

## **Divided Families among Latin American Immigrants in Spain: Just how level is the playing field?**

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It is well known that migratory movements always have a basically familial dimension. Very often migrations arise within family units, fit the life cycles of families, disarrange domestic structures of co-residence of origin, and help to bring about new households in the countries of arrival. In other words, migratory movements are due in some measure to specifically familial dynamics and strategies. Two important aspects of these dynamics have empirical and analytical interest here. On the one hand, the family plays a primary role in the migratory process because it is the basic social unit where the decision to migrate takes place, a decision that very often is taken with specifically familial criteria, prospects and goals in mind (Borjas & Bronars 1991). On the other hand, the migratory process itself implies —except for the few cases where the whole family group migrates conjointly and simultaneously— a breakdown of the family unit in origin that may become totally or partially reunified in destination (Suárez-Orozco, Todorova & Louie 2002). In these conditions the family split itself can in turn act as a powerful engine for new migrations: the family chaining causes an immigration multiplicative effect (Jasso & Rosenzweig 1986; Massey 1987), and family reunification becomes one of the main sources of migratory flows in those countries that already have a great volume of migrants (Kofman 2004).

Whatever the final family result of migration, it is clear that international migratory movements produce in some cases and for some time the reality of divided families that are located in at least two different places. The rich literature on divided (or transnational) families and family reunification movements has shown how the socio-demographic determinants (above all, in origin) and the socio-economic and institutional factors (above all, in destination) drive these processes (Rumbaut 1997, Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco & Qin 2005, Cerruti & Maguid 2010, Esteve & Cortina 2009).

Beyond aspects related to the situation of individual migrants, however, there are other factors in play constraining the decisions made with regard to their families. All migrant strategies are implemented within a general context of perceived risks, costs and benefits. Some of these may be related to individuals and individual characteristics but others are more general perceptions, cultural or even historical in nature, that often tend to bridge both sending and receiving societies. These contextual factors may facilitate or hinder decision-making, and they are always present. When they are conducive to self promotion and eventual insertion into the host society, they will also facilitate decisions regarding family regrouping because they limit perceived risk. When the opposite happens, perceived risk is always much more daunting and strategies often tend to be postponed or even foregone; bets are hedged. This is the playing field where individual decisions are made. If it is a level playing field, then the individual characteristics outlined above will explain the vast majority of the decisions made with respect to family regrouping. If the playing field, however, is not level, then important differences in behavior can emerge that go far beyond the specific situation of any given individual.

We will address this research question using information relating to Latin American immigrants arriving to Spain during the first decade of the new century. The Spanish case, with a rich history of migratory relations with Latin American countries, as well as a sudden explosion of intense migratory flows between 2000 and 2007, offers us a particularly suitable scenario to investigate the phenomenon of divided families and the likely relevance of their playing field. An earlier paper on this same topic (Requena y Sánchez-Domínguez 2011) found the existence in Spain of relevant proportions of immigrant fathers and mothers not living with their children. The factors in the country of destination driving family reunification are well known: the immigrant adaptation to the host society (measured, for instance, by the length of residence in the country) and his/her level of integration (measured by his/her legal condition) are very relevant. Both of them operate in the expected direction: the higher the adjustment and level of integration of the immigrant, the higher the probability of family reunification. Other elements such as the distance from the children or economic resources are also relevant in this process.

From an empirical standpoint, our research issue is whether or not there is a significant amount of variance in the living arrangements of families (divided or undivided) that is not explained by standard socio-demographic variables and by those related to the concrete situation in the country of origin. Fortunately, the origins of Latin American immigrants to Spain are sufficiently diverse so as to enable us to undertake this kind of analysis.

In empirical terms, we will study divided families versus non-divided families—that is, family separation versus family reunification and/or family migration—in order to discover the relevant elements that underlie each of these situations. By divided families we understand those family situations where the immigrants have some or all their children living in the society of origin. Undivided families are those who have finished the family reunification process, those who migrated together or those whose offspring were born in the Spain.

The analysis will be based on a selection of the National Immigrant Survey of Spain sample (hereafter, NIS) (Reher and Requena 2009). The NIS was conducted between November 2006 and February 2007. The total sample consists of 15,465 foreign-born respondents living in Spain at the time of the interview who were at least 16 years old and who had resided in Spain for at least a year or had the intention of doing so. Our sample is based on immigrants from several Latin American countries who in 2007 had children. Persons with Spanish citizenship from birth were excluded so as to eliminate any potential bias created by informants who may, in fact, be real Spaniards despite having been born abroad. The full analysis includes control variables such as year at arrival to Spain, socioeconomic information, family and social networks or timing to reunification.

The dependent variable is “Divided Families”. This variable has been grouped into five categories:

Divided families:

- 1) All children in origin
- 2) Some children in origin

Undivided families:

- 3) Family reunification (completed)

- 4) Some children reunified, others born in Spain
- 5) All children born in Spain

The first two categories represent those family situations where the immigrants have all or some of their children living in the society of origin. Category three includes those family situations where reunification has been completed. Category four refers to families where some of the offspring were born in Spain and others were born in origin and were subsequently reunified. The fifth category refers to those families in which all of the offspring were born in Spain. For summary statistics of this dependent variable by country of origin see Table 1 after references.

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Table 1  
Sample distribution by country of origin and family status in destination

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	Cuba	Dominicana	Argentina	Bolivia	Brasil	Colombia	Chile	Ecuador	Paraguay	Peru	Uruguay	Venezuela
<b>Divided families</b>	<b>38,7</b>	<b>56,5</b>	<b>18,3</b>	<b>59,0</b>	<b>32,4</b>	<b>42,3</b>	<b>38,5</b>	<b>42,3</b>	<b>65,7</b>	<b>41,6</b>	<b>20,9</b>	<b>14,9</b>
All children in origin	24,4	28,8	8,3	50,5	27,5	26,3	23,1	28,1	58,2	27,9	6,1	7,0
Some children in origin	14,3	27,6	10,0	8,6	4,9	16,0	15,4	14,2	7,5	13,7	14,8	7,9
<b>Undivided families</b>	<b>61,3</b>	<b>43,5</b>	<b>81,7</b>	<b>41,0</b>	<b>67,6</b>	<b>57,7</b>	<b>61,5</b>	<b>57,7</b>	<b>34,3</b>	<b>58,4</b>	<b>79,1</b>	<b>85,1</b>
Family reunification (completed)	29,4	14,1	37,8	25,7	29,4	25,6	34,1	24,1	14,9	21,0	37,4	37,7
Some children reunified, others born in Spain	2,5	5,3	10,0	7,6	8,8	9,7	4,4	12,9	9,0	9,9	12,2	10,5
All children born in Spain	29,4	24,1	33,9	7,6	29,4	22,4	23,1	20,7	10,4	27,5	29,6	36,8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
N	119	169	339	327	102	587	90	822	67	233	115	114

Source: National Immigrant Survey of Spain (2007)