

THE CUBAN DIASPORA'S ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION WITH THE ISLAND

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Motivated by various economic and political reasons, nearly a million Cubans and descendants live in Miami-Dade County (U.S. Census, 2019). Since the 1990s, one of the main reasons for migration has been the profound economic crisis on the island. To address the economic crisis, in 2011 the Cuban government introduced economic changes on the island through the so-called "Update of the Economic and Social Model" (PCC, 2011). Among the changes, the Cuban government relaunched the private sector of the economy. In response, the value of remittances to the island increased (HCG, 2019), as some emigrants wished to contribute to the development of private initiatives on the island. The investment of remittances for the development of private initiatives has favored the economic situation of relatives, friends, neighbors, and other receiving partners (Delgado, 2015, 2017).

In February 2019, the Cuban National Assembly of People's Power approved the most recent Cuban Constitutional Referendum (Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular, 2019). During widespread consultation that preceded the approval, the Cuban government invited the Cuban diaspora to share their opinions on a draft and present their proposals. In September 2019, Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla met with a selected group of the Cuban diaspora in New York, representing influential Cuban-Americans and advocacy groups (Oro, 2019). The Cuban government's discourse towards

the diaspora was a welcome change after decades of hostile relations, fragmentation, and distance. According to the 2018 Cuba Poll, Cuban migrants living in South Florida who arrived after 1995 are more willing to support U.S. rapprochement policies with Cuba (Grenier and Gladwin, 2018).

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the economic and political participation with the island of the Cuban diaspora living in South Florida. After framing the analysis, I first describe the sociodemographic characteristics of the Cuban diaspora residing in Florida, then I examine the Cuban diaspora's economic participation and finally I explore the Cuban diaspora living in south Florida's influence on U.S.-Cuba foreign policy.

TRANSNATIONALISM, DIASPORA, AND INTEREST GROUPS: WHAT DO THE THEORIES SAY?

The scholarly literature defines transnationalism as unofficial cross-border contacts initiated and maintained by immigrants, their relatives, and their communities in the home country. Transnationalism is a social phenomenon that explains the interconnectivity between people and the economic, social, cultural, and political significance of nation-states' boundaries (Graham, 1996; Levitt, 2001; Vertovec, 2001; Portes, 2002; Castles, 2005; Duany, 2011). Transnationalism has taken a more intense form as technological advances permit social networks to be main-

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tained for more extended periods and allow individuals, ideas, and resources to move back and forth more quickly than in the past.

The theory of transnational social spaces adds to the idea of private actors' participation through economic initiatives (Suárez-Orozco and Summer, 2000; Flores, 2006; Levitt, 2001; Feldman-Bianco et al., 2011). For example, the knowledge and experience acquired abroad can be decisive in starting a new business or motivating family members residing in their home society to establish one. These transnational economic actors seek to capitalize on opportunities in both the area of origin and reception at the same time (Portes, 2002: 139).

Other authors have considered the role of the diaspora as an ethnic minority group that influences and shapes the foreign policy regarding their country of origin. In Bard's view (1994), ethnic minority interests play an essential role in influencing U.S. foreign policy: by "contributing money to the campaigns of candidates for the presidency and Congress, ethnic activists have another valuable source of access to decision-makers" (Rubenzer, 2010: 108). They can raise funds to make significant campaign contributions to influence U.S. foreign policy and advocate for their causes or policies of interest.

The literature also argues that interest groups arise more or less spontaneously in response to feelings of common interest among individuals experiencing some form of deprivation or frustration (Truman, 1951 in Walker, 1983). Two elements are essential to organize interest groups: membership and material support. Once interest groups have received financial or technical contributions from a patron, the patron continues to support the group in most cases. At the same time, groups find it difficult to become independent of grants from individuals, private foundations, and government agencies (Walker, 1983: 400). If interest groups are well-funded, they can supply information and analyses that are either too costly or too difficult for a congress member or bureaucratic agency to obtain (Gais, Peterson and Walker, 1984). They have more access to information, the ability to disseminate their views, and more time to devote to political participation.

TRANSNATIONALISM, DIASPORA, AND INTEREST GROUPS: THE CUBAN CASE

Studies on the Caribbean diaspora emphasize five major insular migrations arriving at the United States since the last century: Cubans, Dominicans, Haitians, Jamaicans, and Puerto Ricans. According to Portes and Grosfoguel (1994), immigrants from the island-nations are diversified entrepreneurs, professionals, technicians, and skilled workers, contrary to common stereotypes. However, they present differences in their migratory and settlement stories that shape their experiences in adaptation and assimilation in the United States.

Studies about Cuban migration emphasize the historical dimension. The literature shows that the exodus of Cubans migrating to the United States began earlier than 1959. In this respect, Jorge Duany states that by the end of the 19th century, Cubans had established sizable communities in Key West and Tampa, Florida; New York City; and New Orleans (Duany, 2017). Between 1868 and 1898, the period that comprises the Cuban Wars of Independence, the United States admitted approximately 55,700 Cuban immigrants (Duany, 2017). They migrated in a context of economic and political disturbances on the island.

The literature widely documents the post-1959 Cuban diaspora. Various authors have described the distinctions between migrant waves after the triumph of the Revolution in 1959 (Gomis and Hernández, 1986; Bach, 1987; Masud-Piloto, 1988; Pedraza, 1992; Duany, 1999, 2017; Torreira and Buajasan, 2000; Arbolea, 2000; Aja, 2009). From 1959 onwards, radical changes in Cuba structured the migratory phenomenon. The literature identifies five fundamental stages of migration: the Historical Exile (1959–1962), the Freedom Flights (1965–1979), the Mariel Exodus (1980–1989), the Balsero Crisis (August–Sept. 1994), and the Wet-Foot, Dry-Foot Policy period (1995–2017).

The first migrant wave happened when the Cuban government nationalized private property after 1959. The historical exile, mainly composed of the white bourgeoisie, migrated mostly to the U.S. They were considered political refugees with the means and

wealth necessary to live in the United States (Bach, 1987: 112). The second wave took place after the U.S. government suspended travel from Cuba to the U.S. in the aftermath of the 1962 Missile Crisis. During this period, Cubans first attempted to migrate to the U.S. illegally using a variety of unsafe vessels. To address this dangerous situation, in 1965, the Cuban government authorized emigrants residing in the United States to sail to the island to pick up their relatives in the Cuban port of Camarioca between October 10 and November 15, 1965. Later on, diplomatic negotiations between Washington and Havana resulted in the creation of an airbridge between Varadero and Miami from December 1, 1965, to April 6, 1973 (Duany, 2017). The Cuban government signed a "Memorandum of Understanding" with the United States to regularize the migratory flow through charter air flights, which were called "the Freedom Flights" (Duany, 1999). During this migratory wave, the Cuban exodus was more representative of the island's population, with greater participation of blue-collar and service worker migrants.

A third migrant wave took place as a result of the Cuban government opening up a maritime bridge between the Cuban port of Mariel and Key West (Florida) in 1980, giving Cubans living abroad the opportunity to sail to Cuba and pick up Cuban relatives on the island. Also called "the Mariel Exodus," this migrant wave was composed of a more racially and economically diverse population than previous waves (Arboleya, 2000). The migrants were considered by Cuban authorities as *escoria* ("scum"), representative of social marginality in Cuba, and included prisoners and psychiatric patients (Antonio Aja interviewed by Delgado, 2010). The fourth wave is known as "the *balsero* crisis" (rafters crisis). It began in 1994, in the aftermath of the collapse of the socialist camp. This migration was mainly motivated by economic reasons, even though there were also political reasons. A 1995 survey of *balseros* found that they were predominantly male, urban, light-skinned, educated, and younger than the overall Cuban population. As in the past, the majority came from Havana (Acosta, 2020).

The fifth and most recent migrant wave is closely related to the "wet-foot, dry-foot" policy toward migrants from Cuba implemented by the U.S. between 1995 and 2017. This policy was an interpretation of the 1995 application of the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 that set forth that anyone who emigrated from Cuba to the United States would be allowed to remain the U.S. and pursue residency a year later. Under the "wet-foot, dry-foot" policy, Cubans that reached U.S. soil (dry-foot) were admitted, regardless of their legal status, while those captured at sea (wet-foot) were returned to Cuba. This policy gave Cuban migrants who reached the U.S. territory a privileged treatment in the United States compared to other migrants captured at sea who were deported. However, toward the end of the Obama administration, the White House announced the end of this policy. Cubans presenting themselves at U.S. land ports of entry with no legal status were no longer authorized to enter (Duany, 2017). The Cuban government accepted the return of Cuban nationals.

The political participation of Cuban diaspora's interest groups in the United States has been less explored in the literature. Rubenzer's study (2010) is a novel contribution to this topic in which he underlines that Cuban-American interest groups have been influential in campaign contributions to local and national candidates. Their material contributions, he argues, have had an impact on U.S. foreign policy decisions related to the Cuban embargo. The Cuban ethnic minority in the United States is diverse in purpose, organization, and resources. U.S. embargo supporters have been able to raise funds to make significant campaign contributions, outspending anti-embargo groups. According to Rubenzer (2010:12), the diaspora's opposition to the embargo is not sufficiently united. However, mighty political action committees (PACs) outside of the diaspora representing the interests of U.S. agribusiness, business interests, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and other advocacy groups have become vocal opponents of the Cuban embargo.

Social scientists have explored the impact of Cuban migration on family dynamics and remittances for family consumption. Social psychologist Consuelo

Martín (2006, 2007) notes that transnational dynamics affect the everyday life of islanders, including developing economic strategies that intertwine with aspirations, desires, motivations, and the expectations of both the diaspora and their family living in Cuba. Scholars considered remittances for family consumption as a survival strategy during the 1990s economic crisis. It was also a way to maintain emotional ties with family and friends in the island (Martín, 2000; Fresneda, 2007). The sociological approach explores the Cuban diaspora's socio-cultural and economic participation by sending remittances for family consumption. In this respect, sociological studies consider that remittances transmit new knowledge, ideas, and advice for private enterprises' development. They also examine the diaspora's investments in private enterprises as a form of working capital for Cuban private sector enterprises (Delgado, 2015, 2017, 2019; Rodríguez, 2018; Perera, 2019).

Economists have made essential contributions to the study of remittances in Cuba. A special interest has been to examine the characteristics of Cuba's remittance landscape and significance of remittances in the Cuban economy (González-Corzo and Larson, 2007). Other experts have considered how U.S. policies toward Cuba and the Latin-American context more broadly affect Cuba's economy. In this regard, Pérez-Villanueva (2008) highlights the intensification of U.S. pressure, through restrictions on Cubans' travel abroad, restrictions on remittances, and sanctions against Cuban financial assets abroad. Mesa-Lago and Vidal (2019) have analyzed the impact on the Cuban economy of Venezuelan crisis's and Donald Trump's policies. The Trump administration's policies toward Cuba, which restricted travel and remittances to the island, affected the Cuban economy at the macro level and the daily life of Cuban families at the micro level.

MIXED-METHODS APPROACH

This paper follows an integrative mixed-methods design (Creswell and Creswell, 2018) to answer the following research question: What is the economic and political participation of the Cuban diaspora living in South Florida with the island? In this regard, the mixed-methods design uses techniques drawn from

more than one methodological tradition in the course of answering my single integrated research question. Therefore, I apply the explanatory sequential mixed-methods strategy. I first conduct quantitative research, analyze the results, and then build on the results to explain them in more detail with qualitative data (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). In this study, I firstly analyze primary data from the 2018 Cuba Poll and then explore these quantitative research results by conducting semi-structured interviews.

The 2018 FIU Cuba Poll, directed by Guillermo Grenier and Hugh Gladwin, collects information for about one thousand Cuban-American residents in Miami-Dade County, ages 18 and over. The poll offers information about the sample's profile with respect to sociodemographic, economic, and political variables.

I have used Stata software to analyze the primary data collected by the 2018 Cuba Poll. I have used Stata to explore descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, standard deviation, median, and percent) and inferential statistics (chi-square test). The Poll also includes information about the economic participation of the Cuban diaspora in relations with the island, such as sending remittances to their relatives in Cuba and their role in investing in private businesses. It also presents data on other preferences of respondents, such as visiting the country and returning to Cuba. Likewise, it explores political attitudes such as opinions in favor of or opposition to the embargo and the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Cuba.

I conducted ten semi-structured interviews to provide further insights to the information collected by the 2018 Cuba Poll. The interviews allowed me to capture Cuban diaspora's perceptions of their economic and political role with the island. The cases for the interviews were selected intentionally. I prioritized diversity to show varied experiences as the Cuban diaspora living in South Florida is not a homogeneous group. I interviewed Cuban-Americans living in South Florida, ranging from 28–70 years old, both men (7) and women (3), from different generations, who arrived in the United States in different years.

Table 1. Summary Sociodemographic Statistics of Cuban-Americans Living in South Florida

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Median	Percent
Sex	1,001	1.51	0.50	Female	51.55% female
Age	970	59.14	17.13	60	50% 60+ years old
Race	1,001	1.61	1.34	White	79.12% (White)
Marital Status	1,001	1.94	1.15	Married	51.75% (Married)

Source: Author’s estimation from primary data collected by 2018 Cuba Poll, FIU. 5

Table 2. Summary Year of Arrival Statistics

Year of Arrival	Frequency	Percent
Before 1959	20	2.71%
1959-1979	344	46.55%
1980-1994	160	21.65%
1995-2018	215	29.09%
Total	739	100%

Source: Author’s estimation from primary data collected by 2018 Cuba Poll, FIU

This diversity contributes to show realities that the survey does not capture. I gave all the participants the option to speak in the language of their preference, either Spanish (9) or English (1). After conducting the interviews, I transcribed them using Happy-Scribe, an online transcription service that builds transcriptions and subtitles tools in various languages.

This study received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. All interviewees gave their written and verbal informed consent to participate in this research, and they were aware of confidentiality, voluntary participation, potential risks, and benefits.

FINDINGS²

Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Cuban Diaspora Living in South Florida

The sample interviewed by the 2018 Cuba Poll was composed of 51% female and 49% male participants, whose average age was 60 years (see Table 1). Fifty percent of the sample was older than 60 years old. Generally, they defined themselves as white, and more than half of the sample was married. Almost half of the sample (47%) arrived in the United States between 1959 and 1979 (see Table 2). These subjects

were Cuban-Americans who migrated during the first and second waves, were predominantly white collar workers and left Cuba mostly because they opposed Cuba’s political system. Those who arrived in the United States between 1980 and 1994 (third and fourth waves) composed a racially and economically diverse group. Around 30% migrated after 1995.

In contrast, the interview sample was composed mostly by men (7 men compared to 3 women), and the predominant marital status of interviewees was single (see Table 3). Their average age was 42 years old, and most of the interviewees arrived in the United States after 1994, meaning that they belong to the fourth or fifth migrant waves. The contrast between the survey and interview samples contributes to a variety of opinions and preferences.

ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION OF THE CUBAN DIASPORA LIVING IN SOUTH FLORIDA

An analysis of the primary data collected by the 2018 Cuba Poll suggests that more than half of the sample considers their finances to be sound. On average, their household income is between \$50,000—\$70,000 (see Table 4), with \$52,594 being the average household income in Florida (Department of Numbers, 2017). Most considered themselves to be middle class or upper-middle class.

Most of my interviewees mentioned having achieved or striving to achieve the American Dream. For instance, one of the subjects said: “I came to this country with a bag of dreams, as everybody comes. Absolutely, I came with a fundamental goal; I came

2. My calculations are based on the original data collected by the 2018 Cuba Poll, to which I had access, and might slightly differ from the published report (Grenier and Gladwin, 2018). This may be due to the sample weighting the authors used. However, in general, my calculation show the same trends as the original report.

Table 3. Summary Sociodemographic Statistics of Interviewees Living in South Florida

Interview#	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Years (U.S.)	City of origin	Education Level	Profession in Cuba	Profession in the U.S.
1	Female	53	Married	20	Marianao	High School	Housewife	Housewife
2	Male	35	Single	2	Vedado	College Degree	Musician	Media Producer
3	Male	35	Married	15	Vedado	High School	—	Businessman
4	Male	28	In a relationship	5	Vedado	College Degree	Lawyer	Student
5	Male	30	Married	4	Marianao	College Degree	Computer Engineer	Computer Engineer
6	Female	33	Single	4	Centro Habana	Master's Degree	Professional Translator	Bartender and Student
7	Male	67	In a relationship	40	Vibora	College Degree	Lithographer	Lithographer
8	Female	33	Single	2	Centro Habana	Master's Degree	Computer Engineer	Cafeteria worker
9	Male	32	In a relationship	5	Marianao	College Degree	Computer Engineer	Computer Engineer
10	Male	74	Married	54	Cerro	High School	—	Photographer, Caricaturist

Source: Author's semi-structured interview sample data.

Table 4. Summary Statistics: Economic Situation of Cuban-Americans Living in South Florida

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Median	Percent
Personal finances	1,001	2.3	1.16	2 (good)	56.74% Good
Household income	1,001	3.68	1.77	4 (\$50,000-\$70,000)	11.59%, 25.87% > \$70,000
Economic class	1,001	3.03	1.3	3 (middle class)	44.36%
American dream	1,001	1.54	0.95	1 (achieved A.D.)	74.33%
Visits to the island	991	1.57	0.50	2 (No)	57% No, 43% Yes
Send remittances	993	0.38	0.48	0 (No)	61.3%
Invest in private business	1,001	1.67	0.64	2 (No)	52% No, 41% Yes

Source: Author's estimation from primary data collected by 2018 Cuba Poll, FIU.

pursuing economic well-being” (Interviewee #6, female, 33 years old).

As soon as the interviewees obtained a stable economic situation and legal status as a permanent resident in the United States, they undertook their first trip to Cuba. They typically started traveling to Cuba around a year and a half or two years after they migrated. I noted generational differences with respect to this pattern, however. In this regard, the younger interviewees travelled to Cuba more frequently than the older interviewees, but for a shorter time. For example, some young interviewees mentioned they travel every 3–4 months for a weekend or a long holiday weekend. Meanwhile, older interviewees travelled for more extended periods, such as one female who stated that she travels once a year from 4 to 6 months and stays with her family in Havana, coming back to Florida for the rest of the year. Overall, the interviewees found a way to visit their family and friends in Cuba, celebrate birthdays and weddings with them, take their families to hotels, or accompany family members to surgeries and medical treatments.

Another factor we consider relates to sending remittances. The primary data collected by the 2018 Cuba Poll (Grenier & Gladwin, 2018) suggests that the Cuban diaspora generally presents a stable economic situation, and close to 40% report sending money back to friends or family in the island.

Figure 1. Send Money to Cuba: Cuban-Americans Living in South Florida

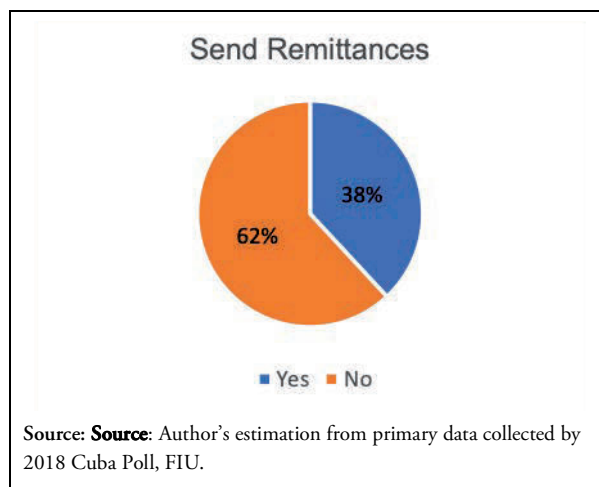
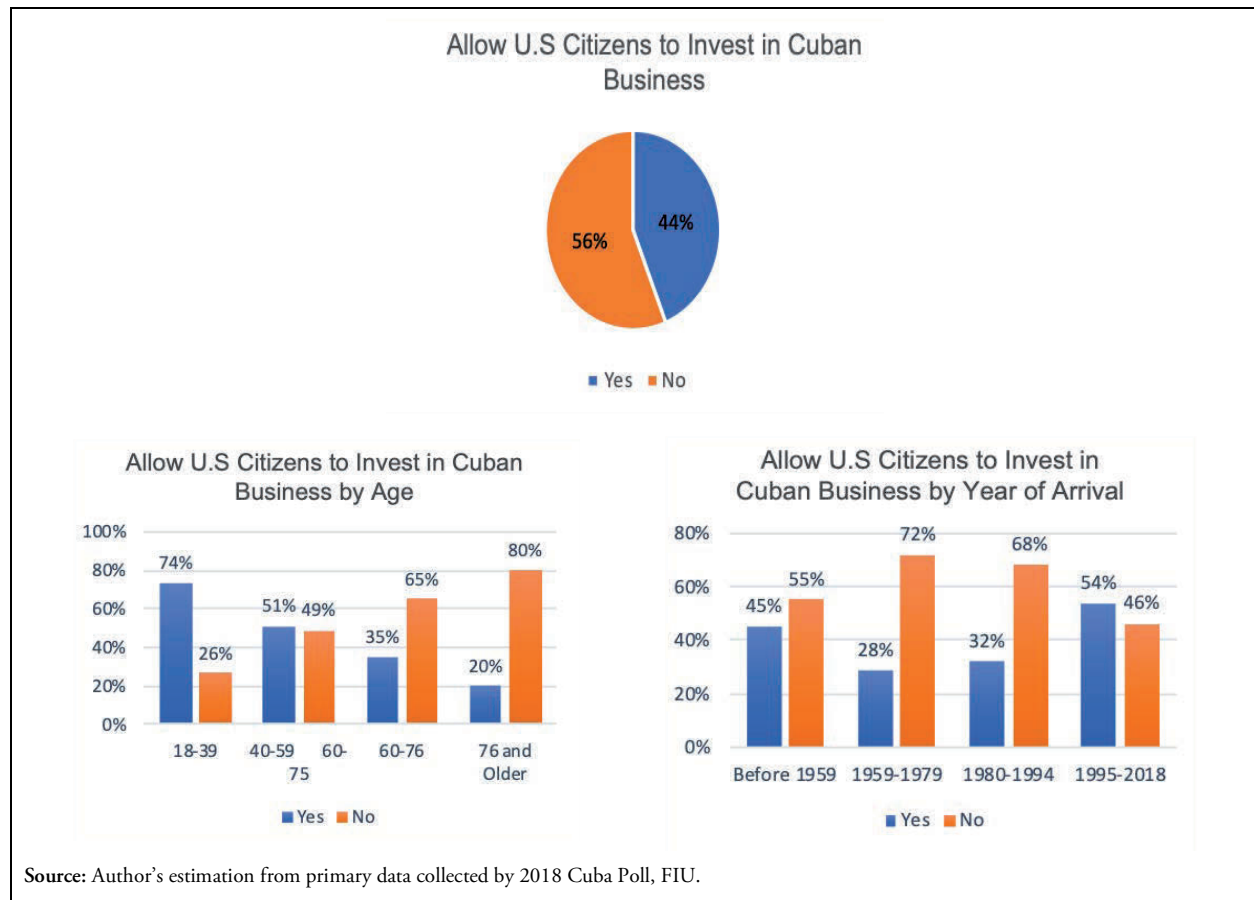


Figure 2. Allow U.S. Citizens to Invest in Cuban Businesses



According to the 2018 Cuba Poll, those who arrived from Cuba after 1995 are more likely to send remittances. Likewise, those in the age range group 18–39 years send more remittances, while those who are 60 years old and over send smaller volumes of remittances to the island. This is so even though the financial situation of younger generations is less stable than that of the Cuban-American population older than 60 years.

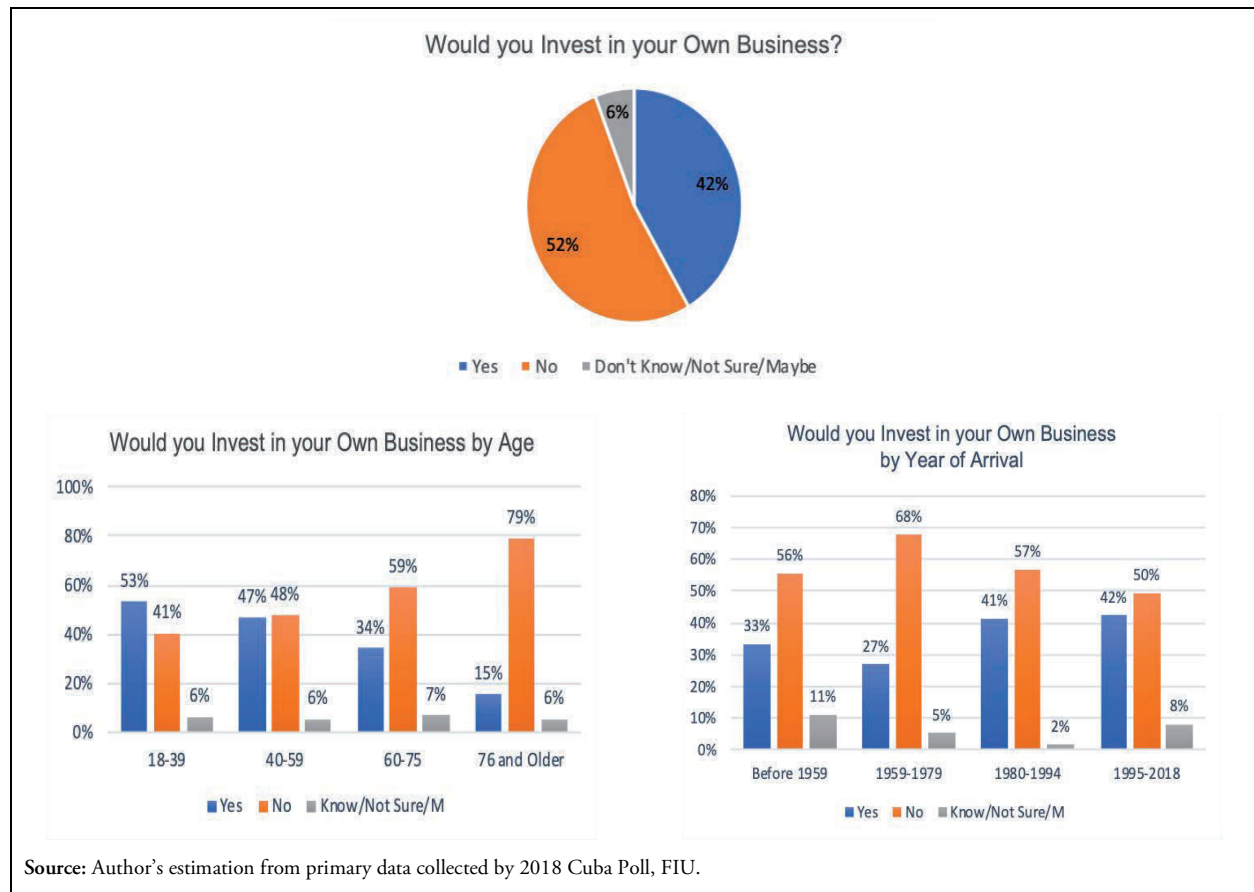
The interviewees send \$100—\$200 to their families in Cuba every month for family consumption. The money is used to address basic needs such as food, clothing, transportation, health care, education, and family celebrations. They also pay for monthly *recargas* (recharges) of their families' phone services so

they can access the Internet. The act of sending remittances for the first time after migrating has a special meaning for the interviewees. One of them told me: “Being able to send money to my family in those first months after I got paid was an otherworldly thing, not to mention the first visit I made to Cuba, where I was able to pay a meal for my family and invite my friends out” (Interviewee #5, male, 33 years old).

Remittances have also played an essential role as working capital to develop private enterprises in Cuba. Based on the information collected by the 2018 Cuba Poll (Grenier & Gladwin, 2018), 44% of the sample³ believed that U.S. citizens should be allowed to invest in Cuban businesses. The youngest cohort

3. My estimate differs from the published report (Grenier & Gladwin, 2018), where the authors estimated that half of the sample favored U.S. citizens being allowed to invest in Cuban businesses. This difference might be due to the sample weighting the authors of the FIU poll used, or how they treated outliers.

Figure 3. Invest in Cuban Business



(18–39 years old) was more likely to support this idea, while those who are 60 years and over opposed it. Those who arrived after 1995 (54%) also believed that U.S. citizens should be allowed to invest in Cuban businesses. Among them, second and third generations support this idea the most (69%) (Grenier & Gladwin, 2018: 20).

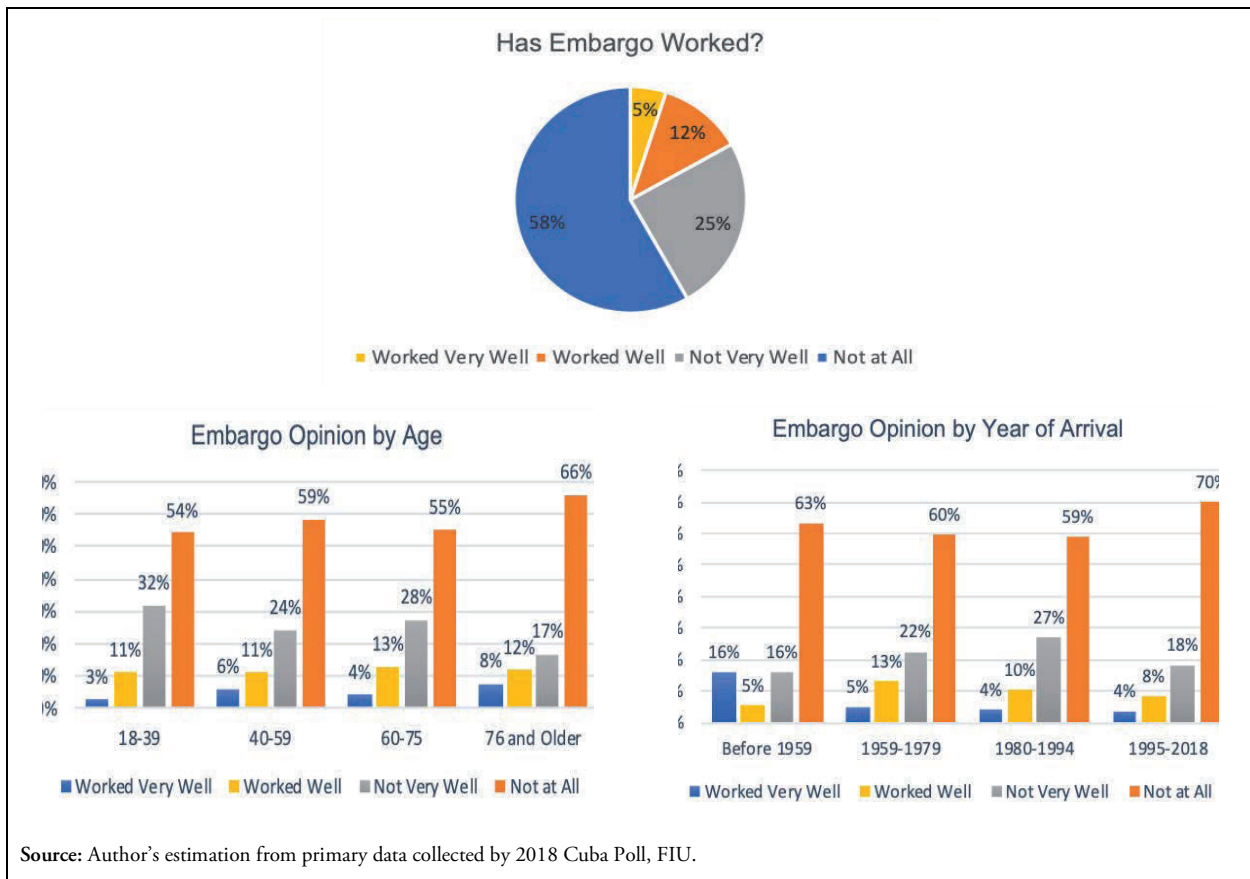
Additionally, 42% of the Cuban-Americans responding to the FIU poll who supported the ability of U.S. citizens to invest in the island would do so themselves. That is, if they had the opportunity, they would become transnational economic actors.

The youngest cohorts are more willing to invest in their own private businesses on the island (53% of those between 18–39 years old would invest in their private businesses in Cuba). Looking at the data by year of arrival, those who arrived between 1980–1994 (41%) and 1995–2018 (42%) are more interested in investing in their private businesses in Cuba.

According to the 2018 Cuba Poll report (Grenier & Gladwin, 2018: 21), those who were not born in Cuba (second and third generations) are the most supportive group (57%).

Some interviewees also mentioned they are already investing in Cuba’s private enterprises in the area of technology. In addition to that, a participant said: “I am a computer engineer, and sometimes I have clients that I cannot attend to. I ask a Cuban friend who lives on the island to make a web page or web application for the client’s business. They earn some extra money, and I don’t lose my client. This is a way I help my friends in Cuba” (Interviewee 9, male, 30 years old). To this respondent, providing job opportunities to friends on the island under these circumstances is a win-win relationship. He can reap the benefits of serving the needs of one of his clients, and his friends in Cuba benefit from the opportunity as well.

Figure 4. Opinion About How Well the U.S. Embargo Has Worked



Political Influence of the Cuban Diaspora Living in South Florida on U.S-Cuba Foreign Relations

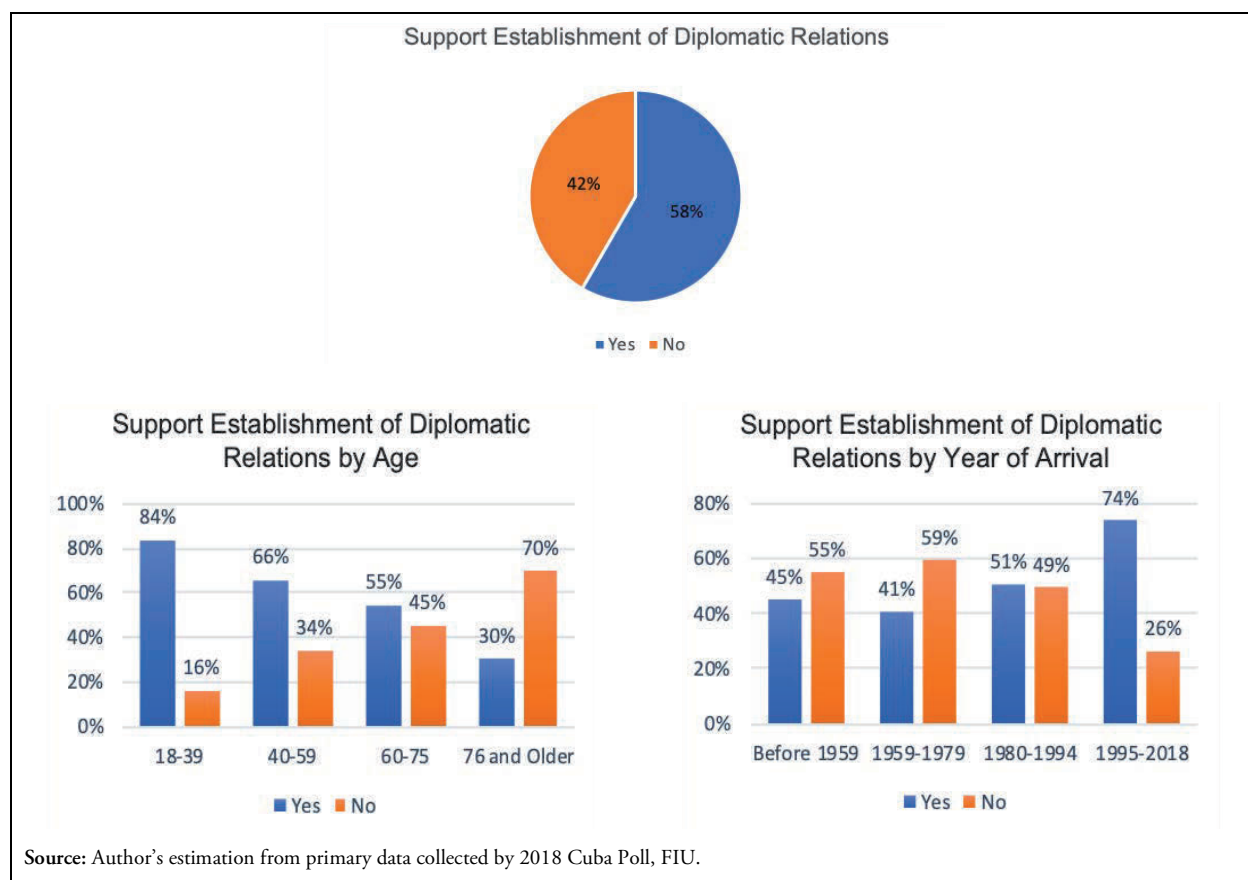
Over 80% of the Cubans living in South Florida believe the U.S. embargo has not worked (Grenier & Gladwin, 2018). This view cuts across migrant waves and age groups. Cuban-Americans who arrived before 1995 and those who oppose the Cuban political system also agree with this opinion (Grenier & Gladwin, 2018).

Likewise, 58% of the Cuban-Americans living in South Florida think that the United States and Cuba should establish diplomatic relations, with this percentage rising to 74% for those who arrived after 1995. The youngest cohorts are also the strongest supporters of establishing diplomatic ties between the United States and Cuba, with 84% of those between 18–39 years old supporting relations. The ones between 40–59 years also significantly support diplomatic relations (66%). Based on the 2018 Cuba Poll report, second and third generations importantly

support diplomatic relations (Grenier & Gladwin, 2018: 21).

Miami is home to influential actors. Díaz-Briquets & Pérez-López (2003) highlighted the Cuban-American community's influence on Cuba's U.S. foreign policy. Some prominent actors living in South Florida, have helped improving the relationship between the two countries, stimulating educational trips and cultural exchanges. Similarly, some Cuban-American political activists living in South Florida have opposed the U. S. embargo towards Cuba. In 2013, 60 Cuban-American signed an open letter addressed to President Barack Obama asking for removal of Cuba from the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism. On April 14, 2015, President Barack Obama announced that Cuba was being removed from the list. This group of influential actors is attuned with the 58% of Cuban-Americans who agree with establishing the relations between the United States and Cuba.

Figure 5. Support Establishment of Diplomatic Relations



Miami is also home to influential actors that favor the embargo and other restrictions imposed on Cuba. Miami restaurant *Café Versailles* is known to be the gathering place for older generations of Cuban-Americans who oppose the Cuban government. They gather at this location and attract the attention of the press in order to magnify their impact. They are well organized and younger cohorts of the Cuban diaspora have recently joined these efforts against the Cuban government. Even though this type of activism is unusual among young Cuban-Americans, the social media project “Make Cuba Great Again,” has gained Facebook followers.

Local public figures—journalists, actors, recognized musicians, and influencers on YouTube—publicize the website. These influential local people help to spread the message of the imperative to change the political system in Cuba from abroad. In January 2020, they launched a campaign to stop the flow of remittances to Cuba, called *Paro Enero* (2020), led by

local personality and Youtuber Alexander Otaola, with the objective of damaging the Cuban economy. Interestingly, the young Cuban-Americans who have joined this group are rekindling the interest of older cohorts that oppose the establishment of the relations between the two countries and those who believe the embargo should remain. Their views do not seem to align with the general views of those of their age groups and cohorts.

Some interviewees stated that even though they might favor some economic and political changes in Cuba, they will keep supporting their families as a priority. In this respect, an interviewee said: “There are people here—in South Florida—who say that they do not send money to Cuba because it supports the political system. Well, this is true, but I cannot look at it that way, because my family is receiving this money in the end. Even knowing that things are wrong in Cuba, I will support my family” (Interviewee 5, male, 33 years old).

Even though a new generation of political activists in Miami supports a hardline position on U.S.-Cuba relations and question the economic progress of Cuba under the communist system, the interviewees were unsure about the real impact this group might have on U.S.-Cuba relations and on the behavior of the diaspora on relatives on the island. To the interviewees, sending remittances is an expression of affection and support for their loved ones.

CONCLUSION

This paper sheds light on the relationship between the Cuban diaspora living in South Florida and the economy and political system on the island. Members of the diaspora are sending remittances that support their families' consumption. Some are also investing in private enterprises.

Cuban-Americans also organize themselves in groups to influence U.S. policy towards Cuba. This paper highlights the diversity of the groups that seek to influence this relationship. On the one hand, some groups support lifting the U.S. economic and trade embargo imposed upon Cuba; these groups were proactive during the U.S.-Cuba rapprochement led by former U.S. President Barack Obama and former Cuban President Raúl Castro. The younger generations, those who migrated after 1995, and second and third generations of Cuban-Americans, are more likely to support maintaining ties with the island. On the other hand, other groups favor changing the political system on the island. They support hardline policies toward Cuba and have seen their demands supported by President Donald Trump.

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The Cuban diaspora's perceptions of their economic and political role with Cuba are diverse. Even though some believe their actions can make a significant impact, others think that nothing will change on the island. U.S. policy toward Cuba became increasingly hostile during the Donald Trump administration. The U.S. policy toward Cuba mediates the scope of the diaspora's involvement. At the end of the day, many Cuban-Americans will keep supporting their family and friends living on the island, even if that means bolstering the existing political system.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Based on the results of this research, Cuban policymakers might consider formalizing the Cuban diaspora's economic and political participation as part of the rights of Cuban citizens. Similarly, U.S. policymakers might want to improve relations with Cuba to facilitate Cuban-Americans' wish to support their family and friends on the island.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Normalize the diaspora's investments in the Cuban private sector by establishing formal channels, and legal expeditious mechanisms (Cuban Policymakers).
- Integrate the Cuban diaspora into political processes on the island as part of their citizenship rights (Cuban Policymakers).
- Remove restrictions that prohibit/limit U.S. citizens to invest in Cuban businesses, send remittances, and travel (American Policymakers).
- Normalize diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Cuba that facilitate the Cuban diaspora participation in economic and political changes on the island (Cuban and American Policymakers).

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