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### Transnational Links for Socio-political Empowerment

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**DOMINICAN**  
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*Research Monograph*

# **Transnational Links for Socio-political Empowerment**

Julián Valdés





**DOMINICAN**  
**STUDIES INSTITUTE**

*Research Monograph*

# **Transnational Links for Socio-political Empowerment**

Julián Valdés

## **Dominican Studies Research Monograph Series**

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The Dominican Research Monograph Series, a publication of the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute, documents scholarly research on the Dominican experience in the United States, the Dominican Republic, and other parts of the world. For the most part, the texts published in the series are the result of research projects sponsored by the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute.

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## Foreword

Dominican immigrants are now one of the ethnic groups in the United States who maintain a strong relationship with the country of origins. Ties between Dominicans, those in the U.S. and those in the Dominican Republic, have only increased throughout the years, giving rise to a body of works that describe the nature of these nexuses, and U.S. Dominicans as transnational people. Collaborations among Dominicans residing on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean range from economic transactions and, cultural expressions, to political participation and involvement. In an evermore-interconnected world, this reality only seems to strengthen with time, permeating life among Dominicans at all levels.

In *Transnational Links for Socio-Political Empowerment* Julian Valdés analyzes institutional policies that promote and sustain transnational ties and political empowerment among people of Dominican descent in the United States. Valdés examines the relationships between singular citizenship and dual citizenship, and the prospects these linkages generate for political and civic engagement. Valdés's research shows that for Dominicans, U.S. naturalization and dual citizenship generate empowerment at both ends, that is, in the Dominican Republic and in the U.S. Yet, with increasing ties and, especially, increasing political integration in both societies, challenges remain, particularly with a population that now counts on several generations residing in the United States.

The author highlights the lack of relevant data and systematic studies on the civic and political participation of Dominican communities in the United States and argues that it is imperative to understand and document their political behavior. In the tradition of CUNY DSI, the current monograph contributes to filling the vacuum on the subject matter, opening the doors for further research, specifically on the question of transnational links for socio-political empowerment.

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## Introduction

The expression “absent [ausente] Dominicans” was used for years to refer to Dominicans living abroad, but has now, fortunately, fallen out of use. As Dominican immigrants have become aware of their capacity to influence the internal affairs of their native land and made their voices heard, thus reclaiming their space, Dominicans in the Dominican Republic have become ever more conscious that their compatriots overseas never really left. Dominican immigrants are now one of the ethnic groups in the United States with the strongest transnational ties to the homeland. Parallel to this process, Dominicans abroad, after more than 50 years of sustained migration, have integrated into their receiving countries and expanded their scope of influence from the economic field to the cultural, social, and political fields.

It is worth considering how and to what extent the constant and intensive relations between Dominicans living abroad and those in the home country - the phenomenon known as transnationalism- have encouraged or complicated the exercise of citizens’ rights in the Dominican Republic and the United States. Similar questions arise with regards to whether transnationalism can strengthen the sociopolitical empowerment of Dominicans in the U.S. and if so, what mechanisms can help sustain transnational ties between the Dominican Republic and children of Dominican descent born abroad, particularly beyond the second generation.

This paper will:

- a) Evaluate institutional policies that promote and sustain transnationalism and the sociopolitical empowerment of people of Dominican descent in the United States;
- b) Explore Dominicans’ civic engagement and involvement in institutional politics in both the U.S. and the Dominican Republic.

## 1. Transnationalism and Empowerment

Transnationalism is commonly used in migration studies to refer to the complex network of relationships established by immigrants with their home country, as they live abroad, and how these relationships become a social space that expands beyond national borders. This transnational social space encompasses the daily lives and activities of immigrants, affecting all aspects of their lives, from their economic opportunities to their political behavior and identity.<sup>1</sup>

Some schools of thought assert that transnational connections hinder the full integration of immigrants into host societies, while others suggest that participation in transnational movements constitutes a vehicle for the successful political integration of immigrants in the host country. In this view, engagement with transnationalism is what gives them the skills for political participation and allows them to establish collaborations and struggle together in their new home. This article adheres to the vision of those who emphasize that transnationalism offers opportunities for greater integration of immigrants and is favorable to their well-being, and the development of both the home and receiving societies.

I am defining empowerment in this writing as people's capacity to become aware of society's problems, develop their own interests, pursue objectives that increase their sphere of influence, access to resources, both symbolic and material, their autonomy before society, and promote changes that favor them. Empowerment also entails an increase in the capacity of the disadvantaged population to organize, collaborate, and mobilize in defense of their rights. Empowerment includes at least four dimensions:

- a) An economic dimension, which refers to having access to productive factors at the level of material well-being and having control of resources and benefits;
- b) A psychological dimension, or someone's sense of potential and individual capacity;
- c) A social dimension, which refers to an organization's strength, legitimacy, and representativeness, capacity for social mobilization and collective action based on collaboration;
- d) A political dimension, which includes the full exercising of citizens' rights and participation in political power structures.

This writing focuses on the social and political aspects (c and d) of the process of empowerment of Dominicans in the United States and in the Dominican Republic, looking specifically at Dominicans residing in New York.

## 2. Citizenship as Fully Belonging

Citizenship is the full incorporation of individuals in a political community, by means of a status that guarantees their rights, liberties, and powers.<sup>2</sup> The condition of being a citizen constitutes a key element of sociopolitical empowerment and opens the door for individuals and groups to fully participate in politics.

The massive migratory phenomenon that took place during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century presented serious challenges to the migrant community because their citizenship status remained suspended in the sending country and was revoked if the individual acquired the citizenship of the receiving country. The increasing influence of migrants at both migratory poles obligated sending countries interested in preserving their migrants' loyalty to confer dual citizenship. In this way, migrants preserved their legal status in their country of origin, while at the same time incorporating themselves in their receiving country.

When looking at the phenomenon of dual citizenship among Latin American immigrants in the U.S., scholars have found that passing laws that permit the maintenance of dual citizenship has promoted the acquisition of U.S. citizenship among Latin American immigrants, opening the door to an increasing direct political participation, particularly in institutional politics.<sup>3</sup>

Twenty-five years ago, the idea of becoming a citizen of another country was not very popular in the Dominican Republic. For the most part, for many Dominicans living abroad, opting to naturalize in the receiving country made them traitors of their homeland. The sentiment of betrayal became in fact an obstacle to pursuing naturalization for many Dominicans, hindering their potential integration in the political processes of the receiving societies.

Gilbertson and Singer examined the naturalization statistics of Dominicans in the U.S. before 1995 and discovered a low naturalization rate compared to other immigrant groups. Analyzing reports from the Immigration and Naturalization Service, they found that while 46% of the cohort of all immigrants who entered the U.S. in 1977 had naturalized by 1995, only 28.6% of Dominicans had done so by that time.<sup>4</sup>

Despite what seemed to be high levels of political activism among Dominicans, the mind frame around dual citizenship at the time prevented Dominicans' actual integration into institutional politics in the United States. Similarly, because they were living abroad, many Dominicans did not participate in institutional politics in the Dominican Republic. In time, however, a new mentality began to rise among Dominicans, nurtured perhaps by countrymen who insisted on having a relationship with the home country, to preserve their legacy in the receiving society and pass it onto their children.

In 1994, as a result of constant and systematic demands from Dominicans residing abroad, increasing awareness among both elected officials and people in general in the Dominican Republic, the Dominican Constitution was amended, granting Dominicans the right to hold dual national citizenship. Specifically, the amended Dominican Constitution permitted Dominicans residing abroad to become citizens of their host countries while retaining their Dominican citizenship. Dual citizenship meant that Dominicans could potentially enjoy the full exercise of citizens' rights in both countries. Since then, all reforms made to the Dominican Constitution have maintained and expanded the rights of Dominicans with dual citizenship. Among the most significant rights granted to dual citizens is the right to run and be elected as president and vice president of the Dominican Republic.

Dual citizenship among Dominicans had an immediate impact on the number of those who sought naturalization in the United States. The number of Dominicans who became naturalized in the U.S. almost tripled in a period of two years, skyrocketing from 11,390 in 1994 to 29,459 in 1996.<sup>5</sup> This growth continued into the twenty-first century. Looking specifically at the state of Rhode Island, where the sixth largest Dominican population resided in the U.S. in 2000, the majority of naturalized Latino immigrants in 2006, were from the Dominican Republic, as cited in a report issued by the Latino National Survey.<sup>6</sup> In fact, between 1994, the year in which dual citizenship was approved in the Dominican Republic, and 2016, more than half a million (501,113) Dominicans had become U.S. citizens.

**Table No. 1**  
**Dominican Naturalized as U.S. Citizens, 2003-2016**

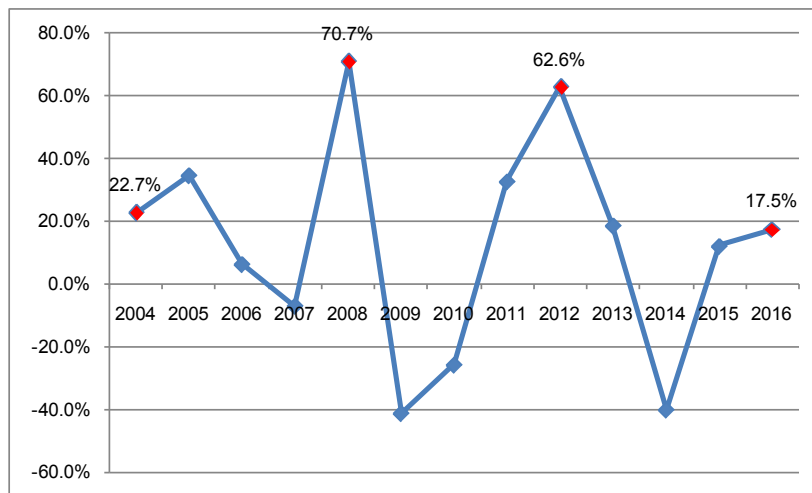
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
In all United States	12,607	15,464	20,831	22,165	20,645	35,251	20,778	15,451	20,508	33,351	39,590	23,775	26,665	31,320
In NY	6,717	7,587	10,001	10,629	10,028	14,618	8,914	6,051	8,684	15,638	20,402	10,080	11,463	13,297

**Source:** Homeland Security, *Profiles on Naturalized Citizens*.

**Note:** The gray columns highlight the years of presidential elections in the United States.

A closer look at the last 14 years reveals that between 2003 and 2016, the number of Dominicans who became citizens of the United States reached 338,401, for an annual average of 24,171 Dominicans. What is interesting is that the number of those becoming citizens of the U.S. fluctuates, reflecting a tendency to increase during presidential election years. Only one exception disrupts this pattern (2004). Of the total number of Dominicans who became citizens of the U.S. between 2003 and 2016, over one third (34%) did so during the four years of presidential elections in the United States (2004, 2008, 2012, and 2016). As indicated in the graph below (graph 1) both 2008 and 2012 saw remarkable highs in the rates of naturalization as compared to other years.

**Graph No. 1**  
**Annual Growth Rate of U.S. Naturalized Dominicans, 2003-2016**



**Source:** Homeland Security, *Profiles on Naturalized Citizens*.

In 2003, 53% of naturalized Dominicans resided in New York state. This percentage decreased to 39% in 2010, and then increased slightly, reaching 42%, in 2016. Nonetheless, the majority of Dominicans who are naturalized in the United States still live in New York. The pattern in the number of Dominicans residing in the state of New York who acquire U.S. citizenship also presents a visible correlation with the electoral cycles: 33% of naturalizations from 2003 to 2016 occurred in years of presidential elections.

A survey conducted among Dominican residents in the neighborhood of Washington Heights in New York City, found that regardless of the increase in the number of Dominicans that acquire U.S. citizenship, there are obstacles that hinder and discourage the process:

[...] it is evident that individuals who are active in the politics of the Dominican Republic and have most of their families in the Dominican Republic are less likely to pursue US citizenship. Having one's family mostly abroad reduces the probability of naturalizing by 25 per cent while participating in the politics of the home country reduces naturalization by 28 per cent.<sup>7</sup>

The same survey reports that the level of contact with the Dominican Republic affected Dominican's motivations to become naturalized citizens of the United States. While high contact with the Dominican Republic decreased the likelihood of Dominicans to become U.S. citizens, participating in Dominican electoral politics, however, was found to be a strong predictor for Dominican participation in U.S. institutional politics.<sup>8</sup>

**Table No. 2**  
**Population of Dominican Origin in the United States and in the State of New York, 2006-2016**

	2006	2016	Growth Rate 2006/2016
<b>United States</b>			
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,217,225</b>	<b>1,914,120</b>	<b>57%</b>
A) Natives	482,590	864,464	79%
B) Non-natives	734,635	1,049,656	43%
<i>Naturalized</i>	<i>328,186</i>	<i>555,607</i>	<i>69%</i>
<i>Not naturalized</i>	<i>406,449</i>	<i>494,049</i>	<i>22%</i>
<b>NEW YORK</b>			
<b>Total</b>	<b>659,962</b>	<b>871,525</b>	<b>32%</b>
A) Natives	259,026	366,011	41%
B) Non-natives	400,936	505,514	26%
<i>Naturalized</i>	<i>177,952</i>	<i>265,373</i>	<i>49%</i>
<i>Not naturalized</i>	<i>222,984</i>	<i>240,141</i>	<i>8%</i>
<b>CITIZENS (Natives+Naturalized)</b>			
<b>In United States</b>	810,776	1,420,071	75%
<b>In New York</b>	436,978	631,384	44%

**Source:** United States Census Bureau.

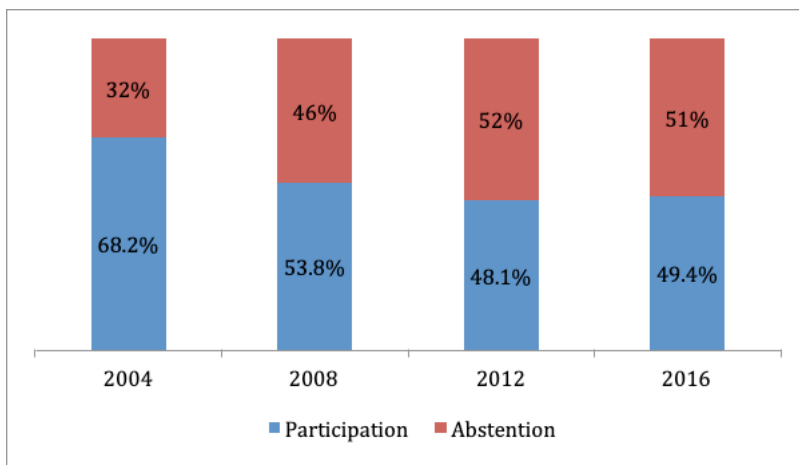
As indicated in table 2, the number of Dominicans born in the United States grew at a rate of 79% between 2006 and 2016. This growth was lower in the state of New York, which recorded a growth rate of 41% within the same years. Table 2 also shows that of the 871,525 Dominicans residing in New York state in 2016, 72% were U.S. citizens. Of this last number, 58% had obtained citizenship by naturalization while 42% have done so by birth. Only 28% of the total number of Dominicans in New York in 2016 were not U.S. citizens.

### 3. Political Empowerment

#### 3.1 Political Participation in the Dominican Republic

Dominicans who lived abroad exhibited high levels of politicization, creating branches of all major political parties from the Dominican Republic in the countries where they resided. Dominican political parties took advantage of that reality during the early years of the 1970s, increased their effort to create strong bridges among members who resided in various countries, and represented a potential of steady funding and votes from constituencies outside of the Dominican Republic.

**Graph No. 2**  
**Participation and Abstention of Dominicans Residing in NY**  
**in the Dominican Presidential Elections, 2004-2016**



**Source:** Dominican Central Electoral Board (JCE) and National Statistical Office (ONE).

Dominican migrants’ participation in electoral campaigns has often been fervent, and it is estimated that they have financed around 15% of the campaign expenses of the political parties. The most enthusiastic voters residing abroad traveled to the Dominican Republic during electoral processes to exercise their right to vote. There are no statistics on this, but it is assumed that those who traveled to vote were few in number, due to the fact that many could not purchase an air ticket. However, the low Dominican migrant voter turnout was offset by the influence that residents abroad had on voters in the Dominican Republic, who, along with their remittance, opined about who to vote for.

Dominicans who resided abroad pressured the Dominican government and politicians in the Dominican Republic to open electoral processes to allow for their participation from abroad. As a result, in 1997, three years after Dominicans were granted dual citizenship by constitutional amendment, Electoral Law 275-97 was passed. This law allowed for the creation of voting sites in foreign countries for Dominicans living abroad to

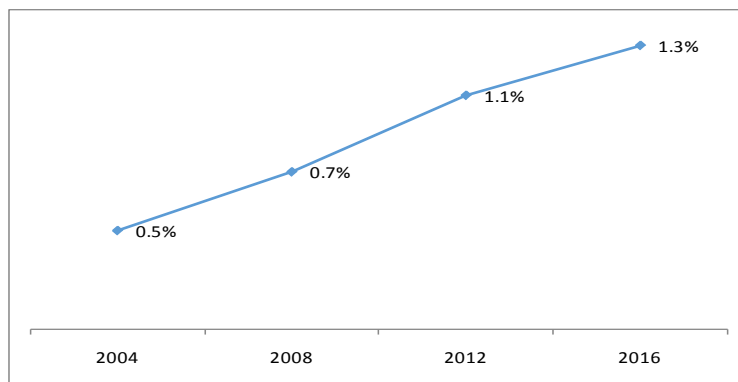
exercise their right and participate in presidential elections. Due to logistical and budgetary issues, however, it was not until the Dominican presidential elections of 2004 that Dominicans residing abroad voted for the very first time in their countries of residence.

During the 2004 Dominican presidential election, 16,618 Dominicans voted in the state of New York, representing 47% of all the votes cast abroad, and 0.5% of the total Dominican votes. In the 2008 presidential election, the number of Dominicans who voted in the state of New York increased to 30,145 practically doubling the number of participants as compared to 2004. In the 2012 election, the number of those who voted increased again, reaching 49,733. By the 2016 election, the Dominican voters in the state of New York numbered 62,209, tripling its representation in a matter of 12 years. In 2016, Dominican New York voters represented 33% of all the votes cast abroad and 1.3% of the total votes cast that year.

Despite the fact that the number of registered voters increased systematically in New York state, voter turnout has been decreasing and abstention, correspondingly, increasing. Voter participation in the state of New York, representing 68% in 2004, decreased to 49% in 2016. Similarly, voting participation of Dominicans residing abroad generally declined as well. voter participation of Dominicans abroad decreased from 67% in 2004 to 49% in 2016. In the Dominican Republic, however, electoral participation continues to be among the highest in Latin America, although participation slightly fell from 73% to 70% between 2004 and 2016.

Graph No. 3 shows the impact of New York Dominican voters in the last four presidential elections. As indicated by the graph, Dominican New Yorkers have significantly increased their representation within the total number of participants in Dominican presidential elections. In 2004, New York Dominicans represented 0.5% of the total vote and 1.3% in 2016.

**Graph No. 3**  
**Votes in NY as a % of Total Votes in the Dominican Republic**  
**2004-2016**



Source: JCE and ONE.

### ***3.2 From Proselytism to Political Representation in the Dominican Republic***

Dominicans living abroad have remained very active in home politics, even during the times when they had to travel to the Dominican Republic to participate in electoral processes. During campaign periods, Dominicans engaged in partisan activities such as fundraising and voter motivation. Despite their activism and involvement, however, Dominicans' participation in the exercise of political power was always more symbolic than real and



was largely confined to appointing a few people in Dominican consulates positions in the Dominican Foreign Service. Still, Dominicans living abroad continued to demand more political representation.

These demands for greater opportunities to participate in institutional politics at home did not fall on deaf ears. In 2010, the Dominican Constitution was modified. Among the modifications was the inclusion of seven new members to Congress, elected by Dominican constituents living abroad. This new constitutional provision was regulated by Law 136-11, which created three new electoral districts (*circunscripciones*) worldwide. New York state was designated part of the first district, along with Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Washington DC, Connecticut, Montreal, and Toronto.<sup>9</sup> In 2012, Dominican citizens abroad elected their first representatives to the Dominican Congress.

New York state was home to 30% of all the polling sites created abroad. The 49,040 valid votes cast in New York were distributed as follows among the main parties and alliances:

- Dominican Revolutionary Party and allies (PRD) 46.37%
- Dominican Liberation Party and allies (PLD) 35.33%
- Social Christian Reformist Party (PRSC) 10.71%

Four out of the seven members of Dominican Congress elected to represent Dominicans living abroad belonged to the PRD party; the other three belonged to the PLD party. Three of the members elected to Congress resided in the United States, part of the First Electoral District, two in Puerto Rico, part of the Second Electoral District, and the remaining two in Spain, part of the Third Electoral District.

In the 2016 presidential elections, the number of polling stations in New York state increased from 184 in 2012 to 236. This number represented 31% of the total polling stations installed abroad. Similarly, the 60,843 valid votes cast in the state that year were distributed as follows among the major political parties and their allies:

- Modern Revolutionary Party and allies (PRM): 52.14%
- Dominican Liberation Party and allies (PLD): 44.18%
- Social Christian Reformist Party (PRSC): 2.5%

In the 2016 elections, the PLD and its allies obtained five of the seven overseas representatives while the PRM obtained two representatives.

### ***3.3 Proselytizing Exported to the United States***

There is very limited information regarding the participation in U.S. electoral processes of Dominicans who are U.S. citizens and Dominicans who were born in the United States. Voting registration in the U.S. does not include voter's national origins. Because of the lack of data on U.S. voter's countries of origin, we are advancing a hypothesis about Dominicans' participation in U.S. electoral politics based on the following assumption: a relationship between Dominicans' high level of civic engagement in the U.S. and political outcomes among Latinos in the United States.

The potential Hispanic vote in the United States increased from 8.8 million in 1992 to 28 million in 2016. Nonetheless, less than half of potential Latino voters voted in the presidential elections between 1992 and 2016.<sup>10</sup> In a 2016 study regarding Latino voter registration, Bergard found that Latino groups had lower

voter registration rates than non-Latino groups. In fact, the study points at low voting registration rates among Latinos as the major obstacle behind their low participation in U.S. electoral politics.<sup>11</sup>

A study conducted in New York and Rhode Island by Latino Decisions in 2015 found that while people had a strong desire to register and vote in elections, a lack of knowledge about how to vote prevented them from participating in electoral processes.<sup>12</sup>

The same study found that U.S. naturalized Dominicans who were registered to vote in the U.S. said that they would participate more in electoral processes if they had people of Dominican descent running for political offices:

[...] there was a very strong sense that beyond candidates, there is a need for more Dominican-focused community organizations to inspire civic participation. An overwhelming 91 percent of registered and 94 percent of non-registered Dominicans agreed with the statement “we need more local Dominican-focused civic advocacy groups that help raise the voice of Dominican Americans”.<sup>13</sup>

The study concludes that political parties and electoral campaigns have paid little attention to Dominicans, despite the fact that they make up an important segment of the Latino electorate in the United States.

### ***3.4 Increasing Political Representation in the United States***

The American Community Survey (ACS) estimated that the number of people of Dominican origin in the United States increased from 1,217,225 in 2006 to 1,914,120 in 2016, a growth rate of 57% in approximately ten years. In New York state, the Dominican population increased from 659,962 in 2006 to 871,525, during the same period. As the number of Dominicans increased, their civic and political involvement intensified, and in 1991, Guillermo Linares became the first person of Dominican ancestry to be elected to the New York City Council. Six years later, in 1997, Adriano Espaillat became the first Dominican to be elected to the State Assembly of New York, a position he held until 2010, when he was elected State Senator to represent District 31. In 2002, Jose Peralta joined the State Assembly of New York, a position he held until 2010 when he was elected to the New York State Senate. In 2016, Marisol Alcántara, was elected to the New York State Senate, becoming the only woman of Hispanic ancestry to hold this position at the time. At the time of this writing, Victor Pichardo (2013), representing District 86, and Carmen de la Rosa (2016), representing District 72, are the only two members of Dominican ancestry in the New York State Assembly.

In 2016, Dominicans held comparable shares of the New York City Council and the New York City population. During that year, people of Dominican descent represented 8% of the total number of members in the New York City Council and 7% of New York City’s total population. The New York City Council members of Dominican origin were Ydanis Rodriguez, District 10, elected in 2009; Fernando Cabrera, District 14, elected in 2009; Antonio Reynoso, District 34, elected in 2013; and Rafael Espinal, District 37, elected in 2013.

The state of New York has 27 representatives in the House of Representatives. In November 2016, Adriano Espaillat became the first person of Dominican ancestry elected to the United States House of Representatives. At the time of this writing, the Dominican contingent of elected officials represented 3.7% of New York’s total electoral posts, a percentage that is similar to the proportion of people of Dominican descent within the total New York population.

## 4. Social Empowerment

### *4.1 Organizations and Integration in the United States*

Portes, Escobar & Arana (2008) created an inventory of 1,775 organizations that belonged to Colombian, Mexican, and Dominican immigrants in the United States. They found that in the case of Colombians and Mexicans, a similar number of organizations focused on both, domestic affairs (issues on immigrants' lives in the United States) and on transnational issues (issues related to the homeland). In the case of Dominicans, however, the number of organizations that focused on domestic issues predominated. Portes, Escobar & Arana's study demonstrates Dominican immigrant's decision to concentrate on issues that affected them in the receiving society. In addition, these authors found that Dominican's involvement in home country affairs did not impede their participation in U.S. politics. In fact, "...transnational involvement and political incorporation turn out to be mutually supportive rather than oppositional."<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Hernandez (2012) demonstrated that while Dominicans kept a strong relationship with the home country, they were actively engaged in a process of community building in New York City, where they created multiple and diverse organizations, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s. By 1990, a grassroots leadership emerged from these community organizations, spreading to various cities in the United States. Some of these leaders would eventually transform into politicians and seek political offices in Dominican hubs in the U.S, including Providence, Lawrence, and New York City.

### *4.2 Transnationalism and Linked Social Actions*

Transnational links between Dominicans residing abroad and in the Dominican Republic have been amply documented. Dominicans who live abroad have established branches of Dominican political parties in their host society; they have created cultural organizations to preserve their cultural heritage and celebrate their historical legacy; and they have secured the right to participate in Dominican electoral processes. They have also spearheaded philanthropic actions—which are often activated by regional misfortunes and national catastrophes in the Dominican Republic—an essential component of their transnational link.

Protests demanding social change constitute a new type of transnational link, evinced in New York City, for instance, during the last few years. Summoned through social networks, New York Dominicans have taken to the streets to protest for sporadic concerns or in response to a call of social movement in the Dominican Republic. Social protests and demonstrations have been organized in synchronization in both the United States and the Dominican Republic. More than simple collaborations, the social protests abroad demanded action from the Dominican Government.

The *Coalición Educación Digna*, which brought together almost two hundred social organizations, led a well-mounted strategy that mobilized practically all social sectors of Dominican society, to protest and demand the increase of the educational budget to 4% of the Gross National Product (GNP), as stipulated by the Dominican Constitution. New York Dominicans did not stay on the sidelines. They organized marches and protests using the logo and colors that identified the 4% social movement. On the fourth of each month, groups of students, teachers, artists, and others gathered at four different locations in New York City, to protest and ask passers-by to sign a document addressed to UNESCO, urging the Dominican Government to increase its educational budget. The educational budget was finally increased to 4% of the GNP in 2013. The Green Movement, which seeks to end corruption and its ability to flourish with impunity in the Dominican Republic, followed a similar trajectory.

The Green Movement established a permanent committee in New York City, which was responsible for organizing marches and protests synchronized with similar events in the Dominican Republic. On July 14, 2017, a march organized by the New York City Green Movement committee attracted an estimated 5,000 people to the streets of Washington Heights, in New York City.

## 5. The Question of the Second Generation and Civic and Political Empowerment

While many immigrants who live abroad maintain strong nexus with their home country, their children born in the foreign abode, however, may not follow in their footsteps. In fact, some have found that among U.S. born children, nativity and generation statuses negatively affect their relationships and interest with their parents and grandparents' homeland.<sup>15</sup> Evidence show that descendants of immigrants feel more incorporated and committed to the country where they are born and not the country of their ancestors.

Currently, a little over 4 Dominicans in 10 have already been born in the U.S. and approximately, 12% of them are between 18 and 24 years of age. Though there are very few studies regarding the U.S. Dominican second generation, some observers have already exerted views about the group's links with the Dominican Republic. Jordan (1997) suggests that second generation Dominicans have not remained closely attached to their parents' homeland:

[...] many Dominicans, especially young people, have made the break. Younger New York-born Dominicans see the older generation's ties to homeland politics as nostalgic, and they view the future of the Dominican community as intimately linked to the empowering of Dominicans in the United States. This often creates tensions between those older generation organizers who focus their organizing efforts around island politics and those who advocate active involvement in local metropolitan affairs.<sup>16</sup>

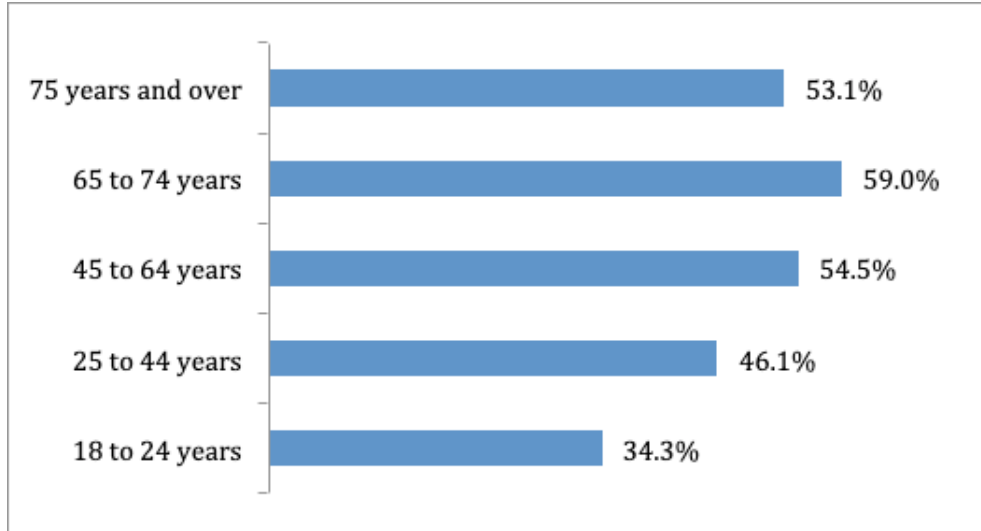
Do lower links with parents' homeland increase the likelihood of higher political involvement in the U.S. among second generation Dominicans? This cannot yet be determined. Unfortunately, the lack of information in this area prevails. Yet, the survey conducted by Pantoja among Washington Heights Dominicans gives us reasons to be cautious in our expectations regarding U.S. young Dominicans' civic and political involvement. Among those interviewed Pantoja found that:

“respondents who are older, have higher rates of education and income participate at rates higher than those who are younger or have lower socio-economic and educational statuses.”<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, the low political engagement found among U.S. young Dominicans seem to be a generalized attitude among young Hispanics in the United States. In fact, voting output among Hispanics shows that the youngest voters have the lowest participation rate among all age groups. This is captured in Graph 4, showing participation rates among Hispanics in the 2016 presidential election disaggregated by age. Similarly, U.S. born Hispanics have been found to have lower voting participation rates as compared to U.S. naturalized Hispanic immigrants.

**Graph No. 4**

**Electoral Participation of Hispanics in the 2016 US Presidential Elections,  
by Age Groups**



**Source:** United States Census Bureau

## Conclusions and Moving Ahead

In the course of writing this paper it became clear that Dominican immigrants have made significant strides towards integrating in the life of the United States. Similarly, Dominican immigrants' close relationship to the home country have benefited them tremendously both in the U.S. and in the Dominican Republic. Yet, in the process, we have identified several shortcomings and challenges that remain ahead and that need to be addressed to continue Dominicans' road to achieving higher levels of integration in the U.S. and maintaining tight links with Dominican society.

Dominicans have yet to realize, for instance, that voters from abroad can significantly influence electoral and political outcomes in the Dominican Republic. Dominicans abroad represent 4% of the Dominican electorate. They also have achieved the right to elect 7 members to represent their interests in Dominican Congress. Yet, some believe that voters abroad, particularly in places like New York where the highest political representation resides, still lack clear paths to exercise pressures on their representatives to deliver and pay attention to issues that matter to their constituents. Similarly, voter turnout abroad must be improved. Though the number of those registered to vote has increased systematically, voter participation has declined abroad. The right to vote abroad represents a political achievement and one of highest points in democratic society; this right should make every Dominican proud and should be put into practice effectively.

It is also clear that Dominicans who live abroad need to create more civic organizations that inspire and guide the political participation of Dominicans, particularly U.S. born Dominicans. The civic and political participation of young people, as noted earlier, is a complex phenomenon, that permeates young people in the United States in general. Yet, Dominicans should make an effort to invest in civic and political education programs that promote involvement in the social and political life of neighborhoods and ethnic communities from an early age, as a way to instill social and political engagement. Similarly, making a conscientious effort to involve U.S. born Dominicans in immigrant parents' activism with regards to the Dominican Republic may encourage a strongest relationship between U.S. born Dominicans and the Dominican Republic. It may also help to instill among second generation Dominicans a valorization for civic and political engagement and a vision of themselves as agents of social change in the place where they were born, undermining the general apathy that characterize many young people today.

## Endnotes

1 For an early definition of transnationalism, see Ninna Glick Schiller Linda Basch, & Cristina Blanc-Szanton, eds. *Towards a transnational perspective on migration: race, class, ethnicity, and nationalism reconsidered* (645. The Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 1992).

For further reading on Dominicans and transnationalism, see Eugenia Georges's *The making of a transnational community: migration, development, and cultural change in the Dominican Republic* (Columbia University Press, 1990), Jorge Duany's *Quisqueya on the Hudson: the transnational identity of Dominicans in Washington Heights* (CUNY Dominican Studies Institute, 1994), Luis E. Guarnizo's *Los Dominicanyorks: the making of a binational society* (*Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, 583, May 1994, pp. 70-86), Alejandro Portes & Ramón Grosfoguel's *Caribbean diasporas: migration and ethnic communities* (*Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, 533, May 1994, pp. 48-69), Pamela Graham's *Reimagining the nation and defining the district: Dominican migration and transnational Politics* (In Patricia Pessar, ed. *Caribbean Circuits: New Directions in the Study of Caribbean Migration*. Center for Migration Studies, 1997), Ninna Nyberg Sørensen's *Narrating identity across Dominican worlds* (In Michael P. Smith & Luis E. Guarnizo, eds. *Transnationalism from below*. Transaction Publishers, 1998), José Itzigsohn, et al. *Mapping Dominican transnationalism: narrow and broad transnational practices* (*Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2.22, March 1999, pp. 316-339), Silvio Torres-Saillant's working paper *Diasporic disquisitions: Dominicans, dominicanists, and the community* (CUNY Dominican Studies Institute, 2000), Peggy Levitt's *Transnational villagers* (University of California Press, 2001), and Ernesto Sagás & Sintia E. Molina's *Dominican migration: transnational perspectives* (University Press of Florida, 2004).

2 Marshall 1949: 312.

3 Portes, Escobar & Arana 2008: 1061.

4 Gilbertson & Singer 2003: 28.

5 See M. E. Rodríguez 2005.

6 CSREA 2006: 30.

7 Pantoja 2005: 135.

8 Pantoja 2005: 137.

9 District No. 2 includes Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Miami, Panama, St. Martin and Curazao. District No. 3 includes Madrid, Barcelona, Zurich, Milan and Amsterdam.

10 Bergard 2016: 5.

11 Ibid.

12 Pantoja & Barreto 2015.

13 Pantoja & Barreto 2015: 3.

14 Portes, Escobar & Arana 2008: 1077.

15 Portes, Escobar & Arana, 2008: 1085.

16 Jordan 1997: 4.

17 Pantoja 2005: 133.

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