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# Who Drives Diaspora Development? Replication of Mexico's 3x1 Program in Yucatán

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# Who Drives Diaspora Development? Replication of Mexico's 3×1 Program in Yucatán

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## **ABSTRACT**

Migration and remittances are increasingly central to development plans and the search for best practices has driven convergence of diaspora development policies. Mexico is often considered a model, particularly its *Tres Por Uno* or 3×1 Program that offers matching grants to encourage migrant organizations to sponsor development projects in their origin communities. We employ a policy mobilities framework to ask how this program has been positioned as a model and exported from its original contexts. With replication in other high emigration countries possible, we examine internal replication within Mexico to evaluate the model's possible external relevance. We focus on its re-grounding in Yucatán, a new sending state with low intensity and short history of migration by Mexican standards. Despite the non-traditional context, the state has rapidly embraced the migrant-centered 3×1 Program. We find that the program initially followed expectations in Yucatán, but within a few years devolved into a pattern of "simulation"/*aval* projects that are controlled by municipal officials and minimize migrant involvement. Without effective counter-presures from migrant organizations, corruption

and clientelism became common. We conclude that implementation in a very distinct context mainstreamed and normalized problems that had been present but marginal in the original contexts.

**KEYWORDS:** *transnationalism, development, policy mobilities, Mexico*

## **RESUMEN**

La migración y las remesas son temas cada vez más centrales en planes de desarrollo que, en búsqueda de modelos exitosos, propician la convergencia de varias políticas de desarrollo que tratan el tema de la diáspora. México suele ser considerado como un modelo al respecto debido a programas como el llamado *Tres Por Uno* o 3×1, el cual ofrece subsidios combinados a organizaciones de migrantes que adelantan proyectos de desarrollo en sus comunidades de origen. Empleando el marco analítico de políticas de movilidad, preguntamos cómo este programa mexicano se ha posicionado como modelo y ha sido exportado a otros contextos nacionales. Siendo posible su replicación en otros países de alta emigración, examinamos la replicación del 3×1 dentro de México evaluando la posible

relevancia externa del modelo. Nuestro argumento gira en torno a su rediseño en Yucatán, un nuevo estado emisor con baja intensidad y corta historia de migración según los estándares mexicanos que ha adoptado rápidamente el programa 3×1. Encontramos que allí el programa inicialmente cumplió con las expectativas pero al cabo de unos pocos años generó patrones de “simulación”/aval controlados por funcionarios municipales con mínima participación de los migrantes. Ante la ausencia de participación efectiva de organizaciones de migrantes, la corrupción y el clientelismo se volvieron comunes. Concluimos que su implementación en un entorno muy distinto al original amplificó y normalizó problemas que habían estado presentes pero marginales en los contextos iniciales del 3×1.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *transnacionalismo, desarrollo, movilidades de políticas públicas, México*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In recent decades, origin country governments have shown increased interest in migration as remittances become central to less developed nations' economies (Bakker, 2015). By the mid-1990s, remittances to developing countries surpassed official development aid, and by 2015 remittances were triple the value of aid (World Bank, 2015). Even in Mexico, a country with more than a century of notable and sustained migration history, remittances have garnered increased attention in recent years as volumes grow and data improves. For the first time in 2015,

remittances surpassed petroleum as Mexico's leading source of foreign exchange, drawing still greater attention to their economic centrality (Esteves, 2016). The value of remittances continues to grow although migration from Mexico has slowed, demonstrating the durability of this transfer pattern and quashing any doubts about its continued importance, at least in the short to medium term (Orozco, 2017).

Increasingly, origin countries see remittances as more than just an individual transfer of money from a migrant to his or her family, but rather as a development strategy for an entire nation. Governments attempt to leverage their diasporas as development resources by implementing policies to bolster transnational ties and encourage migrants' contributions not only to their families but also to infrastructure and other community projects (Portes & Fernandez-Kelly, 2015). Mexico has formalized efforts to maintain the flow of remittances through its innovative Tres Por Uno, or 3×1 Program for Migrants. The program is a form of public-private partnership between the Mexican government and U.S.-based hometown associations (HTAs), which are clubs of migrants from a common origin that typically engage in philanthropy, mutual support, and cultural or recreational activities. The 3×1 Program incentivizes HTA contributions for community projects, referred to as collective remittances, by offering matching funds from federal, state, and municipal governments, creating a three-to-one match that gives the program its name. Common projects include building infrastructure such as roads, water, sewer, and electricity in migrants'

hometowns, as well as educational, cultural, sports, and health projects.

The 3×1 Program is hailed as a policy model whose relevance is not limited to the contexts in which it emerged, but rather extends throughout Mexico and beyond. The remittance strategy is commonly cited in discussions of global diaspora or migration-linked development policy (e.g. Orozco, 2013; McKenzie & Yang, 2015), various foreign governments have sent study teams to see the program in action, and its visibility has been boosted by involvement from international organizations, including the World Bank, USAID, and the Inter-American Development Bank (Iskander, 2010).

The first expansion of the model took it from its informal origins among migrants from the traditional migrant origin regions in central Mexico, to formalization as the 3×1 Program, to expansion throughout the country. Replication in other countries with sizable numbers of migrants is possible, given the program's visibility and positioning as a diaspora development best practice, yet few studies have examined how the program functions outside its original contexts. In this paper we analyze the positioning of the 3×1 Program as a policy model by examining empirical evidence from its most significant replication to date—the internal replication created by institutionalizing it as a federal program throughout Mexico.

We examine the expansion of the model in Yucatán, one of the three states of the Yucatán Peninsula in southeastern Mexico. Yucatán has only recently been incorporated into the country's migratory tradition as one of the “new sending areas” of Mexican migrants

to the United States. For a new emigration area, Yucatán has been remarkably active in the migrant-driven 3×1 Program. Many new Yucatecan hometown associations have been formed and more than a hundred rural villages have benefitted from 3×1 projects. Yucatán's total expenditures within the 3×1 Program are eleventh highest of Mexico's thirty-two states.

At first look, this rapid uptake of the migrant-led development program appears to be a success story. Upon closer examination, however, the growth—often in municipalities with very low migration intensity—raises questions about mutations of the model and outright corruption. We are left asking how well suited the 3×1 Program is to replication and implementation in Yucatán. This paper examines 3×1 projects in Yucatán to understand how place and context influence the application of the policy model. This kind of comparative analysis of implementation across multiple contexts yields deeper insights about the policy itself, which is of particular value in this case given its status as an international model, as well as allowing reflection on the process of policy mobilization.

We use a policy mobilities framework to explore the regrounding of the 3×1 Program in Yucatán, after first reviewing the program's evolution in its original contexts in central Mexico. This framework structures our analysis of whether and how replications duplicate the documented benefits of pioneering examples of the model, and when and why replications in new contexts yield substantial deviations or novel results.

Recent geographical research on policy

mobilities centers on the concepts of policy assemblages, mobilities, and mutations as a way to explore the movement of policies across space and place (e.g. Peck & Theodore, 2010; McCann & Ward, 2011, 2012; Prince, 2012; Baker & Temenos, 2015). The policy mobilities framework examines how policies are assembled in specific places and draw on local resources and contexts, how they are mobilized and packaged, and how they are mutated in the process of movement and through application in new places. In a globalized context of substantial policy convergence, both in the urban realm that has dominated policy mobilities research and in migration and diaspora policy—an inherently international field—it is imperative to understand how context shapes policy development and its subsequent replication in new places.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT NEXUS

Scholars have long debated whether migration is more likely to spur development in origin areas and countries, or perpetuate underdevelopment. Optimistic views have dominated in some eras and pessimistic views in others (Faist, 2008; de Haas, 2012; Gamlen, 2014a). Optimism has been resurgent since the late 1990s, amid growing recognition and better accounting of the huge sums of money remitted by international migrants. Scholars and officials increasingly see migrants as transnational actors who can contribute and participate, even from a distance (Levitt, 1998; Vertovec,

2009). This has been accompanied by a discursive shift away from narratives of migrants as deserters and toward discourses of migrant heroes—loyal and generous contributors to the homeland (Durand, 2004). Origin country governments and international organizations have rushed to embrace migrant and diaspora populations and enact policies to facilitate and encourage remittances and investments, often converging on common ideas and policies (Delano, 2014; Bakker, 2015; Price, 2017). A technocratic air pervades the current optimism about migration as a win-win process, with officials emphasizing policy solutions and arguing that “migration benefits everyone *as long as the policies are right*” (Gamlen, 2014b, p. 198, emphasis added). This perspective acknowledges that migration has not always benefitted origin areas, but assumes that best practices exist or can be developed to produce desired outcomes. We argue that to the extent migration policy ignores context—both contexts from which policies emerge and contexts in which they are to be regrounded—these assumptions are problematic. A policy mobilities lens can help correct this problem.

Mexico has been at the center of diaspora development and migration policy trends, particularly its famed 3×1 Program (Orozco, 2013; McKenzie & Yang, 2015). Mexico’s posture toward emigrants and diaspora has shifted seismically since the 1980s, and especially since the early 2000s, with several diaspora outreach programs unveiled and expatriates’ rights expanded (Delano, 2011). The changes have garnered attention from governments in Latin America and beyond that look to Mexico as a model for diaspora

policies (Delano, 2014). It is in this context of ascendant optimism and technocratic policy convergence that we examine Mexico's 3×1 Program, analyzing its mobilization and replication within Mexico and discussing its implications more broadly. This concrete case study helps us contextualize and make sense of the spread of diaspora development policies.

### **MIGRATION FROM MEXICO AND YUCATÁN**

Emigration from Mexico has traditionally been dominated by individuals leaving rural communities in the historic heartland of west-central Mexico, particularly the states of Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacan, and Zacatecas and neighboring areas, and going to principal destinations that include California, Texas, and Chicago (Massey et al., 2003). Those patterns have diversified significantly in recent decades to include many new origins and destinations (Zuñiga & Hernandez-Leon, 2005; Riosmena & Massey, 2012), including more migrants from urban areas (Hernandez-Leon, 2008) and more indigenous migrants (Klooster, 2013). The southeastern region of Mexico is among the most recent to make a substantial contribution to migration flows. This paper focuses on the southeastern state of Yucatán, where emigration has been limited and recent by Mexican standards, but nonetheless has made a noticeable impact and has increased rapidly since the 1990s (Cornelius et al., 2007). As a new region of international migration, the scholarly attention to migration from Yucatán is limited but growing (e.g. Adler, 2004; Burke, 2004; Cornelius et al., 2007; Piacenti, 2009, 2012; Solís Lizama

& Fortuny, 2010; Iglesias, 2011).

Migration is part of broader patterns of change in Yucatán that have been driven by the long-term decline of the traditional agricultural economy in the state's rural areas (Carte et al., 2010; Iglesias, 2011). One result has been large-scale rural-to-urban migration to the capital city of Mérida and to the emerging tourist hub of Cancún in neighboring Quintana Roo (Cornelius et al., 2007). Eventually a secondary trend emerged of international migration from Yucatán to the United States. Cornelius et al. (2007) note that Cancún often serves as a sort of "migration school" where rural and indigenous people gain experiences and skills that make the option of migration to the USA more visible and viable. The short history of migration from Yucatán means fewer people are able to draw on family or other networks to obtain legal status in the USA; a state official told us that an estimated 90 percent of Yucatecans currently in the USA are undocumented. He estimated that about 70 percent live in California, principally the San Francisco and Los Angeles areas, with smaller clusters in Portland, Dallas, and Denver (personal communication, January 25, 2016). Official data show that emigration from Yucatán predominantly comes from a southern cluster around Oxkutzcab and a northern cluster around Cenotillo; meanwhile, 87 percent of the state's municipalities are rated as having very low international migration intensity, as is the state as a whole (Zamora Ramos & Gonzalez, 2014).<sup>1</sup>

### **THE 3×1 PROGRAM**

The 3×1 Program traces its roots to informal, localized community projects that

migrants from Mexico's historic migration region have been undertaking since at least the 1970s. Piecemeal government support dates from the 1980s, coalescing in 1992 with formalization of the precursor 2x1 matching program in Zacatecas, and expansion nationwide in 2002 with the institutionalization of the federal 3x1 Program (Fernandez et al., 2006; Garcia Zamora, 2007; Iskander, 2010). Annual investments through the 3x1 Program, including collective remittance contributions by HTAs and the triple government match, grew from an initial total of Mex\$400 million in 2002 to Mex\$1.5 billion in 2014, the latest year for which full records were available.<sup>2</sup>

Research on the program has documented improvements in infrastructure and provision of public goods in beneficiary communities (Orozco & Lapointe, 2004; Duquette-Rury, 2014), and diversification of public investment away from municipal seats and toward rural areas (Burgess, 2005; Fox & Bada, 2008). Authors have also emphasized that migrants' financial stake can enable them to check the power of traditional elites and pressure government actors for transparency and efficient use of program resources (Bakker, 2007; Garcia Zamora, 2007)—a point we will discuss in more detail later. Evaluations have not been entirely positive, however, as studies also have revealed patterns of partisan manipulation to direct matching funds toward party strongholds or to align project timing with election cycles (Meseguer & Aparicio, 2012; Waddell, 2015; Simpson et al., 2015).

The literature on the 3x1 Program, briefly summarized in the previous paragraph, includes overviews and quantitative

analyses at the national scale, but qualitative and case study research has been limited to the experiences of pioneering migrant organizations and examples from states in the historic migration heartland (e.g. Fernandez et al., 2006; Garcia Zamora, 2007; Iskander, 2010; Bada, 2014).<sup>3</sup> The limited engagement with nontraditional contexts obscures the diversifying range of experiences within the 3x1 Program. The program has been widely adopted in the fifteen years since it was institutionalized nationwide, with more than half (54 percent) of all municipalities in Mexico completing at least one project and all but two states participating. The portion of the program budget absorbed by the four leading states (Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán, and Zacatecas) decreased from 70 percent over the first five years to 40 percent by 2014.<sup>4</sup> A survey of Mexican HTAs found that three-quarters had been founded since 2002, the year the 3x1 Program was established, and that many new clubs form at the invitation of municipal presidents specifically to participate in the program (Duquette-Rury & Bada, 2013; also see Goldring, 2004). Research on the 3x1 Program needs to be expanded beyond the pioneering cases to capture more experiences. This paper contributes to the task by focusing on the new emigration region of Yucatán.

Despite being latecomers to international migration, Yucatecan communities have engaged extensively with the 3x1 Program. The first projects in the state were completed in 2004, the program's third year, with just five of the state's one hundred six municipalities participating. By 2014, eighty-seven municipalities (82 percent) had participated in 3x1,



completing an average of five projects each over ten years. Yucatán's total 3×1 Program expenditures of Mex\$390 million since the federal program began rank eleventh highest out of thirty-two states—a remarkable statistic for a state that consistently ranks among the lowest in migration intensity. Yucatán's higher migration municipalities are the most active in the program, but the majority of the participating municipalities are classified as low or very low migration intensity. This mix of nontraditional characteristics and strong program participation bolsters our position that research on 3×1 must extend beyond the pioneering examples from the high-migration heartland region. Our goal in this paper is to analyze how this federal program to support and encourage diaspora contributions has been adapted in the distinct context of Yucatán. Examining replications of 3×1 in new contexts allows us to examine the policy's positioning as a model, analyze the importance of context for replications, and discuss implications for the general ideas of diaspora development.

#### **POLICY MOBILITIES APPROACH**

Our analysis of the replication of the 3×1 Program outside of its original contexts is grounded in the emerging policy mobilities theoretical framework. This framework takes a critical approach to policy, focusing on questions of power to understand how policies emerge and spread, the effects they have, and the ways people and groups interact with policy (Shore et al., 2011; McCann & Ward, 2012). A key starting point is the problematization of the idea of best practices. Success and failure are not objectively determined,

but instead are shaped by the ideological and methodological orientations of networks of experts with the power to designate success and failure (Prince, 2012; McCann & Ward, 2015). Peck & Theodore (2015) emphasize the interplay of evaluation and marketing in the technocratic positioning of policies as best practices with salience beyond their place of origin. The packaging and marketing of policies renders them as myths—decontextualized and functionally polyvalent, able to interface with and legitimize varied practices and existing ideas, rather than specify or dictate a uniform program (Lieto, 2015). Reflecting on the development industry, Mosse (2005, p.14) comes to a similar conclusion, that “policy primarily functions. . . to legitimize rather than to orientate practice.”

A second focus of policy mobilities research is the importance of place and context, both for assessing the extent to which policies reflect the contexts from which they emerge and for analyzing the regrounding of mobilized policies in diverse contexts. Policies are assembled in places, absorbing local influences together with more diffuse elements, but mobilization is often partial, with only some parts of the model moving (McCann & Ward, 2015). Again, power is central both in the mobilization of policy and in its uneven reproduction in new contexts. These insights become particularly important as policymaking is increasingly globalized and decisions reflect influences and expertise from diverse contexts.

We apply the policy mobilities approach first by examining the importance of context in the emergence of the 3×1 Program and the creation of a legitimizing policy myth,

and then by examining how the model is regrounded in distinctive new contexts. We recognize that because policy is packaged and mobilized through abstractions and incomplete histories and because it is regrounded and renegotiated in each place, we must consider the agency of a multiplicity of actors and the substantial scope for variation and repurposing beyond what might be envisioned by the policy entrepreneurs and institutions that do much of the mobilizing. This is particularly true in the case of the 3×1 Program, which mandates the participation of migrant organizations and all three levels of Mexican government. We study “up, down, and sideways” (Stryker & Gonzalez, 2014) to understand the complex power dynamics at play.

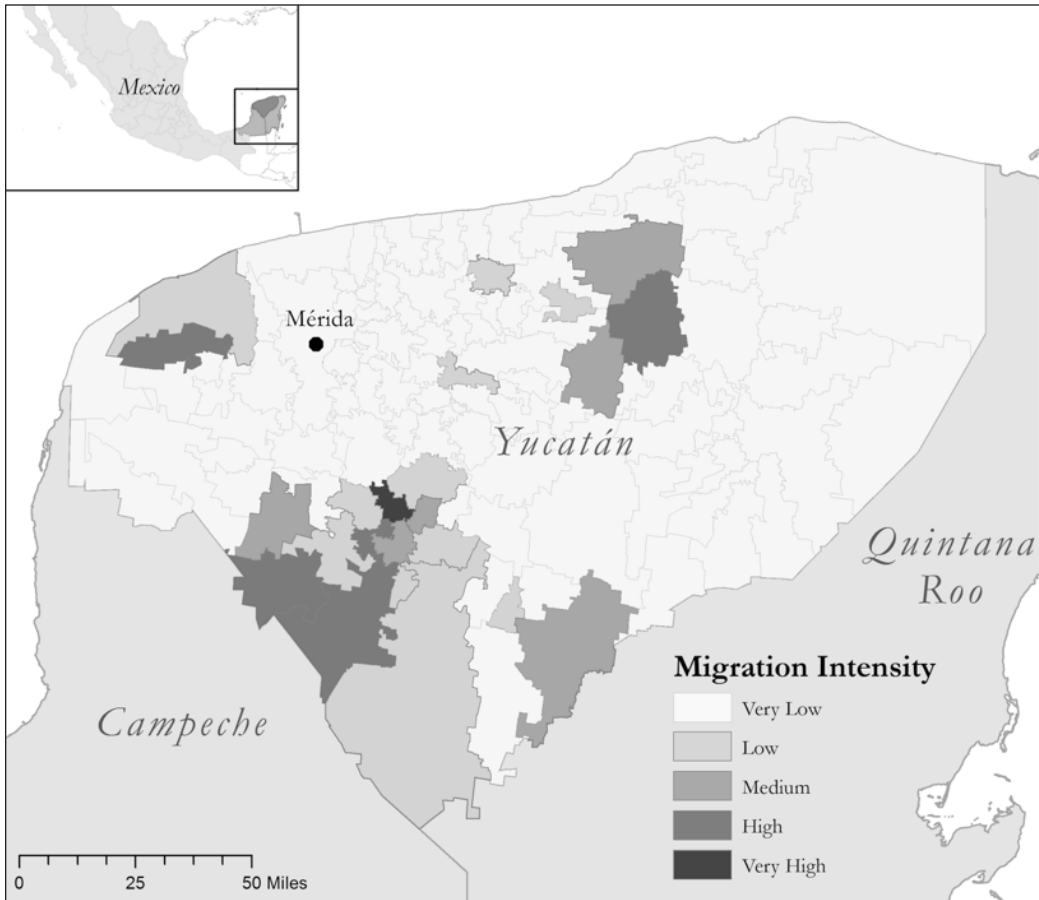
This study also contributes a new perspective within policy mobilities research. The majority of work using this approach focuses on interurban or translocal mobilities linking cities around the world. The key players in these accounts are urban officials and the traveling policy experts, consultants, and organizations with whom they interact (Temenos & McCann, 2013). The focus is urban and global, with national governments rarely factoring into these analyses (Lovell, 2017). Our case study includes migrant and municipal policy entrepreneurs who more or less fit the typical city-centric mold, but the example also shows that the Mexican federal government has played a key mobilizing role. The federal government’s early engagement helped solidify the fledgling program in the original contexts and shaped its institutionalization, which made the policy mobile and introduced it in numerous new contexts

around Mexico. Other studies of policy mobilities in Latin America similarly note the importance of national governments (Delano, 2014; Jajamovich, 2016).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research relies on interviews and field observations in the state of Yucatán, Mexico, as well as analysis of national-scale administrative data from the 3×1 Program. The first author conducted four weeks of field research in Yucatán in early 2016, as well as in-person and telephone interviews with USA-based Yucatecan migrants.<sup>5</sup> The research presented here is part of his larger research project examining collective remittances and hometown associations throughout Mexico, encompassing interviews and fieldwork in eight Mexican states and with associated migrant organizations across the USA, as well as interviews with World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank officials who have worked on the topic. The second author conducted survey research in Yucatán over two months in 2008–2009 and conducted interviews and field observations in 2012 and 2015. Each author conducted semi-structured interviews with federal, state, and municipal officials as well as leaders of migrant hometown associations from Yucatán. Our analyses of 3×1 Program trends in Yucatán and beyond are based on administrative data for all projects completed nationwide from 2002 to 2014, obtained from Mexico’s National Transparency Institute (INAI) at [www.infomex.org.mx](http://www.infomex.org.mx).

The research specifically looked at seven Yucatán communities with completed 3×1



**Figure 1.** Migration Intensity Index for Municipalities in Yucatán, 2010. Source: Map by author, data from CONAPO (Consejo Nacional de Población).

projects. The study includes municipalities ranging from very low to high international migration intensity, as calculated by Mexico's population bureau, all of which have medium or high levels of marginalization (Zamora Ramos & Gonzalez, 2014).<sup>6</sup> The municipalities range in population from 1,000 to 30,000.

### FRAMING THE 3×1 PROGRAM

From its earliest iterations, the 3×1 Program and its informal precursors have been celebrated as groundbreaking examples of

migrant initiative and diaspora-led development. The air of perceived success was solidified in part by a positive evaluation commissioned by USAID (Orozco, 2003) and by support from the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank (Iskander, 2010). It also helped that the model could be framed as a version of public-private partnership, in line with dominant neoliberal thinking at these international institutions and within Mexico's federal bureaucracy.

The standard discourse of the program emphasizes that it is a *grassroots*

phenomenon; that migrants began organizing and completing projects on their own and the government only got involved later. This stylized origin story is epitomized by frequent reference to the “0×1” era, when migrants’ collective remittances were not matched or supported by government involvement. At that time, migrant organizations were completing public projects to address unmet needs without any help from the government. The *cero por uno* era is indeed foundational for the 3×1 Program, and it is true that government involvement came as a response to the initial stimulus provided by migrant groups. Yet the constant invocation of this grassroots origin story by both migrants and government officials emphasizes only some elements of the program’s origins, and has the potential to distract from the important ways it has since evolved.

In contrast to the grassroots discourse, academic analyses have produced more nuanced interpretations that complicate the narrative. Some of the most consequential analyses to date of Mexican HTAs converge on the conclusion that interactions with various levels of government have long played a fundamental role in strengthening migrant organizations and influencing the evolution of the collective remittance phenomenon (Goldring, 2002; Iskander, 2010; Bada, 2014). These authors convincingly argue that the evolution, growth, and solidification of the extensive network of Mexican HTAs, and the evolution of the associated 3×1 matching program, would not have happened without early engagement between migrant groups and government actors that provided support and recognition to the fledgling groups.

The conclusions these authors draw stand in sharp contrast to the myth-making that centers *grassroots* as the defining characteristic of the 3×1 model. Rather than grassroots migrants going it alone, Iskander (2010) documents a history of evolving and iterative cooperation, coordination, and occasional conflict between migrant organizations and government actors in the pioneering Zacatecan example. She uses the term “interpretive engagement” to describe the dense web of interactions and relationships that she identifies as the most important factor in the evolution of a strong and functional program in Zacatecas—the basis for the creation of a federal program. She points to the interpretive engagement itself as the true best practice to be emulated. Bada (2014) studied Michoacano HTAs and emphasizes similar relational processes as a key element. In both cases, translocally successful approaches were established not because grassroots migrant organizations went it alone, but because they participated in a productive learning process together with government and community actors. The types of engagement identified as fundamental to early successes were not necessarily replicated, however, as the institutionalization of the 3×1 Program packaged and exported a mechanical formula or policy model to be implemented with or without substantial engagement and cooperation (Iskander, 2015). We will return to this point in our discussion of the Yucatecan case.

Our purpose in critically analyzing the discourse of grassroots origins is not to minimize or discount the truly impressive efforts of migrants and migrant organizations, but rather to assess how the policy was assembled

and mobilized, identify gaps in the origin myth, and consider the importance of the original context. The long history of emigration from the historic heartland region, its extensive networks of migrants abroad, and a particular focus on local ties all contributed to a strong pattern of hometown association formation (Portes et al., 2007). “The migrant” became a figure associated with development and progress; migrants and migrant organizations were accorded status and legitimacy as social and political actors (Smith & Bakker, 2008; Iskander, 2010). Migrants and migrant organizations have gained a higher profile in Zacatecas than perhaps any other state, befitting the area’s migration history. In Zacatecas, half of all municipalities are classified as very high or high migration intensity (Zamora Ramos & Gonzalez, 2014). In Guanajuato the figure is 39 percent and in Michoacan it’s 35 percent (in Yucatán just 2 percent are high or very high migration intensity). The emergence of the 3×1 Program was heavily influenced by this historic heartland context and was intertwined with the rise to prominence of migrants and migrant organizations.

The pioneering examples from the historic heartland region are important not only as the contexts in which the 3×1 Program emerged, but also as the cases that serve as points of reference and legitimization for the model. Migrants from a few pioneering states engage in lighthearted debates about who should get credit for instigating the first precursor projects that led to the creation of 3×1, but in most accounts Zacatecan migrant groups have become the face of the program—the pioneering “brand” of collective remittances (see the discussion of

policy brands in Temenos & McCann, 2013). Even within Mexico, Zacatecas stands out as a high migration area and has become inextricably linked to the 3×1 Program and ideas of migrant-led development. The pioneering Zacatecan case is fundamental to the branding and mythologizing of the program, both as a success and as a grassroots, migrant-led model. In interviews, federal officials and officials in other states nearly always referenced the Zacatecan case in positioning and justifying the program’s replication in new contexts. Zacatecas takes on the status of a brand, standing in for the pioneering experiences across the historic migration region that were central in the model’s emergence.

As noted earlier, the empirical focus of this paper will be on the replication of the 3×1 Program in the nontraditional origin state of Yucatán. The state presents a starkly different context from the historic migration region, yet institutionalization of the program at the national level allowed the model to be replicated and regrounded there. We document the results of the 3×1 Program in Yucatán and compare them to the pioneering examples, using a policy mobilities framework.

## **REGROUNDING THE 3 × 1 PROGRAM IN YUCATÁN**

### **HURRICANE ISIDORE AND THE BEGINNINGS OF 3×1 IN YUCATÁN**

The first hometown associations representing Yucatán organized in response to Hurricane Isidore, which struck the peninsula in 2002, causing extensive damage. Interviewed by phone in September 2016, the leader of the

first Yucatecan HTA to join the 3×1 Program noted that after the hurricane, many people wanted to do something to help. There had been a growing number of people from the same hometown living in the Los Angeles area, but they were not in regular contact. Responding to the hurricane was the first time they were motivated to organize. They coalesced as a group and raised funds through raffles and small events, and donated it directly to needy, hurricane-affected families in their Yucatecan hometown.

The process of organizing relief donations brought the group into contact with other Yucatecan migrants and laid the foundation for further organizing. They also began to establish links with existing Mexican migrant groups in the Los Angeles area, including Zacatecan and Michoacano hometown associations, which introduced them to the 3×1 Program that had just been formalized and expanded nationwide that year. Upon learning of the matching grant program, the young Yucatecan groups reoriented their efforts to work within the program. The club leader recounted:

There had not been any [3×1] projects yet in Yucatán. . . . I explained [to the group] that the program could be a big benefit for Yucatecan communities. If we put in a dollar, the others [three levels of government] put in the same. To get the program going, I talked to my group and we did the first project, rehabilitating a kindergarten (personal communication, September 21, 2016).

A handful of hometown associations

representing Yucatecan communities organized, researched the 3×1 Program, established contact with officials back home, and began submitting projects. The first projects were approved during the 2004 funding cycle, with Mex\$1.1 million in migrant contributions and Mex\$4.4 million total expenditure in Yucatán for the kindergarten, a senior center, residential water service, church renovations, and two ambulances. The program caught on quickly in Yucatán, expanding to eighteen projects with Mex\$2.2 million in migrant contributions in 2005, and twenty-three projects with Mex\$4.5 million in migrant contributions in 2006.<sup>7</sup> Migrant leaders and government officials uniformly reported in interviews that 3×1 projects in Yucatán during these early years were initiated and funded by the nascent migrant organizations, with government officials playing a supporting role.

The direction of early Yucatecan hometown associations was shaped by the nontraditional origin context of Yucatán, as migrants were organizing for the first time and working to forge new connections with one another and with their origin community governments. Yucatán's low migration intensity meant they had smaller communities of hometown emigres from which to draw. The shorter history and lower intensity of migration also meant that migrants did not have the same status and visibility in the origin communities as do their counterparts from the historic migration region. These differences are important as we analyze the replication of the 3×1 program in this new context.

However, in addition to the nontraditional

origin context, the Yucatecan HTAs were also influenced by the traditional destination of Los Angeles and the mentoring of established HTAs. A Yucatecan migrant leader we interviewed said the Zacatecan organizations in California were like big brothers who passed along their knowledge to the fledgling groups. Migrant leaders and officials from Zacatecas put on a 3×1 Program workshop for new HTAs from other states and took them on a tour of projects in Zacatecas. Zacatecan HTA leaders also visited Yucatán to help jump-start the program there. These influences fit the classic policy mobilities model, as the program's innovators promoted the model to prospective emulators and led study tours to show successful examples.

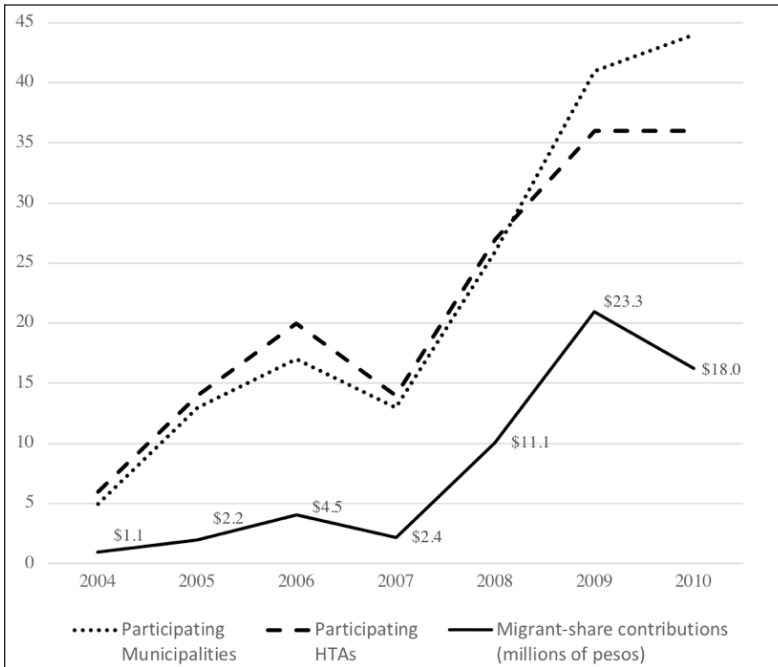
The early experiences in Yucatán mirror the pioneering model and the grassroots discourse of the program to a remarkable degree, despite notable differences in context. Summarizing, migrants living in the U.S. began organizing independently, then found out about the 3×1 Program and rechanneled their activity through it. Government actors were involved from an early stage, but their initial roles can reasonably be characterized as reactive and supportive rather than driving the initiative. The policy model that had been packaged and mobilized was regrounded in Yucatán with little if any mutation. Early examples followed both the letter of the policy and the spirit of the model.

#### **RECESSION, MUTATION, AND “SIMULATION” PROJECTS**

The earliest applications of the 3×1 Program

in Yucatán closely approximated the pioneering examples, but within a few years the story diverged from this auspicious start. The grassroots variety of 3×1 in Yucatán was supplanted by so-called simulation projects, representing a significant mutation of the model—as might be expected, given the substantial differences in context relative to the policy's origins. Simulation projects, most commonly referred to as *aval* projects in Spanish,<sup>8</sup> are initiated and funded by municipal governments, with migrant groups providing only their signature on the project paperwork. The project is a simulation in the sense that HTA money and engagement exist only on paper, while in reality the municipal government manages everything and covers the migrant share of the cost. Given the three-for-one matching structure, even contributing its own share plus the intended migrant organization share in a simulation project, a municipal government can double its money by capturing the state and federal matching funds.

The economic recession of 2008 was an important catalyst for the shift from slow growth driven by migrant initiative to a pattern of simulation projects with minimal migrant involvement. Migrants' incomes and financial security in the USA were battered by the recession; household remittances, which often remain steady during recessions, dropped in Yucatán by 20 percent from 2008 to 2009.<sup>9</sup> Yucatecan HTAs were no longer able to fund projects in the same ways or to the same extent that they had before the recession. Paradoxically, the decreased availability of migrant contributions opened the floodgates as municipalities shifted to



**Figure 2.** Trends in 3x1 Program Activity in Yucatán State, 2004 to 2010. Data source: Instituto Nacional de Transparencia, Acceso a la Información y Protección de Datos Personales (INAI).

simulation projects. The modest fundraising capacity of the handful of new Yucatecan HTAs had been the limiting factor for program growth, but with simulation projects that was no longer the case. Municipal governments could submit as many projects as they could fund, covering their own designated contribution and the intended migrant part, as long as a migrant organization would sign off on the paperwork. Mayors and even entrepreneurial migrant “leaders” began recruiting migrants to register new HTAs specifically to enable simulation projects, in some cases creating ghost clubs that exist only on paper (Burgess, 2016).<sup>10</sup>

Simulation projects quickly became the default approach in Yucatán. Speaking frankly, migrant leaders and government officials alike conceded that nearly all Yucatecan 3x1 projects in recent years have been simulations (Gomez Hernandez, 2014 also

noted this trend). One interviewee in California quipped that they would be surprised if Yucatecan migrant groups put in even 1 percent of the 3x1 Program funds attributed to them (personal communication, April 30, 2016).

Three trends in the program’s administrative data would be counter-intuitive during a recession but make sense as evidence of a shift to simulation projects, helping corroborate interviewees’ claims. First, as seen in Figure 2, supposed migrant contributions to the 3x1 Program in Yucatán ballooned from Mex\$4.5 million in 2006 to a peak of Mex\$23 million in 2009, despite the recession—recall that household remittances *decreased* during this time. Second, the number of participating municipalities and HTAs increased rapidly during the depths of the recession. In addition, for the first time in 2009, individual clubs began sponsoring projects in multiple



municipalities and working with municipalities other than their own—a notable anomaly in a program premised on migrants working to benefit their communities of origin. The shift to simulation projects allowed the 3×1 Program to scale up in Yucatán—82 percent of municipalities have benefited from at least one project—despite the economic recession and despite the context of relatively limited and recent emigration.

Simulation projects are not unique to Yucatán, but the prevalence of the pattern is noteworthy. Simulations have been identified in numerous contexts, including in pioneering areas and dating back to the early years of the official program (e.g. Valenzuela, 2006; Villela, 2014; Burgess, 2016). The key distinction is that in most contexts simulation projects account for a fraction of program activity and are often vigorously challenged by established migrant organizations. Our conclusion is that Yucatán's nearly complete reliance on simulation projects is not a difference of kind but rather of degree. The program mutated over time in Yucatán to mainstream and normalize a practice that existed in the original contexts but was marginal and contested.

We argue that the 2008 recession was a decisive moment and the response to it crystallized the simulation mutation. The recession was the first major obstacle in Yucatán's replication of the 3×1 Program. In the pioneering cases, Iskander (2010) and others highlighted how migrants and officials worked through problems and breakdowns along the way—including debates about what constitutes a legitimate migrant organization, about how much the state should

influence project selection, and about how to deal with failed projects—through *interpretive engagement* and ongoing cooperation and collaboration. In contrast, in Yucatán, the first major roadblock derailed engagement rather than deepening it. Shifting to simulation projects might have been intended as a stopgap measure to keep the program afloat as HTA donations dried up during the recession, but in the long run the change seems to have demonstrated to key government actors in Yucatán that the program could run without HTA contributions or substantial migrant involvement. Instead of migrants and officials working through the setback iteratively and collaboratively, the existence of a fully formed policy with a dedicated funding stream opened the door for officials to manage the program as they would any other and step away from the difficulty and limitations of partnering with migrant organizations. The migrant groups, meanwhile, did not have the organizational strength nor the political clout to challenge this shift—even the oldest of Yucatecan HTAs had existed just five years when the recession began. Thus, the practices of interpretive engagement failed to materialize and government officials were centered while migrants were relegated to the margins. Despite initially appearing to be a close replica of the pioneering model, the 3×1 Program in Yucatán was diverted at this key juncture and went to scale as a simulation model. We argue that this mutation toward simulation projects opened the door for customary practices of clientelism and corruption to gain a foothold in the 3×1 Program, outlined in the following section, contrary to

expectations of increased transparency and pressure for good governance.

Why did the policy mutate so significantly in Yucatán, despite the early parallels in organizing and migrant initiative? Context is a central factor. The policy model emerged in the distinctive context of the migration heartland, with its sustained history of intensive migration and extensive migrant organizing, and the outcomes the policy boosters have encouraged everyone to expect are derived from that unique example. The contextual factors in Yucatán are very different. The state has emerged as a new emigration area, but the intensity of migration remains very low relative to other parts of Mexico. The short history also means migration networks are less established, which contributes to the high incidence of undocumented status among Yucatecan migrants, in turn fostering a culture of secrecy around migration. These factors help account for the much lower profile and limited power of migrants and migrant organizations in Yucatán. In contrast to Zacatecas and the pioneering contexts where HTAs have become powerful actors who work to advance their own agendas, in Yucatán's less-than-extreme migration context, the lower visibility and power of migrant groups left them unable to resist coopting of the model.<sup>11</sup>

#### **GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY TO ELITE CORRUPTION**

The Yucatán case presents a cautionary tale that good governance effects often associated with the 3×1 Program and transnational migrant organizing cannot be taken for granted. Previous research has been

optimistic about the transformative power of migrant organizing, engaged transnational citizens, and collective remittances (e.g. Burgess, 2005; Moctezuma, 2011). Hometown associations are seen as venues for political and civil action that cultivate transnational solidarity by engaging community members as well as local, state, and national governments to address community needs and, ideally, herald a new period of political transparency and responsiveness (Orozco & Lapointe, 2004; Garcia Zamora, 2007; Smyth, 2017). The 3×1 Program is assumed to nurture and support these trends, despite being a government program, because it is portrayed as independent and grassroots.

Discussions linking migrant-led development to good governance and transparency agendas begin from an assumption, either explicit or implicit, that the baseline is a state of bad governance. In Mexico broadly, there is a long and pernicious history of clientelism (Fox, 1994; Seffer, 2015) and corruption (Morris, 1999; Warf & Stewart, 2016). The country's much discussed democratic transition has not eradicated these patterns; as some types of corruption and clientelism diminish, new forms have emerged (Seffer, 2015). Even within Mexico, the state of Yucatán stands out for its pervasive and entrenched systems of political and economic control that have remained largely unchecked since the colonial and hacienda eras (Goodman, 1974). Goodman (1974, p.150) remarked on the ubiquitous corruption, noting that "everyone in the state, from the highest government officials, to the richest merchants, to the lowest peasants, is fully aware of this."

Although migrant organizations have been discussed as a countervailing force with the potential to upend historic patterns of corruption and elite power, we have not always found that to be the case in Yucatán. The examples in the following paragraphs highlight problems that emerged from the regrouping of the 3×1 Program in this particular context, and that also reflect on the program's structure. In sharp contrast to the association between diaspora development and good governance, these examples illustrate how the 3×1 Program can become a medium for new corruption to flourish or old corruption to evolve.

As discussed earlier, the transition to simulation projects that cut out the participation and leadership of migrants underscores the (de)evolution of the 3×1 Program policy. Within the Yucatecan case, the migrant as the true motor and origin of the hometown association has become a myth. For example, discussing a Portland, Oregon, organization that is considered one of the most successful Yucatecan HTAs, a Yucatán state official admitted that it was the municipal president who initiated the formation of the HTA. The migrants who comprise the organization had to be convinced by state and local officials to go along with the arrangement. The official related:

We asked them to see it as an opportunity to help improve their community. We also told them that if we did not do it [form an HTA and participate in 3×1] in their community, we would do it in some other municipality anyway because it was a resource the federal

government had given and we had to make use of it. That is how we got this group involved (personal communication, December 11, 2012).

The state official's comment highlights an unintended consequence of institutionalizing the 3×1 Program: Officials began to see it as money that would be left on the table if they did not find a way to claim it. This perspective reinforced the growth of simulation projects, and, as noted in the quote, was often convincing to migrants. Even if they could not follow the intended model of the program by initiating and funding their own projects, migrants could help out their hometowns by going along with municipal governments' schemes to qualify for the funds.

Beyond simulation projects and ghost organizations, signs of corruption and clientelism are clear in the 3×1 Program in Yucatán. Migrant leaders allege that government officials now routinely collude with contractors to receive kickbacks. One complained, "I love this program but it makes me sick and gives me a headache because I have to deal with these crooks," later adding, "At this point they could rename the program instead of 'Program 3×1 for Migrants' to 'Program 3×1 for Contractors and Government Employees'" (personal communication, April 25, 2016). Project budgets are inflated and materials and workmanship are shortchanged to maximize profits and graft, often at the expense of project quality. Unfortunately, in Yucatán the allegations of corruption extend beyond the usual suspects. One migrant leader accused other migrants of "learning" from the way

government officials take advantage of the program and beginning to demand payments from mayors in exchange for signing off for simulation projects—effectively using the HTAs they control to sell access to the program.

The story of a hometown association project in one of our research communities illustrates the role political and economic corruption plays. The impetus for the creation of this hometown association came from a member of the community's economic elite in Mexico. He personally flew to the USA to meet with emigrants from his town and educated them on the matching funds available via the 3×1 Program. After officially establishing an HTA and deciding together with the migrants that a much-needed health clinic would be the first project, he used his political influence to make sure his wife was hired as the designing architect and her family's construction business got the contract to supply materials and manage construction. Community members routinely commented on the profit these local elites made by ensuring the projects were channeled through their own family businesses and their self-interest in facilitating the formation of a hometown association.

It is worthwhile to question whether the transnational economic and political activities by migrants actually promote change. Are migrants involved in altering the status quo of the political order, finding new forms of visibility and participation as transmigrants that they had not achieved prior to migration? While HTAs can be seen as agents of change that usurp the power of elites and long ingrained political machines,

the partnership of the state and federal governments with migrants could also be seen as perpetuating the status quo (Itzigsohn, 2000). Although many examples exist of hometown associations catalyzing positive changes in their communities of origin, our experiences in Yucatán demonstrate that is not always the case. We found that the presence of simulation projects and the formation of ghost HTAs specifically to facilitate simulations often went hand in hand with corruption and clientelism in the execution of projects. In these examples, a program designed to empower diasporas and support their engagement was captured by local officials and existing elites to pursue their own interests, rather than challenging the status quo or promoting good governance.

## CONCLUSION

The pioneering examples of the 3×1 Program from Zacatecas and the historic heartland region are used to brand the policy model and legitimize its expansion. However, as we have shown, replication of the program in new contexts will not always recreate those perceived successes. The model assumes strong and respected migrant organizations that are treated as full partners alongside government actors—an assumption based on the context in which the program emerged. In Yucatán, however, we found that the expectations the program makes of migrant groups were too much for the state's fledgling HTAs. Lacking the ability to operate as equals with government actors, the migrant organizations were displaced from any meaningful role.

The peripheral issue of simulation projects became a mainstream and normalized practice in Yucatán as municipal officials became the true drivers of activity. They learned to manage the program like any other, in some cases leading to corruption and graft of project funds. This is an example of a policy being mutated through its application in a new context—a common outcome of mobilization. It is not inevitable that mutations will be negative, but it is nearly certain that a policy will function differently as it is regrounded in new contexts with different power structures. In this case, the most significant mutation was not the introduction of a new element, but rather an amplification of a preexisting, but previously marginal, problem.

One interpretation of this example is that the policy model has significant weaknesses, but that they did not become fully manifest in the pioneering cases because of the uncommon strength, dedication, capacity, and political clout of the pioneering migrant organizations. Once the model was applied in new contexts where migrants had not attained such power, the policy's faults emerged more clearly. This implies that it is not the 3×1 Program model itself that was successful in the pioneering areas, but rather that strong migrant organizations (and their government counterparts) succeeded, with the program being a conduit for their activity. This mirrors Iskander's (2010) conclusion that the pattern of interpretive engagement is the best practice to be emulated, not the 3×1 Program's specific mechanics. This conclusion should serve as a cautionary example for other governments considering replicating the 3×1 Program: Not that it is fundamentally

flawed and cannot succeed, but rather that it is not a foolproof model, impervious to context.

As this example of the expansion of the 3×1 Program within Mexico demonstrates, strong and capable migrant organizations are essential to the policy's proper functioning. We join other researchers in critiquing the Mexican federal government for focusing on expansion of the 3×1 Program and formation of new HTAs with little concern for the groups' strength or capacity to participate (Escala et al., 2011; Escala, 2014). Although we recognize that there are significant limitations and potential drawbacks to government efforts to strengthen HTAs, more could be done to facilitate and support migrants' own efforts at organizing. Escala et al. (2011, p. 66) conclude that "simply creating more organizations and asking them to take on more activities will probably not translate into better or more projects." Our research confirms these fears, finding that the 3×1 Program spurred the formation of numerous Yucatecan hometown associations, but because these HTAs lacked capacity or institutional strength, they were quickly pushed aside by municipal officials and marginalized from their own program.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The migration index, calculated by Mexico's population bureau (CONAPO), includes data on remittances, emigration, circular migration, and return migration.

<sup>2</sup>The exchange rate for Mexican pesos to U.S. dollars was approximately Mex\$10 to US\$1 from 2002 to 2008. From 2009 to 2014 it

fluctuated around Mex\$14 to US\$1.

<sup>3</sup>Exceptions include studies in Hidalgo and Oaxaca (Fernández et al., 2006), Yucatán (Gomez Hernandez, 2014), and an unidentified “central” state (Smyth, 2017).

<sup>4</sup>Authors’ calculations, based on administrative data obtained from Mexico’s National Transparency Institute (INAI) at [www.info-mex.org.mx](http://www.info-mex.org.mx).

<sup>5</sup>The first author received funding for this research from the University of Colorado’s Geography Department, Center to Advance Research and Teaching in the Social Sciences, and from the Tinker Foundation via Colorado’s Latin American Studies Center. The second author received funding from the Fulbright Hays Faculty Research Award as well as Bucknell University.

<sup>6</sup>The marginalization index includes data on education, housing quality, rurality, and income.

<sup>7</sup>The migrant share of a project budget is generally one-fourth of the total expenditure, due to the 3×1 matching structure, but in Yucatán the state government declined to contribute or only contributed to a few projects in 2010, 2012, 2013, and 2014, creating a functional 2×1 match. Migrant share data

are presented instead of total expenditure to allow easy comparison between years with 3×1 and 2×1 matching structures and to avoid confusion.

<sup>8</sup>From the verb *avalar*, meaning to endorse or cosign, *proyectos de aval* are ones in which an HTA signs the necessary documents to submit a project but does not contribute funds. The 3×1 Program head at Sedesol mentioned in an interview that his central office staff refers to the projects as *simulaciones*, and we adopted the term because of its better translation to English (personal communication, April 22, 2016).

<sup>9</sup>Remittance data from Banco de Mexico, <http://www.banxico.org.mx/SieInternet>.

<sup>10</sup>Only HTAs registered with the Mexican government or authorized by an existing HTA federation may sponsor 3×1 projects. A club must be made up of at least ten adult members living outside of Mexico.

<sup>11</sup>We make this comment with some ambivalence, as even within the community of Yucatecan migrant organizations, frustration with the simulation model and resistance against it is not uniform, with some individuals taking a more opportunistic approach, as we discuss later.

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