students whom she teaches are also very transnationally connected and knowledgeable about the home-country. She describes a group that she is involved with which consists of so many younger generation Salvadoran Americans like her who maintain transnational political activism. The activism includes being connected to politicians and the media in El Salvador, going to El Salvador and making documentaries, monitoring the elections in El Salvador, and sharing political news and historical knowledge about El Salvador with Salvadorans in El Salvador. This

interviewee is very knowledgeable and passionate about party politics as well as the difficult social and political realities today in El Salvador which she partly blames the U.S. government for causing and then perpetuating.

With the group I'm part of, people who I work with are born here [in the U.S.], have parents from El Salvador, but they have connections to the home-country and do everything possible to stay connected with the culture, politics, and the media in El Salvador. A lot of these individuals have connections to politicians back at home [in El Salvador]. They know these people, so there's a real push to maintain a transnational network of politics of Salvadoreños. If we do this we have more agency here [in the U.S.], and we will have more power and influence over there [in El Salvador]. I'm a T.A. [teaching assistant] for Central American study courses, and there are Salvadoreño students who are born and raised here. Some of them even know more about the home-country than I do. Only a few don't know anything about this. I was pleasantly surprised. The great thing is because of the transnational commitment at this point, people are doing documentaries and literature in El Salvador and bring them back to the U.S. and share them with us youth. It's more impactful and more motivating. It makes us think about what we were able to do and what we still can do. It motivates us. Once we push to have those means in El Salvador, and we work to push for transnational connections, we will continue to grow in activism. The thing is, after the war, there has been 20 years of a right-wing government which exacerbated the socioeconomic conditions of the country [in El Salvador]. People see that. The last almost 10 years of government has been the FMLN party running the country [of El Salvador], and people blame them, but they do not see the other side of the story. What's lacking in El Salvador

is the real truth, that there's more than just what they watch on the news. People don't learn about the history of the war in El Salvador, why the war was fought, because of these reasons, those that leave the country [of El Salvador] nowadays aren't fully aware, especially the younger generations that are leaving the country recently don't understand why the country is so miserable. They blame it on the gangs, but it depends on their experience. What I always criticize is that it's more so for the kids who live in El Salvador, they don't know this history. They do not know about the two decades before the war. History stops at 1930-1940, and they don't learn about what the civil war was all about. I don't see that problem here with the younger generations [born and raised in the U.S.]. Over here [in the U.S.], it's easier to see things, hear more things than back there [in El Salvador], especially because after the war, the vicious human rights violators were never brought to trial. The idea was just to forget about the war and move on. No. People were traumatized by what happened, and things were not dealt with, like what happened to family members, what happened to them, is anyone ever going to do anything? The fact that it hasn't been talked about is making things far worse. I am very involved politically. Like during the election season [in El Salvador], it can be very shady in El Salvador. There is a lot of fraud that goes on there. They go through a crazy media campaign, so what we always work on here [in the U.S.] is to say no to what's going on, that this is also the truth. We share this through social media. It's so powerful, an important political tool for us as we work to campaign about the truth from abroad and share media reports from here. We fight to not let the government just give you superficial information, but we give you the profound truth and share those truths, so the groups here that I'm involved with are political in that sense. Also I work with the youth

in El Salvador to realistically represent the conditions of how the people actually live here [in the U.S.], so that people can feel like they don't need to come to this country [the U.S.], and I also fight so that these kids have what they need at home [in El Salvador]. Being involved in community organizations and groups, to bring education to what they would never get at home, to bring things from here [in the U.S.] to there [in El Salvador], that's what I do. Or like the mining movement; many were involved here [in the U.S.] for that cause in El Salvador. Whatever we find that needs to be more publicized, that we want people to know about, we make it a point about that and get involved. Whatever we can do, we find a way to be involved to bring that knowledge here [to the U.S.]. We push to be transnational and transparent, to not only know one side of the story. That is key in El Salvador because the media, the primary media outlets are owned by corporations run by the Salvadoran elite, and transnational agencies are owned by the elite, so the news is superficial and does not touch on critical issues. It's like watching Fox, CNN, and NBC here where you just get one side of the story, not all sides. By having these transnational networks with people here [in the U.S.], we help to bring this openness to political discussions in El Salvador, discussions about other topics, put questions in the minds of individuals so people become more knowledgeable. I have this faith, to help in some way, shape, or form, to help the sociopolitical improvement of El Salvador. We see this commitment here in the U.S., to help El Salvador, because of the strong activism within our community here. We never got the refugee status, so we came here as undocumented and not fully accepted, so we had to fight for the right to show that we are here. We made really important strides to be a congregated and united community to put ourselves on the political map. There is a possibility of being forgotten and we don't

want to have that happen. That war was funded by the U.S. We want to shed light on this fact, that the U.S. played a major role which caused us to leave our country. Millions of dollars in American aid went to the Salvadoran military with national police squads used for torture and death squads. We want to make it known here. We want people to know that it's because of the U.S. that's why we had to leave, and why El Salvador has a major problem today with violence because of this systematic issue taking place transnationally, especially with the gangs that are deported from L.A. [Los Angeles] to El Salvador. This history only creates more problems of gangs, and people continue to flee because of that violence.

On the other hand, it does not have to be that a descendant of a refugee will be more cognizant of home-country political issues. One interviewee who is a 2nd generation Salvadoran American whose family came to the U.S. after the Salvadoran peace accords and therefore not refugees was able to describe in detail the social and economic challenges facing the different political parties in control of the government in El Salvador. However, this same interviewee is the one who mentions being inspired by the refugee history, legacy, and identity, even though he was not related to any of that. Possibly it is this adopted refugee identity through close affinity to refugees which has led to his interest in home-country political issues, but this is just one conjecture.

It's a mixed bag for Salvadoran Americans today if they are aware of El Salvador's troubles nowadays. Before, it [Salvadoran American involvement in home-country politics] was about being organized to stop the U.S. support to El Salvador, but following

the peace accords, it's a mix. There's still persecution and structural problems of criminality, poverty, and violence that has been exacerbated, and this increases the flow so more come in now. The FMLN opposition to the conservative party eventually became a political party and got in power in El Salvador. We find out that it's easy judging from the outside than the inside. It's easy to criticize the people in charge, but it's hard to be part of it and actually do it. As a party, now you have to run the health care system, water system, infrastructure, and you begin to see the reality, and it's no longer mission driven, but about individual power and party power. Yes, it's a more progressive party that's in charge today, but it's no longer about the collective good. It's just about power. See the struggles that the government in El Salvador faces now, they are the problems of the current conditions, but you're now running the place; sure, you're not the ones that started it [the problems], but you must solve it now as the new party in power. It's no longer ARENA. You're the government in power. Some of the conditions still exist. The poor is still poor and the rich is still rich.

Nevertheless, cognizance of home-country politics does not always get transferred from the 1st generation refugees to the U.S.-born 2nd generation. One 2nd generation Salvadoran American whose parents both fled as refugees from the war in El Salvador discusses how he and his friends have continued to lose interest in issues going on in El Salvador even though they were once interested and connected. He mentions how it is quite rare to find anyone in his generation who would be interested in home-country political issues.

Very few of us follow what's going on in El Salvador or politics in general in El Salvador. My friends are not interested in things that are going on in El Salvador. They just try to get ahead and get by and pay less attention to things going on in El Salvador now, but we were more interested in college. We followed what happened through activist friends over there [in El Salvador].

Salvadoran American Interviewees' Reflections on U.S. Politics

All of the Salvadoran Americans whom I interviewed showed interest in U.S. politics and were knowledgeable about the current presidential election cycle. All of these Salvadoran American interviewees said that their political activity in the U.S. includes going out to vote on a regular basis. Moreover, the majority of these Salvadoran American interviewees who had a refugee background reflected on how they and most of the Salvadoran American community are very active in U.S. politics beyond just voting in elections. These interviewees who had a refugee background are very knowledgeable about the political history of Salvadoran Americans in the U.S., and most have had experience working for organizations that are involved with various levels of government in the U.S. These interviewees attribute this activism in U.S. politics to the Salvadoran American refugee experience which motivated them to partake in U.S. government and politics at all levels.

For instance, a 1.5 generation Salvadoran American refugee who came during the war states that the Salvadoran American community is a refugee community that is surpassing the Cuban American community. According to him, the Salvadoran American refugee legacy of actively participating in U.S. politics is ascribable to the community's politicized provenance during the civil war. This interviewee is very knowledgeable about the political history of

Salvadoran Americans in the U.S. He is involved in a community organization which pushes for more Salvadoran American representation at all levels of U.S. government, building coalitions with other ethnic groups, and he sees the current anti-immigrant rhetoric in today's U.S. politics as something that will help in this pursuit. This interviewee is very committed to building a Salvadoran American political machine here in the U.S., and his non-profit organization works to make the Salvadoran American community more well-known to politicians throughout the U.S.

Salvadorans that arrived began integrating into our new home and the democratic process in America and the American dream or folklore. We learned the language, the culture, so when we came here [to the U.S.], Salvadoran Americans were more politically organized. We came from a country during a time that was politicized, so when we came here [to the U.S.], we developed and organized at the local and national levels. We developed community institutions, legal and social services, medical services, education, programs, scholarships. Remember, we are a young immigrant community, so wait another 10 to 15 years to have more Salvadoran Americans develop politically. There are no Salvadoran [American] elected officials today [in the U.S.]. There had been only a few, but then the term limits, and then there were no more [Salvadoran American elected officials]. In Southern California, only 2 were elected to a local school board. Asians are growing in political position as congressmen, senators, city council members. I'm impressed, so we got to work a little harder to get together. We are the third largest group—we've overcome Cubans. What we need to do is develop a political machine. In comparison to Mexican Americans, there's a big difference, but the latest anti-immigrant movement in the U.S. is helping our communities organize, including Mexican Americans, so that's good. Our goal as a refugee community is to become more

established culturally, economically, and politically in political institutions here in the U.S. We've become professionals, go to good schools, and the next step, it's time for us to get involved in the American political process more. You cannot force that. We need to start establishing alliances between us and African Americans, other Latinos like Mexican Americans, you name it, to get support. Now, we got to do this. I've been involved and continue to be involved in this organization to reach out, politically, to the community. I go out as part of my work for [a Salvadoran American community organization] to develop our politics more, but as a non-profit, we cannot support elected officials directly, but I do as much as I can to help Salvadoran Americans get into the political process. We have many community institutions, but we only have a few newspapers and media for political information, so we need to develop more of this.

Another 1.5 generation Salvadoran American who came as a refugee during the Salvadoran civil war also echoes the sentiment that Salvadoran Americans who came out of the refugee background are highly politicized, and that this political background has helped them in their fight for asylum and citizenship in the U.S. This background has helped them to overcome the reluctance of many other refugee communities to get involved in politics, all of which has aided Salvadoran Americans in their outreach to Congress, the Supreme Court of the United States, various presidential administrations, and non-governmental organizations including churches and student groups. This interviewee mentions that he and most of the other Salvadoran Americans are fully integrating and becoming active citizens who vote and participate in U.S. politics in various other ways. This interviewee's work in a Salvadoran American organization includes fighting for immigrant rights by getting in touch with members

of Congress, the Republican and Democratic parties, and keeping track of elections in the U.S. involving Salvadoran Americans.

So the war in the 1980's took Salvadorans out of the country [of El Salvador] and many ended up in the U.S. Salvadoran Americans brought the organizing skills to apply here in the U.S. Some of the skills we developed later, but we already had the political principles. The Salvadoran existence here in the U.S. was tied to the fight to get political asylum. Like working with Congress, how to pass legislation, the way the Congress here [in the U.S.] works differently in passing legislation. In the U.S. Congress, a congressman from one party may be willing to deviate from the guidelines of the party. For example, those Salvadorans got some of the G.O.P. to oppose Reagan and got the Democrats and convinced them about immigration. There are churches in Virginia which had members who were in the Pentagon and legislators that could implement legislation, and Salvadoran refugees were able to organize parishes in Virginia that were opposing the violations of human rights and intervention in Central America, parishes that were taking in refugees from El Salvador. So it's how Salvadoran Americans applied the core political principles to new situations. This was different from all the other refugee peoples who wanted to get out of a dangerous situation and wanted to disappear and live their lives. They suffered repression in their home-country for activism, and here [in the U.S.] they fear being deported. It takes the effort by refugees themselves like in the Sanctuary movement to join others like churches, universities, etc., and to form committees. Like the Japanese Americans, they were able to reverse a government order against them years later and could even get reparations. Congress created a committee and found resources, and then it could secure reparations for damages caused by the U.S.

government. After the long fight alongside church coalitions in a legal suit to the U.S. Supreme Court, Salvadoran Americans were able to reverse the deportation order, and Salvadoran Americans were able to get people on track to become U.S. citizens. Salvadoran Americans were leading the fight, or sometimes following, as during demonstrations in Washington D.C. and in L.A. [Los Angeles] alongside people from this country [the U.S.]. What was pushing the people close to their heart was the need—the demand—to not deport Salvadorans and to give them political asylum. That you can get then, but now it's different. The environment I encounter now when I work with Congress is against immigrants, but you see the international phenomenon of immigrants like Syrian refugees. [Donald] Trump, if he wins the election, he has moved the immigration debate to the ultra-right, and Democrats may start circling to the right of Obama. Trump has been able to move the debate, like when he said that he wants to deport all of the undocumented. Obama deported 2.5 million. I like [George W.] Bush, Bush was much better than Obama and did not deport as many, but things could get much worse if the G.O.P. takes office now. From the very beginning, I distinguished the American government from the American people. We have been able to identify the different colors of the rainbow in the U.S. At some point we need someone to be in Congress. Right now in the congressional race in Maryland, we may have a Salvadoran American congresswoman, so she can represent us in Congress like Mexican Americans or Korean Americans who already have this. The other point is that in the U.S., you need to belong, to be a voting U.S. citizen, and I and others have integrated into America like this. Who is undocumented and who is not—some of the media label us as undocumented, but if we came in the 1930's, we have been documented for 60 years. If

we came in the 1980's with the legal process we won in 1986, those are documented too. So for 2.5 million Salvadoran Americans, they are already documented, and a tiny minority is undocumented. I think we Salvadorans are of all colors, that is also one mistake of the G.O.P. that thinks immigrants are automatically Democrat. They are surprised that we vote by the issues, like immigration issues, women issues, abortion issues—you will have a rainbow of opinions.

Another 1.5 generation Salvadoran American who fled during the civil war in El Salvador repeats this same idea of how the refugee background of anti-government activism back in El Salvador helped Salvadoran Americans like him become active citizens who have made a political difference in the U.S. Like other interviewees, he is able to recount the political history of Salvadoran Americans in the U.S. who fought alongside religious and university organizations for political asylum at the Congressional and Supreme Court levels. In addition, this interviewee adds an interesting analogy that is truly insightful in elucidating this political activism in American politics particular to Salvadoran Americans. According to this interviewee, the fight in the U.S. for political asylum for unrecognized refugees was itself like a civics class (a sort of political training program) which helped Salvadoran Americans hone their innate political skills and activism borne from political persecution, but now in a strictly American context. This interviewee mentions how all of this has helped him continue to be active as a voter and immigration rights activist who not only provides legal and social services to new immigrants but also fights for immigrant rights at all levels of the U.S. government.

We are very active politically, at first, with anti-dictatorship activism, later for demanding rights as immigrants, and with Reagan's IRCA in [19]'86, many opted for obtaining permanent residency in the U.S. and a path to naturalization and citizenship, and we all participate fully in American civic and political life as new Americans who vote, and some even go the extra mile. It's not only passion in politics for the sake of passion. The new leaders of Salvadoran origin, it will be transferred in our DNA to fight, to fight for rights related to gender, to the environment, to animal rights, to food security, to different causes that affect our quality of life, that affect the local level for the community we live in. So yes, that character of our community, whether it's social or political activism, will remain there. That is our contribution to the fabric of society to have active citizens, especially when the divide is clear between the one percent and the rest of us. For us as an entity of unrecognized refugees, the difference between the people of America and the U.S. government was a lesson we learned very early on. So the church, and the sanctuary offered by the church in the U.S., helped to clarify the difference between the U.S. people who helped unrecognized refugees as opposed to the foreign policy in Central America pronounced by people like Alexander Haig, so it was clear that there were differences between a society and a culture of humanitarianism versus the cold war reality of U.S. foreign policy. The church organized efforts to help bring the plight of human rights and human rights violations in El Salvador to the U.S. Congress and created a serious debate. They had constituencies of members of Congress in both aisles, activating them on the question of whether to renew aid to El Salvador and Honduras, so that was a great training ground in U.S. politics and advocacy in the U.S. for Salvadoran Americans in general, not only at local level. Salvadoran Americans went

with religious communities to visit the district offices of members of Congress throughout the U.S. bringing the issues to the nation's Capital. Not only was the church helpful in bringing the plight of human rights to the fore and demanding the cessation of military aid and the atrocities in Central America, but the church was central to the Court too. It was the best introduction for the Salvadoran American community to politics in America. It was like a real-life civics class. Of course, the U.S. policy was to support the military regime and junta in El Salvador because the U.S. policy wanted to avoid what happened in Nicaragua. So the U.S. intervened militarily and politically and financially. But whatever the political interest of the U.S. was, that was then and there, but within U.S. society, there were other forces like the churches. It was a good fight, and it was more inspiring when you find support in the American society, in the religious institutions and the non-religious institutions like universities and colleges, against U.S. military aid and military dictatorship. Salvadoran Americans made a difference. So the Salvadoran American community aspires more, even though they are a fairly recent American community. Three decades sounds long, but it takes a long time to make a mark in politics in the U.S. It takes a generation to really have a share or seat at the table of political decision-making. Many Salvadoran Americans are active in the labor movement in the U.S. or like me, I am a community organizer who is involved in the immigration debate, especially now with the presidential election going on here in the U.S. For example, [the community organization that I am a part of] provides legal services and advice for immigrants and help to those in detention centers. In the last two years, we have received thousands of kids with needs such as education, social care, jobs, and guidance on what and how they are going to shape the future, but the immediate need

is legal representation in immigration court and family court as special juvenile visas are granted to some of them. Right now our community has many Salvadoran Americans who participate in the political system at local levels and one is aspiring to national politics in the U.S. Congress: she's running for the Maryland U.S. Congressional seat and was a member of the Maryland Assembly. Another one ran for the House of Representatives in the U.S. Congress, and one or two decades ago there was one on the Arlington County Board of Administrators as well as another Salvadoran American in the state senate, and in California, Salvadoran Americans participate in the California Assembly as well as in other city level governments. Also, there's a Salvadoran American who was born in El Salvador who participates in Arizona politics and also another one in New York City.

On the other hand, being active in U.S. politics is not exclusive to 1.5 generation refugees or 2nd generation children of refugees from El Salvador. A 2nd generation Salvadoran American whose parents did not escape the civil war and were not refugees is very politically active and involved in the community.⁵⁷ He is part of an immigration rights and services organization and works closely with politicians at all levels of government. In addition, he is very active in learning about the political history of the Salvadoran refugee generation who came during the 1980's. The refugee generation was able to create the various organizations/institutions that exist today, and he says that this activism and familiarity with U.S.

⁵⁷ Nevertheless, he also mentions how he is very close to the refugee generation and leadership and pushes younger generations like himself to learn from the refugees. (See the excerpts from the section above on Refuge Background, Identity, and Legacy.) So my conjecture is that the refugee legacy may transcend actually having the refugee background, so that in his case, he may have adopted a refugee identity due to his interest in the refugee history and close association to the refugees themselves.

government gets transferred to people in his organization who continue the legacy of activism in other ways and over other issues. Nevertheless, he also finds a number of Salvadoran Americans who are of the younger 1.5 and/or 2nd generation who have succumbed to what he sees as political apathy in American culture in general.

But what set the mark was when Salvadoran Americans came in at that time [fleeing the civil war in El Salvador during the 1980's]. A lot of the [Salvadoran American] institutions that exist now in America are from the war era, but some have changed. A huge number of activists from that time became part of unions, and Salvadoran Americans provided leadership. Our community came out of this struggle and quickly went into the existing U.S. institutions today, like the non-profit organizations. These organizations may or may not work well for the immigrant community in general, but the fact is that they came out of that struggle in the [19]80's. I think there was a shift. Prior to the peace accords, there was a singular struggle and outcome sought after, which was to stop the particular policies in Central America. It was that reason, but after the peace accords, everything became more diffused like fighting for health care, labor rights, other political issues, but it left an indelible training of how you operate in the government of America. So we Salvadoran Americans are still involved, but not necessarily in the issues that impact the Salvadoran American community in particular. Some are the children of refugees, and they carry on the activism to local issues. For example, on my board, I have 2nd generation Salvadoran Americans who are born here and want to reconnect to the Salvadoran American community and give back. But some Salvadoran Americans are not connecting at all. Some are just apolitical. It's consistent with the environment in the U.S. with so many members of the dominant culture being apolitical

and having 40% voter turnout. So there's a real deep disconnect in this country [the U.S.] over politics. In the past, there was the church, but now we [Salvadoran Americans] are losing the church and other organizations in politics. So a lot of Salvadoran Americans are not engaged, even if their parents were. They just want to see who's the new bachelor on TV. That's a general condition of this nation.

A 2nd generation Salvadoran American whose parents fled as refugees from the civil war in El Salvador during the 1980's adds a different perspective. Although he says that he is an active voter like others in his generation, and even though he volunteers in an organization that helps the Salvadoran American community, he feels that Salvadoran Americans in general are not politically active in U.S. politics. He attributes this lack of a political voice to the refugee background and the U.S.'s involvement in the violence in El Salvador. According to this 2nd generation interviewee, the U.S. government's aid to the Salvadoran government's violent repression of its people has left the Salvadoran American community traumatized and distrustful of the U.S. government. There is a sense of not belonging anywhere because of this disaffection toward the U.S. government. In his opinion, these negative effects of the refugee episode have contributed to the lack of political voice and political representation of Salvadoran Americans despite their growing numbers in the U.S.

As for Salvadoran American politics in terms of things over here [in the U.S.], we are a young demographic. There's the sense of fighting for justice, it is there, but it does not translate to actual involvement in the political process. There is large scale activism; there is a sense, a heightened sense or sensitivity, against discrimination and oppression.

We are a passionate people even if we are not very political. That is a paradox. We are passionate even if on the opposite side of the spectrum, there is only a small sector of us who are the activists. There is the passion about these issues regardless of which side of the spectrum you're on, radical or not radical, there is a kind of a direct action approach. The actual doing the action is not happening much, but in the small sector that is active, they did the immigration marches. It is a small sector of the population that is engaged in this, but, wow, look at them go. It does not translate into recruiting people because of the trauma associated with the political nature of their past, so it's hard to bring in people to join the movement. My family came to the U.S. and our status was protected. They weren't directly involved in the activism on either the right or left, but they experienced being shot at and got asylum. There were victims, and it beats this into the national consciousness, no matter where you are from, even if you are so oblivious to it, that is a survival mechanism related to the war, life, and the need to survive. Most Salvadoran Americans come from this background and suffered from the violence in some way, the violence that the U.S. had a huge hand in creating. What I saw on TV was the struggle for political power, because of the U.S. backing of the right-wing government in El Salvador and the lack of accountability of the U.S. government, like it was washing its hands of this, so we were in limbo and on our own to have political power and to advance economically, despite the traumas and violence before and during the civil war. I think that the refugee history is a defining episode. Anecdotally, what I've heard, is that the people who fled and did the big immigration marches in the [19]80's were the Salvadorans, I think, more so than the Mexican American population, but I think the activism did not translate to formal participation in the political process. A lot of us were

refugees, but we are not recognized as refugees. Again, this is the U.S. washing its hands, given the Cold War, and it did not look good to give that status to people leaving a government which they supported. It's like a lack of political voice. We are number three now in terms of the Hispanic population here [in the U.S.], but we don't have representation and political power given our size. The trauma has to do with it. It leads to a population as a whole here [in the U.S.] that's not politically engaged from what I've seen. It's not about voter participation. We all vote, and there will be more as more of us become citizens, but in terms of creating a political voice in the community, we may be civically involved, but as a community, education levels might not be very high. With the later generations, they are angry and upset at the U.S. and critical of all of that, especially America's continued policy of violence. I give as an example, like the distrust of the political process overall and distrust of authority and politicians in America in general. Sure we obey them, but we don't trust that authority—it's a paradox. We saw how the U.S. trained soldiers in El Salvador and armed them and perpetuated death and escalated it, so we are critical of this. It's a funny feeling of whether we really belong to anywhere. Especially there are right-wing conservatives here in America and in El Salvador too.

A 2nd generation Salvadoran American whose parents had fled the Salvadoran civil war gave another perspective about Salvadoran Americans' relationship to U.S. politics. Like most of the interviewees, she indicates that it is the Salvadoran refugee background which has contributed to their political activism in the U.S. She describes how the 1st generation refugees who had come out of the war were able to unite and make a political impact in their fight to stay

in the U.S. She also expressed how she is a voter and would vote for candidates that shared her views. She was able to describe how Salvadoran Americans had taken part in electoral politics at the local level in Los Angeles and was open to seeing more Salvadoran Americans gain elected office. Nevertheless, she mentions that she and others of her generation want to move further than just electoral politics. Like the 2nd generation interviewee above, she expresses a distrust of the U.S. government due to its history with El Salvador.

We never got the refugee status, so we came here as undocumented and not fully accepted, so we had to fight for the right to show that we are here. We made really important strides to be a congregated and united community to put ourselves on the political map. There is a possibility of being forgotten and we don't want to have that happen. That war was funded by the U.S. We want to shed light on this fact, that the U.S. played a major role which caused us to leave our country. Millions of dollars in American aid went to the Salvadoran military with national police squads used for torture and death squads. We want to make it known here. We want people to know that it's because of the U.S. that's why we had to leave, and why El Salvador has a major problem today with violence because of this systematic issue taking place transnationally, especially with the gangs that are deported from L.A. [Los Angeles] to El Salvador. This history only creates more problems of gangs, and people continue to flee because of that violence. We see all of this as a burden to this country [the U.S.], but we do not hear that Salvadoreños are beneficial to this country. We are an organized community. Look at the labor unions. The leadership is made up of Salvadoreños. The civic skills of the Salvadoreños here [in the U.S.] are a direct result of that refugee history. We younger generations continue to provide so much more. The best way for people to demonstrate

some kind of a reaction is to begin building a mentality that makes you wonder whether you can or cannot trust the U.S. So for those born and raised here [in the U.S.] who actually get to go to El Salvador to see the real conditions, that's the wakeup call, that this happened to our home-country, it was because of U.S. imperialism. It is a really difficult situation to explain to the younger generations, but if the parents were deeply affected by the war and come here as refugees, their heart is so committed to explaining that situation, to thoroughly explain it to these kids, and then they [the children] begin to understand, especially with the poverty and the minors fleeing the country [of El Salvador] and being incarcerated. When the children see those realities, it hits them. Is the United States of America the land of the free? Or is it something else other than what people have always known. I want to do that, to share this educational wisdom and knowledge so that we can continue the activism, so that the youth have a desire to go over there [to El Salvador], and to come back here [to the U.S.] with an agency as U.S. citizens and residents who can then voice what they want and be heard, so we can make a difference in this country [the U.S.] and in El Salvador. Definitely we see Salvadoreños in the American legislature and people are involved in government; that helps. Every little bit counts, but that's not my major objective, but I do see the benefit of that.

Whenever the person aligns with what I believe in socially and politically, I support them with my vote. Like last year, a Salvadoreño ran for mayor of LA, and I remember people being curious about that. I would not say that is the prime objective for me. It's not like I want to be at the forefront of doing things like connecting with Congress. People of my generation want to be on the streets to do something tangible rather than just networking with people in Congress. Yes it's key to network, but people want to stay motivated

within the community. Yes if we have a network, we would have more resources in the community, but we need to find a strategy to tackle all those different facets of activism. What motivated me to be part of [a Salvadoran American community organization] was that we need something more than just what the older generations have done, to move on to do something in the community, that was the push for me. We also understand that we need to create those networks with Congress too. If anything, we need to make sure that we are aware of all the resources we have and how to take advantage of them.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I continue the project of supplementing my quantitative findings about Central American refugees with more focused qualitative findings gained from interviews with Salvadoran Americans, a large Central American group in the U.S. many of whom have a refugee background but did not receive official refugee status by the U.S. government. Most, but not all, of the interviewees indicated having a refugee background stemming from the Salvadoran civil war. What I find is that the refugee history and identity is something that is very important to Salvadoran Americans with a refugee background. The refugee background is vital to the overall political activism of the Salvadoran American community. My theory and hypothesis that the refugee generation will pass on political activism to latter generations finds support in the comments by many interviewees that the refugee history is something which is openly discussed within the refugee household helping both the 1.5 generations and the 2nd generations carry on a refugee legacy of political activism. The hostile stance of the U.S. government does not dampen the refugee activism of the Salvadoran American community.

With regard to non-refugee Salvadoran Americans and whether they are different from Salvadoran Americans who have a refugee lineage, most of the interviewees commented on how the Salvadoran Americans who are not related in any way to the refugee history during the 1980's are not as politically active as the ones who do have a refugee background. Whether it is the older Salvadoran American population that had come earlier in the 20th Century or the more recent arrivals fleeing violence and poverty today, these Salvadoran Americans are not viewed as having the refugee identity and its associated activism. This would tend to support my theory that those with a refugee background would be more politically active than those without one. Additionally, a surprising finding is that some interviewees who are not refugees commented on how the refugee identity is something that inspires even non-refugee Salvadoran Americans into action. Some of these non-refugee Salvadoran Americans are students of the 1st generation Salvadoran refugees, and these non-refugee Salvadoran Americans express the importance of the refugee identity to the political activism of the Salvadoran American community as a whole. This suggests that the refugee identity is something that may transcend those who actually have a refugee background so that other Salvadoran Americans unrelated to the refugee history are able to adopt the refugee identity/legacy of activism. This is something that I did not anticipate in my theory. On the other hand, what does undermine my theory is that a few interviewees of the 2nd generation see the negative side of the refugee background on many younger generation Salvadoran Americans. According to these individuals, the trauma of the refugee background, combined with the political hyper-activism of the 1st generation refugees, may have completely turned off some children of refugees to politics.

Regarding home-country politics, it is surprisingly very strong among the younger generation Salvadoran Americans whom I interviewed. The interviewees who mentioned having

a refugee background tend to have more thorough knowledge about the political history, recent political developments, and current sociopolitical realities in El Salvador. This observation accords with my quantitative result that descendants of Central American refugees tend to be more knowledgeable about home-country politics than others, something that is predicted in my theory. These same interviewees also mentioned being involved/active in home-country politics by making frequent trips to El Salvador to not only help with its socioeconomic troubles, but to also help monitor the political process in El Salvador to safeguard against political corruption and other kinds of malfeasance. This also accords with my theory that home-country political activism will be heightened among the 1.5 and 2nd generation individuals with a refugee background. Nevertheless, my quantitative findings do not show that descendants of Central American refugees are necessarily more involved in home-country political activities. Overall, what seems to sustain this home-country political activism is the oft-mentioned feeling that the U.S.'s meddling in El Salvador contributed to the reasons why the Salvadoran refugees had to flee to the U.S. in the first place, and the legacy of the U.S. government's meddling still negatively affects the sociocultural realities of El Salvador leading to the violence and continued emigration today. The more that the younger generation embraces their parents' refugee past and the more that the parents opens up about that past to their children, the more that the younger generation is knowledgeable about the current state of politics in El Salvador, travels to El Salvador, and pursues activities that relate to politics in El Salvador. Unfortunately, whether any of this has to do with each interviewee's Spanish language proficiency to be able to speak about complex matters like home-country politics with their parents cannot be determined because I did not question interviewees about language barriers (or the lack thereof) between the parents and the children.

Surprisingly, a 2nd generation Salvadoran American who lacks a refugee background is also knowledgeable about home-country politics. This would counter my theory that home-country political interest and knowledge would be confined to those with a refugee background. Nonetheless, this interviewee is a bit unique because he seeks out knowledge from the refugee generation and feels that the entire community is inspired by the refugee generation and its identity. On the other hand, one 2nd generation interviewee who has a refugee background in his family observed that home-country politics is something that is not on the minds of the U.S.-born or raised Salvadoran Americans. This observation goes against my theory and predictions.

On the topic of U.S. politics, every Salvadoran Americans interviewee expressed interest and cognizance about U.S. politics (especially the 2016 presidential election) and is a regular voter. This contradicts my quantitative finding that descendants of Central American refugees tend to be less likely to register to vote and vote in the U.S. Most of these interviewees who had a refugee background also showed their knowledge about the accomplishments of Salvadoran Americans in U.S. electoral politics, and most have had experience working for immigrant rights organizations or community organizations which are in close contact with federal and state politicians. This finding is supported by my quantitative result that descendants of Central American refugees tend to be more likely to have contacted U.S. government officials.

These interviewees attribute this activism in U.S. politics to the Salvadoran American refugee experience which motivated them to partake in U.S. government and politics at all levels. Although this observation supports my overall theory that the refugee background should lead to political activism in the U.S. context, the interviews revealed nuances which I did not expect. For instance, based on my quantitative analysis, I conjecture that the hostility of the U.S. government toward the Central American refugees was a possible explanation behind the usual

lack of an effect and, in some cases, the significantly negative effect of the Central American refugee background on various measures of political participation in the U.S. Contrary to this idea that the lack of U.S. governmental recognition and acceptance of Salvadoran refugees might stifle their and their offspring's potential to be engaged and involved in U.S. politics, the interviewees all believe that this lack of governmental recognition—and the consequent fight for recognition—actually helped to spur their political activism in the U.S. from the 1980's to today.

The interviewees all echoed the same sentiment that the history of political persecution and escape from a repressive government in El Salvador combined with their experience with a U.S. government that did not recognize their refugee plight motivated them to fight for refugee and immigrant rights in the U.S., something that helped them become effective community organizers skilled at reaching out to members of Congress and working with the U.S. government to address various issues of concern to the Salvadoran American community. None of the interviewees mentioned anything along the lines of the classical assimilation assumption that the older 1st generation will be preoccupied with home-country politics while the latter generations will be more centered on politics in the U.S. Instead, all of the Salvadoran American interviewees stated how the 1st generation refugees, their parents' generation, are very active in U.S. politics, sometimes more so than they are, and these interviewees regard the older generation as role models to emulate in their own political endeavors in the U.S.

On the other hand, one of the interviewees thinks that the refugee background has made the younger generation less trusting of the U.S. government and politics and therefore less politically vocal or active. This would go against my theory that the refugee background would consistently boost political activity in the U.S. However, this view tends to support the caveat which I had proposed in my quantitative section that the Central American refugee background

which lacked official U.S. governmental recognition might lead to distrust of the U.S government and politics by the younger generations. However, it should be noted that various studies do find that younger-aged individuals regardless of racial-ethnic background are often disenchanted with conventional government and politics in the U.S. anyway (see Dalton 2009; Wattenberg 2008; Zukin et al., 2006). Furthermore, a surprising finding is that one 2nd generation interviewee whose family came to the U.S. unrelated to the refugee flight from the war is also extremely politically engaged, involved, and connected in the U.S. Such a finding counters my theory of how activism in U.S. politics would be exclusive to children of refugees. This interviewee, however, did reflect on how he is part of a community organization founded by the refugee generation and how he is inspired by and continues to learn from the refugees who had been the pioneers in American politics during the 1980's. Thus, a possible explanation is that the refugee legacy of activism in the U.S. context is something that can inspire both children of refugees and non-refugees alike. This is something that my theory fails to anticipate.

In this chapter, I conveyed the stories, opinions, and reflections of younger generation Salvadoran Americans to supplement my quantitative findings about the political interests and activities of the descendants of Central American refugees. The information gained from my interviews here has helped to shed additional light on the relationship between the Central American refugee background, in this case, the Salvadoran refugee background, and the politics of the younger generations. Overall, the younger generations that have a Salvadoran refugee background and do all that they can to actively learn more about that background tend to be more politically active in both the home-country political context and the U.S. political context. Non-refugee members of the younger generations can also be activated in their home-country and U.S. politics if they are close to and actively learn from the Salvadoran refugees. This marks the

end of the qualitative section of my dissertation. In the next chapter, I provide the overall conclusion to this dissertation.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION:

The Political Effects and Implications of the Refugee Background on the Politics of the Children of Refugees

Quite often in world history, refugees are forced to leave their home-country because of war and persecution. It is a recurring phenomenon and is once again under the media spotlight with the recent Central American unaccompanied minor crisis in the U.S., the Syrian and North African refugee crises which have substantially impacted Europe but also other countries like the U.S., as well as other refugee migrations still taking place elsewhere in the world. Refugee assistance, settlement, and integration again will figure prominently in the policies of the U.S. government and numerous other host-country governments throughout the world as they deal with refugees and their children who will grow up in the new host countries. Although social and economic integration is critical, political integration of these refugees and their descendants who escaped from a traumatic sociopolitical environment is also very important.

My dissertation tackles the latter by examining the effects that the refugee background/context has on the political behaviors of the 1.5 and 2nd generation children of refugees here in the U.S. Using quantitative analysis of large-N datasets that contain variables relating to refugee background and my own open-ended interviews with a number of Cambodian Americans and Salvadoran Americans (two groups often associated with a refugee history), I explore how the overall refugee background affects the younger generations' (1.5 and 2nd generations') politics vis-à-vis the ancestral home-country as well as the U.S.

My overall theory is that the distinctive refugee background will help to heighten all facets of politics for the 1.5 and 2nd generation children of refugees in both the home-country and American political contexts. The traumatic experience of refugees often includes being persecuted, involuntarily having to flee from the home-country without first desiring to emigrate, maintaining a nostalgic connection to a home-country which seems lost or taken away, desiring to change the political system that caused the forced-emigration, and being vigilant/active in making a change in the politics of the home-country in hopes of eventual repatriation. All of these factors oft-associated with the traumatic refugee experience which can heighten the political involvement of the refugee generation should also be transmitted to their children. The children of refugees should carry on a unique refugee political identity and legacy so that they, whether they are 1.5 generation or 2nd generation, should be more activated in terms of home-country politics and U.S. politics. Essentially, the refugee background should be a positive factor which boosts the younger generations' political engagement and participation in both ancestral home-country politics and U.S. politics.

I then proceeded to test my theory using quantitative analysis of large-N survey data in the Intergenerational Mobility in Metropolitan Los Angeles (IMMMLA), Latino National Survey (LNS), and the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS) datasets. I chose these datasets because they contain younger generation respondents, and questions about politics. Most importantly, all three datasets contain some measure of refugee background: IMMMLA and CILS record whether a respondent has refugee parentage, while LNS records whether a respondent is a 1.5 generation refugee. In Figure 7.1 below, I condense all of my quantitative results from Tables 3.1—3.6 and Tables 4.1—4.9 into a very short summary of my overall

quantitative findings about whether there is any kind of statistically significant relationship⁵⁸ (positive or negative) between the refugee background and various measures of politics (home-country and U.S.) of the younger generations. A plus sign reflects a statistically significant, positive relationship being found in my quantitative analysis. A minus sign reflects a statistically significant, negative relationship being found in my quantitative analysis. A blank reflects a lack of a relationship reaching statistical significance.

Figure 7.1
Summary of Quantitative Findings: The following grid relates to the younger generation (i.e. 1.5 or 2nd generation) respondents in all three datasets. A “+” in the grid below indicates a positive relationship that is statistically significant, while a “-” indicates a negative relationship that is statistically significant. A blank means that no statistically significant relationship was found.

		Home-Country Politics				U.S. Politics				
		Interest in home-country politics	Knowledge of home-country political leader	Participation in home-country political organization	Transnational voting or donating to home-country political campaigns	Contacting U.S. government officials/offices to address concerns/issues	Participation in protest activity in the U.S.	Attending a political gathering in the U.S.	Registering to vote in the U.S.	Voting in U.S. state and federal elections
IIMMLA and CILS	Refugee parentage in general		+			+				
	Southeast Asian refugee parentage		-	+			+			
	Central American refugee parentage		+			+			-	
	Cuban refugee parentage	+	+					+	+	
LNS	1.5 generation refugee in general									
	Central American 1.5 generation refugee								-	
	Cuban American 1.5 generation refugee	+								

⁵⁸ Statistical significance in terms of reaching at least the 0.10 level.

I find in my quantitative analysis that the generalized refugee background tends to positively affect the younger generations' knowledge about home-country politics as well as the younger generations' propensity to contact the U.S. government and its officials to air grievances. On the other hand, the generalized refugee background often fails to have any statistically significant effect on most of the other measures of either the home-country politics or the American politics of the younger generations. Nevertheless, I find some support for my theory upon further disaggregation of the data in terms of refugee backgrounds from specific regions known for producing political refugees.⁵⁹

For example, the Southeast Asian refugee background tends to positively affect the likelihood of organizational activity in home-country politics among the younger generations. Meanwhile, the Central American refugee background tends to positively affect the likelihood that the younger generations will be knowledgeable about home-country politics. The Cuban American refugee background tends to positively affect both interest in and knowledge of home-country politics. Conversely, however, a surprising result is that the Southeast Asian refugee background is negatively associated with knowledge of home-country politics among the younger generations. Turning to the U.S. contexts, the Southeast Asian refugee background tends to positively influence the younger generations' tendency to participate in protest activity in the U.S. The Central American refugee background tends to positively affect the younger generations' tendency to contact the U.S. government offices and officials with issues or concerns. The Cuban American refugee background tends to positively affect the younger generations' likelihood of attending a political gathering and to register to vote in the U.S.

⁵⁹ Please see chapter 2, especially the “Quantitative Methodology and Data Sources” section for a complete explanation about why I disaggregated the refugee background variable into different regions.

Conversely, the Central American refugee background tends to negatively influence the younger generations' tendency to register to vote in the U.S.

In sum, some (but not all) of my quantitative findings corroborate my theory that the refugee background would be a positive influence on the younger generations in terms of their psychological attachment and participation related to home-country politics and American politics. Nevertheless, because of the weaknesses in the extant survey data in IIMMLA, LNS, and CILS in fully capturing the dimension of the refugee experience on which my theory is founded, namely the experience of fleeing war (civil or otherwise) and/or persecution, I turned to my own qualitative research through interviews with Cambodian Americans and Salvadoran Americans, most of whom have experienced the refugee background at the heart of my theory.

My interviews with Cambodian Americans and Salvadoran Americans shed much more light on the effects of the refugee background on the politics of the younger generations and reveal how complex the dynamic is. Figure 7.2 below summarizes my qualitative findings based on my interviews with these individuals.

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FOLLOWING FIGURE ON THE SAME PAGE]

Figure 7.2	
Overall Qualitative Findings from Interviews	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three factors necessary for the transmission of refugee background to the younger (1.5 and 2nd) generations: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Candid Refugee Parents 2) Inquisitive Children (inspired by school/college) 3) Closeness/Proximity (between refugee parents and children) • Refugee background is often not actively transmitted to the younger generations because often missing any one of the three factors above • Transmission of refugee background to the younger generations <u>leads to</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Younger generations’ feeling of refugee identity/uniqueness, <u>which then leads to</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strong duty toward community service, social justice, and human rights in the home-country and in the U.S. to help alleviate refugee suffering <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note: Not necessarily a strong duty toward conventional electoral, voting participation (perhaps due to a distrust of conventional political participation due to refugee legacy of trauma, fear, and distrust of government) • Refugee background leads to commonality, understanding, unity—a stronger sense of community • Descendants of refugees are perceived to be more politically active than descendants of non-refugees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ But some descendants of non-refugees are very politically active <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ However, the non-refugee descendants that were interviewed may be atypical (i.e. a vicarious refugee identity) 	
Findings Unique to Cambodian American Interviewees	Findings Unique to Salvadoran American Interviewees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refugee background/history hard to transmit to the 1.5 and 2nd generations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Desire to shield younger generations from trauma of Khmer Rouge • Often low psychological attachment to home-country politics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ However, refugee-filial duty to join home-country organizations • Refugee-filial duty to assist in protests to give voice to the parents’ generation silenced by trauma <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Non-refugees are reluctant toward open protests • Political distrust and lack of political efficacy in U.S. politics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Refugee legacy of trauma and fear of politics ○ Perceived mishandling of settlement by the U.S. government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refugee background/history easy to transmit to the 1.5 and 2nd generations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Desire for recognition as refugees and understanding of their struggle ○ Desire to remember legacy of U.S. involvement in the home-country ○ Salience of current migration from Central America • Refugee background/history seen as key ingredient in activism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Model/inspiration for non-refugees • Often high engagement and participation in home-country politics • The fight to be recognized as refugees <u>leads to</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Propensity for seeking political allies, <u>which then leads to</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Propensity to network/contact with U.S. elected officials and politicians

My interviews were conducted over the phone, and interviewees were recruited using a snowball sampling method.⁶⁰ The interviewees were asked about their reflections, thoughts, and

⁶⁰ For more details about my interview procedures and overall methodology, please see the section, “Qualitative Methodology”, in chapter two.

opinions on politics and how it has been affected by the refugee history of escaping the genocide and war under the Khmer Rouge (for Cambodian American interviewees) and the refugee history of escaping the killings and civil war between the FMLN and the Salvadoran government (for Salvadoran American interviewees). To protect the interviewees, no identifying information was included with their responses. In general, my overall findings from the interviews regardless of whether the interviewees were Cambodian American or Salvadoran American are as follows. The refugee background, experience, and history is something which is not easily transmitted from the parents' generation (1st generation) to the younger generations (1.5 and 2nd generations). This is something that I did not anticipate in my theory because I had assumed that the refugee background would be something that parents would actively discuss with (and instill in) their children. On the contrary, it takes three key ingredients for the successful transmission of the refugee background to the younger generations: 1) having parents who are candid about their refugee past, 2) having children who are curious about their parents' refugee past (the children's curiosity is often sparked by refugee episodes learned in school/college), and 3) closeness or proximity between the refugee parents and the children.

These three factors are necessary for the transmission of the refugee background to the younger generations, and if any one of these three factors are missing, then the transmission of the refugee background to the younger generations would likely fail. Indeed, the refugee background is often not transmitted to the younger generations precisely because of any one of these factors being missing. For instance, what I often heard during the interviews is that refugee parents are often left traumatized, and are often reluctant to reveal to their children their refugee experiences out of fear of causing psychological harm to their children. Meanwhile, some children of refugees are not close to their parents. They either do not have a close relationship

with their parents while growing up, or they are not geographically near their parents (some having moved far away from their parents while in college and afterwards). In any of these situations which are actually quite commonplace, the refugee background gets either underappreciated or forgotten completely by the younger generations. Therefore, the passage of the refugee legacy to the younger generations is often very precarious, and only under the right conditions—namely, when the three factors are all present—will the refugee legacy be passed on to the younger generations to affect their identity and then their politics.

If the refugee background does get successfully transmitted to the younger generations, the refugee background often affects the younger generations' identity. The many interviewees mention how their family's refugee background makes them view themselves differently from others. They feel that they must remember how their parents were refugees, and this sets them apart from others in their community who do not have this refugee experience/history. These children of refugees take up a kind of refugee identity, a feeling of being unique because their parents have suffered and endured so much hardship in fleeing for their lives from their respective home-countries. They feel that they owe something to their parents who had to witness so much death, brutality, and fear of governmental oppression, persecution, and attack in their journey from their home-countries to the U.S.

This feeling of indebtedness, a sense of owing something to their refugee parents, then inspires the younger generations to be active in their communities in the U.S. and abroad. Because their parents and other refugees had to flee the home-country due to human rights violations, injustice, widespread warfare, violence, and death, these children of refugees are motivated to actively solve these kinds of issues for their community in the U.S. as well as abroad in their parents' home-country. Thus, children of refugees who carry on the refugee

identity and legacy tend to be very active in organizations that help achieve social justice, human rights, economic development, and political reform (especially transparency and opposition to political establishments) in the home-country, and they are also very active in community service to help their respective communities in the U.S. In the U.S., these children of refugees are active in providing psychological care, fighting for refugee and immigrant rights, contacting government officials, engaging in protests in their local communities, and other forms of community organizing and community empowerment. They feel it is their duty to be community activists as a way to give back to their refugee parents and people of the refugee generation in their community who have seen so much horror and devastation.

What I notice, however, is that the children of refugees who are carrying this refugee legacy often have a passion for community or grassroots activism, but not necessarily political activism through regular, conventional channels of political participation like voting, donating to a political campaign, working for a political campaign, etc. All interviewees do mention that they and their family are regular voters, but my impression from speaking with them is that their passion and sense of duty is more for unconventional forms of political activity like grassroots campaigns and community organizing rather than more conventional forms of electoral participation. This applies to both the home-country and American political contexts. These children of refugees may not be the most ardent voters or donators to political campaigns in either the U.S. or even the parental home-country, but they are involved in community organizations and social media campaigns to fight for overall betterment in the home-country and in their local communities in the U.S. Perhaps this gravitation toward unconventional politics and repulsion away from conventional politics stems from political trauma associated with the refugee background. Cambodian American and Salvadoran American refugees escaped

from a repressive and often murderous home-country governmental regime, and this might have led to a lasting impression that official government channels cannot be trusted and that grassroots action outside of regular, conventional political participation is the answer. On the other hand, this aversion toward formal/conventional political participation may be totally unrelated to the refugee trauma, because most of the interviewees whom I interviewed were in their early twenties or early forties in age, and much scholarship exist in political science about the preference of the younger age groups for unconventional forms of political participation out of angst and a sense of political distrust and inefficacy toward conventional/official government and politics (see Dalton 2009; Wattenberg 2008; Zukin et al., 2006).

Moreover, regardless of whether interviewees are Cambodian American or Salvadoran American, the interviewees all mention how the refugee background is a potent political force in the sense of creating unity and solidarity. The experience of a traumatizing flight from unspeakable horrors in the home-country has given members of the respective communities (either the Cambodian American community or the Salvadoran American community) common ground to understand one another, empathize with one another, and support one another. This refugee cohesion is seen as transcending various factors which can create splits/fissures within communities of the same national origin. Thus, interviewees mention how their respective refugee communities can coordinate better in response to social, economic, and ultimately political problems/issues that may arise. In other words, the refugee community is seen as being very unique in their cohesion.

The refugee community is also seen as being very unique in its political/community activism, and this is something which is common to responses given by both Cambodian American and Salvadoran American interviewees. Respondents with a refugee background

make it known that the refugees have suffered through greater trials and tribulations than their fellow community members who are not refugees, and this suffering and struggle is key to the commitment to political activism and community service among refugees and their children. The respondents who are the children of refugees often say that they do not see this propensity for activism and service among members of their community who have no refugee experience/history in their families. Nevertheless, my interviews with a very small number of interviewees who indicate that they have absolutely no refugee background in their families demonstrate otherwise. These few individuals who are non-refugees are quite politically motivated and active, even in terms of electoral participation and other forms of conventional political participation, and they are very active in various community organizations. However, it should be noted that these few non-refugee individuals may not be representative of the entire non-refugee population. First, these individuals volunteer in organizations founded by refugees, and they work very closely with refugee members of the community. They are knowledgeable about the refugee history even though they and their families were not a part of it. Essentially, what may be underlying these non-refugees' activism is what I would call a vicarious refugee identity which also impacts them and politicizes them. They may not be representative of the hyper-assimilated, non-refugee members of the community who do not work in such home-country or cultural organizations that are closely associated with refugees.

Aside from the foregoing findings which are generally applicable to both the Cambodian American and Salvadoran American experiences, I find that there are some phenomena relating to the refugee background and its impact on politics that are peculiar to each community, either the Cambodian American community or the Salvadoran American community, but not both. For example, the difficulty with the transmission of the refugee background to the younger

generations is particularly acute and widespread among the Cambodian American refugee community. The primary reason for this is the absence of the first factor that I mentioned which is necessary for the successful transmission of the refugee background to the younger generations. Essentially, Cambodian American refugee parents are less forthcoming about their refugee experience. The unimaginable death and suffering during the genocide and the unspeakable acts of brutality by the Khmer Rouge are things which the Cambodian American refugee parents in particular would like to shield from their children in an effort to protect their children from psychological scarring. Because of this, many respondents mention vaguely how their parents were refugees during the Khmer Rouge era, but they do not have a deeper understanding about that background let alone are impacted in their politics by that background. Consequently, Cambodia and the politics of Cambodia are things that are far off and inconsequential to these respondents who are not impacted by the refugee legacy. Thus, there seems to be low interest and knowledge about the politics of Cambodia as a result of all of this. Nevertheless, there are many Cambodian American interviewees who meet all three criteria for the successful transmission of the refugee background to them from their parents, and they are the political and community activists vis-à-vis the home-country and the U.S.

What is surprising is that the Cambodian American interviewees all mention how they are very committed to being involved in Cambodian cultural and national organizations despite this low level of interest in Cambodia or Cambodian politics. Based on what many interviewees describe, there seems to be a filial duty unique to Cambodian American children of refugees. It is a kind of sympathy for what the refugee parents had to endure in Cambodia and in escaping to the U.S. that is placed atop a kind of inherent Cambodian filial duty to their parents. Serving or being involved in a Cambodian organization is a cathartic experience for many interviewees who

see the importance of making their parents happy, and because their refugee parents often reminisce or dream of the old Cambodia that was destroyed by the Khmer Rouge, they must make their refugee parents happy by being involved in Cambodian organizations. This occurs despite how some of these younger generation Cambodian Americans lack interest or knowledge about Cambodia or its politics. It is a unique dichotomy that I observed in the Cambodian American refugee experience. This filial duty, or what I call a refugee filial duty, impacts younger generation Cambodian Americans in another way as well. It motivates them into helping to organize protests and serve as translators during protests on behalf of the parents' generation. Many interviewees mention how their refugee parents are silenced by trauma so that (regardless of English proficiency) they do not dare to speak up against injustice, and their children feel a duty to serve their parents by making sure that they speak up on behalf of their parents. This dynamic leads to an active commitment by younger generation Cambodian Americans to protest on behalf of their reticent refugee parents, and this differentiates children of refugees from children of non-refugee Cambodian Americans. Children of non-refugee Cambodian Americans and their non-refugee parents are very reluctant to participate in open protests, especially when those protests in the U.S. involve home-country issues, because they fear the repercussions that might await them or their immediate relatives in Cambodia. Unlike many Cambodian refugees who feel as though they have nothing to lose, non-refugee Cambodian Americans and their children often feel afraid to get involved in anything that implicates the Hun Sen regime in Cambodia which either still employs their relatives or affects their relatives in Cambodia in multiple ways.

Finally, an observation that is peculiar to Cambodian American interviewees is that there is a high level of distrust of the U.S. government and politics because of a perception that the

U.S. government mishandled their settlement and assimilation in the U.S. Unlike Salvadoran Americans who did not receive any assistance from the U.S. government, younger generation Cambodian Americans feel that even though the U.S. government had good intentions in helping their refugee parents come to the U.S., the government ultimately failed them by settling them in undesirable areas and giving them financial aid but not helping them with non-financial resources to help them acclimate to the U.S. All of this helped lead to the negative socioeconomic outcomes for many Cambodian Americans. In addition, younger generation Cambodian Americans convey the resentment of their refugee parents toward the U.S. government for its equivocation as it helped them immigrate into the U.S. but simultaneously bombed their home-country where their relatives were just collateral damage. Overall, this leads to pervasive disenchantment, distrust, and ultimately distance when it comes to Cambodian Americans' relationship with the U.S. government and American politics. However, it should be noted that many of these interviews are of the younger generation, and on top of that, also of the younger age group which often feels political distrust and inefficacy toward government and politics anyway (see Dalton 2009; Wattenberg 2008; Zukin et al., 2006), but their revelations about the specific refugee situation between the U.S. government and Cambodian American refugees outlined above does shed important insight that must be taken into consideration.

Like the Cambodian American interviewees revealing things that are rather unique to the Cambodian American refugee experience, the Salvadoran American interviewees also reveal things that are peculiar to the Salvadoran American refugee experience. First, Salvadoran American refugees and their children are, comparatively speaking, more likely to experience the successful transmission of the refugee background from parent to child. The reason is that in all of the Salvadoran American interviewees' descriptions of their family dynamic, I often find that

the three necessary factors for successful transmission of the refugee background are fully satisfied. The Salvadoran refugees of the 1st generation are very adamant and vocal in their asseverations that they are political refugees and not economic migrants as claimed by the U.S. government. This is something which they are passionate about, and they actively teach their children to remember the dire straits, the war and death, the persecution in El Salvador, and the struggle for political liberation and survival. The children are taught to remember how the U.S. government's denials of their refugee heritage stem from its constant intervention and involvement in El Salvador. The children are actively taught about this history, and they are currently reminded by this history with the new waves of Central American refugees fleeing from the region caused by what they perceive to be the legacy of past intervention and ongoing involvement by the U.S. government in the region.

Another feature unique to Salvadoran American interviewees is how their refugee identity is a symbol, a catalyst, a synonym for activism. All interviewees mention how the refugee experience is part-and-parcel of the notion of political struggle for survival. The Salvadoran American refugees of the 1st generation lived and breathed political activism. Their very existence in the U.S. and reason for being in the U.S. was due to political activism and their opposition to the Salvadoran government as well as the U.S.'s involvement there. Because of this, the refugee generation started community organizations and formed alliances with others in their political struggle and fight. The confluence of political activism with refugee identity became a model which inspires the younger generations today, not only the children of refugees, but also the children of non-refugee Salvadoran Americans who look to the refugee legacy for their own political inspiration.

Overall, this combination of successful transmission of the refugee background, combined with a political legacy of activism tied to their refugee identity, have made Salvadoran Americans very cognizant, interested, and participative in both home-country politics and U.S. politics. However, in the U.S. context, a very unique phenomenon of the Salvadoran American experience is the additional activation and motivation for political networking and contacting government in America. The interviewees describe how the U.S. government's official denial of refugee status and recognition for Salvadoran Americans motivated these Salvadoran American refugees to take to other avenues to influence government policy in their favor. Because they could not vote or could not officially have their voices heard through regular government channels, the 1st generation Salvadoran American refugees took to unofficial, unconventional means of influencing government policy. They made overtures to potential non-Salvadoran American allies who could join them in marches. They began constructing informal networks which connected them to churches, parishioners, university professors and students, and sympathetic government officials and workers that helped to fight for their recognition in the U.S. under temporary protected status or TPS (for further details on this, please see footnote 41 in chapter six) as well as fight against (and publicize) the U.S. government's involvement in El Salvador. This background of informally working to build alliances through networking and contacting governmental and non-governmental individuals is something that the younger generations remember and take with them.

Ramifications

The foregoing findings from my dissertation illustrate the many complex ways that the refugee background can shape how the children of refugees politically interact with the host-country and ancestral home-country for years to come. Consequently, the findings from my

dissertation can have the following ramifications. For instance, in the study of racial/ethnic politics in the U.S., the findings from my dissertation can aid in the understanding of children of refugees, a population that will become increasingly important as more children of refugees come of age and become a part of the American polity. Knowing that refugees might have an aversion for establishment politics and therefore shy away from electoral politics, partisan wrangling, and the U.S. government itself, but prefer more unconventional, community-based, grassroots political activities can be useful in a number of ways. There could be more of a focus on programs to help refugee communities overcome this aversion to conventional and establishment politics and encourage refugees and their descendants to vote more, work in political campaigns more, run for office more, etc. Moreover, various levels of government could better appreciate the significance of non-electoral, community-based, unconventional political expressions that refugees and their descendants often prefer in voicing their concerns. Being focused on these types of unconventional, more community-oriented activities will also help scholars be better able to grasp and account for the political participation of these refugees and their children.

Refugee families can learn that opening up and sharing the details of the refugee journey and the difficult context surrounding that journey can help rather than hurt their descendants. Even though discussing the refugee history might be difficult due to the horrors and traumas of that episode, having open conversations about the refugee background is something that helps to inspire the refugee descendants toward healthy political action and involvement. Refugee descendants come out being more appreciative, empathetic, respectful, proud, and inspired when it comes to their refugee forebears once they learn about the details of the refugee experience.

Furthermore, the U.S. government can better understand that their policies which affect refugees are remembered for generations to come and can continue to influence their relationship toward the U.S. government. In terms of immigration law, the legal recognition by the U.S. government of refugees who are in desperate need of asylum is something that is incredibly important to refugees and their children. The designation is key to their identity, and they often see themselves as being different from regular immigrants because the legal recognition/designation as refugees is the one thing that can save them from imminent death in their home-countries. Legal and foreign policy that interferes with such legal recognition can lead to refugee community action but it can also lead to lingering political distrust and feelings of political inefficacy for generations to come which can impede their full participation in all parts of government, especially in terms of electoral politics. The same can be said of U.S. government policies and immigration law that help refugees stay in the U.S., but do not help them enough, which also may lead to lingering political distrust and feelings of political inefficacy for generations to come which again inhibit their full involvement in the American political process, especially in terms of voting. It is a delicate balance that the U.S. government and other world governments could recognize and solve in order to ensure that they have a healthy political citizenry which is inclusive of refugees and their children.

Also, in terms of foreign policy, the U.S. government's involvement/intervention in refugees' home-countries prior to their escape from the home-country will be a memory which is not easily forgotten by later generations. This memory can influence their political action in response to past and future intersections/confluences between the U.S. and their home-countries. Thus, the U.S. government as well as other world governments could better understand the

lasting effects of their foreign policies on peoples who these governments might eventually take in and offer refuge to in the future.

Finally, governments and students of political participation should be aware that with the rise of transnational/globalized interconnections today, home-country politics will be something that refugees and their descendants will carry on with them so that home-country political issues and concerns might intersect/comingle with host-country political issues and concerns.

Essentially, the assimilationist idea that future generations will entirely forget the home-country might need to be modified in light of modern-day, social-media-adept refugees and their descendants.

All of the foregoing ideas are possible political implications of my findings regarding refugees and their children. These implications should not only be taken into consideration by political science, but they should also be taken into consideration by the U.S. government, the American people, other world governments, and people in the rest of the world as refugees continue to flee from their home-countries to find refuges, asylums, havens, and ultimately homes in new countries for themselves, their children, and future progeny.

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APPENDIX

Description of Survey Datasets

The Immigration and Intergenerational Mobility in Metropolitan Los Angeles (IIMMLA) dataset from 2004 by Ruben Rumbaut, Frank Bean, Leo Chavez, Jennifer Lee, Susan Brown, Louis DeSipio, and Min Zhou interviewed 4,655 young adults (ages 20-39) who are the children and grandchildren of immigrants in the metropolitan Los Angeles area (Los Angeles, Orange, Ventura, San Bernardino, and Riverside counties). 3,440 out of the 4,655 respondents are of the 1.5 and 2nd generations, with the rest being of the 3rd generation and beyond. The study targeted six of the largest immigrant populations in the metropolitan Los Angeles region—i.e. Mexicans, Salvadorans/Guatemalans (IIMMLA categorized Salvadorans and Guatemalans as one large population), Chinese, Koreans, Vietnamese, and Filipinos—but also included a residual group of other immigrant populations. The study compared these groups to U.S.-born/native parentage groups of non-Hispanic whites, blacks, as well as Mexicans of the 3rd generation and beyond. Of the groups targeted by IIMMLA, the Vietnamese and Salvadorans/Guatemalans have the highest percentages of 1.5 and 2nd generation respondents who have at least one refugee parent.

<i>IIMMLA Dataset: 1.5 or 2nd Generation Respondents, sorted by Ethnicity/National Origin and Refugee Parentage</i>			
<i>Ethnicity/National Origin Groups</i>	<i>Frequency (with row percentage underneath)</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>No Refugee Parentage</i>	<i>Refugee Parentage</i>	
Mexican	771	72	843
	91.46%	8.54%	100.00 %
Salvadoran/Guatemalan	316	60	376
	84.04%	15.96%	100.00 %
Other Latin American	173	15	188
	92.02%	7.98%	100.00%

Chinese	393	7	400
	98.25%	1.75%	100.00%
Korean	396	3	399
	99.25%	0.75%	100.00%
Vietnamese	334	67	401
	83.29%	16.71%	100.00%
Filipino	398	3	401
	99.25%	0.75%	100.00%
Other Asian	89	6	95
	93.68%	6.32%	100.00%
White, non-Hispanic	283	14	297
	95.29%	4.71%	100.00%
Black, non-Hispanic	40	0	40
	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Total	3,193	247	3,440
	92.82%	7.18%	100.00%

The Latino National Survey (LNS) was conducted by Luis Fraga, John Garcia, Rodney Hero, Michael Jones-Correa, Valerie Matinez-Ebers, and Gary Segura in 2006. The LNS interviewed 8,634 individuals of self-identified Latino/Hispanic residents in states with large Latino populations as well as states with emergent Latino populations (i.e. states without long histories of having large Latino populations) in the U.S. The states included Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Texas, and Washington (Washington, D.C. was also a targeted, non-state area).

LNS Dataset sorted by Ethnicity and 1.5 Generation Refugee Status			
Ethnicity	Frequency (with row percentage underneath)		Total
	Not 1.5 generation refugee	1.5 generation refugee	
Hispanic	612	1	613
	99.84%	0.16%	100.00%
Mexican	5,699	5	5,704
	99.91%	0.09%	100.00%

Cuban	392	28	420
	93.33%	6.67%	100.00%
Dominican	333	2	335
	99.40%	0.60%	100.00 %
Puerto Rican	821	1	822
	99.88%	0.12%	100.00%
Salvadoran	400	7	407
	98.28%	1.72%	100.00%
Central American	329	4	333
	98.80%	1.20%	100.00%
Total	8,586	48	8,634
	99.44%	0.56%	100.00%

The Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS) by Alejandro Portes and Ruben Rumbaut is a study that was conducted beginning in 1992 and culminating in 2006. Using face to face interviews as well as paper and pencil interviews mailed out to respondents, the CILS researchers followed a sample of 5,262 individuals who are the children of immigrants (those born and/or raised in the U.S. to immigrant parents) over the course of their lives from adolescence into adulthood. The survey was conducted initially in the metropolitan areas of Fort Lauderdale/Miami, Florida and San Diego, California, although subsequent waves of the survey were sent out to the original respondents who had moved outside of Fort Lauderdale/Miami and San Diego. The same respondents were interviewed first in 1992, then in 1996, and finally in 2002. The three waves of the interviews corresponded to three points in the respondents' life cycles: respondents at age 14 (transition from junior high to high school), age 17 (end of high school), and age 24 (a decade after the initial wave was conducted). The second wave was successful in surveying 81.5% of the original sample while the third wave was successful in surveying 68.9% of the original sample.

CILS Dataset: 1.5 or 2nd Generation Respondents, sorted by National Origin and Refugee Parentage

National Origin	Frequency (with row percentage underneath)		Total
	No Refugee Parentage	Refugee Parentage	
Cuba	543 44.29%	683 55.71%	1,226 100.00%
Mexico	743 98.41%	12 1.59%	755 100.00%
Nicaragua	170 49.42%	174 50.58%	344 100.00%
Colombia	212 93.39%	15 6.61%	227 100.00%
Dominican Republic	100 95.24%	5 4.76%	105 100.00%
El Salvador	29 85.29%	5 14.71%	34 100.00%
Guatemala	29 93.55%	2 6.45%	31 100.00%
Honduras	48 90.57%	5 9.43%	53 100.00%
Costa Rica	16 100.00%	0 0.00%	16 100.00%
Panama	18 90.00%	2 10.00%	20 100.00%
Argentina	40 93.02%	3 6.98%	43 100.00%
Chile	27 90.00%	3 10.00%	30 100.00%
Ecuador	35 100.00%	0 0.00%	35 100.00%
Peru	42 93.33%	3 6.67%	45 100.00%
Venezuela	15 93.75%	1 6.25%	16 100.00%
Other South America	39 92.86%	3 7.14%	42 100.00%

Haiti	160	18	178
	89.89%	10.11%	100.00%
Jamaica	146	10	156
	93.59%	6.41%	100.00%
West Indies	113	3	116
	97.41%	2.59%	100.00%
Philippines	793	26	819
	96.83%	3.17%	100.00%
Vietnam	218	152	370
	58.92%	41.08%	100.00%
Laos	113	42	155
	72.90%	27.10%	100.00%
Cambodia	55	40	95
	57.89%	42.11%	100.00%
Hmong	31	22	53
	58.49%	41.51%	100.00%
China	32	5	37
	86.49%	13.51%	100.00%
Hong Kong	15	2	17
	88.24%	11.76%	100.00%
Taiwan	18	0	18
	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Japan	30	0	30
	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Korea	21	2	23
	91.30%	8.70%	100.00%
India	18	0	18
	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Pakistan	12	0	12
	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Other Asia	17	0	17
	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Middle East/Africa	34	4	38
	89.47%	10.53%	100.00%
Europe/Canada	79	9	88
	89.77%	10.23%	100.00%

Total	4,011	1,251	5,262
	76.23%	23.77%	100.00%

**LIST OF INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE WON (OR HAVE SOUGHT) ELECTED OFFICE IN
THE U.S. BY NATIONAL ORIGIN GROUP**

(Note: these are unofficial and are based on my own searches and research)

Cambodian Americans

1. Fennel, Sambath Chey (Ran for Lowell School Committee, MA)
2. Hul, Nil (Ran for City Council, Long Beach, CA)
3. Lam, Daniel (Selectman, Randolph, MA)
4. Lim, Meng (Elected as Superior Court Judge, GA)
5. Meas, Sam (Ran for Congress, MA)
6. Mom, Randy (Ran for State Representative, MA)
7. Neang, Saun (Ran for Congress, WA)
8. Net, Hong (City Council, Lynn, MA)
9. Nuon, Vesna (City Council, Lowell, MA)
10. Pech, Van (Ran for City Council, Lowell, MA)
11. Peou, Bopha (Ran for Lowell Tech Committee, MA)
12. Uong, Rithy (City Council, Lowell, MA)
13. Yem, Paul (Ran for State Representative, MA)

Salvadoran Americans

1. Alas, Arturo (Running for Congress, CA)
2. Campos, William (City Council, Prince George, MD)
3. Figueroa, Liz (State Senator, CA)
4. Gutierrez, Ana Sol (House of Delegates, MD)
5. Montenegro, Steve (State House of Representatives, AZ)
6. Ramirez, Victor (House of Delegates, MD)
7. Rios, Oscar (City Council and Mayor, Watsonville, CA)
8. Rodriguez, Jessie (State Assemblywoman, WI)
9. Tejada, J. Walter (County Board, Arlington, VA)