

# The Matrix of Attachment: Immigrant Integration and Transnationalism

*Insights from the project 'Possibilities and Realities of Return Migration'*

Immigrants typically have attachments in two directions: to the country in which they live, and to their country of origin. These attachments are often discussed in terms of integration and transnationalism, respectively. A new conceptual framework, which we call *the matrix of attachment*, enables us to examine immigrant integration and transnationalism simultaneously. This perspective, we argue, can inspire more nuanced analyses and policy development. We use this framework to analyze variations in attachment among immigrants in Norway.

## Brief Points

- Immigrant integration and transnationalism are neither related in a fixed way nor independent of each other.
- A substantial proportion of immigrants have weak attachments to both their country of origin and their country of residence.
- There is great variation between immigrants from different countries in patterns of transnationalism and integration.
- In Norway, immigrants from Turkey are particularly likely to be strongly oriented towards their country of origin rather than to their country of residence.

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## Integrated and transnational?

A popular assumption in policy debates is that stronger immigrant integration implies weaker transnationalism and vice versa. Recent social-scientific research increasingly challenges this assumption, on both theoretical and empirical grounds. It is argued that integration in the country of destination can *coexist* perfectly well with strong transnational attachments to the country of origin.

At the same time, a substantial proportion of immigrants have weak attachments to both their country of origin and their country of residence. In other words, they are neither integrated nor transnational. This point has received less attention.

In this policy brief we use data from a representative sample survey of ten large immigrant groups in Norway (see text box). We first explore variations in integration and transnationalism and then relate this variation to migrants' intention to return to their country of origin.

## Attachments in two countries

By 'attachment' we mean the totality of place-specific resources, networks, competencies and emotions that affect a person's life. Transnational attachment results from life in the country of origin before migration, and subsequent return visits or long-distance communication. Integration is the socio-cultural process of becoming part of society in a new country of residence.

Transnationalism and integration are concepts with many dimensions. For instance, some migrants are well-integrated in the

**Table 1. Distribution of respondents across the four categories in the matrix of attachment (percentages by row)**

	Strongly integrated, weakly transnational	Strongly integrated, strongly transnational	Weakly integrated, weakly transnational	Weakly integrated, strongly transnational
Quadrant (Figure 1)	A	B	C	D
<b>All</b>	28	28	27	18
<b>Gender</b>				
Men	27	28	25	20
Women	29	28	27	16
<b>Proportion of life in Norway</b>				
0–25 %	28	18	38	16
25–49 %	27	35	18	20
50–74 %	31	43	8	18

labour market but have few social ties outside their own immigrant group. Similarly, some migrants are politically active in their country of origin while for others transnationalism is primarily a family affair.

We approach this complexity in two ways. First, we focus on aspects of integration and transnationalism that *all* migrants can relate to. This means, for instance, leaving out labour market integration (since not all migrants are economically active) and citizenship (since not all migrants qualify for becoming Norwegian citizens if they wish). Second, we combine different indicators of transnationalism and integration to create a single measure for each form of attachment.

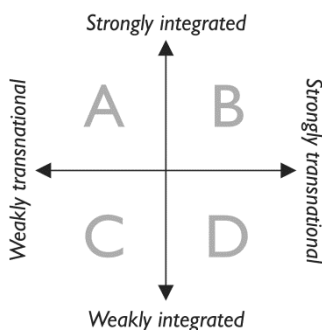
Our approach is clearly a simplification of integration and transnationalism. There is an extensive research literature that looks critically at the complexity of each phenomenon. As

long as we are aware of the simplification, our approach can yield valuable contributions to understanding another form of complexity: the relationship *between* transnationalism and integration.

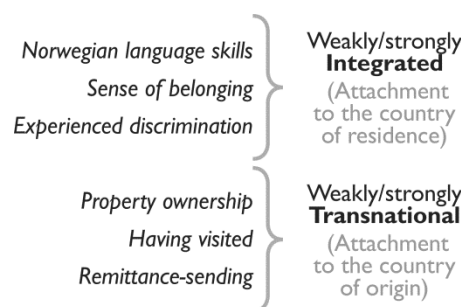
## The matrix of attachment

We propose a new conceptual framework that facilitates analysis of migrants' multiple attachments by seeing integration and transnationalism as intersecting dimensions. We call this framework the *matrix of attachment* (Figure 1).

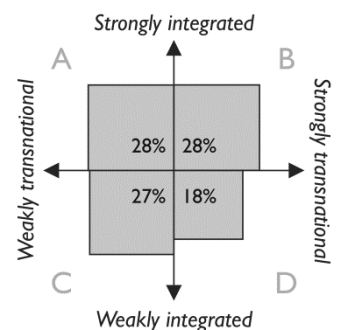
Each *quadrant* in the figure, marked with the letters A–D, represents a particular combination of weak or strong integration and transnationalism. For instance, being located in quadrant A means having strong attachments to the country of residence and weak attachments to the country of origin.



**Figure 1. The matrix of attachment**



**Figure 2. The three indicators of the two dimensions in the matrix of attachment**



**Figure 3. Distribution of respondents across the matrix of attachments**

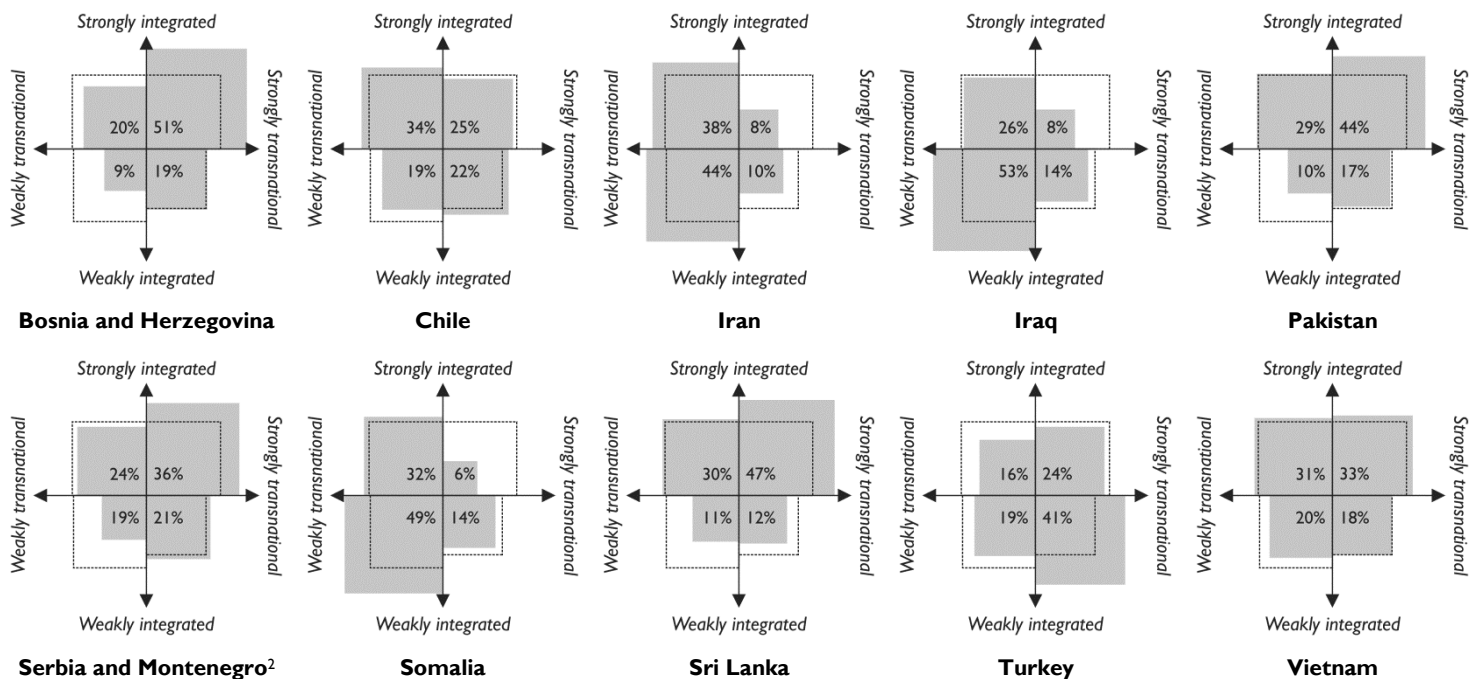


Figure 4. Distribution of respondents across the matrix of attachments, by country of origin

#### Data source

The survey 'Living Conditions among Immigrants in Norway' was conducted by Statistics Norway in 2005–06. A total of 3,053 individuals aged 16–70 who had lived in Norway for at least two years were interviewed face-to-face or by telephone. We primarily use information about the 2,015 respondents who came to Norway as adults, aged 18 years or more. The survey covers ten countries of origin, selected among the largest immigrant groups in Norway.

#### Matrix

A matrix is a cross-table for showing combinations along two dimensions. Our approach to seeing integration and transnationalism as two intersecting dimensions of attachment makes it appropriate to employ a matrix.

#### Quadrant

A quadrant is a quarter of a plane that is divided by two crossing lines. In our case, the matrix has four quadrants that represent different combinations of integration and transnationalism.

#### Measuring attachment

We have taken a very basic approach and simply distinguished between two levels of integration and transnationalism: weak and strong. The advantage of this approach is that it gives us four groups, which can be compared.

Each of the two dimensions in the matrix is determined on the basis of three indicators (Figure 2). Respondents are identified as strongly integrated or transnational if they score positively on two of the three indicators.

The indicators of integration are (1) speaking Norwegian well, (2) having a sense of belonging in Norway, and (3) not having experienced discrimination on the basis of being an immigrant. The indicators of transnationalism are (1) owning property in the country of origin, (2) having visited the country of origin during the past five years, and (3) sending remittances to the country of origin.<sup>1</sup>

Figure 3 shows how survey respondents are distributed across the matrix of attachment. The smallest group (18%) are weakly integrated and strongly transnational—that is, oriented primarily towards their country of origin. The other three groups are of virtually identical size. (Due to rounding the numbers

do not add up to 100.) Results are also displayed in Table 1 and in Figure 4. This figure contains one panel for each of the 10 countries of origin, displaying the distribution of respondents across each quadrant of the matrix. In order to ease comparisons, we have included a dashed line that shows the average distribution (i.e. the same as in Figure 3).

#### Attachments combined

If integration and transnationalism had been incompatible, quadrants B and C would have been empty. But this is not so: More than half of the respondents are located in one of these two quadrants.

In quadrant B we find people who are well integrated in Norwegian society and at the same time maintain strong links to their country of origin. For some, it might be precisely because they are well-integrated and have stable income that they can afford extensive transnational practices. This situation is particularly common among immigrants from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Moreover, being strongly integrated and strongly transnational is particularly common among people who have spent most of their lives in Norway.

### A marginalized group

In quadrant C we find people in a very different situation: comparatively marginalized in the country of destination and detached from the country of origin. Again, it might be that one is the cause of the other; being weakly integrated in Norway can make it difficult to afford transnational activities such as maintaining a house in the country of origin or sending money to relatives.

Being weakly integrated and weakly transnational is a more common situation among Somalis and Iraqis than among other groups.

### Contrasting orientations

A large part of the immigrant population is firmly oriented towards Norwegian society, with few ties to their countries of origin. These are represented by quadrant A. There are particularly many immigrants from Chile, Iran, and Somalia in this category.

The opposite situation—being oriented primarily towards the country of origin—is the least common situation for the survey population as a whole (Figure 3). However, more than four in ten immigrants from Turkey fall into this category. When we consider the survey population as a whole, such an orientation primarily towards the country of origin is more common among men than among women.

### An example: Intentions to return

We used the matrix of attachment to study variation in immigrants' stated *intention to return to their country of origin*. These intentions differ by location within the matrix (Figure 5).

We see clear signs of interaction between transnationalism and integration. Not surpris-

ingly, intentions to return are most widespread among people who have weak attachments to Norway combined with a strong attachment to their countries of origin (quadrant D). Four out of ten people in this category want to return.

What is striking in Figure 5 is that the likelihood of wanting to return is very similar in quadrants B and C. In other words, people with *strong attachment to both countries* have the same level of intention to return as people with *weak attachments to both countries*; what matters is the *relative strength* of attachments to Norway and the country of origin.

Among those who intend to return, a majority maintain strong ties to their country of origin. However, many are also well integrated in Norwegian society. In fact, if we consider the population of potential returnees, the highest number is found in quadrant B. Again, transnational practices and return may well be facilitated through the resources and possibilities that come with a high level of integration.

### A useful analytical tool

When we distribute the immigrant population across the matrix of attachment we see that integration and transnationalism are neither related in a predetermined way nor independent of each other. The distribution of respondents across all four quadrants of the matrix attests to the value of the matrix.

The variation in patterns of attachments across the ten immigrant groups is remarkable, as shown in Figure 4. It bears underlining, however, that from every country of origin, there are individuals in each quadrant. The patterns at the group level should therefore not lead us to make assumptions about individuals.

The matrix is a useful tool for thinking about possible ways in which migrants manage

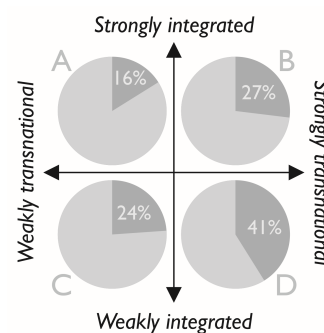


Figure 5. Proportion of people in each quadrant who intend to return to their country of origin<sup>3</sup>

multiple attachments. It can inspire more nuanced analyses and policy development related to immigrant behaviour and attitudes.

Instead of seeing integration and transnationalism as separate orientations, the matrix enables us to examine their combined influence on behaviour.

### Further reading

- Carling, J. and Pettersen, S. V. (2014), Return Migration Intentions in the Integration–Transnationalism Matrix. *International Migration*, 52(6):13-30.

### Notes

1 Details about definitions and measurement are provided in Carling and Pettersen (2014), listed under 'further reading'. 2 At the time of the survey Montenegro and Serbia were in a union. 3 The data for this figure includes respondents who were born in Norway or immigrated as children (N=3053).

This PRIO Policy Brief is also published in Norwegian with the title 'Tilknytningsmatrisen: integrering og transnasjonalisme blant innvandrere'.

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### THE PROJECT

This Policy Brief is part of the project 'Possibilities and Realities of Return Migration' (PREMIG), a large-scale research project that explores return migration from Norway and the United Kingdom. The project is led by Research Professor Jørgen Carling. For more information, see [www.prio.org/premig](http://www.prio.org/premig).

### PRIO

The Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) is a non-profit peace research institute (established in 1959) whose overarching purpose is to conduct research on the conditions for peaceful relations between states, groups and people. The institute is independent, international and interdisciplinary, and explores issues related to all facets of peace and conflict.