

## Abstract

How do migrants make the decision to naturalize? The majority of the literature focuses on the economic costs and benefit calculus of individual migrants, usually those who arrived as adults. Yet a large and growing population of foreign-born individuals arrived as children. Despite spending their formative years in the United States, many remain foreign nationals into adulthood. Based on results from a discrete-time event history model of naturalization of 1.5 generation respondents in California we argue that the cost-benefit tradeoffs underlying most accounts of naturalization decisions will apply in different ways to this population. We show that especially for this population the decision to naturalize cannot be conceptualized as an individual choice but is strongly embedded within the family and co-ethnic context which, in turn, introduces symbolic concerns and country of origin related factors into the decision.

## Introduction

Far from the atomistic expected income maximizers posited in classic economic theories of international migration, migrants are embedded in co-ethnic and family networks. As contended by the new economics of labor migration, family level survival and economic mobility strategies shape emigration decisions. Similarly, by providing support, information, and financing, previously arrived relatives facilitate the departure of kin still living at home, in turn generating the “chain migration” patterns commonly found all over the world. The analyses that we present in this paper show that the decision to acquire host society citizenship, just like the decision to leave home, is a family level matter.

This paper makes the argument for an *embedded* model of naturalization choice by focusing on a very specific sample: foreign-born adults who migrated to Los Angeles as children. This group, the 1.5 generation, presents an exemplary case of embedded naturalization choice: most did not decide on their own to move to the U.S.; similarly, many became citizens in “sidecar,” derivative naturalizations occurring before reaching majority and resulting from their parents’ decision to acquire receiving country citizenship. Yet, even among those foreign-born, but U.S.-raised respondents who opt for naturalization on their own, strong dependencies link parental and respondent’s naturalization. Moreover, despite spending their formative years in the United States, many follow slow naturalization trajectories: of the 1.5-generation respondents living in the Los Angeles area and who comprise the focus of this paper, less than a third had naturalized by the age of 18 and one-third remained foreign nationals at the time of

survey.<sup>1</sup> For this group naturalization is not a taken-for-granted outcome; instead, acquiring citizenship is a decision embedded in family and community-level contexts. Using event-history models including individual, family, and community covariates, we show that characteristics of the national-origin community matter, and that, net of these factors, there is significant family level interdependence in the decisions to naturalize. All other things equal, having a parent who was previously naturalized raises the probability that a 1.5-generation respondent will become a citizen by a factor of three; those who have a parent who naturalized in the same year are eight-times more likely to naturalize in that year than a respondent who does not have any naturalized parents.

These findings converge with recent research (Street 2013, 2014; Peters et al 2016) illuminating family level influences on naturalization in Europe, as well as work by Abascal (2017) demonstrating the influence of specific characteristics of the co-ethnic community on naturalization in the U.S. However, in contrast to this scholarship focusing on the decisions of immigrants who arrived as adults, we focus instead on those who arrived as children, for whom *parental* influences, rather than those relating to *spouse or children*, are likely to be of great importance. This paper therefore contributes to a broader literature on the intergenerational dynamics in migrant families (e.g. Kulu and Gonzalez Ferrer 2013; Carol 2014), extending what we currently know about intergenerational links in fertility and social attitudes to intergenerational links in political behaviour. We also show that, even controlling for these parental influences, the average education level of the co-ethnic community as well as characteristics of the political regime in the country of *origin* yield further effects. Given the large and growing population of immigrants in the United States who arrived as children, with current estimates pegging the population of minor, foreign-born children living in the United States at 2.1 million<sup>2</sup>, developing a model of naturalization decisions that includes this population is an imperative.

In the following sections, we review key arguments in the literature, providing overviews of three dominant frameworks: individual models, family and life course models, and finally contextual or community models of naturalization decisions. We then turn to our specific sample, the foreign-born children of immigrants in the Immigration and Intergenerational Mobility in Metropolitan Los Angeles survey (IIMMLA), and present results from an event-history model of naturalization with covariates for individual, parental, and community level characteristics.

---

<sup>1</sup> The CYAS reports similar levels of foreign nationals among Latino youth in California as we have in the IIMMLA (Patler 2017).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states#Children>

## Naturalization and the 1.5 generation in the United States

The strong institutionalization of birthright citizenship comprises one of the distinctive features of the US immigrant experience. All U.S.-born children of immigrants, are full members of the American polity from birth, regardless of parents' legal or citizenship status. Exercising powerful symbolic as well as real-life benefits, birthright citizenship is in an often taken-for granted, unacknowledged precondition of the later multigenerational assimilation processes. But not all immigrant children enjoy the birthright citizenship that accompanies U.S. birth; many are instead born abroad but raised in the United States. While socially similar to the second-generation, the members of this 1.5 generation are categorically different: just like every other migrant, they start as aliens and immediately confront the formal, political boundary separating citizens from foreigners. Nonetheless the fact that most members of the 1.5 generation have been in the US from a very young age on (85% of the respondents in the IIMMLA arrived before age 6) means that they confront the boundary separating aliens from citizens in a different way than those who entered as adults.

That legal boundary also fundamentally differs from the often blurry, social boundary separating immigrants from natives: as conceptualized by Alba and Nee (2003), crossing the latter is a seamless, almost unnoticed process, beginning from the moment of entry into the initially strange environment. It then continues ceaselessly as, if only by easing the difficulties of day-to-day survival, each new competency and insight gained generate some additional opportunity.

In contrast, citizenship is a bright, unambiguous boundary; its crossing involves a discrete step requiring deliberate action. For immigrants who initially arrive in an unauthorized status, the encounter with the boundary of citizenship comes at the end of a long trajectory involving a series of transitions across formal status boundaries, each time-consuming, costly, and uncertain, thereby draining resources that can be used for the effort to move ahead. Moreover, persons in an alien status can rarely cross these barriers on their own: unlike the process of social assimilation, where each step leads the immigrant to take another, moving from one civic stratum entails a conscious choice. As our analysis shows, it is unlikely that migrants make these decisions in isolation; consequently, considerations pertaining not simply to the individual but to core family members will affect the decision to become a full member of the polity.

### *Formal requirements and contextual considerations*

The respondents surveyed by IIMMLA were mainly the children of parents who arrived in

the United States between the mid-1960s and mid-1980s, a period when border controls were still lax and migration had yet to become a politicized issue occupying the national agenda. Uniform across the United States, naturalization requirements were also fairly stable during this period, although the political and social climate surrounding immigration became more hostile during the 1990s and early 2000s.

Surmounting the multiple obstacles impeding access to citizenship demands both patience and sacrifice, even for people like the IIMMLA respondents who arrived under relatively promising circumstances. U.S. Naturalization is available to legal permanent residents who have been continuously resident for five years (or three years in the case of the spouses of US citizens). That first step -- acquisition of permanent residency -- varies by the initial status at arrival: those who enter the U.S. under the preference categories for family members or skilled workers do so with greencard in hand; those accepted as refugees are fast-tracked and may apply for permanent residency one year following admission. For those who land with work or study visas, acquiring permanent residency is more complicated, affected by on skill level, occupation, and continuity of employment. For those present without authorization, the transition to permanent resident is currently exceedingly difficult. However, unauthorized status was less of an impediment for the unauthorized parents of the immigrant offspring with whom we are concerned: as about 70% of the parents who had entered without authorization were present in the United States in 1982, they would have been eligible to regularize their status long before the survey, thanks to the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA).

Once eligible, immigrants must comply with a variety of documentary requirements (including certified tax returns as well as evidence of all foreign travel during the prior five years), pay a non-refundable filing fee, which has become increasingly onerous over the past thirty years, and then pass a civics (but not an integration) test (in English) . Tolerating dual nationality, the US does not require immigrants to renounce their first nationality at naturalization.

#### *Risks and cost-benefit calculations*

Standard rational choice models of naturalization decisions include the economic costs and benefits of naturalization as well as a wide range of considerations about the social context, and origin and destination country policies (Yang 1994, DeVoretz and Irastorza 2017). In this framework, the costs and benefits of naturalization will vary with immigrants' age, labour force participation, the strength and allegiance of national identity, as well as nationality laws in both sending and receiving countries.

In the short-term, narrow economic incentives appear modest: in the U.S restrictions on the employment of legal permanent residents have steadily declined since the 1960s; similarly, permanent residents enjoy the same level of access as citizens to higher education. Estimating wage premia of citizenship is difficult, with figures ranging between one and five percent (Bloemraad 2017). But regardless of the level these premia do not amount to a one-time citizenship raise or bonus, but rather occur over a time via increased returns to work experience (Bratsberg et al. 2002). While differences in the time horizon are likely to affect immigrants who arrive in adulthood – with returns much greater for those who enter at a younger age – that factor is unlikely to affect the 1.5 generation, a category consisting of persons who all arrived as children.

Personal preferences for long-term residence and political participation in the destination country – themselves often linked to demographic characteristics including age, sex, and educational attainment- should also influence naturalization decisions, as these options are contingent upon the acquisition of citizenship. Since naturalization entails acquiring full and permanent membership in the polity, it provides the means to participate in electoral politics as a voter and candidate - the quintessential right (and responsibility) that liberal democracies typically reserve for status citizens.<sup>3</sup> Voting is symbolically important, and may be particularly important for the 1.5 generation growing up as *de facto*, but not *de jure* citizens; however, for many potential citizens such “bread-and-butter” issues as permanent and unconditional access to the territory will matter more. Since legal permanent residents risk losing their status after a stay abroad lasting more than six consecutive months, U.S. citizens wishing to pursue long-term residence abroad face no such risk.

As status citizenship provides security, removing any uncertainty about residency rights, a further individual consideration involves tolerance for risk. In the United States, legal permanent residency remains a somewhat tenuous status, potentially revocable by the state. Since the 1996 passage of the Effective Death Penalty Act and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act a broad range of crimes can be “aggravated felonies” rendering a defendant deportable and often triggering mandatory deportation (Morawetz 2000). Though the risk is low, we estimate the annual risk of deportation at about 0.3% for the average greencard holder during the period we study,<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> We note that some countries allow non-citizens to vote in local elections.

<sup>4</sup> The Immigration Policy Center estimates that about 10% of deportees each year are Legal Permanent Residents (LPRs). Applying that fraction to the record of 409,849 “removals” in 2012 implies a total of roughly 40,000 deported LPRs a number that, for the LPR population of approximately 12 million, translates into an annual risk of just 0.3%.

some migrants may nonetheless perceive legal permanent residency as precarious. Examining an extended Dominican family in New York City Gilbertson and Singer (2003) show that certain family members worried that permanent residency could be at risk and therefore opted for naturalization as a protective measure. Similarly, Cort (2012) shows that during a period when California voters tried to enact anti-immigrant legislation naturalization rates rose, though the increases were greater among Latinos than Asians.

### *Symbolic and Emotional Concerns*

In addition to these tangible benefits naturalization decisions are also influenced by individual level symbolic concerns. Feelings of belonging to the host society are likely to matter, though how those sentiments may matter is far from clear. As a token of admission to full membership citizenship's promise may ring hollow, especially as it is invisible in day-to-day interactions. In that case, the motivation to naturalize may be lacking, as suggested by an earlier student of the Mexican American experience (Grebler 1966: 27) who summarized the sentiment of Mexican immigrants with the following quote: "Why should I become an American citizen - people will still treat me as a Mexican". Moreover, if social assimilation makes immigrants more aware of and sensitive to discrimination, it might also lead them to doubt that acquiring citizenship would induce more favorable treatment (Portes and Curtis 1987, 361). Yet, immigrants might instead take the countervailing, more optimistic view, viewing citizenship as a way to improve their status by transcending a group membership that suffers from low social standing (Diehl and Blohm 2003).

Concerns about membership in the host society comprise only one side of the equation. If still connected to the home country, migrants may perceive naturalization as an act of betrayal, as indicated by the widespread myth among Mexican immigrants that the naturalization ceremony entails "... stomping and spitting on the Mexican flag" (Fitzgerald 2004:236). Immigrants with stronger ties to their home countries may be less willing to acquire a new nationality, especially if they originate in countries that do not tolerate dual citizenship, though previous research yields supportive and contradictory evidence (supporting: Joppke 1999; opposing: Dronkers and Vink 2012) For the 1.5-generation respondents who are *de facto* Americans with limited home country exposure these symbolic conflicts will likely be less salient, as suggested by their responses to a question asking which country most feels like home, with 90% of 1.5-generation respondents answering "The United States". Still, to the extent that naturalization is a family affair, parents' emotional connection to the home country may have a spillover effect on their adult child's naturalization decision.

### *Family and the life course*

For the 1.5 generation, for whom individual level variation in the costs and benefits of naturalization is much reduced, we might instead expect family and life course considerations to weigh more heavily. Many of these immigrants become eligible for naturalization before adulthood; for those undergoing “sidecar” naturalization, obtain derivative citizenship when their parents naturalize, the decision can be wholly conceptualized as family level. Yet even those who naturalize after turning 18 are likely to be influenced by family-level concerns. Unlike immigrants who arrived as adults, the 1.5 generation usually enters the destination country preceded by or alongside at least one if not both parents; as such, their political socialization arrival unfolds within the family unit.

Naturalization is partly a political act; as such it partakes of the logic of political socialization and mobilization. As research on political socialization has shown family level processes deeply influence political orientations and affiliations. Classic works highlight the importance of parental political socialization for children’s political outlook (Jennings and Niemi 1968; Niemi and Hepburn 1995); recent work has emphasized the role of children and family communication for political socialization (McDevitt and Chaffee 2002), especially among migrant families where parents may face linguistic barriers and children may have more experience with host-country institutions. Simultaneously immigrant parents’ more developed ties to ethnic networks may provide access to a distinct set of political resources and information. Similar processes of information diffusion affect knowledge about the benefits of citizenship and the application process (e.g. Johnson et al 1999, Abascal 2017). Thus as members of a newly arrived family unit, emerging political understandings and affiliations, alongside the informational resources needed to naturalize and the decision to start the process, are best considered as embedded in a range of family level processes.

In addition, as most immigrants maintain ties to family members in the country of origin, the choice to obtain a new citizenship may also be shaped by obligations and concerns related to home-country kin left behind. In particular, the right to petition for immigration status on behalf of such relatives may motivate the quest for U.S. citizenship. Unlike greencard holders, US citizens are exempt from numerical admissions caps when sponsoring spouses, minor children and parents. Even though for some categories, family reunification occurs after an exceedingly long wait, status citizens far surpass legal permanent residence in the opportunities for citizens to facilitate the legal arrival of immediate relatives. The presence of homeland kin may also increase motivation to naturalize, since, as already noted, only citizens possess the right to spend unlimited

amounts of time abroad and still return to their United States at their complete discretion. On the other hand, if acquiring US citizenship entails abandoning home-country citizenship, transnational ties and the presence of family still residing in the home-country may increase the costs of naturalization, since those with persistent and frequent contacts with non-migrants still living in the country of origin may be particularly sensitive to the views of stay-at-homes who consider that acquisition of receiving society citizenship represents betrayal.

As considerations of this sort – whether involving the *immigration* of family members residing abroad or the preferences of those kin who did not *emigrate* – are inherently bound up with the family, a model of embedded naturalization choice seems appropriate. However, we anticipate that these influences will vary across the life-course, especially when immigrant offspring depart the parental household where cross-border ties are strongest (Soehl and Waldinger 2012). Hence, we expect family decisions and home country connections to exercise diminishing influence as 1.5 generation respondents age, with those who naturalize at older ages showing signs of greater independence than those who naturalize shortly after turning 18.

#### *National Origin and Ethnic Community*

The costs and benefits of citizenship are also likely to be weighed in a calculus that takes into account immigrants' relationship to the country of origin as well as the future that they see for themselves in the host country. Rather than an individual level characteristic, countries of origin are best conceptualized as contextual effects, which are likely to exercise influence in a variety of ways.

First, immigrants from countries where political institutions function more poorly should be more likely to naturalize, as the costs of abandoning membership in poorly functioning or more autocratic states are lower than for those who stem from developed and well-functioning democracies and for whom the benefits of membership, as well as the possibility of return, are likely to be higher. For example, studying naturalization in the Netherlands Peters et al (2016) find that EU immigrants naturalize at a rate 80 percent lower than the level attained by non-EU immigrants, a result that plausibly reflects differences in the relative attractiveness of return migration.

Second, countries differ significantly in the degree to which their passports open doors internationally. Relative to most sending nationalities the US passport has great utility as a travel document, providing visa-free access to 156 countries in contrast to 131 for

Mexican passport, and only 61 for a Filipino passport.<sup>5</sup> While this option may not have much bearing for less resourced immigrants whose main travel interests focus on the country of origin, passport power is much more likely to prove influential for the foreign-born, U.S.-raised persons whom we study.

Third, since immigrants often maintain a powerful sense of loyalty to their country of origin, which can remain their “imagined community” even after long years of absence, sending country policies that might release them from that allegiance, or, at least, provide for greater flexibility, could exercise considerable influence. In particular immigrants from countries permitting dual citizenship should be more likely to acquire receiving country citizenship than those that do not. However, dual citizenship policies may not exercise the same influence over all; we suspect, rather, that persons with persistent home-country ties and engagements will prove most sensitive to any release in allegiance that acceptance of dual citizenship provides.

Finally, characteristics of the co-ethnic community in the destination country –usually proxied by national origin -- are also likely to prove influential. In particular, immigrants from co-ethnic communities which have more resources – financial, informational, or otherwise – should be more likely to naturalize as they can draw on these resources in pursuing citizenship, thus decreasing the individual cost of naturalization (Johnson et al. 1999, Abascal 2017).

### Data and Analysis

We now turn to the Immigration and Intergenerational Mobility in Metropolitan Los Angeles survey (IIMMLA) to examine these hypotheses. Conducted in 2004 IIMMLA employed a quota sampling strategy for the major national origin groups in Southern California, interviewing a total of 3,440 young adult children of immigrants in the Los Angeles metropolitan area.

We start with those 1,572 respondents – comprising a little less than half of the total sample -- who were born abroad and arrived in the United States as children (before the age of 15)<sup>6</sup>. As a quota sample aiming for coverage of major national origin groups, the IIMMLA is not strictly representative of the 1.5 generation population in California or the US as a whole. However, supplementary analysis comparing the IIMMLA sample with contemporaneous data from the American Community Survey demonstrates that the

---

<sup>5</sup> Data drawn from passport index <https://www.passportindex.org> [accessed August 21 2017]

<sup>6</sup> The original IIMMLA file has 1,622 respondents born abroad. We drop 50 respondents for who we are unable to identify the country of birth.

sample is roughly similar, although the IIMMLA sample is somewhat positively selected, with a higher percentage naturalized (58% in IIMMLA vs 47% in Los Angeles county) and higher average years of education (14.3 years of schooling vs. 12.1 years in the ACS)<sup>7</sup>. The implications of this positive selection for our findings are discussed in the conclusion. However, only the IIMMLA collects the necessary information on year of arrival in the US and year of naturalization of its foreign-born respondents, as well as data on the timing of arrival and naturalization of their parents.

We use this information to construct family-level naturalization histories and then apply discrete time event history analysis to model the “risk” of acquiring US citizenship in each year. In this setup the data has one case for each person-year until the respondent is naturalized. Once naturalized, the respondent is removed from the data (risk set) and no longer figures in the analysis. We drop 27 respondents reporting arrival as U.S. citizens, 38 respondents with one parent possessing U.S. citizenship at arrival, and 61 cases missing on the year of naturalization. Finally, we limit our sample to those who naturalized with age 18 or later. This leaves 1,067 respondents from 47 countries of origin, of which 645 had naturalized before they were interviewed and 422 had not. Converting the data into person-year format yields 17,665 person-year observations. The model includes a third-order polynomial for time, controlling for the possibility that those who are longer in the US are more likely to naturalize (baseline hazard). We also include control variables measured at the national-origin group level and use clustering to adjust standard errors. One issue in this type of analysis concerns the question of when the clock to naturalization starts: that is, when does a person first become at risk of naturalizing? Two individuals may have resided for the same amount of time in the US and yet may not have enjoyed a spell of eligibility that is equally long. For example, one respondent might have arrived undocumented, not gaining eligibility until the moment when legal permanent residence was acquired. By contrast, if married to a U.S. citizen, a respondent arriving as a permanent resident need only wait three years to naturalize. Unfortunately, the IIMMLA survey does not provide reliable information on the time at which respondents acquired permanent residency. In theory, the earliest time of eligibility is three years after arrival; since no respondents report naturalizing earlier we start the analysis at this point.<sup>8</sup> We can, however, include control variables for status at arrival and age at arrival in our regression model.

An important assumption of this analysis is the proportional hazards assumption; in other

---

<sup>7</sup> Comparison tables between IIMMLA and the ACS available on request.

<sup>8</sup> In fact only nine respondents naturalize in the third to fourth year after arrival.

words, that a covariate has a constant and proportional effect that is invariant to how long after arrival the value of the covariate changes. To assess this assumption, we introduce interaction terms for all statistically significant main effects with this baseline hazard to test whether the impact of this covariate varies.

A final issue is the use of retrospective and cross-sectional nature data for the analysis of time. On the one hand, recall effects might be one concern: respondents might, consciously or not, align naturalizations of family members in time. We believe that several features of the IIMMLA survey render this possibility unlikely. First, questions about respondent's and parental nationalization were asked at different points in the survey. Second, respondents were asked how long ago (relative to the survey time) naturalizations took place. We then used questions about the time of migration to calculate how long after arrival in the US respondents and their parents naturalized. A retrospective ordering of events would be hard to do during the interview and thus is unlikely to pose a problem for our analysis.

On the other hand, our use of retrospective data has the strength in that it automatically meets an often difficult-to-meet assumption of hazard models: namely, that of non-informative censoring. In contrast to studies which rely on register data like in many European studies or survey immigrants at the point of acquiring a green card as in the US New Immigrant Survey, no one in our survey drops out of the study prematurely due to emigration. As those who go on to move internationally more quickly after arrival (either due to return migration or moving to a third country) are also those who might have been less likely to naturalize had they stayed, right censoring becomes informative and potentially biases results. The retrospective nature of our data allows us to avoid this bias.

### Independent Variables

Timing of parental naturalization: A key independent variable is the timing of parental naturalization. The IIMMLA is unique (to our knowledge) in providing information on the timing of respondents' *and* parents' naturalization. In our central regression analysis we enter this information as a three category variable distinguishing cases in which no parent naturalized before the respondent (omitted reference category), those in which one parent naturalized in the same year as the respondent, and those in which at least one parent naturalized at least one year before the respondent.

Legal status at arrival: Of course, not everybody is eligible to become a citizen. The key formal requirement in the US is residence in the United States as a Legal Permanent Resident for 5 years (3 years if citizenship is through marriage to a citizen) without leaving

the US for 6 months or longer. As mentioned above, the IIMMLA data unfortunately does not provide data on the timing of acquisition of legal permanent residency. However, as only a small fraction of all those eligible each year actually naturalize the timing of eligibility is unlikely the deciding variable. That said, those who arrived without permanent legal status will likely have a longer path towards citizenship. To account for this we include a five-category variable distinguishing arrival as legal permanent residents (omitted reference group); with a temporary or tourist visa; with a work or refugee visa; arrival without any visa, which we classify as undocumented; and last, those for whom this information is missing.

Family legal status is interdependent: the offspring of those who arrived with legal status will have a shorter path than the children of those who came as undocumented migrants or on temporary status. Consequently, the legal status of parents will also matter. To account for these differences we include a five-fold distinction of parental legal status at arrival. The omitted reference group involves those for whom no parent had legal permanent resident status when arriving - 40% of the sample; the next two categories are families in which one (14%), or both (43%) parents had legal permanent residency status at arrival. A final category groups the 3% of the sample for which we could not reliably code this information.

Socioeconomic Status and Assimilation: As emphasized above, naturalization requires a discrete and conscious choice in contrast to the seamless transitions comprising the assimilation process. Nevertheless, it is plausible that persons socially or culturally more similar to the “mainstream” will naturalize quicker than those who are relatively distant.

As a measure of parental assimilation we include English language ability distinguishing between families in which no parent speaks English well (omitted reference category), those in which one speaks English well and one not and those in which both speak English well. As an indicator of parental socioeconomic status we include the years of education completed by the highest educated parent.

Location of Family: To capture the influence of family structure and location we include two variables. One distinguishes those with no close relatives in the home-country, those with two parents in the US but close relatives in the home-country, and those with one parent in the home-country. On one hand, we may expect that kinship ties to the homeland will provide the channel for those symbolic concerns that could deter acquisition of a new citizenship. On the other hand, we might anticipate those will family members still abroad might find that the greater ease of travel afforded by US citizenship

will prove particularly attractive. To the extent that families share resources and knowledge about naturalization we might expect more rapid naturalization among those with more family members living in the household. We create this latter variable from information in the IIMMLA survey indicating the number of family members living in the respondent's household.

Ties to the country of origin: One set of explanations for naturalization emphasizes that those who fully settled immigrants with primary social ties (children) and economic investments there will be more motivated to join the political community (Portes and Curtis 1987). Similarly, the attenuation of home-country ties will also encourage naturalization by diminishing the emotional bond to the home country and thereby weakening any sense that obtaining a new citizenship involves betrayal. As acquisition of host country citizenship involves aligning the boundaries of one's territorial residence with the boundaries of one's national membership, continuing crossing over the territorial border, via return visits to the origin country, is an especially relevant indicator of persisting home-country connections. The IIMMLA contains a variable indicating how often respondents visited the country of origin; we divide the number of trips by respondents' number of years of US residence to arrive at an average visiting frequency ranging from no visits to 10 per year. The large majority of respondents visit very rarely with half visiting once every 10 years or less (including more than a third who have never visited) and barely over 5% visiting more than once a year on average.

Loss of Origin Country Citizenship: To measure whether becoming a US citizen would entail giving up origin-country citizenship we use the MACMIDE Global Expatriate Dual Citizenship Dataset (Vink et al 2015) which codes expatriate citizenship policies for 200 countries for every year since 1960. We add this information to the personal records of each respondent such that we consider the citizenship policy of the origin country for each year a respondent is at "risk" of naturalizing. We consider the possibility that the value of U.S. citizenship and the border-crossing freedom it provides may vary by the intensity of home country ties. Though only a small minority of respondents, those who engage in frequent home-country travel might find a US passport more useful as it facilitates long-term stays abroad. By contrast, for those who face loss of home-country nationality as the price of gaining a U.S. passport, the tradeoff might work the other way around. To capture this possibility, we include a term interacting our visiting variable with the measuring loss of origin-country citizenship.

Country of Origin Political Climate and Global Prestige: For respondents from politically less stable countries, US citizenship might be more attractive as it removes risks of

deportation and return. As an indicator we use the polity scores developed by Polity IV project (Marshall and Jaggers 2002). Similarly, a US passport might be more attractive for those from countries whose passports make travel difficult. As a measure we include the Hanley and Partners Passport Index<sup>9</sup> for each country which uses data from the International Air Transport Association to score the travel freedom a country's passport provides. We have complete coverage for the passport index but have to rely on multiple imputation for six countries for the polity scores.

Ethnic Community Resources and Legal Status: Following Luthra et al (2017), we include two measures of the context of immigration for each national origin group. To index co-ethnic resources, we derive the mean level of education of the respondent's national origin group as measured in the 1980 Census for Los Angeles County. We then merge this information to the individual level data in IIMMLA. We use multiple imputation for three national-origin groups for which we cannot construct this measure and adjust the standard errors of our regression results accordingly.

Since group-level legal status might have spillover effects on families' naturalization decisions we include a status-prevalence score which combines information on the share of an immigrant national origin group that legalized in 1986 under IRCA (as a proxy for preponderance of undocumented status) and the share of new arrivals between 1980 and 1989 admitted as refugees. Following Luthra et al (2017) the scale ranges from 1 indicating groups with the most negative context of reception (20%+ undocumented, no refugees) to 6, the most positive context of reception (no IRCA legalizers, 20%+ refugees).

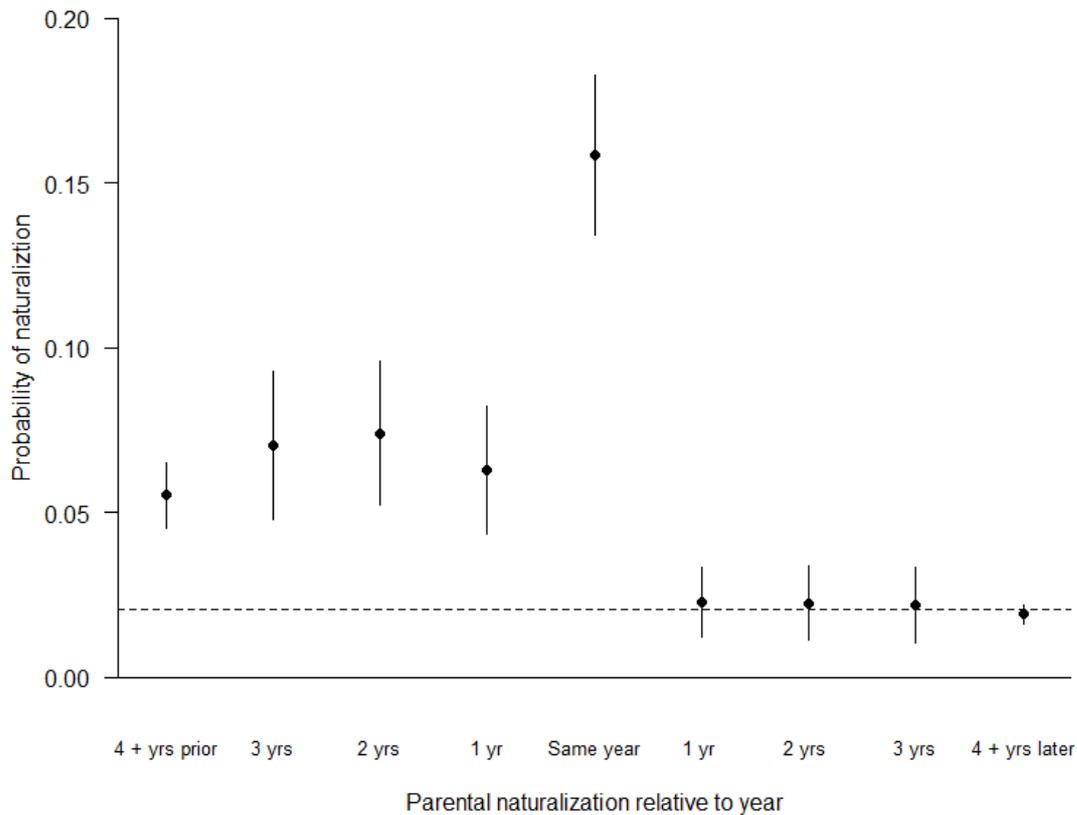
## Results

In table 1 we present two models. The first includes all variables except the indicator for parental naturalization status. The second model enters the time-varying indicator for parental naturalization status. We summarize interaction terms with analysis time in table 2.

As seen in the first rows of model 2, the largest coefficients by far concern the timing of parental naturalization. In a year in which at least one parent was previously naturalized, respondents were significantly more likely to naturalize than those who did not have a naturalized parent. The marginal predicted probability to naturalize in a given year for a respondent without a naturalized parent is 2 percent. It jumps by a factor of three to 6 percent if a parent was previously naturalized. Finally, in a year in which a parent naturalizes respondents had a 16 percent chance of also naturalizing themselves.

---

<sup>9</sup> See: <https://tinyurl.com/hlweebw> - accessed August 20 2018



*Figure 1: Probability of naturalization in given year by timing of parental naturalization*

Figure 1 presents predicted probabilities from a variant of model 2 where the timing of parental naturalization relative to the focal year is more detailed going from years in which parental naturalization was four or more years prior in yearly increments to those years where parental naturalization happened four years after that focal year or later. Results for the effects of prior parental naturalization and simultaneous parental naturalization are congruent with those reported above. As one would expect, future parental naturalization does not increase respondents' naturalization beyond the baseline of about 2 percent. Regression coefficients for the difference are small and statistically not significant. Reassuringly, the future does not affect the present in this case.

Relaxing the proportional odds assumption and interacting parental naturalization with analysis time (see table 2) leads the linkage between parental and 1.5 generation naturalization to decline over time. One plausible explanation for this pattern would be that with settlement and age the importance of the family as the relevant unit for

decision-making and conduit for information and resources diminishes.

Turning to model one we see some confirmation for the hypotheses contending that the location of family members matters. Those respondents living with more family members in their household naturalize somewhat faster. Yet this association disappears once we control for parental naturalization timing, suggesting that this dimension of household composition affects 1.5-generation respondents via the naturalization trajectories of their parents. In contrast we see no such spillover effects with regards to family members living in the Los Angeles Metropolitan area. Similarly, we find no differences in naturalization behavior between those who have parents or close relatives living in the origin country and those who do not.

Turning to variables that provide leverage on origin-country influences, we again see how the naturalization timing of parents moderates some of these effects. Model 1 predicts that when respondents face a loss of origin-country citizenship they are less likely to naturalize, a difference that is small, amounting to a 0.7 percentage point difference in the risk of naturalizing (3.3% vs 4.0%) and disappears after the addition of the timing of parental naturalization. A model interacting the frequency of visiting and citizenship loss reveals significant heterogeneity in the role of origin-country citizenship policies. As shown in figure 2, for those who never visit their country of birth the potential loss of origin citizenship makes no difference in naturalization rates (~3.5% in each case). However, for the small share of respondents who maintain strong connections to their country of birth by returning several times a year *and* who can also enjoy dual citizenship, naturalization is attractive whereas for those among the frequent home country travelers with a country of origin that prohibits dual citizenship, the potential loss of origin-country citizenship deters acquiring US citizenship. For example, according to our model those traveling on average five times to the home country are almost twice as likely to naturalize (~6%) when not facing loss of their birth-country passport than when they do (~3%). These differences diminish somewhat once we control for parental naturalization and the interaction coefficient is only significant at the 0.1 level.

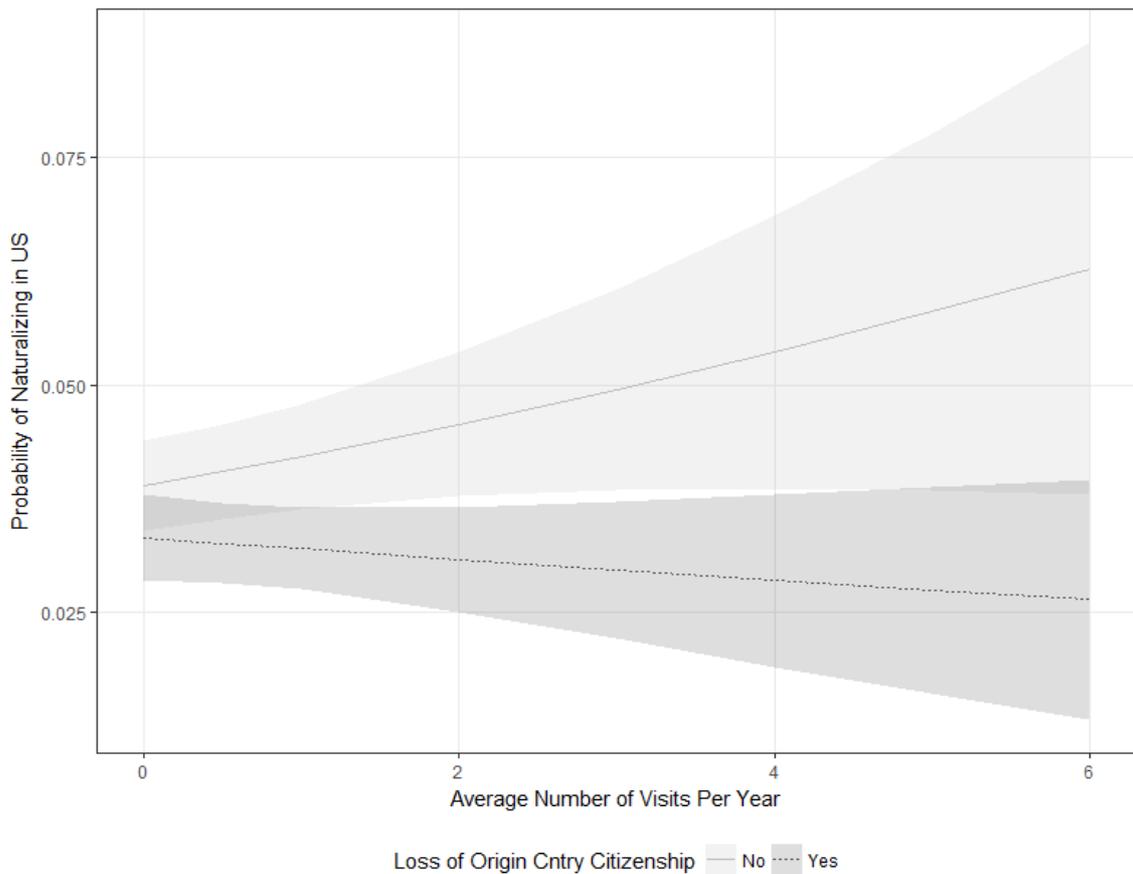


Figure 2: Marginal predicted probability of naturalizing by frequency of visits to the country of birth and whether or not naturalization implies loss of origin-country citizenship.

The political climate of the origin-country also matters. Those from countries one standard deviation below average in democracy score naturalize at a rate of 4.8% per year versus those from the most democratic countries (2.8%). In contrast we do not find any sign that the relative utility of the origin-country passport as a travel document matters. The coefficient for the “passport power” index is tiny and far from any level of statistical significance.

Our indicators of the context of reception also predict the time to naturalization. Ethnic resources as measured by average national origin group level of education seem to accelerate naturalization, an effect that persists when introducing parental naturalization. Respondents from national origin groups with an average level of education one standard deviation above the mean for the sample naturalize almost twice as fast as those from

groups one standard deviation below the average (2.6% vs 4.5% per year).

While co-ethnic resources clearly accelerate naturalization, more positive status prevalence has a negative, albeit smaller effect that is significant only at the 0.1 level. Again, moving from one standard deviation below to one standard deviation above average is associated with about a one percentage point difference in naturalization rate (4.4% vs 3.3%). Once we add parental naturalization this coefficient shrinks by more than half and is no longer statistically significant.

These differences are net of individual level legal status which we can only measure at the time of arrival. Here the associations are as expected: arrivals with a greencard naturalize at a significantly faster rate. We also note that respondents arriving with temporary or tourist visa status were less likely to naturalize than even those who arrived undocumented, a finding likely related to ways in which the 1996 Immigration Reform and Control Act facilitated regularization among the undocumented arrivals in this sample. As is the case with parental naturalization here the interaction term in table 2 indicates a declining association with increasing time in the US probably reflecting that as respondents with temporary status find opportunity to acquire permanent residency thus diminishing the importance of legal status on arrival.

Parental assimilation as measured by language ability does not appear to influence naturalization net of other variables in model 1. In model two the coefficient is negative indicating that given parental naturalization (which is aided by parental assimilation), parental assimilation may in fact delay citizenship acquisition. Yet, consistent with prior research, we find that educational attainment positively predicts speed of naturalization. In a model excluding respondents' educational attainment but not shown here, parental education becomes a significant predictor indicating that parental human capital affects children's naturalization mainly via their schooling outcomes.

## Conclusion

Unlike the seamless process of assimilation yielding unintended, often unnoted consequences, naturalization is a discrete, one-time outcome, necessarily resulting from self-conscious choice. In this paper we examine that process for immigrants arriving in the US as children – the 1.5 generation. Like all other immigrants, these child immigrants initially lack status citizenship. Unlike all other immigrants, they are socially Americans, having grown up in the US, attended US schools, and having had little direct post-migration exposure to their country of birth. Consequently, many key variables that previous research has identified as influencing naturalization are unlikely to apply to this

population in quite the same way. It is doubtful, for example, that inadequate mastery of English -- a reason cited by about a quarter of Latinos who don't apply for citizenship (Taylor et al. 2012) -- impinges heavily on these 1.5-generation immigrants, who acquired English language competence at a young age. Issues related to allegiance to the country of birth -- a salient emotional touchstone for many adult immigrants -- are similarly unlikely to weigh significantly among the foreign-born, but U.S.-raised. Having grown up in the US, the overwhelming majority of the 1.5 generation sees its future unfolding in the country of destination, in contrast to the country of origin, which looms as a place that if not fully strange, no longer feels like home. Indeed, in the current debate around the protection of "dreamers" -- those undocumented immigrants who arrived as children and who received protection due to DACA in 2012 -- proponents of DACA point to the cruelty of deporting people whose home is to be found where their childhood and adolescence unfolded, and no longer possess a meaningful connection to the country in which they were born. Indeed, it is precisely the condition of being socially American, with lives fully rooted and unfurling in the United States that provides the rationale for policies that will allow these *de facto* Americans to become Americans *de jure* as well. Thus, a model of naturalization for the 1.5 generation will need to emphasize a set of tradeoffs different from those applying to immigrants who moved when already adults.

Citizenship does not simply confer status and provide the basis for rights; it is also implicated in national identity. Acquiring host-country citizenship, as denoted by the term naturalization, involves a re-establishment, a crossing of the internal border that separates "us" -- the status citizens -- who live alongside "them" -- the foreigners. As such any decision to acquire citizenship will be conditioned, not only by a rational cost-benefit calculus, but also by concerns of affective and emotional type. Moreover, by influencing a part of a person's identity naturalization has the potential to reshape social relationships. As students of social decision making have shown, in these cases "... the ordinary determinants of choice (the direct additions and subtractions from utility due to the choice) [are] of only secondary importance" (Akerlof 1997:1006-7).

The results of our event history regression model clearly point to the importance of embedded citizenship choice, as we conceptualize it in this paper. One single variable -- whether or not parents naturalized before the respondent or in the same year -- is by far the most important co-variate in the model.

Our data do not allow us to disaggregate the precise mechanisms linking parent to child naturalization. Alongside the concerns about social identity which we highlight, previous work points to the importance of information flows through family networks: family

members who already naturalized or are thinking about naturalizing may provide information to others on both the benefits of citizenship and detailed information on-, and assistance with the administrative process (Johnson et al 1990, Abascal 2017). Parents who prioritize naturalization may also transmit norms and values about civic membership to their 1.5 generation children, similar to the transmission of other priorities for instance preferences for endogamy (Nauck et al 1997). Our results clearly confirm these prior findings but we cannot conclusively resolve the direction of influence as children might possibly influence parents instead of the other way around.

We are on firmer ground when thinking about the channels by which home-country concerns exercise influence. The analysis strongly implies that parents are the driving force: while birth country restrictions on dual citizenship delays naturalization this effect disappears once the timing of parental naturalization is properly controlled suggesting that this relationship is mediated through the family context. Similarly, while the naturalization choices of that small subset of respondents who independently maintain close ties to their place of birth are affected by origin-country citizenship policies, the latter factor loses some influence after controlling for parental naturalization.

More generally our analysis of embedded citizenship choice points to the importance of taking into account the effects of country of origin characteristics and policies in models of immigrant naturalization. While some country of origin characteristics, such as policies allowing for or prohibiting dual citizenship are clearly relevant, just how to pick among other possible indicators is much less clear; identifying additional relevant country of origin variables is one task for future research on citizenship acquisition. Given a large set of possible variables and a necessarily limited number of cases (national origin groups) achieving that goal is by no means a trivial task. We included the polity score as a measure for the political climate in the sending country which is associated in our sample with the propensity to naturalize. Yet a variable much more directly tied to concrete benefits of naturalization, such as the passport power index, proved clearly irrelevant. As regards the co-ethnic context in the society of immigration, existing research provided much more guidance: In alignment with findings about the role of co-ethnic resources in a variety of other domains, we find that average education in the co-ethnic community facilitates naturalization. By contrast, the association with group-level migration status is smaller and more tenuous.

In contending that naturalization involves a fundamentally social dimension and in advancing the concept of “embedded citizenship choice,” we are far from dismissing the importance of strictly financial considerations. As suggested by recent research, the cost

of applying for citizenship serves to significantly deter many potential applicants (Hainmueller et al. 2018). Conceptualizing citizenship as an outcome embedded in family process may help explain why this factor exercises such great influence, since the costs of naturalization are amplified if migrant families decide to take the step together. For a family of three, for example, the application fees alone add up \$2040 (3 x \$680), a price augmented when families turn to lawyers to assist in the process. As the median household income of non-citizen households falls below \$38,000 (Kochhar 2008) acquiring U.S. citizenship can consume a non-trivial share of total familial resources that may be available at any one time. The 1.5 generation sample in IIMMLA is slightly more female, more educated, and migrated at a younger age on average (4 years old in contrast to 8 years old) as compared to the larger American Community Survey. While it is impossible to know precisely how a more positively selected sample may bias our results, we do know that naturalization rates in the IIMMLA were higher than those of the general population, suggesting that the deterrent of price and the appeal of civic engagement may be lower among the general 1.5 generation.

One could also ask why destination countries are turning naturalization into a matter of “paytriotism”, as acerbically noted in an article appearing in *The Economist*,<sup>10</sup> in particular when the people affected – most especially the 1.5-generation immigrants at the center of our research – are de facto citizens in almost every way. However, that question, while surely important and intriguing, is a topic for another paper.

## References

- Abascal, Maria. 2017. “Tu Casa, Mi Casa: Naturalization and Belonging among Latino Immigrants.” *International Migration Review* 51:291–322.
- Alba, Richard and Victor Nee. 2003. *Remaking the American Mainstream*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- Akerlof, George. 1997. “Social distance and social decisions.” *Econometrica: Journal of the Econometric Society* pp. 1005–1027.
- Bloemraad, Irene. 2017. “Does Citizenship Matter?” In *Oxford Handbook of Citizenship*, edited by Ayelet Shachar, Rainer Bauboeck, Irene Bloemraad, and Maarten Vink. Oxford University Press.

---

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.economist.com/news/britain/21648699-becoming-british-costly-business-paytriotism> [accessed April 2nd 2018]

- Bratsberg, Bernt, James Ragan, and Zafar Nasir. 2002. "The effect of naturalization on wage growth: A panel study of young male immigrants." *Journal of Labor Economics* 20:568–597.
- Carol, Sarah. 2014. The intergenerational transmission of intermarriage attitudes and intergroup friendships: The role of Turkish migrant parents. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 40(10), 1550-1571.
- Cort, David. 2012. "Spurred to Action or Retreat? The Effects of Reception Contexts on Naturalization Decisions in Los Angeles." *International Migration Review* 46:483–516.
- DeVoretz, Don, and Nahikari Irastorza. 2017. "Economic Theories of Citizenship." In *The Oxford Handbook of Citizenship*, edited by A. Schachar, R. Bauböck, I. Bloemraad, and M. Vink, 200–20. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Diehl, Claudia and Michael Blohm. 2003. "Rights or identity? Naturalization processes among "labor migrants" in Germany." *International Migration Review* 37:133–162.
- Fitzgerald, David. 2004. "Beyond 'transnationalism': Mexican hometown politics at an American labour union." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 27:228–247.
- Gilbertson, Greta and Audrey Singer. 2003. "The emergence of protective citizenship in the USA: naturalization among Dominican immigrants in the post-1996 welfare reform era." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 26:25–51.
- Grebler, Leo. 1966. "The Naturalization of Mexican Immigrants in the United States." *International Migration Review* 1:pp. 17–32.
- Hainmueller, Jens et al. 2018. "A randomized controlled design reveals barriers to citizenship for low-income immigrants." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*
- Jennings, Michael and Richard Niemi. 1968. "The transmission of political values from parent to child." *American Political Science Review* 62:169–184.
- Joppke, Christian. 1999. "How immigration is changing citizenship: a comparative view." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22:629–652.
- Kochhar, Rakesh. 2008. *Sharp Decline in Income for Non-Citizen Immigrant Households, 2006-2007*. Washington, D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center.

- Johnson, Hans, Belinda Reyes, Laura Mameesh, and Elisa Barbour. 2001. *Taking the oath: An analysis of naturalization in California and the United States*. San Francisco: Public Policy Institute of California.
- Luthra, Renee, Thomas Soehl and Roger Waldinger 2017. "Reconceptualizing Context: A Multilevel Model of the Context of Reception and Second-Generation Educational Attainment." *International Migration Review* [online first]
- Marshall, Monty, and Keith Jagers. 2002. *Polity IV project: Political regime characteristics and transitions, 1800-2002*.
- McDevitt, Michael and Steven Chaffee. 2002. "From top-down to trickle-up influence: Revisiting assumptions about the family in political socialization." *Political Communication* 19:281–301.
- Morawetz, Nancy. 2000. "Understanding the impact of the 1996 deportation laws and the limited scope of proposed reforms." *Harvard Law Review* 113.8:1936-62.
- Nauck, Bernhard, Annette Kohlmann, and Heike Diefenbach. 1997. "Familiäre Netzwerke, intergenerative Transmission und Assimilationsprozesse bei türkischen Migrantenfamilien" *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 49 (3): 477–499
- Niemi, Richard and Mary Hepburn. 1995. "The rebirth of political socialization." *Perspectives on Political Science* 24:7–16.
- Patler, Caitlin. 2017. "Undocumented Disadvantage, Citizen Advantage, or Both? The Comparative Educational Outcomes of Second and 1.5-Generation Latino Young Adults" *International Migration Review* [online first]
- Peters, Floris, Maarten Vink, and Hans Schmeets. 2016. "The ecology of immigrant naturalisation: A life course approach in the context of institutional conditions." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42:359–381.
- Portes, Alejandro and John Curtis. 1987. "Changing flags: Naturalization and its determinants among Mexican immigrants." *International Migration Review* 21:352–371.
- Soehl, Thomas and Roger Waldinger. 2012. "Inheriting the homeland? Intergenerational transmission of cross border ties in migrant families." *American Journal of*

*Sociology* 118:778-813.

Street, Alex. 2013. "Naturalization Dynamics in Immigrant Families." *Journal of Comparative Migration Studies* 1:23–44.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2014. "My Child Will Be a Citizen: Intergenerational Motives for Naturalization." *World Politics* 66:264–292.

Taylor, Paul et al. 2012. *An Awakened Giant: The Hispanic Electorate Is Likely to Double by 2030*. Washington DC: Pew Hispanic Center.

Vink, Maarten Peter, Gerard-René De Groot, and Ngo Chun Luk. 2015. *MACIMIDE Global Expatriate Dual Citizenship Dataset* Harvard Dataverse.

Yang, Philip 1994. "Explaining Immigrant Naturalization." *International Migration Review* 28:449–477.