

Conference Draft
March 1, 2005

NATURALIZATION OF U.S. IMMIGRANTS BEFORE REFORMS IN THE 1990s

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* This research was made possible by a grant from National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (R01HD37279) awarded to the first author as the project Principal Investigator. The contents are solely the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily represent the official view of the NICHD or the National Institutes of Health. I gratefully acknowledge assistance of the Statistics Office in the former U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, now the Office of Immigration Statistics in the Department of Homeland Security. Direct all correspondence to Karen A. Woodrow-Lafield, 2308 Mt. Vernon Avenue #327, Alexandria, Virginia 22301, by phone 202-276-2818, or by email KarenWLafield@cs.com . Further information is available at www.nd.edu/~klafield/ .

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Abstract

The influences of gender, origin, and admission criteria are examined in the timing of naturalization for all lawfully admitted adult immigrants of 1978-1991. Individuals entering as spouses may especially seek to naturalize to give visa opportunities to their family members living abroad. Prior research suggests origin differences in completed naturalization levels for foreign-born persons in the census, controlling for duration of residence. Cox regression models are discussed, including sex-specific models with dummy variables for region of origin. Asian origin immigrants show the greatest naturalization propensity and Latin American immigrants show the least naturalization propensity. Immigrants were more likely to naturalize if they were admitted in categories suggesting lower social capital or higher human capital, such as employment-sponsored categories, spouses of aliens, and spouses of citizens.

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INTRODUCTION

From a global perspective, questions underlying international migration relate to the nature and causes of various exchanges between one of the major receiving nations and another country or larger grouping of countries or sometimes between neighboring nations. Human flows can be treated as analogous to commodities except their shifting involves behavioral aspects. Advances have been made in syntheses on theories of international migration (Massey et al. 1998; Massey and Taylor 2004), and next steps are underway in accomplishing similar advances on theories of immigrant incorporation. From the perspective of a single receiving nation, questions about permanence and incorporation of migrants take on as much importance as those of the migration event.

For the United States, an historical background of European immigration has dimmed with a newer mosaic of Latin American and Asian immigration. In a migration momentum sustained over four decades, greater diversity along racial and ethnic lines has been forged within the population. Whether this diversity is integrative or dissecting in nature is at the heart of scholarly writings and political debates. Many investigations have focused on immigrant incorporation within social institutions and whether differences might be converging as to educational attainment, labor force participation, earnings, occupational advancement, health and wellbeing, and fertility levels.

Among contemporary, fascinating stories of immigrant America, the story is unfinished as to immigrant transitions to American citizenship. The heterogeneity of U.S. immigrants as to individual-level, aggregate-level characteristics, from origin countries or regions to specific

sending communities, and macro-level aspects of economies and social capital are complications in the modeling of naturalization experiences. Very little research has as yet focused on patterns of attainment of naturalized status as a measure of immigrant incorporation. As immigration studies have increased over two decades, a few studies dealt with naturalization outcomes. Theoretical construction with validation (Yang 1994a, b) has been one avenue, but more studies have been country-specific and comparative analyses (e.g., Garcia 1981; Liang 1994a, b; Portes and Curtis 1987; Woodrow-Lafield, et al. 1999, 2000a). Whereas naturalization research of past immigration eras utilized a single-line assimilation approach, more recent research has sought explanations tied to ethnicity and reception. Finding the right data is a persistent problem.

This study seeks generalizations about the naturalization experiences of U.S. immigrants with the strategy of grouping origin countries into larger geographical entities such as continents and sub-continents (Jasso and Rosenzweig 1990). The specific aims are investigation of variations among immigrants by continents of origin in naturalization and assessment of implications of the new immigrant diversity for settlement and incorporation.

Several historical and theoretical justifications are relevant for this investigation and assessment, and these background discussions highlight and illuminate the importance of this analytical scope.

NATURALIZATION OF U.S. IMMIGRANTS IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

Prior research on international migration systems ambitiously mapped out migration structures, processes and policies in a global context (Kritz and Zlotnik 1992; Massey et al. 1998). Though this body of literature identifies all nation states based on geopolitical boundaries, it, however, permits transcendence of these boundaries and integrates specific social,

political, economic and demographic contexts into one global system that embraces several interconnected sub-regional systems (Zlotnik 1992). This theoretical as well as analytical framework coincides with what Charles Tilly has coined “big structures, large processes and huge comparisons” (Tilly 1984). Guided by this framework, the timing and occurrence of naturalization of U.S. immigrants are linked to the global migration systems by dividing the immigrant sending countries into large geographical entities that reflect historical conjunctions, changes in both national and international labor markets, gendered migration experiences and policy changes in the U.S. as receiving country.

Continent Variations and Historical Conjunctions

Since World War II, especially the end of the cold war, societies around the world have become increasingly connected through political, economic and cultural exchanges. Alongside this global connectedness, international migration has emerged as an important aspect of American multiculturalism. The historical legacies of American military, political and economic involvement and hegemony worldwide have yielded and will continue to yield patterned international migration to the United States (Rumbaut 1994). From the beginning to the middle of the 20th century, the majority of immigrants admitted to the United States were from European countries. From the 1970s to the 1980s, due to America’s military intervention in Indo-China, migration flows to the United States began to include marked numbers of political refugees and asylees from South-East Asia. In the closing decade of the 20th century, the profound significance of new immigrants from Asia and Latin America became widely accepted as social fact. This new diversity has profound implications in studying the propensity of naturalization of U.S. immigrants. Shared migration experiences and similar adaptation abilities, such as English proficiency, lifestyle similarity, and availability of social capital that are likely to be bounded by

immigrants' similar geographical locations of origin, may imply important continent variations in the timing and occurrence of naturalization.

Continent Variations and the International-US Labor Markets

Country origin variations in naturalization of U.S. immigrants may stem from variations in immigrants' skill and other human capital composition and ability to meet the U.S. labor market demand. According to both neoclassical economics and segmented labor market theory, international labor migration is demand-based and influenced primarily by labor market mechanisms (see Massey et al. 1998). It is initiated through recruitment by employers in advanced industrial societies, or by governments acting on their behalf. If this is the case, then changes in the international and U.S. markets may have implications for where the migrant workers will be recruited, and this may help form unique geographic patterns in that only certain segments of the population from a particular region will become labor immigrants.

For example, historically and contemporarily, in response to the U.S. market demand immigrants from Asia (e.g., from China, India, Korea, and Taiwan) tend to be highly skilled professionals, whereas immigrants from Latin American countries tend to be less educated laborers. While both groups find their respective niches that match their market experiences in the United States, the pattern of long-term residence and the propensity of naturalization is distinctly different corresponding to their origin continents.

The tension between push-pull factors for causing international migration has been tempered by greater role of push-intervening factors for influencing international migration. Nation states have complex structures for controlling immigration.

Continent Variations and the Feminization of Immigration

Based on both qualitative and quantitative studies, the theme of feminization of immigration is a recognized major theme in addressing international labor migration (Houstoun et al., 1984; Le 1996; Lim and Oishi 1996; Michalowski 1996). The shift to women as immigrants is related to crucial global and historical changes that include, but are not limited to, shifts from traditional to service industry that targets and attracts female workers, changes in women's social status that enable them to migrate, and immigration policies that favor family unification (see Lee 1996). Lawful immigration to the United States has been female-dominated since 1930 (Greenwood and McDowell 1999) as a consequence of restrictions of immigration quotas of the 1920s for countries with high sex ratios, prevalence of males among temporary migrant workers, and reunification of men with wives and children.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data Source and Measures

This study draws from a new longitudinal data source promising in several aspects, especially for delineating the temporal process of naturalization. This study used the provisional database that is a linked records file from 9.1 million immigrant records and 5.5 million naturalization records, and the former are for fiscal years 1978-1992 with the latter covering fiscal years 1978-1996 (Woodrow-Lafield 2002). For this study, a 1978-1991 multi-cohort sample is utilized that excludes those immigrants who were under 21 years at admission for lawful permanent residence and excludes FY 1992 immigrants admitted after provisions of the Immigration Act of 1990 had become effective. The final linked records file included 5.2 million adult immigrants.

Comment [k1]: 9,085,945

Comment [k2]: 5,539,763

Comment [k3]: 5,177,887

Comment [k4]: In order to perform high quality multivariate statistical analysis, listwise deletion of missing cases was implemented.

Although similar data for linked immigrant-naturalization cohorts have been previously limited to selected years (Jasso and Rosenzweig 1986, 1990; Levine, Hill, and Warren 1985; Rytina 1999), this study is part of a broader project to create and analyze linked immigrant and naturalization records data sources (Woodrow-Lafield et al. 2004). This research project has focused on a statistical model-based approach to the occurrence and timing of naturalization and the use of existing administrative records. Most studies on immigrant naturalization have been based on census or survey data that are admittedly rich on current characteristics and yet lacking detailed timing of events (naturalization and receiving lawful permanent residence), with the added limitation that the universe is imprecise, including ineligibles. The only post-immigration characteristics gathered are naturalization date and marital status and occupation at time of naturalization. The major strengths of the data are characteristics at immigration, capturing the rich heterogeneity by origin of immigrants, and precise length of time to naturalization, unavailable in decennial censuses. The major strength of these analyses lie in making maximum use of existing data for a new and critical assessment of immigrants' behavior. The task is challenging in encompassing so many countries with varied sending contexts and varied modes of reception of groups highly diverse in human capital.

For the current hazards modeling study, the dependent variable is the timing of naturalization defined as waiting time or duration to naturalization, measured as century months of duration (graphic presentations utilized duration years). In addition, censored records were indicated by a zero if immigrants were not naturalized at the end of fiscal year 1996, and one if otherwise. An obvious difficulty is that some censored cases may be immigrants who have returned to origin country or migrated to a third country. Nor does the analysis control for mortality.

Key covariates are gender, continents/regions/countries of origin, and admission criteria. Gender was dummy coded with 1=male and 0=female. Based primarily on the United Nations classification, origin countries were re-coded into nine (9) continents or sub-continents of origin (Europe, Eastern Asia, South-Eastern Asia, South-Central and Western Asia, Africa, Oceania, Central and North America, Caribbean, and South America. These categories were further dummy coded with Europe specified as the reference category (1=Europe (all European countries), 2=Eastern Asia (China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and others), 3=South-Eastern Asia (Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Viet Nam, and others), 4=South-Central and Western Asia (India, Iran, Kuwait, Lebanon, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and so on), 5=Africa (all African countries), 6=Oceania (including Melanesia and Micronesia-Polynesia), 7=Central and North America (Canada, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, and others), 8=Caribbean (Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, and others), and 9=South America (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, and others).

This strategy for handling origin is expedient given the volume of data and possible directions of analyses. There are many examples of utilizing regions as categories for the reason of having less data or smaller samples (Greenwood and McDowell 1999; Chiswick and Sullivan 1995; Gibson and Lennon; several chapters in Waldinger 1998; Jasso and Rosenzweig 1990; Reitz 1999; and Clark 1999). Key studies have transcended national boundaries and viewed international migration as within one global system comprised of several sub-regional systems.

Admission criteria or visa class of admission categories (based on before the Immigration Act of 1990) were recoded into fourteen (14) categories according to exempt or numerically limited, family-sponsored or employment-sponsored, principal beneficiary or derivative

beneficiary, and specific preference category, e.g., 1st preference principal (unmarried sons and daughters of citizen), 2nd preference principal, spouse of permanent resident, 2nd preference principal, child of permanent resident, 4th preference principal (married sons and daughters of citizen), 4th preference derivative (spouse of married sons and daughters of citizen), 5th preference principal (sibling of citizen), 5th preference derivative (spouse of sibling of citizen), 3rd preference principal (professional), 3rd preference derivative (spouse of professional), 6th preference principal (skilled, special, and employment creation), 6th preference derivative (spouse of skilled, special, employment creation), exempt-immediate relative principal (spouse), exempt-immediate relative principal (parent), and, finally, the reference category of refugee, asylee, and others. Refugees are the primary group in this reference category and this is a logical choice as reference because they are regarded as likely to be highly committed to staying in the United States. They may be initially disadvantaged because of the circumstances of their departure from the origin country, but the available governmental assistance may be compensatory. The category is also an excellent choice as reference because the category is distinct from family-sponsored and employment-sponsored bases for immigration.

Other covariates serving as statistical controls include immigrant entry cohorts (all dummy coded with the most recent cohort, 1991, as the reference category), age at admission (dummy coded with six age groups top coded at 70 years of age and above as the reference category), having prior nonimmigrant experience in the US, and being married at admission.

This study utilizes event history techniques to model the timing and occurrence of naturalization, an approach advantageous for effectively dealing with censoring of the data. When data permit, this method would allow investigating transitions related to time-dependent covariates, but these administrative records are insufficiently specific on changing

characteristics. For convenience, we use the Cox proportional hazards model to estimate the timing of naturalization, selecting the Efron method in SAS for handling ties, and verifying for the proportionality assumption. The underlying hazard distribution is assumed as log-normal.

Mathematically, the Cox proportional hazards model can be denoted as

$$h(t) = h_0(t) e^{\beta_1 x_1 + \dots + \beta_k x_k},$$

where $h(t)$ is the logged hazard rate of naturalization and $h_0(t)$ is the baseline hazard function when the co-variates were held at 0. Like OLS regression models, β s are the regression coefficients. If e^{β} is performed, the regression coefficients can be interpreted as the hazards or hazard ratios of naturalization (Allison 1995).

RESULTS

Two regions of origin—Central and North America (17.93 percent) and South-East Asia (17.66 percent)—show the greatest shares of immigrants. As well understood about current immigration trends, Europe is less represented than either Asia or Latin America, combining sub-regions to look at the whole. Again, these cases include only adults, so Asia is represented to a slightly greater extent, and Latin America is represented to a slightly lesser extent than in the database including persons under 21 years at admission.

The greatest admissions were under exempt immediate relative categories, spouses and parents, or refugee-asylee-other. Again, this distribution differs from the distribution of all immigrants, including children, among classes of admission. In particular, large numbers of children are admitted as exempt immediate relatives, children of US citizens, or as children of lawful permanent residents, or as derivative beneficiaries of other classes. Among numerically limited categories, 2nd preference, for spouses and children of aliens, accounted for large

numbers, along with 5th preference for siblings of citizens. Class-of-admission categories are fairly evenly divided between males and females with some logical exceptions, more females among spouses of aliens (2nd preference), more females among spouses of employment-sponsored immigrants (3rd preference or 6th preference), and more females as immediate relative parents of citizens.

Next, we consider probabilities of naturalizing by duration of residence for all immigrants, for men and women, and for continent of birth. Broadly speaking, these distributions all show peaking bounded at 5 to 10 years after admission to permanent residence, as those immigrants most committed to naturalizing do so soon after reaching eligibility

There is another peaking in probabilities much later—17th, 18th, and 19th years of residence. This could reflect two INS policies. First, all residence cards issued pre-1979 became invalid on March 20, 1996. INS had begun issuing cards with a ten-year expiration date in late 1993 (Associated Press, December 5, 1995 “Green Cards”). Immigrants may have perceived needing to have the renewal residence card following anti-immigrant legislation in California and public concerns about immigrants’ utilization of public benefits. Second, INS initiated the Citizenship USA program to encourage naturalization in the mid-1990s. INS began encouraging individuals to naturalize upon expiration of residence cards. This second peaking is more pronounced for women than for men, possibly showing a catching up behavior.

Continents/regions patterns are similar to what is known from other studies and basic data. Early on, probabilities are lowest for Central and North American immigrants, but these increase in the second decade of residence, especially in the latter years. Probabilities are somewhat higher for women than for men. The highest probabilities are shown quite early for Southeast Asian and African immigrants, and probabilities are highest for African immigrants on

a sustained basis well into the second decade of residence. Other origins show extreme peaking around the 7th year of residence—East Asia, South Central and West Asia. European and Oceanian immigrants show low probabilities of naturalizing, except for an early prominent “bulge” for Europeans at the 5th to 8th years and a lesser peaking for Oceanian immigrants in the 7th and 8th years. These Oceanian immigrants seem to be male-dominated and may be attributable to employment needs.

For males, there is more variation by region of origin, or a more even paced pattern in timing of naturalization, although women seem to show a delayed transition.

Results to date are from four nested Cox models: Model 1 with continent dummy variables only; Model 2 with addition of class-of-admission categories; Model 3 with cohort dummy variables; Model 4 with all other control variables—age, prior nonimmigrant experience, male, and married. (We will explore results without the control variable for marital status as well.)

Calculation of these models was very time consuming given the volume of data when pooling all regions, although the data volume is advantageous for the number of significant effects. At this point, Wald chi-square statistics are not calculated or discussed for testing male-female differences.

Summarizing the results for models with pooled gender, the β regression coefficients show positive effects for all continents/regions of origin, except negative effects for Oceania and North America. Oceania is primarily Australia, which is composed of largely European-origin population. Australia is an immigrant-receiving nation and emigration is fairly low (cite sources). The effects are positive for employment-sponsored categories, spouses of lawful permanent residents, and spouses of citizens. Considering gender and prior experience in the

United States, there are positive effects on propensity to naturalize for males and those with nonimmigrant experiences.

The results are generally similar for males and females. Among male immigrants, effects are positive again for several continents of origin, and we find negative effects again for Oceania and North America. Interestingly, the effect of being of Caribbean origin is now negative for naturalizing, consistent with some research suggesting that Caribbean origin males experience loss of status after immigrating to the US and, being nostalgic for old community, may plan to return rather than remain in the United States. There are positive effects for Asian origin, although less so for East Asia, suggesting reluctance to relinquish citizenship by Chinese. Male spouses of employment-sponsored female immigrants are more likely to naturalize. Such husbands of women who migrate as labor migrants may possess a similar quantity of human capital and may need to secure similar opportunities for themselves. Spouses of aliens and spouses of citizens are less likely than refugees, but more likely than some other categories to naturalize. For a male immigrant, being married is associated with greater propensity in naturalizing than being nonmarried.

Results for females parallel earlier ones for most continents of origin, but one notes especially positive effects for women of Caribbean origin. A distinct possibility exists of independence effects for Caribbean (and Central American) women after joining the U.S. labor force and gaining household power in consumption and decisionmaking. Women may be more optimistic and realistic than their husbands about the benefits of U.S. residence versus returning to the origin communities.

For most class-of-admission categories, the effects for naturalizing are positive. However, a large negative effect is shown for immediate relative-parent. Mothers who have

joined their daughter who is permanently settled in the United States may be elderly and unlikely to naturalize due to a lesser period of time to reap the advantages of naturalized citizen. Also, they are unlikely to need to sponsor a relative or to be employed. Non-married women immigrants are more likely to naturalize than married women, interestingly, in addition to the effects of class of admission, including employment-sponsored categories. Thus, there may be further independence effects that are unmeasured here.

Several hypotheses are confirmed. Asian origin immigrants show greater naturalization propensity. European and Oceanian immigrants show lesser naturalization propensity. Latin American immigrants show lesser naturalization propensity. Immigrants admitted in categories associated with lower social capital are more likely to naturalize. Such categories include employment-sponsored classes, spouses of aliens, and spouses of citizens. Women of Caribbean origins show greater naturalization propensity than men. Gender effects for naturalization propensity are variable by marital status, as married men more likely to naturalize than unmarried men and unmarried women more likely to naturalize than married women. Among women, those admitted in admission categories for which there are likely to be none or few family members in the US are more likely to naturalize. These include employment-sponsored categories, principal or derivative beneficiaries.

Among men, those spouses of women admitted under employment-sponsored classes are more likely to naturalize. This suggests incentive to maximize employment opportunities. Although it is possible another incentive is to maximize sponsorship of family members, none of the other class of admission categories is associated with greater naturalization. Males admitted as employment-sponsored immigrants are somewhat more likely to naturalize than other categories, but not as much so as refugees or spouses of employment-sponsored immigrants.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Research on patterns of immigration and immigrant incorporation for the United States is generally weak in consideration of differences on gender. Gender effects for naturalizing appear specific for origin migration streams characterized by modes of arrival through the immigration preference system. Demographic context may be important. Analyses for specific continents or regions are ongoing to investigate origin-specific variation by gender and admission criteria, in conjunction with models for single countries. An initial analysis on immigrants from ten selected countries has been expanded to include immigrants from Canada and several European countries.

In a 1994 report, the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform recommended increases in immigrant visas for spouses and minor children of aliens and reductions in immigrant visas for parents of citizens, adult sons and daughters of citizens, and siblings of citizens. These analyses suggest that these categories of immigrants may be less likely to naturalize than employment-sponsored categories and spouses of citizens (and certain other spouses), perhaps because they are uncertain as to whether they will permanently reside here. There are indications that women who are spouses of siblings of citizens may be likely to naturalize, possibly to gain the right of sponsorship and begin chain migration of family members. Further research about the magnitude of such migration may inform policy makers in reconsidering the preference system. Immigrants' access to and utilization of public benefits attracted political attention and social scientific research in the 1990s. In the interests of public health, even unauthorized immigrants have access to certain benefits. Other benefits are restricted to lawful permanent residents or naturalized citizens. Although this research does not address immigrants' motivation to

naturalize, understanding the relevance of admission criteria and origins for the timing of naturalization is part of the contemporary puzzle of immigration policy and immigrant policy. Bean et al. are investigating whether immigrants naturalize to ensure welfare access. Those immigrants entered after August 22, 1996 are barred from receiving Medicaid and SCHIP for the first five years.

Much of migration research is data-driven, descriptive of the phenomenon rather than theoretically relevant. This research seeks to contribute theoretically at macro and micro levels, but this is a mere portion of the body of work to be done. May these results inform policymaking as to revising categories for lawful admission to the United States? What are the implications of these findings for more recent immigrant cohorts?

The macro-level contexts of immigrant policies, including naturalization, shifted markedly in the 1990s as the contours of immigrant admissions were altered with the Immigration Act of 1990 and as major immigration control legislation was enacted. Three legislations have implications for the lives and wellbeing of immigrants: The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), The Welfare Reform Act of 1996, the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, and The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA), the Immigration Reform Act of 1996.

An ongoing debate concerns the comparative skill levels of contemporary immigrants and natives, as well as the trends in skill levels among immigrants in the new regime of immigration with large shares of family-sponsored immigration and Latin American origin immigration. The conference paper will include an assessment of official statistics and discussion of implications of these results for immigrant naturalization for (1) questions of

integration of family-sponsored and employment-sponsored immigrants and (2) likely patterns of naturalization subsequent to 1996 as the Congress weighs reauthorization of the PRWORA.

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Tables and figures are not included here because their inclusion led to an error in uploading to the PAA program web site.