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# Love Thy Neighbor? Trust in Foreigners and Support for Transnational Policies

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## Abstract

This study assesses the extent to which individual levels of trust in foreigners relate to preferences about regional transnational policies. We use a nationally representative survey from Mexico (2003), an emerging democracy with relatively high levels of nationalism and several multinational trade agreements. We argue that clarifying the target of social trust is essential for understanding the attitudes of citizens of less powerful countries toward the international policy realm. Statistical analysis strongly suggests that in fact trust in foreigners, above generalized trust, is key to understanding such attitudes. Our results indicate that trust in foreigners among Mexican respondents is positively associated with support for open immigration policies, the North American Free Trade Agreement, and political union with the United States.

**Keywords:** trust in foreigners, public opinion, transnational policies, immigration, NAFTA, international regional integration, Mexico

On November 10, 2012, Geraldo Cadava admonished Americans in an op-ed piece in the *New York Times* to keep in mind the importance of “warm relations in the hemisphere” when dealing with immigration and of pursuing an approach that “will strengthen our partnerships” in the region (Cadava 2012, 21). Being able to get along with regional neighbors is important given not only immigration issues but also trade partnerships, economic development concerns, and cultural exchanges. Countries depend on citizen support for transnational policies that demand regional cooperation and that can drastically affect the state of the economy and, more broadly, regional relationships. Determining what increases support for transnational policies is therefore pivotal in an increasingly globalized world.

Research on attitudes toward specific transnational policies, such as trade agreements and immigration, often highlight policy-specific explanations. Building upon research on foreign policy attitudes where trust has been a key variable explaining militarist or cooperative foreign policy solutions, we contend that support for regional transnational policies—policies that involve one’s country working closely

with neighboring countries—fundamentally rests on trust, not merely generalized trust, but particularly trust in foreigners. The more individuals trust people from other countries in their region, the more accepting they will be of policies that necessarily increase interactions between their own country and neighboring countries and between citizens and foreigners. Therefore, this article’s empirical analyses are devoted to assessing the relationship between trust in foreigners as our key independent variable and support for a host of regional transnational policies, specifically immigration, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the possibility of international integration.

We believe that both the theoretical and empirical contributions of this study will be of interest to scholars interested in the vast body of literature on political trust and on attitudes toward international public affairs. From a theoretical standpoint, we argue that clarifying the target of social trust is essential for understanding the relationship between trust and transnational policy attitudes. Indeed, some work has shown that public opinion toward some transnational policies (including international trade) is significantly influenced

by intergroup attitudes such as ethnocentrism (e.g., Mansfield and Mutz, 2009, 2013). Therefore, it is important to account for which group the policy evokes in the public's mind. We contend that distinguishing trust in foreigners from generalized trust is a critical step in advancing knowledge on this matter, and this study aims to steer the debate in this direction. From an empirical point of view, this study provides evidence of the relationship between trust in foreigners and support for regional transnational policies stepping outside of the dominant setting of advanced industrial democracies. Mexico is an emerging democracy that participates in NAFTA along with the United States and Canada. In addition, Mexico often has to deal with immigration issues of its own and is constantly faced with the possibility of increased regional integration with its powerful neighbor to the north, making this country an ideal case for the purposes of our study. In the following section, we offer our theoretical arguments regarding the relationship between regional transnational policy attitudes and trust in foreigners.

### Transnational Policy Attitudes and Trust

Foreign policy issues are difficult for most people to understand because they are "exceptionally complex and ambiguous. International events that occur around the globe are remote, fluid, and extraordinarily complicated" (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987, 1103). Whereas early research on foreign policy attitudes suggested that these attitudes were somewhat random and unstable (see, for example, Almond 1950; Converse 1964), the more recent view is that people can and do make sense of foreign policy and that these attitudes are often rational (e.g., Holsti 1996; Page and Barabas 2000; Page and Shapiro 1992; Peffley and Hurwitz 1992). Even if people have only limited information, they draw on core values and predispositions to make sense of the complexity and ambiguity of foreign policy concerns and to make decisions on foreign policies (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987; Popkin and Dimock 2000).

Regional transnational policies, as we define them, are a type of cooperative foreign policy that involves neighboring states or states within a circumscribed region.<sup>1</sup> Events that occur around the world can affect any given country, but relations with neighboring countries can take on a special meaning. Neighborhood relations on an individual level matter in everyday life, playing a key role in the development of social capital. We argue that neighborhood relations matter on a state level as well. States that cooperate with each other can solve transnational policy concerns, such as increasing economic development through trade agreements, pursuing regional integration in culture and politics, and dealing effectively with immigration issues. As a type of foreign policy,

however, regional transnational policies are complicated and relatively remote, and people usually have little information upon which to develop attitudes about them.

Trust has been shown to be a key predictor of foreign policy attitudes in general, and we expect it to be a key predictor of transnational policy attitudes as well. The higher people's level of trust, the less they support isolationism, militarist and aggressive solutions to foreign policy problems, and heightened defense spending (see, for example, Bartels 1994; Binning 2007; Brewer et al. 2004; Brewer and Steenbergen 2002; Hurwitz and Peffley 1990). More trusting individuals are also likely to be more supportive of involvement in free trade agreements (Brewer and Steenbergen 2002; Popkin and Dimock 2000) and open immigration policies (Herreros and Criado 2009; Popkin and Dimock 2000).

Two forms of trust are particularly relevant when analyzing attitudes toward foreign policies: political trust (trust in government) and social trust (trust in people). Political trust can be defined "as the degree to which people perceive the government is producing outcomes consistent with their expectations" (Hetherington 2005, 9). The concept of political trust is occasionally confounded with the related concepts of support and approval (see Maloy 2009, 493 for a discussion of this point), although efforts have been made to distinguish among them (Citrin and Luks 2001). Political trust involves expectations about the future behavior of government or government actors (Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn 2001; Levi 1998), whereas support and approval are based on assessments of what the government has already done. Social trust, the main focus of our research, is much less likely to be discussed in terms of support or approval and instead rests on the nature of who is being trusted. Particularized or interpersonal trust focuses on individuals the person knows or interacts with, whereas generalized trust concerns people in general, including strangers and nonspecified others (Nannestad 2008). Generalized trust is a standing decision people use to give others the benefit of the doubt (Rahn and Transue 1998).

The importance of generalized trust is straightforward and perhaps best laid out by Brewer and Steenbergen (2002, 41–43): beliefs about human nature, specifically how trustworthy, honest, and well-intentioned people believe others to be, act as a standing decision rule they can use when thinking about how other nations will behave. Foreign policy considerations naturally involve "thin trust," which is trust in a "generalized other," rather than "thick trust," the trust developed through personal relations (Putnam 2000: 136; see also Rahn and Transue 1998). As Uslaner (2002, 3) argues, people who trust the generalized other assume shared values and "accept the argument that they have common bonds that make cooperation vital." In the sphere of international politics where "thick trust" is impossible and people have little

concrete information upon which to base their judgments, “thin trust” serves as a simple heuristic that emphasizes cooperation with other nations.

A major problem with this research, however, is the ambiguity concerning the target of trust. Most of the research on trust and foreign policy attitudes uses generalized trust, or trust in an unspecified other. To measure generalized trust, researchers usually ask respondents whether people can be trusted, whether they are driven by self-interest, whether they are fair, and so on. But what do respondents have in mind when they answer these questions? It makes sense to think that “people” refers to all humans, but it is not clear that this is the referent people use when answering the question (see, for example, Reeskens and Hooghe 2008; Stolle 1998).

Political scientists themselves seem not to have come to a consensus on the referent for the generalized trust questions. Binning (2007) argues that “people” is a superordinate category that includes all human beings. Rahn and Transue (1998, 545) refer to “most people—even those whom one does not know from direct experience.” Uslaner (2002) emphasizes the notion that “people” refers to people we do not know, people who are strangers to us. Putnam (2000, 136) discusses thin trust as covering those “beyond the roster of people whom we can know personally” and uses as an example a “new acquaintance from the coffee shop.” Popkin and Dimock (2000, 230) suggest that trust is much more circumscribed when they refer to “the very people who distrust their neighbors” as those who are low in trust.

Another option is that when asked the generalized trust questions, people bring to mind their fellow nationals. Binning (2007, 793) asked respondents, who were presumably Americans, to indicate their trust in people in general and in Americans. The correlation between these two targets of trust is very high ( $r = .77, p < .001$ ), suggesting the possibility that the referent people have in mind when asked whether people can be trusted is their fellow nationals. In other words, generalized trust might reflect trust in “people like us” rather than people around the world.

Recent research on social trust confirms that we should be skeptical about whether the trust measures actually measure trust in a generalized other (Delhey, Newton, and Welzel 2011; Freitag and Bauer 2013; Gundelach 2014; Sturgis and Smith 2010; Torpe and Lolle 2011). When people in Great Britain were asked in a think-aloud exercise what referent they had in mind as they answered whether most people could be trusted or you cannot be too careful, 30 percent said people known to them (family, friends, neighbors, etc.) or people in their local area. Not many more, 35 percent, said unknown others (Sturgis and Smith 2010, 87). The difficulty of interpreting responses to the generalized trust questions becomes especially pronounced in cross-cultural

research (Torpe and Lolle 2011) where the dynamics of responses to generalized trust, trust in strangers, and trust in people of different religions or nationalities across different countries are pronounced.

We argue that clarifying the target of social trust is essential for understanding the relationship between trust and transnational policy attitudes. Generalized trust does not necessarily encompass trust in foreigners, yet it is the latter that should be more relevant to foreign policy attitudes. If people answer the generalized trust question thinking about family, friends, and neighbors (Sturgis and Smith 2010), much of the argument about the relationship between generalized trust and foreign policy attitudes seems questionable. The findings on cross-cultural variation in how people respond to different referents to the trust questions also raise serious concerns. Research on the relationship between trust and foreign policy attitudes has primarily been done in the United States with American respondents. When doing research in a non-U.S. setting, we cannot be certain that respondents have the same “people” in mind as American respondents. Our research includes questions on both generalized trust and trust in foreigners, a key referent, we suspect, when it comes to transnational policy attitudes.<sup>2</sup>

We focus on support for three transnational policy areas that involve Mexico with its neighbors: the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), immigration policy, and regional integration. NAFTA, implemented in 1994, was designed to remove trade barriers between the United States, Mexico, and Canada by eliminating many tariffs and phasing out other tariffs over time. Early research on Mexicans’ attitudes toward NAFTA found strong support for NAFTA among Mexicans, although those with higher status occupations and those who supported the parties on the right were more supportive than other Mexicans (Davis 1998). Full elimination of tariffs was in place by 2008. NAFTA has been hailed as a success by many, but unions and consumer-advocacy groups point to problems with outsourcing and lower wages that they say have had an especially negative impact on the United States and Mexico. In particular, critics point to the displacement of Mexican agricultural workers caused by NAFTA (Aguilar 2012).

Immigration is also an important transnational issue in Mexico. Americans tend to focus on Mexican immigrants coming into the United States and Europeans on immigrants coming into the European Union. Not surprisingly, research on immigration focuses on these two parts of the world. Very little research exists on Mexicans’ attitudes toward immigration, even though Mexico is the destination country for many people from around the world, particularly from the United States but also from South and Central America, Europe (particularly from Spain), and East Asia. Mexico also serves as a transit route for people from Central and South



America emigrating to the United States. Mexicans therefore experience the positives and negatives of having many immigrants in their country yet we know little about what drives their opinions about immigration.

Finally, we examine people's reactions to regional integration, in particular integration with the United States. Mexicans have a very large, powerful, and wealthy neighbor sitting right to their north, a neighbor that can both threaten Mexicans' sense of autonomy and identity and offer opportunities to improve their quality of life. The more integrated Mexico and the United States are, the more Mexicans could lose their cultural and political identity but the more they could benefit from the United States' wealth. We examine attitudes toward regional integration both in terms of improving Mexicans' quality of life and in terms of cultural and political integration.

We hypothesize that trust in foreigners, rather than generalized trust, will significantly influence public support for NAFTA, more open immigration policies, and regional integration with the United States. Research on generalized trust has found that "people with little faith in human nature tend to have a different outlook on foreign policy than people who trust in the good will of others" (Brewer and Steenbergen 2002, 54). Our basic contention is that when it comes to transnational policy issues, what should matter most is trust in foreigners, the out-group these policy issues are most likely to evoke in the public's mind. For instance, recent work has shown that Americans' preferences for immigration policy are molded by implicit attitudes toward Latino immigrants (Pérez 2010). Overall, we believe trust in foreigners will have the biggest impact on support for regional transnational policies, bigger than the more general generalized trust.

## Data and Method

In this section, we introduce our data and present our main empirical findings. Recall here that we are interested in assessing if *trust in foreigners*, controlling for generalized trust, is a key explanatory factor for a host of attitudes and preferences regarding regional transnational policies, namely, immigration, international trade agreements (using the case of NAFTA), and international regional integration. We expect that, all else equal, individuals with higher levels of trust in foreigners should be more likely to display preferences for less restrictive immigration policies, for increased access to international markets, and generalized support for regional international integration. To test whether such relationships exist, we take advantage of the *National Bank of Mexico's (Banamex) Division for Economic and Sociopolitical Studies 2003 Mexican Values Survey*. The original survey was conducted among a nationally representative sample of 2,380

Mexican citizens during June of 2003 right before the mid-term federal election of that year. The theoretical margin of error for the entire sample size of the survey is  $\pm 2$  percent. The survey was sponsored by a private financial institution, designed following professional standards in survey research, and fielded by *Trabajos Especializados de Campo, S.A.* (see Moreno 2005).<sup>3</sup>

### *Dependent Variables: Immigration, NAFTA, and Blurred Borderlines*

The first dependent variable, *immigration policy preferences*, is constructed using a question asking respondents about the circumstances under which immigration should be allowed, where 0 denotes that immigration "should not be allowed" under any circumstance (14.9 percent of respondents), 1 denotes "strict limits should be imposed on the number of people allowed in the country" (22.4 percent), 2 denotes that immigration "should be allowed only if there are jobs available" (46.7 percent), and 3 denotes an open door policy where "anyone should be allowed to enter the country" (12.2 percent). The remaining 3.8 percent of the sample did not provide an answer to this question.

The second dependent variable, *trust in NAFTA*, is constructed using responses to a question asking respondents how much they trust the NAFTA, where 0 denotes "no trust at all" in NAFTA (23.9 percent of respondents), 1 denotes "little" trust (32.8 percent), 2 denotes "some" trust (28.9 percent), and 3 denotes that the respondent trusts NAFTA "very much" (8.7 percent). The remaining 5.7 percent of the sample did not provide an answer to this question and are not included in this analysis.

The third and fourth dependent variables are additive indexes constructed from five items on respondents' level of agreement with hypothetical scenarios depicting Mexico and the United States merging into one single country under different circumstances. Respondents were asked whether they would favor or oppose Mexico and the United States forming one single country if doing so would mean (1) having a better lifestyle, (2) Mexico losing its cultural identity, (3) being better able to deal with problems related to security and drug trafficking, (4) Mexico joining as thirty-two new states of the United States, and, (5) having an overall better quality of life. Response options range from "strongly against" (0) to "strongly in favor" (4).

Exploratory factor analysis shows that these five items load onto two separate dimensions. We labeled the first one the *quality of life dimension* (scenarios 1, 3, and 5). The three items load into one dimension with a minimum factor loading of 0.860 and a maximum factor loading of 0.917, and produce a reliable scale with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.875. After adding the responses of these three items our final

scale ranges from 0 to 12. We labeled the second one the *cultural identity and political autonomy dimension* (scenarios 2 and 4). Both of these items load onto one dimension with a loading factor of 0.866, and produce a reliable scale with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.660. After adding these responses, the final scale ranges from 0 to 8. See Table A in the appendix for descriptive statistics on the four dependent variables included in Table 1.

### Independent Variables

Our key independent variable is the construct of *trust in foreigners*. We operationalize this variable as an additive index constructed with a series of items asking respondents how much they trust people of different foreign countries, namely, citizens of the United States, Canadians, Argentinians, Brazilians, Chileans, Colombians, and Cubans. Response options ranged from "not at all" (0) to "a great deal" (3). These seven items load into one single dimension with a minimum factor loading of 0.658 (citizens of the United States) and a maximum factor loading of 0.954 (both Argentinians and Brazilians). These items produce a reliable scale with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.955. For the purposes of our analyses, we constructed a simple additive index, which provides a measure that ranges from 0 to 21, where 0 indicates the lowest level of trust in foreigners and 21 indicates the highest level of trust.

### Control Variables

Our analyses control for a number of usual suspects. The first is *generalized trust*. As the literature has suggested in the past, it could simply be the case that individuals with high levels of generalized trust are more likely to trust anyone, conational or not. Therefore, it is critical that we account for levels of *generalized trust*. Respondents were asked whether most people can be trusted (1) or whether one should never be too trusting in dealing with people (0). It is important to note that the correlation between generalized trust and our construct of trust in foreigners is only .036 (significant at the  $p < .10$  level). In other words, trust in foreigners and generalized trust are positively correlated but the relationship is weak, suggesting that the two constructs in fact capture different concepts.

Another variable we control for is individual news consumption patterns. According to Walter Lippmann (1922, 16), "the real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance," and as such people rely on simplified representations of the world as images in their heads. Research has examined the media as the lens through which people obtain information about the world outside their immediate environment (see, for example, Chong and Druckman 2007; Iyengar and Kinder

1987). People do not necessarily obtain *all* of their information about the world from the media, but we expect that differing degrees of media consumption surely have significant effects on what realities individuals endorse. We think this is especially true when it comes to foreign affairs as people are most likely to gain information and impressions about anything foreign from the media, as recent studies have shown that knowledge of international affairs varies according to the amount of international news coverage in a country<sup>4</sup> (Iyengar et al. 2009; Norris 2012; Norris and Inglehart 2009).

Admittedly, it is not scope of the present study to assess the amount or the content of international news coverage in Mexico. Our empirical models, however, account for individual levels of *news consumption*. Respondents were asked how frequently they followed the news using three different media: television, radio, and newspapers. These three individual measures were simply added to construct a scale that ranges from 0 to 9, where 0 indicates that the individual does not use any of these media outlets at all and 9 indicates that the individual uses all of them frequently.

Nationalism, ideology, and partisanship are also related to transnational policies. In the United States where most of this research has been done, conservatives and Republicans are more supportive of free trade and less supportive of immigration than liberals and Democrats (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014; Uslaner 1998). National pride tends to drive opinions on all three areas, with those higher in national pride or nationalism being more opposed to NAFTA, immigration, and regional integration (Davis 1998; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014; Merolla et al. 2005). We include individual views on national sovereignty, ideology, and party identification in our analysis.

The variable *national sovereignty* is constructed using an item that asked respondents to indicate how important national sovereignty is, ranging from "not important at all" (1) to "very important" (10). *Ideology* is constructed using a question asking respondents to indicate where they would locate themselves in the political spectrum if 1 means "left" and 10 means "right." Those respondents who did not provide an answer to this question (10.5 percent of respondents) were assigned the mean value of the rest of the sample ( $M = 6.246$ ), and an indicator variable labeled *non-ideologue* was also incorporated into our models to determine whether these individuals have systematically different attitudes than their "ideologue" counterparts. Regarding partisan identifications in Mexico, there are three main political parties: the Democratic Revolution Party (Partido de la Revolución Democrática [PRD]), the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional [PRI]), and the National Action Party (Partido Acción Nacional

**Table 1.** The Impact of Trust in Foreigners on Transnational Policies among the Mexican Public.

	Immigration policy		Trust in NAFTA	
	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Trust in foreigners	0.074***	(0.009)	0.182***	(0.010)
Generalized trust	-0.237†	(0.144)	-0.043	(0.144)
News consumption	-0.023	(0.021)	0.062**	(0.021)
National sovereignty	0.071***	(0.022)	0.008	(0.022)
Ideology	0.038*	(0.018)	0.024	(0.017)
Nonideologue	-0.031	(0.169)	-0.369*	(0.168)
Partisan identification				
PRD partisan	-0.173	(0.155)	0.104	(0.156)
PRI partisan	0.100	(0.108)	0.008	(0.107)
PAN partisan	0.027	(0.122)	0.385***	(0.120)
Respondent has relatives in the United States	-0.091	(0.090)	0.260**	(0.089)
Education (in number of schooling years)	0.021†	(0.011)	0.016	(0.011)
Income (in thousands of pesos per month)	0.011	(0.011)	-0.009	(0.011)
Region of the country				
North	0.135	(0.114)	0.000	(0.113)
West	0.051	(0.138)	-0.009	(0.138)
South	0.017	(0.119)	0.115	(0.118)
$\kappa_1$	-0.482**	(0.248)	0.520*	(0.245)
$\kappa_2$	0.807***	(0.247)	2.346***	(0.251)
$\kappa_3$	3.296***	(0.260)	4.506***	(0.269)
<i>N</i>	1,862	1,881		
-2 log likelihood	4,493.93	4,386.23		
$\chi^2$ for LR test	119.52	489.99		
Prob > $\chi^2$	0.000	0.000		
Pseudo <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.062	.229		

	Merging Mexico and the United States			
	Quality of life		Cultural/political	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Trust in foreigners	0.049**	(0.017)	0.013	(0.011)
Generalized trust	-0.555*	(0.276)	0.118	(0.167)
News consumption	0.130***	(0.039)	0.048*	(0.024)
National sovereignty	-0.021	(0.041)	-0.142***	(0.025)
Ideology	0.077*	(0.033)	0.043*	(0.020)
Nonideologue	-1.333***	(0.324)	-0.804***	(0.199)
Partisan identification				
PRD partisan	-0.095	(0.294)	-0.162	(0.180)
PRI partisan	0.417*	(0.204)	-0.275*	(0.124)
PAN partisan	0.598**	(0.230)	-0.532***	(0.140)
Respondent has relatives in the United States	0.347*	(0.169)	0.166†	(0.103)
Education (in number of schooling years)	-0.055*	(0.022)	-0.029*	(0.013)
Income (in thousands of pesos per month)	-0.038†	(0.021)	-0.034**	(0.013)
Region of the country				
North	0.750***	(0.216)	0.291*	(0.131)
West	-0.201	(0.261)	0.440**	(0.160)
South	-0.645**	(0.225)	0.791***	(0.138)
Constant	6.927***	(0.465)	3.348***	(0.250)
<i>N</i>	1,821	1,834		
<i>F</i> (15, 1821)	8.866	9.574		
Prob > <i>F</i>	0.000	0.000		
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.060	.066		

Table entries are Ordered Logistic Regression estimates (top) or OLS Regression coefficients (bottom); standard errors are in parentheses. NAFTA = North American Free Trade Agreement; PRD = Partido de la Revolución Democrática; PRI = Partido Revolucionario Institucional; PAN = Partido Acción Nacional; LR = Likelihood Ratio.

†  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; two-tailed test.



[PAN]). Generally speaking, the PRD can be considered a left/center-left party and the PAN a center-right/right party, whereas the PRI has displayed considerable movement from left to right and back to more centrist positions throughout its history. In our analysis, respondents' partisan identifications were incorporated into the analyses with three indicator variables, *PRD Partisan*, *PRI partisan*, and *PAN partisan*, where the reference category is individuals who do not report any partisan attachment.

The more people are in contact with others, the more they can learn about them. Whether contact increases trust in outgroups is still under debate. The contact hypothesis posits that diversity in a society leads people to experience increased contact with outgroups and thereby develop more favorable attitudes, including trust, toward the outgroups (e.g., Forbes 1997; Putnam 2007). Empirical results, however, have been mixed. In our analysis, we include an indicator variable to denote whether the respondent has family or relatives in the United States (1) or not (0). This variable serves as a proxy for means of potential direct contact with foreigners or alternative exposure to information about foreigners other than that provided by traditional media outlets.

We also take into account prevailing explanations for support for NAFTA and immigration, specifically economic explanations (see, for example, Davis 1998). People who are likely to be harder hit in economic terms by transnational policies are poorer people who work in certain types of jobs, such as manufacturing or agriculture. Research shows that socioeconomic status is related to support for NAFTA and immigration policies. We therefore include both income and education in our analysis. Our measure of *education* reflects the number of years of formal schooling completed by respondents. *Income* reflects estimates of respondents' household income in thousands of pesos per month using the midpoint of the range included in the original categories in the survey. Finally, three indicator variables to account for regional differences are incorporated in our model: *North*, *West*, and *South*, where the reference category is the *Central* region.<sup>6</sup> See Table A in the appendix for descriptive statistics on the independent variables included in the model.

## Love Thy Neighbor, Share Thy Land? Empirical Results

Table 1 presents the results of four different regression models. The first two models, regarding *immigration policy preferences* and *trust in NAFTA*, respectively, are estimated using ordered logistic regressions. The remaining two models, concerning *merging Mexico and the United States* (both the

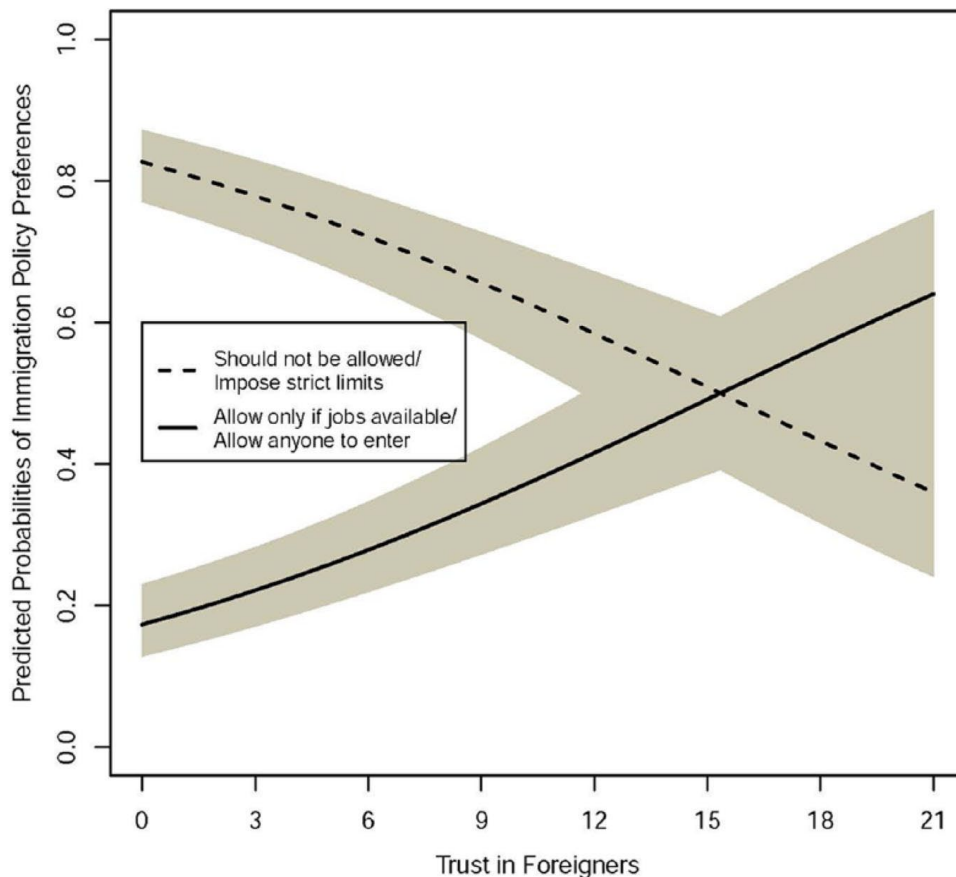
*quality of life* and the *cultural and political autonomy* dimensions), are estimated using OLS regressions. As can be seen, the coefficient of trust in foreigners is both positive and statistically significant in three out of four of the models included in Table 1. Collectively, these results provide evidence supporting our central hypotheses that trust in foreigners informs individual preferences about immigration policy, individual attitudes toward international trade, and (under certain circumstances) individual attitudes toward international regional integration.

We begin with immigration policy. The positively signed and statistically significant coefficient of *trust in foreigners* provides corroboration for the expectation that individuals with higher levels of trust in foreign publics are also more likely to hold less restrictive preferences when it comes to immigration policy, net of generalized trust, individual patterns of news consumption, levels of importance attached to national sovereignty, ideological predispositions, partisan identifications, whether or not respondents have family members or relatives living abroad (in the United States), as well as education and income levels and regional differences. Critically here, it is important to emphasize that this result holds even after controlling generalized trust. In fact, the coefficient of generalized trust is negative and significant at the  $p < .10$  level, which suggests that, at least in Mexico, generalized trust is not positively correlated with attitudes toward immigration.<sup>7</sup> We will come back to this point during our concluding remarks.

To facilitate further the discussion of results, we summarized them graphically in Figure 1, where we report predicted probabilities of supporting different immigration policies. The vertical axis is the predicted probability of supporting less restrictive immigration policies and the horizontal axis is our construct of trust in foreigners. The rest of the predictors were held at their mean value or at their modal category. The original survey item offered four different possible outcomes, but we grouped them into two categories for ease of interpretation.<sup>8</sup> We grouped predicted probabilities for respondents who would prefer not to allow immigration at all or who would want to impose very strict limits on it to represent opposition to immigration. We grouped the predicted probabilities for respondents who would allow immigration depending upon job availability or allowing anyone to enter to represent positive views of immigration.

As can be seen in Figure 1, at the lowest end of our scale of trust in foreigners, the gap between preferring a highly restrictive immigration policy (above 80 percent) and a relatively more open door one (below 20 percent) is over 60 percentage points. This gap, however, narrows, vanishes, and reverses in the opposite direction along the scale of trust



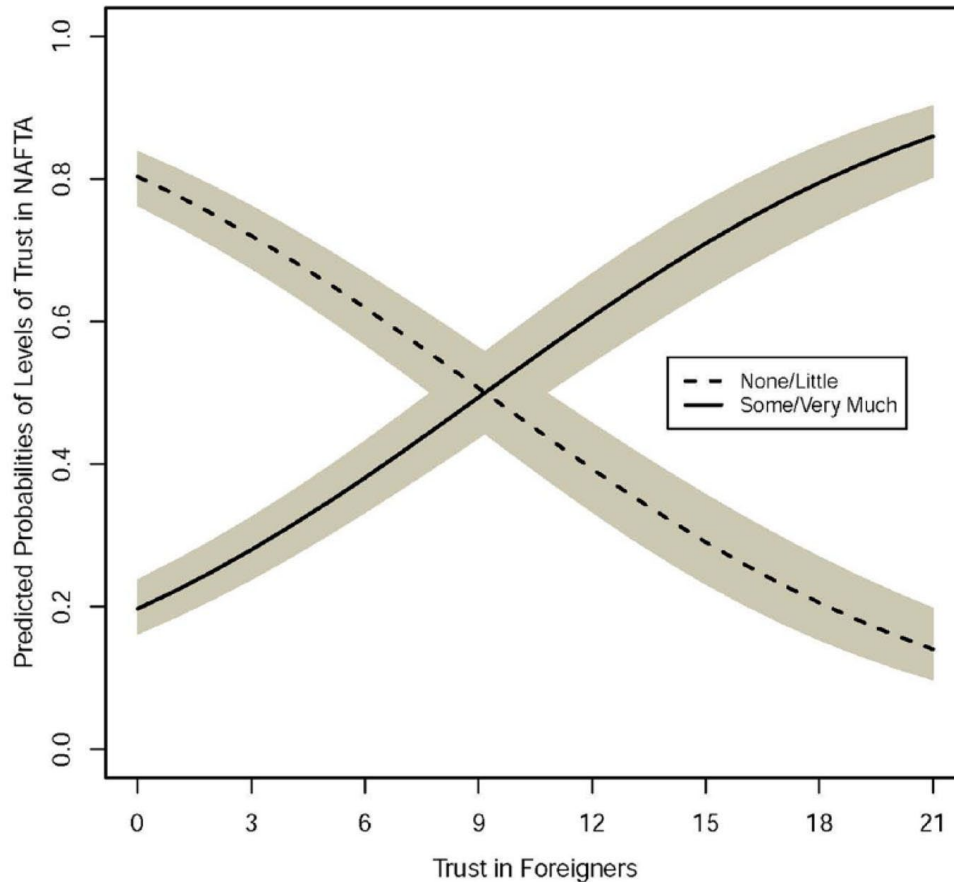


**Figure 1.** Predicted probabilities of immigration policy preferences by trust in foreigners.

in foreigners. In fact, at the highest end of the scale, about 60 percent of individuals prefer more open door immigration policy options, whereas roughly 40 percent of individuals prefer the highly restrictive options. This represents over a 40 percentage point shift in the predicted probabilities of supporting either side of the debate about immigration policy when we move across the full range of the scale of trust in foreigners, taking into account generalized trust and the rest of our control variables.

The next dependent variable analyzed in Table 1, as we move from left to right, is *trust in NAFTA*. These results are computed utilizing an ordered logistic regression model. The coefficient of trust in foreigners is, again, both positive and statistically significant, providing further support to the hypothesis that trust in foreigners has a significant impact on attitudes toward transnational policies such as international trade, captured here with our measure of trust in NAFTA. Specifically, our analysis strongly suggests that individuals with higher levels of trust in foreigners are more likely to hold positive attitudes toward NAFTA than their counterparts with lower levels of trust in foreigners.

To further illustrate the magnitude of the effect of trust in foreigners on trust in NAFTA among Mexican citizens, Figure 2 summarizes graphically our key result regarding the relationship between trust in foreigners and attitudes toward international trade. The vertical axis is the predicted probability of holding greater levels of trust in NAFTA and the horizontal axis is our construct of trust in foreigners. The rest of the predictors were held at their mean value or at their modal category. The original survey item offered four different possible outcomes. Here, however, we again grouped the original responses into two categories for ease of interpretation.<sup>9</sup> We grouped the predicted probabilities of having “none” and “little” trust in NAFTA to represent low levels of trust in this international trade agreement among the Mexican public. We grouped the predicted probabilities of having “some” and “very much” trust in NAFTA to represent high levels of trust in this transnational policy. As should be clear from Figure 2, the effect of trust in foreigners on attitudes toward NAFTA is even stronger than its effect on immigration policy preferences. In this case, predicted probabilities of having relatively high levels of trust in NAFTA



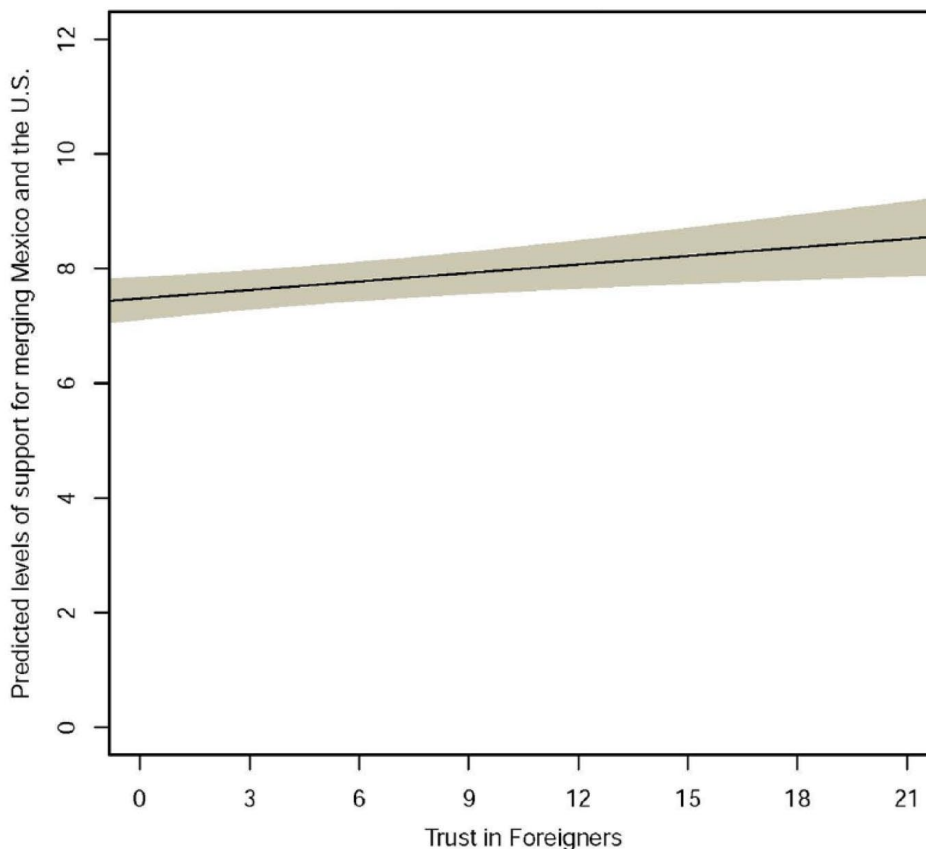
**Figure 2.** Predicted probabilities of levels of trust in NAFTA by trust in foreigners. NAFTA = North American Free Trade Agreement.

rise from roughly 20 to 80 percent when we move from the lowest to the highest end of our scale of trust in foreigners. Similarly, the predicted probabilities of having relatively low levels of trust in NAFTA decrease from roughly 80 to 20 percent when we move across the full range of our main independent variable. These results provide strong corroboration to our expectation that our key construct, trust in foreigners, also accounts for the formation of individual attitudes toward international trade.

Continuing our reading of Table 1, moving from left to right, the third dependent variable is the *improving quality of life dimension*. Here, we offer the results of an OLS regression model.<sup>10</sup> As can be seen, the coefficient of trust in foreigners is both positive and statistically significant. Figure 3 illustrates this relationship further. The vertical axis is the predicted levels of supporting the proposition that Mexico and the United States become one country. The scale ranges from 0 to 12. The horizontal axis is our construct of trust in foreigners. The rest of the control variables were held at their mean value or at their modal category. Moving from the lowest level of trust in foreigners to the highest level increases support for merging Mexico and

the United States a bit over one full point in this scale. And once again, it is important to note that this effect holds after controlling for generalized trust, which has a negative sign and also attains statistical significance. In other words, whereas trust in foreigners helps foster positive attitudes toward regional integration when individuals in Mexico have potential improvements for their standards of living in mind, generalized trust pulls their opinions in the opposite direction.

Finally, the results for our fourth dependent variable are computed using OLS regression, where the dependent variable, the *cultural and political autonomy dimension*, is our construct for the cultural and political consequences of the hypothetical integration of Mexico with the United States. In this model, the coefficient of trust in foreigners remains positively signed, but for the first time, it fails to attain statistical significance. When Mexican citizens are prompted to think of the political and cultural consequences of blurring the border between Mexico and the United States, support for cultural and political integration is low compared to support for economic integration and does not vary with the degree to which people trust foreigners.



**Figure 3.** Predicted levels of support for merging Mexico and the United States (quality of life) by trust in foreigners.

Given that the questions about international regional integration available to us are specific about merging Mexico and the United States, one is left to wonder whether this last set of results would look any different by incorporating *trust in U.S. citizens* instead of *trust in foreigners* as our key independent variable in the model.<sup>11</sup> The results of this exercise are available in Table C in the supplemental appendix (<http://prq.sagepub.com/supplemental/>). As can be seen, once we incorporate trust in U.S. citizens rather than our more comprehensive trust in foreigners construct as the key independent variable, the coefficient associated with trust in the foreign neighbors of the north is both positive and statistically significant. Figure 1 in the supplemental appendix illustrates the effect of trust in U.S. citizens on individuals' preference regarding merging Mexico and the United States into one country (see supplemental appendix). Admittedly, moving from the lowest level of trust in U.S. citizens to the highest level of trust, support for merging Mexico and the United States increases by three quarters of a point in this 8-point scale. The predicted levels of support for this hypothetical regional international integration, however, remain relatively low (they never reach the midpoint of the y-axis) across the full range of the scale of trust in U.S. citizens.

In sum, trust in foreigners seems to foster positive attitudes toward regional integration with the United States, but only when individuals in Mexico have potential improvements for their standards of living in mind. When individuals are prompted to think about the possibility of Mexico losing its cultural identity or of Mexico becoming thirty-two new states of the United States of America, trust in foreigners becomes statistically irrelevant. When we introduce the concept of trust in U.S. citizens, which proves to be statistically significant, substantively speaking, the levels of support for regional international integration remain relatively low. In other words, the Mexican public seems to love their northern neighbors to the point of sharing Mexico's territory if this would bring the Mexican public a better quality of life but not if this would mean the loss of cultural or political autonomy.

## Conclusion

In an increasingly globalized world, people will be called on to react to policies that involve their own country interacting with neighboring countries. From this perspective,

gaining a better understanding of what drives attitudes toward these transnational policies is increasingly relevant for political scientists, especially given the complexity and ambiguity of these policies. Our research contributes to this understanding in two key ways. First, although previous research has shown that people who are more trusting in general are more likely to support more cooperative internationalist policies, this study demonstrates convincingly that the referent for trust matters and that trust in foreigners, not generalized trust, is a particularly powerful predictor of transnational policy attitudes. People who trust their regional neighbors are likely to support increased interactions with them through trade policies, immigration, and political and cultural exchanges.

It is possible, of course, that these transnational policies affect people's trust in foreigners, that is, that the causal arrow heads in the opposite direction. We think it unlikely that this is the case. Despite the predictive power of economic self-interest and domestic political attitudes (e.g., Kaltenthaler, Gelleny, and Ceccoli 2004), opinions regarding transnational policies like trade policies (including NAFTA) and outsourcing are largely driven by feelings toward outgroups and intergroup dynamics (Mansfield and Mutz, 2009, 2013). Although attitudes about "us" vs. "them," trust, and national identity develop early in life (Hess and Torney 1967; Rahn and Transue 1998), before children become aware of transnational policies and their effects, it makes sense to predict that trust in foreigners affects transnational policy attitudes rather than the other way around. Much more research needs to be done, however, on the various referents of trust because, as our research shows, the concept of generalized trust is too vague and amorphous. The trust people feel toward groups relevant to particular policy areas is what drives their attitudes toward those policies.

Our second major contribution arises from our decision to study Mexican attitudes toward transnational policies. Much of the work on the relationship between trust and foreign policy attitudes has been limited to studying the attitudes of people in the United States or other advanced industrialized countries. This is problematic because of the multinational nature of transnational policies. Public opinion on all sides of a transnational policy agreement is likely to significantly influence policy outcomes—not just public opinion in the more industrialized countries. Moving this research question to Mexico introduces a necessary dynamic to this research agenda. It opens the door for a greater degree of generalizability in the models used to explain public opinion toward transnational policies because it addresses the viewpoints of the less wealthy and industrialized partners in these agreements.

Furthermore, unlike the United States, Mexico is not a world superpower and instead is that superpower's next-door

neighbor. Many countries involved in transnational policy agreements find themselves in a similar position, in that they live next door to a much more powerful neighbor. Countries surrounding Western Europe and Russia immediately come to mind. Our findings indicate that generalized trust plays a different role in Mexicans' foreign policy attitudes than it does for Americans' attitudes. What matters the most in Mexicans' transnational policy attitudes is trust in foreigners, not generalized trust.<sup>12</sup> Whether this finding holds up in other countries involved in transnational policy agreements with more powerful neighbors is an important topic for future research. We think it makes sense, though, that trust would play out differently in the powerful and less powerful countries. People in less powerful countries are in some ways at the mercy of their powerful neighbors. Trusting some vague notion of "people" is not as important in deciding to support a certain transnational policy as trusting the people who are involved in the policies. What is important is figuring out if the people who live in nearby countries are trustworthy. People in the more powerful countries, who have been the target of almost all of the public opinion research in this area, simply do not need to be as concerned about trusting their neighboring countries because their country can more readily make things right if things go wrong. Future research should examine how generalized trust and trust in foreigners plays out in other countries, especially less powerful countries that have largely been ignored in previous research.

Increased globalization and the need for agreements among countries to deal with transnational issues heighten the importance of understanding public opinion about transnational policies. Our research points to trust, and especially trust in foreigners, as a key element in people's support for these policies. People are not only concerned about their own pocketbooks or their country's economic well-being, but they also care about the trustworthiness of regional neighbors who are involved in the issue. Without that trust, people will be much less likely to support their government's involvement in these transnational policies.

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## Appendix

**Table A.** Descriptive Statistics.

Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Minimum	Maximum
Dependent					
Immigration policy preference	2,288	1.585	0.898	0	3
Trust in NAFTA	2,244	1.236	0.934	0	3
Merging Mexico and the United States					
Quality of life dimension	2,242	7.746	3.656	0	12
Cultural and political dimension	2,240	2.517	2.193	0	8
Independent					
Index of trust in foreigners	2,140	4.829	5.088	0	21
Trust in people from North America					
Trust in U.S. citizens	2,276	0.874	0.894	0	3
Trust in Canadians	2,200	0.760	0.866	0	3
Trust in people from Latin America					
Trust in Argentineans	2,165	0.622	0.787	0	3
Trust in Brazilians	2,165	0.649	0.801	0	3
Trust in Chileans	2,162	0.646	0.797	0	3
Trust in Colombians	2,166	0.624	0.787	0	3
Trust in Cubans	2,170	0.653	0.808	0	3
Generalized trust	2,380	0.098	0.298	0	1
Index of news consumption					
News consumption from TV	2,374	2.413	0.807	0	3
News consumption from radio	2,375	1.770	1.022	0	3
News consumption from newspapers	2,374	1.535	1.089	0	3
National sovereignty	2,285	8.288	2.065	1	10
Ideology	2,380	6.246	2.565	1	10
Nonideologue	2,380	0.105	0.307	0	1
Partisan identification					
PRD partisan	2,380	0.094	0.291	0	1
PRI partisan	2,380	0.274	0.446	0	1
PAN partisan	2,380	0.192	0.394	0	1
R has family or relatives in the United States	2,376	0.467	0.499	0	1
Education (in number of schooling years)	2,375	8.348	4.420	0	17
Income (in thousands of pesos per month)	2,160	4.201	4.322	1.25	35
Region of the country					
North	2,380	0.277	0.447	0	1
West	2,380	0.156	0.363	0	1
Central	2,380	0.346	0.476	0	1
South	2,380	0.210	0.407	0	1

NAFTA = North American Free Trade Agreement; PRD = Partido de la Revolución Democrática; PRI = Partido Revolucionario Institucional; PAN = Partido Acción Nacional.

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## Notes

1. Wittkopf (1990) distinguishes between two faces of internationalism: militant and cooperative. Militant internationalism refers to support for the use of military force, whereas cooperative internationalism refers to working with other countries, such as through economic aid and involvement in international organizations (see Chanley 1999).
2. Brewer et al. (2004) introduce the concept of international trust, defined as “a generalized belief about whether most foreign countries behave in accordance with normative expectations regarding the conduct of nations” (p. 96, emphasis added). They find strong support for their argument that international trust is a strong predictor of support for humanitarian aid and military action. Although this research makes an important contribution to the literature on foreign policy attitudes, we are interested in *social* trust and therefore focus on trust in people rather than trust in nations.
3. See the supplemental appendix (<http://prq.sagepub.com/supplemental/>) for the original survey question wordings both in English and Spanish for all of the variables included in the following analyses.
4. Our data set, however, does not include questions regarding knowledge of international affairs.
5. These three items load into one single dimension with a minimum loading factor of 0.717 (TV) and a maximum factor loading of 0.809 (radio), and produce a reliable scale with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.651.
6. The North region includes the states of Baja California, Baja California Sur, Coahuila, Chihuahua, Durango, Nuevo León, San Luis Potosi, Sinaloa, Sonora, Tamaulipas, and Zacatecas. The West region includes Aguascalientes, Colima, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán, Nayarit, and Querétaro. The Central region includes the Federal District and the states of Hidalgo, México, Morelos, Puebla, and Tlaxcala. Finally, the South region includes Campeche, Chiapas, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Quintana Roo, Tabasco, Veracruz, and Yucatán.
7. An anonymous reviewer suggested to rerun all the models with only trust in foreigners and only generalized trust. Our results remain substantively unaltered. Only in one of the four models did interpersonal trust have a different sign in the absence of trust in foreigners in the models, going from negative .04 to positive .04 but remained statistically insignificant. In all of the other models, the two constructs preserved their sign, size, and significance (or lack thereof).
8. After grouping the four possible outcomes into two categories, we reran the model using logistic regression. The results are statistically similar and substantively the same. Predicted probabilities are estimated using the logistic regression model available in Table B in the supplemental appendix.
9. After grouping the four original outcomes into two categories, we reran the model using logistic regression. The empirical results are statistically similar and substantively the same. Predicted probabilities in Figure 2 are estimated using the logistic

regression model available in Table B in the supplemental appendix.

10. An anonymous reviewer suggested using ordered logit instead and another anonymous reviewer recommended utilizing a tobit model with censoring. We reran Model 3 under those two specifications and the results rendered statistically similar and substantively the same results. Therefore, for ease of interpretation, we decided to keep our original OLS regression results.
11. We thank an anonymous reviewer for calling our attention to this possibility.
12. Cleary and Stokes (2006) argue that higher levels of interpersonal trust in Mexico are generally found in less democratic regions of the country and are rooted in relatively closed communities, which we believe would make these individuals more likely to be opposed to the effects of transnational policies.

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